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How did Social Media affect the Arab revolutions?

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Part I - Introduction

Linking new social upheavals to the development of social media

1.1 Plan of the thesis

"To all the patriotic Egyptians, Tunisians, and the rest of the Arabs who took over the streets and made history that inspired the world, to every man and woman who made the ultimate sacrifice, to future generations, in hopes that they will live in a free and democratic world."[1]

"For all the social media activists who risked their lives, and continue to do so, during the Arab Spring."[2]

Something worth fighting for in the Arab world existed, and exists until today, such as liberty, freedom of expression or just better economic and social conditions. But why did people in the Arab world decided to take the squares, protest in the streets, and strongly wish the fallen of so durable regimes, independently from their age, sex, social status, and economic conditions, in the same way, singing identical chants and slogans, organizing themselves perfectly even, almost if they possess more power to react in front of their dictators?

Above all, why did such protestors beat the regimes' censorship and their constrains only in the second decade of the 21st century, and not before, after several years of participation in dissenting events which directly blame their political systems?

This thesis wants to attest that social media surely did not either provoke the Arab revolutions, or result as the main cause of a social upheaval in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and so forth, but it wants to certify they certainly inflamed the political debate in these countries, by awaking more democratization through new digital environments, and by supporting the organization of protestors' groups.

Briefly, this thesis wants empirically to demonstrate that toppling such regimes would be more difficult, quite impossible in short time, without the involvement of new modes to report news, to inform people, to organize sit-in or protesting marches even, by giving voice to other parts of society, so long generally

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[1] Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0*. USA: Mariner Books, 2013, cit., pp.295-296.

[2] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring.* LONDON: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, cit., p.v.

silenced or shut down to public spheres of society.

A sort of participation very far from the owned-government broadcasts and televisions, known to those few elites of people involved in the balance of power of the regimes, too close to the dictators' families, and unable to express an opinion not embedded by the mainstream of the national media.

Especially by looking at how the Arab uprisings were born in 2010, and how they developed later, the importance of social media is not in dispute today. Their role resulted particularly relevant in those countries where people were suffering a never-ending censorship, constantly imposed by each sort of regime apparatus, from the block of whole Internet to a more target-oriented limitation against the freedom of expression.

What this thesis is going to explain will be the course of different processes that involved professional journalists who followed apparently unexpected events, political activists who took the streets, digital dissidents able to create new networks for the public participation in some social spheres where most people had been excluded before. Moreover, all this changed the lives of everyone who needed to know more about the actual status quo of their country, revolutionizing so-called petrified societies within the official media politics, as the unofficial one, during the so-called Arab Spring.

The Tunisian and Egyptian cases are mostly significant to understand what we are talking about, but to do that correctly, this thesis is made up of five functional parts.

Each one is about a specific aspect to analyze in order to avoid superficiality or deficiencies within a quite short dissertation on a so huge topic.

First, in the following paragraphs of this chapter, we will examine the geographical context. The Arab world is not so intuitively understandable, and it is worth considering all those minimal details could result relevant by a careful study and according the ends of this work. Where did the Arab uprisings break up, and how have they become revolutions? What was political life in the Arab world like on the eve of the uprisings? Why have authoritarian governments been so common in the Arab world? What was the state of economy in the Arab world on the eve of the uprisings?

Historically, needless to say is the role who played media, from radio to Internet in the Middle East, and how were they able to inspire revolutions and social change. Having said that, we will evoke the most relevant features which exalt social media as alternative modes of journalist practice within the news mainstream, making them extremely useful in a political transition, hopefully toward a freer and more democratic world. Second, we have surely to consider what made Arab states vulnerable to uprisings and what was the spark that ignited the Arab upheavals. In the second chapter we are going to do that by analyzing some of the main

Arab countries involved, such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. How and when social rage grew, what made the uprisings effective, spreading it across the countries, almost in a contagious process which seemed to change everything. All these steps will be taken into account by embedding similarities and differences that characterize each countries we deal with.

Thirdly, more specifically, heart of this thesis will be presenting every personal experience which regards the key figures who quite anonymously brought a revolutionary wave, curiously and apparently, as sign of novelty, from leader-based regimes to leader-less uprisings. Following these goals we ask ourselves what role social networks covered during the Arab revolutions, and since when we scientifically can call them *social media.*

In so doing, this thesis aims to achieve a clearer explanation by summoning the differences between web 1.0, based on contents and web 2.0, based instead on interaction. The second one, of course, most part of the concepts here exposed will rely on, is going to involve on the one hand the spread of several blogs, managed by women in the Arab context, but on the other one those social networks, namely Facebook and Twitter, that thanks to their natural aptitude of involving people, and due to the predisposition to be user friendly, made upheavals successful. A lucky revolutionary wave which enjoyed means other generations of protestors could not use in their grievances. In other words we will try to explain how the power of people resulted greater than the people in power in those times.[3]

Then, after an analysis of the rulers' reactions and their politics of censorship, the thesis will look at the virtues and vices of the traditional media by providing some empirical examples. For instance the *Al Jazeera* case. The Qatari channel born in 1996 and partly funded by the house of Thani, imposed itself as opinion leader in news broadcasting spreading the Arabic language and becoming very known through its English version during the Arab revolutions. We are going to explain the technical advantages while we are of course taking into account the social role played by direct footages and witnesses. In particular, during the height of the protests in Tahrir square (Cairo, Egypt), for example, activists pleaded with *Al Jazeera* to not stop filming, saying, "If you switch off your cameras tonight, there will be genocide...You are protecting us by showing what is happening in Tahrir Square."[4]

But this is not the only example. Several other ones will help one to understand the huge media's role within the political transition which affected the Arab world. Naturally, in the following paragraphs of the fourth chapter, we are going to compare *Al Jazeera* to its main rival *Al Arabiya*. Then, we will sum up the Western

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[3] Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0*., cit., p.294.

[4] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*. OXFORD: Oxford University Press, 2013, cit., p.89.

media's point of view during a general upheavals expected by few experts, but misunderstand by most part of the European and American journalism. In spite of the conflict among broadcasts which seemed initially just professional, we will imply all the consequences emerged in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions. Curiously what did not appeared so different in the following years from a political and social point of view, resulted sharply modified from another one which would involve reportage discourses and effective novelties affirmed in the media. We cannot assert that Arab revolutions were just a series of phenomena which merely regarded the world of information, but could guess that their aftermath has been more decisive for international journalists than for the citizens of the countries involved. Accordingly, we need to add that this political spring has not ended, and surely, it could be said metaphorically that this Arab season have brought a warm summer made of transitions, disappointed hopes, new consciences to listen and new goals to achieve. Just a part of this long path has been crossed, but with a modest approach this thesis will explain why this specific kilometer of the marathon was so important for media and Arab citizens, main characters of an intertwined discourse.

With good judgment, we may present all these points in the course of the fifth chapter, the last one this thesis is going to include. Firstly, it will regard the political consequences in the Arab countries in the aftermath of uprisings. Secondly, it will explore all the alternative modes to protest examined during the previous chapters. Will social media in front of censorship be able to win again, or do they risk to be included in a mainstream where new regimes and form of dictatorship will constrain contemporary citizens to comply with their will? These questions regard not only the Arab world and the whole Middle East, but also can be referred to every country, freer or not, where the balance of power constantly relies on determined features, where surely both traditional media and digital ones are covering an ever more predominant role. According to the latter, old and new democracies could enjoy the virtues of the fourth power as, nevertheless, could instead suffer ancient and common broadcasts' tendencies which take care of few people, so resulting newer and more dangerous dictatorships for all the other ones.

1.2 Where: history, geography and economy

In this paragraph we will deal with the peculiar features of the historical, geographical and economic context in the Arab world at the eve of the revolutions. We are redesigning the general background in the North Africa and Middle East, in order to talk later, possibly in a better way, about those media structures and processes which characterized the uprisings, especially in 2010 and 2011, with particularly attention to three states of the north Africa, namely Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya (chapter 2). These ones are just only few examples of a bigger transition that was able to embed other countries and so different realities, such as other

Arab states like Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Bahrain or as well non-Arab countries like Iran, Turkey and Spain even, the latter through the "*Indignados phenomenon*". In fact, although its European identity, the contagion of the Arab revolutions had seemed to affect other citizens who were not living neither satisfactory economic conditions or who were just following the uprisings through examples provided by the spread of temporarily known success of the Arab transitions thanks to the covering of international and globalized media.

This thesis will be focused on the three Arab states we have mentioned, namely Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, certainly considering the role they played in the course of the whole transition. But what it is extremely necessary before, will be to take into account the scenario through wider lenses, providing more examples. In so doing, we have previously to remind some notions worth citing in order to fulfill better our explanation.

First, the Islamic world cannot be considered as a unique political and historical reality. In fact it is the product of as many historical processes as the number of states which are part of it. One of the wrong believes that Western politics and media have generally transmit is just the following. To consider the Islamic world as unique without taking into account the historical, religious, ethnic and sociopolitical differences which differentiate state by state before to examine problems and seeking possible solutions. With this in mind, we obviously cannot present the Arab revolution as a single phenomenon, but we will prefer to talk about more revolutions and uprisings according to the different outcomes this transition has provoked. State by state, but particularly by analyzing our three study cases. Namely, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

In so doing, we would start with the words of the scholar Jean-Pierre Filiu. "During the past decades, Arabs have been singled out in international debate for being unique. This special treatment was certainly no badge of honor, since the Arab predicament, despair, impasse, lost opportunities, malaise and even cocoon were topics of numerous essays, conferences and multi-layered programmes. Something was wrong, twisted, wasted from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, the geo-linguistic area where the Arabic-speaking people were supposed to form a community (*Ummah*). Instead the paradox of the Arabization of this questioning was that it came in full force long after the defeat and collapse of Arab nationalism. The Arab revolt, launched in 1916 against the Ottoman Empire with the support of the United Kingdom and France, was crushed by the very same colonial powers when they carved up the Middle East, four years later, in various mandates. Gamal Abdel al-Nasser's vision, once hegemonic, was eventually smashed by the 1967 defeat by Israel...Historians recall that Arabs were united under the same flag only at the very dawn of Islam, when the expansion of *jihad* propelled them from the Gulf to the Ocean. During the subsequent twelve

centuries, Arabs were divided into different states and nations."[5]

At the same time, in spite of the military victories and the fail of the Arab socialism politics, we have to specify that today Arab citizens feel a sort of double citizenship.

In fact, just because people might identify themselves as Arab does not mean they necessarily want to renounce their Egyptian or Lebanese citizenship, for example, in favor of citizenship in a Pan-Arab state. As a matter of fact, however, as recent events in the region attest, an Arab identity has not dissipated. This is one reason the inhabitants of the region have followed the uprisings in neighboring countries with such interest and, in some cases, sought to emulate them.

But why do we recall that? In more specific terms let us look at some basic concepts and historical passages that will result significantly important to remember, because underlining everything which regards the Arab world's history would certainly impossible according to the ends of this thesis. Probably simple (it is not), but surely geographically essential; What is the Arab world? "The phrase *Arab World* might be defined in two ways. First, it refers to a geographical expanse that stretches from North Africa to the Western borders of Iran (west to east), and from the southern border of Turkey to the horn of Africa (north to south). The Arab world includes twenty-two states: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories (recognized in 2012 as a non-member observer state of the United Nations), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. In the region the predominant language is clearly Arabic. The phrase *Arab world* also refers to the cultural world in which the inhabitants of the region, and others who identify with that cultural world, live."[6]

Furthermore, most inhabitants of the Arab world are Arabic-speaking Muslims. Nevertheless, the term Arab world seems to hide the fact that the inhabitants in the region are not homogeneous. Just starting from the religion point of view, Muslims are divided into two main groups, Shi'is and Sunnis. The split between the two branches of Islam occurred early on in Islamic history on a dispute about who should rule the Islamic community after the death of the prophet Muhammad. Most Arabs are Sunni, but two Arab countries, namely Iraq and Bahrain, have Shi'is majorities, and there are substantial numbers of Shi'is in Lebanon, Yemen, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless it would be rightful to remind that there is also a substantial Christian population in the Arab world, including Maronite Christians in Lebanon, Copts in Egypt, and Orthodox Christians throughout the region, while, at the same time countries like Iran and Turkey are hugely

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[5] Filiu, Jean-Pierre. *The Arab Revolution. Ten lessons from the democratic uprisings*. NEW YORK: Oxford University Press, 2011, cit., p.5.

[6] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*. NEW YORK: Oxford University Press, 2015, cit., p.1.

involved in such transitions we are examining with a media-based point of view but surely they do not belong to the Arab World, in spite of their historical importance for the development of Islam.

However, several differences undoubtedly exist in significant economic matters as well, trying to underline some other features, but we deal with them later. Let us move instead toward those steps which have tracked the history of the Arab world, the most relevant to understand better the ends of uprisings. Censorship and limited freedoms affected partly the age of colonialism, where talking, trading and knowing different realities opened the minds to significant parts of population, both in Tunisia and in Egypt. People would enjoy in the future the added values of multicultural society. In fact, trading foreign good illegally and promoting hidden activities without renouncing due to the presence of strict rules, allowed people to achieve new opportunities, gradually helping the modernization of the hosting countries themselves. Despite this, common people met difficulties and constrains every day, and the intellectuals especially faced them, striving to overcome each kind of censorship could shut up their mouths. One the one hand, one possible solution would be writing in English or French, trying to enjoy to export the Arab literature abroad. On the other one, these cultural elites could be the impulse for directly renovating the educational structures in their countries, but for many years material needs prevailed in politics, leaving to the culture of reforms without consistent results. Nevertheless, these cultural spheres, still regarding elites though, gradually awoke society from their stall and some examples of that can be provided. New political debates contributed to form new generations of nationalists in the Arab world. Several schools and universities were built in the first half of the 20th century. As Jamal al-din al Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), and Rashid Rida (1865-1935) had contributed and were contributing to spread the renewal through newspapers in order to raise the intellectuals against the autocracies which were limiting their freedoms, some others encouraged culturally the Arab world, fomenting cultural interests and political activism. Briefly, new Islamic schools and media were inspiring the cultural renaissance and empowering the militancy in order to change the *status quo* who characterized contemporary politics.

For instance, Taha Husayn (1889-1973), by writing "The future of culture in Egypt", had shown that there were no reasons which could deny Egypt to get a full integration with the modern European society. Moreover, the socialist Salama Musa (1887-1958) aspired to the complete westernization of the Egyptian culture.[7]

That said, concerning Arab militancy, the historical path on which other generations of protestors walked, should not be overlooked. In certain terms, they had tracked the way for following uprisings, as actually

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[7] Corrao, Francesca Maria. *Le rivoluzioni arabe, la transizione mediterranea*. MILANO: Mondadori, 2011, cit., pp.12-14.

would occur in the 21th century. The Arab revolutions did not broke out in 2010 for a sudden renewal of citizens' participation in social and political life in order to ask for the toppling of the regimes. Surely we would affirm that those protests extremely enjoyed new means to make their voice louder, such as social media, digital networks and more involved participation through Internet and mobile phones which supported it, but certainly feelings shown in Tunisi in that period, as in Tahrir square, had deeper roots. As we can see, activism had not unknown by Arabs before the Arab revolutions occurred in the 21st century, but, to explain it better, we will provide some other examples about the political militancy. Traditionally, the Arab world have hosted two kinds of militancy. These have generally presented either a radical nature or a moderate one.   .

The first sort of militancy implies tough ways to exercise its power in order to be listened, but defining it just as a violent activism would be too superficial. To give an illustration, the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), is not only sources for the first Islamists, but also a political and social force able to make the people's interests more relevant, representing other spheres of the Egyptian population.[8] In fact, Hasan al-Banna had been hugely influenced by al-Afghani, Abduh, and Rida, being part of the Salafist movement. As the Muslim Brotherhood were being created in Ismailiyya, near the Suez Canal, al-Banna urged a cultural rebirth, blaming a too long age of slavery in favor of the English colonial power. Therefore, cultural and religious associations flourished in Egypt, and growing during the inter-war period, number of activists spiked around a million. Moreover, other radical political organizations, such as Hizballah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian Territories, operated within the Arab society articulating the political discourse according to new alternative modes to raise debate, sometimes directly in disaccord if compared to the classic regime propaganda.

Instead, the second kind of militancy, the moderate one, has reached new parts of the Arab society in the contemporary world, playing the ever more important role to educate and form conscience containing also the expansion of terrorism. Giving an example, where the administrations were more stable, like in Egypt, Syria and Tunisia, national subsidies allowed youths to attend university and find a job, granting new possibilities to empowered new generations to participate in social life of their country. To demonstrate this we could remind the case of the Egyptian writer Nawal Saadawi (1928). In 1955, just graduated in medicine, she went to work in the poorest regions of the country where she got the possibility to begin her activism, based on sanitary education for those women victims of ignorance and superstition. This is one case which testifies how much this cultural process empowered people, especially the youngest, in creating new

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[8] Campanini M., Mezran K. *Arcipelago Islam, tradizione, riforma e militanza in età contemporanea*. BARI: Edizioni Laterza,, 2007, cit., pp.41-47.

structures to reform society and inspire national unity and solidarity. The quality improvement of society could be seen and certified through better economic conditions. One case was represented by the Aswam Dam in Egypt, which supplied country with useful energy to develop the industrial sector and providing new job places in order to compensate demographic growth. Consequently, from the cultural side, Egyptian artists fell in love with creating new literary forms and styles to share with the support of radios, televisions and cinema, what we treat better and in more details in the following paragraph of this chapter. An emblematic case, the Nobel Literature Prize laureate Nagib Mahfouz (1911-2006) in 1988. This writer, through metaphoric forms of expression, was able to avoid the harsh censorship for a while, indirectly blaming the Nasser's economic politics in 1956, which took off several lands from the hands of poor peasants. According to him, Arab Nationalism was responsible for least economic results, if they were compared to the population's efforts.

But we will analyze the general economy in more details very soon. Just to conclude, last case we present to create an idea about the Arab population's malaise, is that of Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998), Syrian poet of the last century born in 1923 and died in 1998. Full of sadness for the Arab defeats against Israel, he passed from the romantic poetry to the civil one and satire against the regime. According to him, the political leadership had repressed those freedoms able to bring a cultural growth in people's minds. Qabbani talked about a social defeat, not just military.

All that considered, historical details, even short, may help us why on the one hand there are narrow similarities between the Arab states, even those have been particularly taken into account, but at the same time we cannot overlook those divergent features that will matter when Arab revolutions' outcomes will be considered to mention the most significant political consequences. To give a clearer illustration one outcome in Tunisia, another in Egypt, another in Libya, where the political context that had lived the same season of upheavals generated completely different results. But we will talk about them specifically in the next chapter.

A good academic work should rightfully history-based, therefore we try to sum up the most noticeable steps to evoke, in order to deal with the already mentioned countries we will take into account later. With good judgment, while we may write about specific steps of these states' history during the next chapter, now we

are recalling all the general worth mentioning political aspects that will be useful to understand better where we are, and at what point of the Arab history such revolutions broke out.

So, having said that, what was political life in the Arab world like on the eve of uprisings?

In 2000, the Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme commissioned a group of scholars and policy makers to assess the state of human development in the Arab world. It published the first *Arab Human Development Report* in 2002, then followed it up with four others. Overall, the reports provide a scathing assessment of political, economic, and social conditions in the Arab world in the period leading up to the uprisings.

In terms of politics, the 2002 report begins its assessment in this manner: "There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and other regions in terms of participatory governance. The wave of democracy that transformed governance in most of Latin America and East Asia in the 1980s and Eastern Europe and much of Central Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s has barely reached the Arab States. This freedom deficit undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestation of lagging political development."[9]

We may disagree with the idea of a phenomenon that was born just in recent years, if necessarily should be taken into account the historical Islamic and civil militancy against foreign rulers before, and national ones later. Political activism has been always present within the Arab society, as we have just said, either generally empowered by religious principle, through Islamic fervor, or surprising fomented by new modes to protest and renovate an apparently frozen politics, like the involvement of new participatory platforms we will look at in the third and fourth chapters.

At the moment, however, the 2002 report cited a number of characteristics political systems in the region held in common on the eve of the uprisings.

First, when report came to civil liberties, political rights, and independence of media, only Jordan ranked above the international mean, while Kuwait ranked exactly at the mean.

Second, in states in which there was no dynastic succession, such as Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, presidents regularly modified constitutionally mandated term limits. For instance, in Syria, the rubber-stamp parliament amended the constitution so that the underage son of the former president might assume the presidency.

Third, most Arab states tightly restricted the formation of political parties. For example, interior ministers or government committees in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and Jordan had to authorize the formation of any new party. The Gulf states and Libya dealt with the issue of political parties simply by banning them. About media, seventeen of the nineteen Arab states surveyed required newspapers to be licensed; there was pre-censorship in eleven states.

Finally, although some constitutions guaranteed such fundamental rights as the sanctity of the home and freedom of expression, most guarantees of this kind were empty promises. In some states, the constitution was ambiguous when it came to rights. Other constitutions delegated the definition of rights to the government. In addition Arab Organization for Human Rights cited seven states, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, and the governing authorities in the West Bank and Gaza for regularly torturing interned prisoners. Moreover, on the eve of uprisings *The Economist* reported that not one Arab

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[9] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.4.

state fit into the categories of *full* or even *flawed* democracies according to its annual *Democracy Index*. Last but not least, there were, and there are "hybrid democracies". In hybrid democracies, elections have substantial irregularities, there is widespread corruption, and civil society is weak. *The Economist* placed the remaining nineteen members of the Arab League within the category of "authoritarian regimes."[10]

Moving for a moment to economic issues, what was exactly the state of economy in the Arab world on the eve of uprisings?

"The Arab world includes states such as Qatar, which in 2010 boasted an annual per capita income of $88,232 for the approximately 20 percent of the inhabitants who were citizens, not guest workers, and Yemen whose population earned an annual per capita income of about $1,000 the same year. Briefly, the Arab world fill the richest, and the poorest positions of any economic index. Overall, oil exporters tend toward the wealthy side of the spectrum, while states whose primary source of income is not oil tend toward the poorest side. it is thus difficult to generalize about economic conditions. But it is also necessary to try , since the uprisings that have spread throughout the Arab world are about economic as well as political conditions. This is the reason why autocrats commonly attempted to prevent or defuse protests by making economic concessions to their populations, a sure sign that they recognize the role played by economic issues in promoting dissatisfaction.

In his address on the uprisings in may 2011, President Barack Obama made the point that economic assistance to Tunisia and Egypt would be necessary to ensure a smooth transition to democracy. He also stated that such assistance would be a topic at the upcoming meeting of eight industrialized countries (the G-8). In preparation for that meeting, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) put together a report on the state of the economies in the Middle East and North Africa. The report paints a fairly bleak picture. Firstly, over the course of the previous three decades , the growth of the GDP in the region averaged 3 percent, while the GDP in the rest of the developing world grew at the rate of 4.5 percent. Between 1980 and 2010, per capita GDP grew at a rate of 0.5 percent annually, well below that of the 3 percent growth that marked the rest of developing world. All this considering that to absorb the unemployed and new entrants to the job market, the annual GDP would have grow at a rate of 7.5 percent.

Secondly, with the exception of oil and gas, exports have remained flat in recent decades. The remainder of the developing world has more than doubled its share of the international market since 1980. The situation looks even worse when exports from oil importers in the region are compared with exports from other regions. In 2009, their exports reached only 28 percent of GDP, compared with 56 percent for the Asia Pacific region.

Thirdly, close to 60 percent of the region's exports go to Europe. This indicates two problems. On the one

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[10]Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.4-7.

hand, the only comparative advantage the region has is its proximity to Europe. On the other one, the region is isolated from the global economy in general and from emerging markets such as China in particular. Finally, the number of jobs grew 2 percent annually between 2000 and 2007. Overall, unemployment in countries for which data are available. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia hovered between 10 and 12 percent, while other sources put the unemployment rate as high as 15 percent. Overall , the report asserted that oil importing states would need foreign grants and loans to the tune of $160 billion during 2011-2013 to meet their obligations."[11]

Even if economic conditions would not be so brilliant in the following years, wide promises Arab countries had received in order to consolidate that independence conquered during the post-World War II period. Geographically and historically, the British, the preeminent power in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and the Gulf, generally left behind monarchies (Egypt was a kingdom until 1953, Iraq until 1958). The French, the preeminent power in North Africa, Syria, and Lebanon, left behind a short-lived monarchy in Tunisia and another in Morocco, along with republics elsewhere. In spite of the variation in government forms, however, the ruling bargains states struck with their populations were roughly the same. States played a major role in the economy. By contrast, Arab states initially provided a wide array of social benefits for their populations, including employment guarantees, health care, and education. In addition, states subsidized consumer goods. A factor leading to the adoption of these economic policies was the logic of decolonization. Unfortunately, all the virtuous aspects we have mentioned about the cultural renaissance of the Arab world seemed to disappear when some states, such as Egypt, post-independence Algeria, Libya, Iraq and Syria at various times and others, justified new policies using a populist discourse that extolled anticolonialism and the virtues of revolutionary masses. This new approach brought very soon to the following outcome. The result was rule by the few and economic exploitation of the many. These conditions provoked all the cited and bleak economic features within the Arab world.

In those states, the old regime that young military officers replaced represented collaboration with imperialists, feudalism, and corruption. For instance, the case of Egypt was one of the most dramatic, but not atypical.
On the one hand using resources derived from widespread nationalizations (including that of the Suez Canal in 1956), a $42.5 million loan from the International Monetary Fund, and $660 million in aid packages from the United States, Egypt adopted a program its leader, Gamal Abd al-Nasser, called "Arab socialism." Under Arab socialism, the State became the engine of the economy.

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[11] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.10-12.

Unfortunately, on the other one, if measured by profit, state control over so much of the economy was highly inefficient. Furthermore, even if the Egyptian government significantly reduced the ranks of the unemployed, the result was as one might expect: the Egyptian bureaucracy, never a pretty sight, swelled from 350,000 in 1952 to 1.2 million in 1970. Although the government repealed the bill in 1990 after IMF prodding, the bureaucracy continued to grow. As of 2008, the government employed approximately 5 million Egyptians. Other misfortune, just to conclude this example, which surely influenced other neighboring regimes, was represented by the fact that Nasser's integral democracy equated freedom with economic justice. And since the state was the expression of the "popular will" of the "progressive classes", it was up to the state to guarantee this economic justice. For Nasser, then, political pluralism was incompatible with the developmental and social justice goals of an activist Egyptian state. To sum up, according to World Bank data, average economic growth in Egypt, for example, was 7.52 percent between 1959 and 1964. During the 1964-73 period growth declined to 2.85 percent.[12]

Provided that, the Arab world in the last century surely looks weaker than one would think. However, these short pills about history, geography and economy, and those few examples provided, will surely useful not only to contextualize better the Arab world, but also to understand that political dissent existed before the arrive of social media and the tide of 21st century revolutions. In spite of this, main topic of this thesis, we are going to certify why such a huge uprising occurred only in 2010-2011. The following paragraphs will treat the relevant role historically played by media in the Arab world, explaining why and how they were able to inspire political change and those feelings that would gain more strength thanks to social networks' arrive.

In fact, this thesis will not aim to define social media as main reason or cause for the last Arab revolutions, but instead testify them as essential means common people enjoyed to make their political desires louder. Alternative modes in journalistic practice strongly helped transition from leader-based regimes to leaderless revolutions, and directly risen from the Arab citizenships.

Nonetheless, in the next paragraph we will see why media were not decisive just during transition 2010-2011, but already influenced politics and Arab societies in the previous two centuries.

1.3 The role of media from radio to Internet in the Middle East

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[12] Gelvin, James L. The Arab Uprisings. *What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp. 12-16.

Nobody could deny how important the role of radio was, just before the revolution led by ayatollah Khomeini, when he was in exile, and which brought revolution and a new regime in Iran based on Islamic principles in 1979. This is one example, not regarding the Arab world, but emblematic to explain in this paragraph role played by media in the Middle East history.

In spite of Benazir Bhutto's (1953-2007) opinion, the Pakistani politician who judged negatively the ill of media, completely affected by dictators' will[13], at the same time is relevant to determine how media themselves were able not only to protect such regimes, but also to be decisive in the process of political change, inspiring consciences and spreading new ideas. This was particularly important for those people who generally did not have other cultural opportunities to take part in political debates, even as listeners. Several years before, during the age of *Tanzimat*, "the age of reforms", there was a renewal of the educational system within the Ottoman Empire, yet in the third decade of the 19th century. Some of the most relevant reforms relied on a law system where citizens could be considered equal before the judicial system and new approaches toward different inhabitants of the empire in order to empowerment relations among Muslims, non-Muslims, Jews, Turkish, Greeks, Kurds, and Arabs even.

About the birth of media in the Middle East, multiculturalism developed during colonialism season, brought a major spread of culture thanks to the foundation of newspapers yet in the last decades of the 19th century, and a different approach toward people, who for the first time could gradually profit of new notions as well as the intellectuals. In truth, it should more correct saying that the historical path to follow would be very long, but, just to give an illustration, media gradually awoke new debates among citizens in the course of the 20th century, even if outcomes will be more evident only since the second half of the century. Nevertheless, referring to the birth of media in the Arab world, some examples of newspapers worth being provided are *Al-Ahram* (founded in Egypt in 1875), *Al-'Alam* (founded in Morocco in 1946), *al-Haya* (pan-Arab newspaper founded in 1946), *Al-Ba't* (founded in Syria in 1948), *Assabah* (founded in Tunisia in 1951), *Al-Tawra* (founded in Syria 1962), *al-Sarq al-Awsat* (pan-Arab newspaper founded in 1978), *Essahafa* (founded in Tunisia in 1989), *al-Quds al-arabi* (pan-Arab newspaper founded in 1989), *El-Khabar* (founded in Algeria in 1990), *Echorouk* (founded in Algeria in 1991), *Assabah* (founded in Morocco in 2000), *al-Masri al-yawm* (founded in Egypt in 2002), *Al-Massae* (founded in Morocco in 2006), *Libiya al-yawm*, *Qurina* and *al-Watan* (founded in Libya in 2007) and *al-Yawm al-Sabi* (founded in Egypt in 2008).[14] Important role between the 20th and 21st centuries were surely played by pan-Arab televisions such as *Aljazeera* (born in 1996) and *Al Arabiya* (born in 2003), but we talk about them better in the fourth chapter,

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[13] Bhutto, Benazir. *Riconciliazione, l'Islam, la democrazia, l'Occidente*. MILANO: Bompiani, 2008, cit., pp.309-363.

[14] Selwan El Khoury, Bernard. *Le rivoluzioni arabe non sono figlie del social network* in Limes, Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica. *Media come armi*. ROMA: Gruppo Editoriale l'Espresso, (4-1, 2012), cit., pp.97-104.

in order to establish their relevance during the Arab revolutions, compared to Western media and broadcasts. However is hugely relevant to remind that, after English, today Arabic is the world's most internationally broadcast language. About development of media in Arab regional context is meaningful providing an interesting example.

As the Italian scholar Donatella Della Ratta attests, it was not so easy introducing to conservative social classes of the Arab society, a communication apparatus undoubtedly imported from the Western world. In the last century, about television, sometime Saudi king Ibn Saud (1875-1953), had to face the eminent high figures of religion, and their tight opposition, to the advent of television, especially referring to the introduction of images often not acceptable for the main concept of conservative Islam.

Nevertheless, as religious leaders blamed King Saud to be too easygoing towards Western media brand's business scheme, he replied: "What do you think? Is light good or bad? Koran attests it as good, and shadow, even if not mentioned, is just a consequence of light. Therefore, why should photographs and pictures on television be bad, if they are only a combination of light and shadow?"[15]

Thus, gradually media of new generation spread throughout the Arab world fairly intertwined with Islamic precepts. Moreover, this approach should not be forgotten, because it is able to explain most part of the historical development of journalism within the Arab context, as original and peculiar process, open to innovation, respectful to tradition, and ready to forthcoming challenges it would continuously face. In the course of this work, we will see how it behaved, especially in the advent of the Internet 2.0, through social media platforms. Mainly, how did they affect the political processes regarding North Africa and the Middle East.

Starting from this analysis, it is possible to understand time extension of development of media in the Arab world, strongly affected by political seasons, but undoubtedly meaningful to highline the main features of the Arab society in the course of the last century.

Starting from the post-war world II period, we will consider three steps. First, how newspapers and first radio channels democratized the Arab society supplying people with new knowledge about both national political topics and international affairs. Second, how television and Internet created a narrow relation between broadcast and its public. Third, how social networks revolutionized participation of the public, making themselves *social media* according the mix between the traditional journalism and the new one. The third step, considered the huge role that social networks played in the Arab revolutions in 2010-2011, will be taken into account both during the next paragraph of this chapter and during all the second and third chapters.

Provided that, a great rebirth of the Arab culture worth being reminded, had been promoted by nationalist ideology in the Mediterranean area yet during the 19th and 20th centuries. The Arabic language, after several years of marginalization, enjoyed new cultural fervor thanks to nationalist education and the spread

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[15] Della Ratta, Donatella. Media Oriente. *Modelli, strategie, tecnologie nelle nuove televisioni arabe,* cit., p. 14.

of newspapers across North Africa and the Middle East. Arabic was one of the pillars of nationalism, both that of the Lebanese reformist Shakib Arslan (1870-1946), Abduh's disciple and founder of the Moroccan newspaper *La Nation Arabe*, and that of the secular one which characterized Sati' al-Husri's (1880-1969) thought, Syrian minister in education who strived to go beyond the geographical borders and cultural influence left by European colonial powers in the Arab world. Intellectuals had been decisive in the transition toward national independence, but new consciences were formed through newspapers and radios which were able to make traditional Arab culture accessible to those citizens who had not enjoyed an academic education.

According to political ends, media were generally able to channel public dreams toward a common project. For instance, Nasser widely used *Radio Cairo* in order to empower the pillars of Arab socialism in Egypt. Very soon, the influence of media pushed people to fight harshly against Israel, unfortunately in spite of all the tragic outcomes those wars would transmit to the Arab world. Nevertheless, those defeats themselves were inspiration of a new kind of literature, less interested in politics but more involved in existential discourses. Political illusion disappeared with the decline of pan-Arabism, but political costs, paid overall by Lebanese and Palestinians, inspired other cultural reactions. The exile of many intellectuals who had left their native cities, paradoxically, brought new ideas stimulating culture which would be known through media, in spite of geographical distance. Because of political fail, male and female Arab intellectuals celebrated a new season, neither triumphant nor happy, but certainly remarkable.[16]

In the eighties, need for democratic culture and respect for the human rights grew very quickly in order to change political and social conditions in Tunisia, Lebanon and Egypt. For instance, media contributed in encouraging this trend, bringing the creation of several associations within the Arab world. Specifically foundations to protect main human rights appeared, such as the *Institute for Human Rights Studies* in Cairo, or the *Ligue Tunisienne de defense des droit de l'homme.* They were not the only reason, but media had provided Arab people with new lenses to see the world, probably emulating Western countries without renounce to their identity.

In certain terms, all these novelties inspired an Arab pride within media national system as well. These change gradually brought an improvement of women conditions in the Arab world, but we will mention it in better terms later.

In the following years, what made huge difference, especially in the media historical process, was the advent of the Internet. Despite all the censorships imposed by new dictators who had come into power in the second half of the 20th century, Internet seemed to be the first medium able to connect citizens directly, and bypassing regimes will.

In fact, during the Arab revolutions, four of the world's most ruthless dictators, such as Zine el Abadine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Muhammar Gaddafi of Libya, Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt,

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[16] Corrao, Francesca Maria. *Islam, religione e politica, una piccola introduzione,* cit., pp.116-119.

fell after decades in power. Role played by media was very huge, but that of the Internet was bigger, compared to a petrified system made by government televisions and multiple kinds of censorship. Remembering some historical passages, Tunisia was the first Arab and African country where Internet appeared in 1991. Then, first online opposition magazines appeared in 1998, such as takriz.com, which was suddenly censored in 2000 by Tunisian regime, even if it could continued its work abroad.[17] The latter, possibility to operate abroad, is an important aspect to consider.

Indeed, the importance of the Internet for contemporary Arab civil society actors can be attributed to two factors: first, many groups were pushed online because other forms of political communication were inaccessible. Television commercials for advertising to the public were prohibitively expensive and regulated by the state. Radio commercials and newspapers ads were still beyond the budgets of most small civic groups and also similarly regulated by the state. The well-monitored broadcast media were a means by which the state and mainstream political parties regulated discourse. Second, the Internet allowed for content to be hosted on servers beyond the control of state censor and afforded anonymity to those who advance political criticism. During times of crisis, when physical spaces for public conversation and debate closed down, the Internet provided virtual spaces for political communication.

Over the last decade, civil society organizations have been pulled online because of Internet's expanding user base and changing demographics of the Internet-using population. In part, this was a function of falling costs: in the year 2000, the average resident of Cairo would have spent a quarter of his or her daily income on an hour of Internet access at a cyber cafe. By 2010, around 5 percent of the average daily income would buy an hour of access at an Internet access point. In Egypt, civil society leaders have used the web to reach out to foreign and domestic publics, build linkages with like-minded groups, raise funds from group membership, activate support in times of crisis, and provide social services. But overall, they also used the Internet as a tool for questioning the government and offering policy alternatives.

"Even though a relatively small portion of the general population in these countries has Internet access, the portion that is online is politically significant. Internet users in the Arab world are very often a developing country's wealthy and educated elite. They tend to be younger and live in capital cities and urban areas, and they tend to be among the most politically active. So the clients for civil society organizations, whether those organizations are faith-based, service oriented, or policy focused, are also potential members and supporters of civic agendas. The proliferation of consumer electronic has made it possible for civic leaders to reach new audiences, but this trend has also empowered local civil society "startups" to launch both small, permanent civic organizations and local, issue-specific campaigns. For example, online civil society was vibrant but

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[17] Nicosia, Aldo. *La Tunisia dalla rivoluzione alla nuova costituzione,* in Corrao, *Le rivoluzioni arabe,* cit.*,* pp. 124-126.

constrained in Egypt, but growing and co-opted in Saudi Arabia."[18]

Another aspect we cited worth treating in deeper terms is how media affected the women's life, very marginalized until the 20th century in the Arab context, both in North Africa and in the Middle East. Plenty of novels and movies had attested how bad woman's status in the Arab society was, especially in the rural parts of the countries. Female heroes became quickly a trend, represented by cinema through the works of Salah Abu Sayf (1915-1996), inspired by the Italian realism, and the writer Ihsan Abd al-Quddus (1919-1990), who often told the adventures of young ladies looking for their emancipation.[19] These were just few examples of a wider process that knew particular fervor in the following decades. What we strive to remind are the opportunities the Internet gave to women as well. This significant part of population could initially make more difference behind the anonymity of a screen than manifesting after having taken streets and squares in order to move and sensitize public consciences. In a second moment this cultural background would provide significant strength even in those manifested public events which characterized the Arab revolutions. These aspects may easily testify how media were not the main engine of revolt but surely supplied protestors with new skills and sensibilities toward that they want to ask their regimes for. In 2010-2011, this wave was so strong that the only solution people judged to be the best one, was the toppling of regimes itself.

Needless to say that mass media are one of the major means to homogenize and uniform people's minds, but this can be both a positive thing, and a negative one. As regimes exploited traditional media according to their interest, so opposition groups could use them according to their ends. Mass media seem naturally able to create spontaneity in very artificial processes led by groups of interests. We should not overlook this dangerous element, in order to provide a scientific answers to all the questions will raise during the development of this thesis. In the next chapter Tunisian, Egyptian, and Libyan revolutions will be treated deeper as well as they deserve, through the lenses of digital media involvement. Nonetheless, we will start dealing with all the novelties these digital means brought in the Arab world in the following paragraph yet. Social media have revolutionized the traditional modes of journalistic practice in every part of the world, but demography of the Arab states, heavily affected by digital means, make their regimes particularly vulnerable to political uprisings. In fact, in 2010, approximately 60 percent of the population of the Arab world was under the age of thirty, and the broader Middle East and North African region was second only to sub-Saharan Africa in the percentage of youth within that bracket. Demographers call what took place in the region a "youth bulge." To a certain extent, the current youth bulge might be attributed to the successes of states in the region. Historically, youth bulges occur as a stage in the process of moving from a population characterized by high rates of fertility and mortality. This transformation most frequently accompanies a rise

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[18] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.5

[19] Corrao, Francesca Maria. *Islam, religione e politica, una piccola introduzione*, cit., p.127.

in the standard of living. If such a transformation takes place at an even rate, there will be no young bulge. But most often it does not.

"There is another statistic, however, remarkable for the upheavals, that is more telling about the current state of the Arab world than the percentage of those under the age of thirty: the percentage of those between fifteen and twenty-nine, the period during which youths begin entering the job market and, more commonly in the case of women, marriage. On the eve of uprisings youth between fifteen and twenty-nine made up 29 percent of the population in Tunisia, 30 percent in Egypt, and 34 percent in Libya. Across the region, youth made up approximately 25 percent of the unemployed (30 percent among women)."[20]

The importance of youths in the diffusion of social networks is undoubtedly known, and the Arab world is not an exception. The lack of employment opportunities for young people in the Arab world has given rise to a phenomenon one political scientist calls "waithood", a period in which youths "wait for (good) jobs, wait for marriage and intimacy, and wait for full participation in their societies." Men in particular delay marriage until they become solvent enough to pay customary expenses associated with marriage and can support a family. As a result, incredibly, life is put on hold, and the average age for marriage among men in the Arab world is the highest of any region of the world.

In the following paragraph we will see how the digital-savvy native generation, well-known even in the Western countries, resulted particular decisive in the Arab society to inspire the revolutions in 2010-2011.

1.4 Mainstream and alternative modes of journalistic practice

As we have already said, the Internet changed so much within the global media process that its advent in the Middle East would be difficultly unobserved. What is more, how the Internet, and its so-called 2.0 evolution, affected new modes of journalistic practice, influencing the political context even, could be interesting to see, especially in countries where is not easily possible to enjoy the freedom of expression.

Censorship had generally been quite simple to exercise on newspapers and televisions, delimited inside of the strict rules of broadcasts, in particular when these kind of media were directly managed, or owned even, by the governments.

Otherwise, in recent years thanks to the rise of news leads and political information in expanding informal online spaces, journalists in mainstream media had the means to challenge misinformation from the dictatorial regimes. They could question the elections' outcomes, not rarely affected by ballot rigging, or

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[20] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know,* cit., pp.19-21.

directly accuse the national corruption perpetrated by the lobbies near to the presidential families. These cases frequently occurred in those countries we will deal with in the next chapter, namely Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, where the struggle between mainstream and alternative modes of journalistic practice emerged in divisive terms, notably empowering the push of popular revolution.

In addition, we have honestly to admit that elements of media repression continued, just to mention an empirical example, even after Egypt's first civilian president, Mohammed Mursi, had seemed to win a power struggle with the military in August 2012.[21]

On the one hand, more popular participation in political affairs had been established through the spread of new media, alternative to the national broadcasts, but, on the other one, it is necessary to explain that, in spite of its huge powers, the Internet had never been so uncontrolled as one could imagine, compared to other media.

For instance, we can remind what Jean Pierre Filiu reminded about the relationship between severe regimes and the Internet. "In November 2005, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali hosted the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis. This was the second appointment of a UN-sponsored conference whose first part had taken place in Geneva in 2003. Hundreds of international delegations, both official and non-governmental, convened in Tunis for three days to discuss and exchange their visions about the new age of digital and grass-roots information. But they were confined to a well-polished ghetto in the northern suburbs of the capital city, and access to the Internet was only unrestricted in the limited perimeter of the conference and the delegations' hotel. Local activists and NGOs were banned from attending the WSIS, where the self-proclaimed representatives of "civil society" were in fact selected members of the presidential party, along with informers from the security forces. Never had the Orwellian nature of Ben Ali's regime reached such a climax: while the WSIS guests were celebrating the virtues of do-it-yourself new technologies and e-management, the Internet was heavily controlled in Tunisia, thanks to the monopoly of state-monitored providers and their direct connections with the secret police. Human rights defenders and the Tunisian opposition had to use proxy websites, often based in France, to keep track of the repression and counter the official discourse. But any critical voice was literally silenced."[22]

Tunisian dissidents had been actually marginalized. This can give an illustration of how much the Arab regimes had understood over the years that close monitoring of the Internet was far more effective than its whole prohibition.

In Syria for example, for decades the Internet had been banned , while cybercafés were booming in neighboring Lebanon, but finally Bashar al-Asad, after taking over from his deceased father in June 2000, had lifted the ban.

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[21] Sakr, Naomi. *Transformations in Egyptian journalism*. NEW YORK: I. B. Tauris, 2013, cit., p.vii.

[22] Filiu, Jean-Pierre. *The Arab Revolution. Ten lessons from the democratic uprisings*, cit., pp.43-44.

"In economic terms, the Internet was situated at a fascinating juncture between the public and the private sphere. Specifically, the privatization of the telecommunication sector, in those countries where it was still state-controlled , usually benefited regime-friendly operators, or even the rulers' families.

Providing some data about mobile phones' popularity in recent years, even in rural areas: while the rate in OECD countries reached 785 users per 1,000 inhabitants in 2005, it spiked in the Gulf to 882 in Qatar, 939 in Kuwait. But it was also high in North Africa. 566 in Tunisia, 416 in Algeria, and 411 in Morocco. Notably, but to a lesser extent 304 in Jordan, 302 in the West Bank and Gaza, 277 in Lebanon."[23]

This change presumably brought huge transformations to the Middle East societies, but how did it provoke a political uprising, in particular against the regimes' *status quo*?

To demonstrate specific consequences of the digital media's advent, we may journalistically establish those features that make Internet and 2.0 platforms an added value to the communication process, especially about advantages it provided to audiences and general public.

If *mainstream*, through which we mean traditional media yet existing in the public sphere, is based on contents, alternative modes of journalistic practice, such as the social networks that have occupied most part of the Internet space, are based on interaction. Communication process passed from a strong separation between producer and consumer to a new relationship that relies on overlapping roles. Today the phrase *prosumer* is well-known. Using this expression is important to underline the possibility for general public to take part in the consumption of news actively. If once one had just the possibility of reading newspapers or watching TV programmes independently from his or her personal reactions, social networks have allowed the opportunity to reply instantly. In such terms, on the one hand media experts suddenly understood that social networks could represent a huge journalistic source, listening the audiences in real time, on the other one their advent disenchanted petrified concepts, and presumed truths, perpetrated by dictatorial regimes and state-owned broadcasting companies. Journalists have lost their spiritual role as the unique owner of the truth, and each of them could be contested by those who could know, and clearly express now, other aspects about those news treated by traditional media. By opening a Twitter or Facebook account, just mentioning the most relevant social networks during the Arab revolutions, everyone could participate in the debate, political one even, also collecting the consensus of its public/community. Initially, this could seem quite weirdo or ridiculous, compared to the national sphere that broadcasts were able to cover, but what, if people stopped watching TV spending instead their time on personal computers, as effectively occurred? Protestors, in order to make the uprising real, had necessarily to take streets and squares, but those environments which had been previously defined *virtual,* very soon became seed of the revolts, as they have fomented a political debate broadly accepted on their main points. One of the most important innovations social networks brought, beyond the aggregating virtues, was the peculiar, and also efficient, possibility to coordinate perfectly public events and initiatives, especially by ways able to escape from the censorship.

The regimes' conditions had been very harsh until that time, but another aspect worth taking into account is

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[23] Filiu, Jean-Pierre. *The Arab Revolution. Ten lessons from the democratic uprisings*, cit., p.45.

that social networks like Facebook and Twitter are multinational companies, notably stronger than entire States. Nevertheless, forgetting the importance personal blogs had, before social networks' arrive, would be unfair.

Then, this thesis will rightfully provide some examples about what we have just said, especially referring to the bloggers' activism in the Arab world since the beginning of the new millennium, as the Internet reached the Middle East and North Africa.

Because in the second paragraph of this thesis we have mentioned the huge demographic presence of youths, especially in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, it would be predictable a stronger impact of these digital platforms in the following years, not only as diversion in free time, bat also, and in particular, as unavoidable means of a social revolution, closely intertwined to a political one.

Certainly, this process was neither obvious nor immediate. Today active interaction is energized in the social networks, nurtured by the do-it-yourself philosophy of the Facebook pages. Consequently, some broadcasts, such as Aljazeera of Qatar, have dissolved the fences between traditional media and digital ones, by creating dedicated spaces in the daily schedules and strongly exploiting the digital talks which come every day by new platforms in order to enlarge and foment the debate.

However, at the beginning, all that was not so intuitive, and beyond new formidable tools, activists had had to demonstrate to being able to overcome censorship and freedom of expression limitations in their respective countries.

That said, regimes like those in Tunisia and Egypt, in line with their coherent state-sponsored modernization discourse and practice, had promoted programmes to make computers cheaper to buy among population. Inevitably the widespread practice of illegal connections helped as many as 25 million to get Internet access in Egypt. In Tunisia Internet penetration amounted to almost one third of the population in 2009. Because of the tight control of cybercafés, with identification checks, disk duplication and police alerts, most part of the digital-savvy population began using home connection.

This evolution gradually imported some novelties in the communication process involving those parts of the population who generally did not enjoy easily such means, namely women and people who poverty, social status or other social conditions had previously marginalized. For instance, among the bloggers, women resulted more influential than their male fellows, thanks, paradoxically, to the cultural tradition to preserve them at home. Blogs and social networks were not clearly the reason of activism, but undoubtedly a good starting point to empower it. New parts of the population yet interested in politics could intervene expressing their ideas by writing them down on a personal website. This could initially appear as an innocuous amusement where youths might spend their time, but very soon the interests of bloggers moved to politics through the courage to denounce what in their country did not work.

As one could expect, socializing websites became very uncomfortable for Arab regimes. In Tunisia, Facebook was even banned for ten days, at the end of summer 2008, after articles and materials critical of the regime had been circulated. In contrast with Tunisia, Egypt eventually allowed a relatively free press and

the Internet was far less censored by Mubarak's regime than Ben Ali's. However, the case of Egypt became particularly important when activist bloggers in order to help to popularize its slogans and platform, especially in the Western media, used to write in English on their blogs, raising the issue of an internationalization in the communication process through "multinational" social media.

In the third chapter social network's definition and the differences with social media's will be better explained, because even if they effectively seem the same thing, the use of these phrases is not. At the moment we are going to remain on the novelties evoked by the advent of digital media. Historically, worth being mentioned are the journalistic phrases used for the Iranian Revolution, defined a "Cassette Tape Revolution" and the 1989 uprisings in the Seychelles, Eastern Europe, and Tiananmen Square, defined "fax revolutions". Such expressions were easily accessible for journalists, as a lot of experts defined more recently the Arab uprisings, the "Facebook and Twitter Revolutions".[24]

These phrases could result quite strong, but we remind them just to emphasize the relevant role played by different sorts of media in political changes, each kind according its age and historical period. Bases of the latter process rely on the Internet, but the advent of Facebook and Twitter empowered that interactive perspective we cited before. Protesters during the Arab revolutions used other forms of "new media", such as digital forums and blogs as well, but those did not achieve the engagement of Twitter and Facebook. Mobility was another unforgettable element. New opportunities in involving people and organizing protests would be surely weaker without the possibility of "bearing the Internet in a pocket". Times of reaction became shorter even in front of strict censorship, and every protestor continuously promoted himself or herself as new *prosumer* of the public debate against dictatorial regimes. This is one of the reasons that some scholars use to define the so-called Arab Spring as the passage, or better the attempt to realize a passage, from leader-based regimes to leaderless revolutions, even if outcomes would be very different according the presence of thousand other factors.[25]

In fact, like James Gelvin says, absolutely should be mentioned the new struggle between two opposing camps, one made up of cyberphiles and the other of cyberskeptics. According the first group technology played a huge role in creating a community of protest in cyberspace since real space was not available in Tunisia or Egypt for anti-regime activities. This represented an alternative sphere which created a culture of rebellion and a committed engagement with practical politics. What cyberphiles urge is also that the rapid spread of social media in the region overwhelmed the ability of governments to respond effectively. As matter of fact, between 2008 and 2010, Facebook membership increased in the broader Middle East 360 percent to 3.5 million.

Instead, cyberskeptics like pointing out that in other uprisings social media played a central role, namely in

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[24] Gelvin, James L. The Arab Uprisings. *What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.54-57.

[25] Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0.*, cit., p.294.

Moldova and in Iran in 2009. But from the protesters' point of view they were a failure. According to them, social media effective impact in the Arab revolutions was marginal anyway. Cyberskeptics usually remind that the Tunsian and Egyptian uprisings were not based on social media initiatives. Groups that participated in them were not just young or tech-savvy. [26]

Even if this is certain an aspect to take into account, what should be correct to underline again is that Arab revolutions which provoked the fall of Ben Ali's, Mubarak's, and Gaddafi's regimes is not only due to social media. Reasons of protest were older and already promoted on the squares, but the aim of this thesis is to attest that digital platforms were however fundamental to involve and to make protestors stronger, specifically stronger than regime censorship. What social media provided as alternative modes of journalistic practice is that the political debate became wider and more difficult to be constrained, through citizen journalism practices as well.[27] What had just belonged to few elites, too often the nearest to the dictators, now would become topic of potential popular debate, as it effectively occurred. Mass demonstrations seemed to be irresistible, when they became part of the public sphere and when protesting was perceived as a moral obligation. If this was not true at the first time, it turned to be real in the second one, when the presumed importance of the revolts had pushed more people to attest their rage toward the regimes. Notably, if censorship could be difficultly seen through newspapers and television, regime's will against popular freedom of expression became evident when it began to be exercised over the social platforms. Using Facebook, Twitter, or just writing on a personal blog, participation is fundamental, and not a marginal opportunity, although very limited, like in a broadcast dimension, where only the operators possess the right to produce information, according government strict rules as well.

Now, owning fantastic tools to express yourself, independently if it is a political opinion or just the pleasure to certify social problems, and seeing these thoughts banned by government, make closer the sensation to suffer violation against your right of saying what you see, what you think, and what you want for your country as well. Televisions and newspapers had been able to be artificial without people could notice the strict censorship journalists were suffering.

The so-called "new media" are of course digital, but they are not absolutely virtual, according to the real consequences they have provoked, and in this specific case, inflamed. These new realities which naturally revolutionized the world of media, are not like a videogame, and Arab revolutions demonstrate exactly that. In the course of the thesis we will explain these processes very often, and novelties raised by social media as well, due to they represent the core of such a discourse.

If our first question is if social media have affected the so-called Arab Spring, the answer is surely yes. But what outcomes they would bring, this has to be analyzed in details in the following chapters after the

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[26] Gelvin, James L. The Arab Uprisings. *What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp. 55-56.

[27] Sibilio, Simone. *La rivoluzione dei (nuovi) media arabi*. In Corrao, *Le rivoluzioni arabe*, cit., pp.81-86.

introductive one.

In the second chapter it will be possible to understand more specifically the role played by social media in the three most important States that were involved in the Arab revolutions.

According to the purposes of this thesis, we are going to point out all the details, not only through the lenses of media, which characterized firstly Tunisia, secondly Egypt, and thirdly Libya.

Part II - Main Arab countries involved

Outlined some historical passages of journalism in the Arab world and defined its more significant historical steps, we can truly start with those facts and processes implying the recent history of three major countries involved in the revolution and where popular uprisings brought important changes to the Arab society and political life in the region. Our choice is due to the huge role social media played in these countries, and how much they affected the political processes. Mainly, we will see where digital platforms resulted more evident, in order to clarify this kind of communication processes in the Arab world by analyzing the most relevant case studies. States relevantly affected were surely, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, in spite of several others we cannot deal with in this context, on the one hand for their probable contagion after seeing political developments we will write about the mentioned States, on the other one for the multiple aspects characterizing the Middle East, undoubtedly one of the most complex regions to study. Rightfully, providing example for each country involved would be too superficial in such short terms, so we will refer to the meaningful States that can better explain new media processes within the Arab world, and also where these revolts chronologically took place at the first moment.

Firstly, we are going to hand the case of Tunisia, then, in the following paragraph, we are going to deal with those of Egypt and Libya. This analysis is made up of some reasonably parts. Namely they are the following: geography, history, regime rise and decline, history of the previous revolts, spark and development of the uprisings in 2010-2011, impact of media, especially the social ones, revolutions' victory and their more uncertain consequences in the region.

2.1 Tunisia

Tunisia is neither the biggest country of Africa, nor the most politically influential. In spite of this, at the end 2010, Tunisia suddenly became the lighthouse of each uprising which characterized the Arab world starting from 2011, especially in the area of Maghreb. But the Jasmine revolution, consequently to which President Zine Abidine Ben Ali was forced out of presidency by popular protests, would be difficulty explainable without considering all the reasons which pushed people to take streets and squares until the departure of the dictator and the fall of the regime. Such reasons are both political and economic, needed to be contextualized in order to define better the background in which social media enjoyed the huge popular traffic by coordinating the protests.

Provided that, Tunisia could be a marginal African state, covering 165,000 square kilometers and where

population estimated amounts under 10.8 million. This Mediterranean country is bordered by Algeria to the west and Libya to the southeast. Historically, Tunisia gained its independence with Habib Bourguiba, posing and end to French colonization and the Tunisian Republic was finally declared in 1957. Avoiding all the conflicts occurred to Algeria to be independent from France, Tunisia, after some years ruled by Bourguiba, passed to his minister Zine Abidine Ben Ali, a military figure, who came to power in 1987 and held office until 2011.[28]

Officially, he was re-elected with enormous majorities every election, the last in 25 October 2009, until he fled the country amid the popular unrest, we will talk very soon about, in January 2011. Ben Ali's family had yet been accused of corruption many times when the uprising eventually broke out, because of plundering the public's money and close relations with some important figure of the business sector in the country. One of the evident cases was those of Imed Trabelsi and Belhassen Trabelsi, while the first lady Leila Ben Ali frequently used the presidential airplane to make unofficial trips to Europe's fashion capitals. Independent human rights groups, like Amnesty International and Freedom House, documented that basic human and political rights were not respected. What results more interesting according to the ends of this thesis, is that Tunisia was ranked 143rd out of 173 in terms of press freedom in 2008.

Despite these data, Tunisia is one of the most urbanized countries in Africa, where 68 percent of the population lives in the cities along the coasts, such as Tunis, the modern-day capital. 98 percent of the population is Sunni Arab, resulting quite religiously homogenous.

In addition, although neoliberal policies economically affected all states in the Arab world, Tunisia held a special place in the hearts of those advocating economic reforms. Similarly, "neoliberalism has exacerbated the traditional geographic divide in Tunisia which separates the more prosperous north and eastern coastline from the poorer inland region. The northern part of the country has actually benefited from tourism, while the southern textile production and agriculture, in a region mostly characterized by desert, has suffered the removal of protective trade barriers."[29]

By contrast, having said that, Tunisia is poor in natural resources if one compares it to other countries of Maghreb, but it is certainly a strategic state for the international relations in the Mediterranean area thanks to its geographical position. In the meanwhile, in particular after the revolution, and with the sharp increase of migration crisis in Europe, Tunisia is closely linked to the immigrant fluxes, due to huge numbers of refugee who come from several parts of African continent, especially from Libya and the horn of Africa. This emergency pushed Tunisia to sign some agreements with Italy in order to monitoring at least immigrants arriving from Maghreb, who are generally hosted by the country.

All that said, it is eventually needed to underline those national features, beyond president's corruption,

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[28] *Atlante Geopolitico Treccani*. FIRENZE: Treccani, 2013, cit., pp.843-846.

[29] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.41.

which created the substrate to popular uprising. Before analyzing the role played by social media in such a revolution it should be seen how much dynamic Tunisian society was, and overall what conditions pushed people taking streets asking for the fall of the Ben Ali's regime.

Surveillance mechanism within the Tunisian society was deep at all levels, involving whole public administration, from ministries to the marginal offices, and affecting other less political sectors such as hospitals, farmers and universities. The exercise of political power reflected the figure of the leader and the administration strictly followed presidential will and desires. But to give an illustration of the divisions that would emerge in the country, it is useful to remind that, while the middle class, entrepreneurs, private sector and state functionaries had been contained in their requests by several compromises with the dictator, other spheres of the population, such as unemployed neo-laureates, poor people and peasants living both in the rural areas and in the urban ones, were excluded by any social subsidies or advantages. What had allowed to Ben Ali's regime to last had been social benefits provided to compensate the lack of civil and political freedoms. When economic crisis became harsher, these benefits gradually disappeared, enlarging the discontent and provoking the first protests against insufficient measures given by regime policies. Moreover, regarding political conditions, Ben Ali was for example the only candidate in the presidential elections in 1994. He gained almost 100 percent of preferences. In 1999, regime allowed two fictitious opponent to participate, while Tunisian constitution was amended in 2002 in order to eliminate the limit of three mandates, which would eventually impede president Ben Ali to be re-elected in 2004. In spite of this, government had to face a more dynamic society, in which very often the human rights organizations had been able to collect popular consensus. In occasion of legislative election in 1989, the Islamic political party al-Nahda already got unexpected votes. Even if many scholars affirms today that regime usually used this strategy to justify repression in front of risks of terrorism, the apparently multipartitism was seed of a certain willingness to change. For decades, other political leaders opposing Ben Ali had often decided to remain marginal in the political context in order to receive benefits from the government, but people remained interested in politics and closely began following those human rights organizations having the courage to denounce the repression in spite of the Western support Ben Ali's regime enjoyed.

Moncef Marzouki, one of the main opposition leaders, who would become President at the end of 2011, used to say that from 1991 to 2001 almost 30,000 were imprisoned, and also tortured, for protests. Sihem Bensedrine, well-known human rights activist, was accused by the regime with a fictitious proof, namely one of the artificial videos regime used to blame opponents' reputations, most of them Islamists, figured out in sexual assault, pornographic scenes or pedophile aggression as well. Computer engineer Mohamed Bouebdelli so decided to found a private university in order to create an alternative education in Tunisia, compared to the standards of the public educational system. Sadri Khiari, former politician and leader of the Tunisian left, blamed the regime not only to limit the civil and political freedoms of the citizens, but also to destroy human and personal feelings of each individual.

Furthermore, by using the language of cinema as a political means to actually denounce a social condition, some directors have manifested their resistance through the metaphorical lenses of a movie. In 1996 *Essaida,* directed by Mohamed Zran, took inspiration from a district of Tunisi to show the efforts people were carrying on in order to improve the reality in which they lived, similarly to those films that characterized the Italian Neo-Realism. These fictions pointed out social divides and regionalisms of the lower classes. The artistic approach suggested the willingness to fight for better living conditions, silently, or less silently, protesting against the regime. Yet the scenes presented by *Safa'ih min dhahab,* inspired by the life Nouri Bouzid, a director imprisoned because he belonged to the extremist left, more evidently denounced Ben Ali's ruling class. Youssef, the main character, is lost in his desperation for miserable conditions of society, where he cannot either express himself, or just find a public role. He will attempt to kill himself, and this is an interesting aspect to remind when we deal with the death of Muhammad Bouazizi in December 2010.[30]

Theatre and music denounced desperation and individual crisis of identity as well, blaming the regime by using soft or hard phrases, and gradually awakening a protesting mood in the Tunisian minds. Last aspect to take into account is the aversion to national and centralized politics which distinguished the south of Tunisia. Anthropologist Jocelyne Dakhlia wrote down about a collective memory which historically has characterized the autonomist political vision people had, and continues to have, in the region around Tozeur. This brought several revolts in the course of decades articulating tumultuous relations with the state entity. In addition, population living in this poor part of the country was quite overlooked by Bourguiba and completely ignored by Zine Abidine Ben Ali. Lack of infrastructures, political corruption and the absence of universities or agricultural projects consequently pushed people to manifest their malaise, and due to the general economic crisis, social situation became even worse. In the city of Redeyef broke up a revolt in order to obtain higher wages and contain unemployment. Another element to cite is surely the high unemployment rate, which undoubtedly have given more emphasis to the so-called "youth bulge". In fact, the fifteen to twenty- four age bracket is growing significantly more than the average, according also to those data we mentioned in the first chapter, and unemployment is damaging seriously the youth all over the Arab world at a rate of 20 to 40 percent, without mentioning de-qualification that affect those young people who have been able to find a job. Notably, the unemployment rate among the Arab youth is twice the world average. "University graduates are three times more unemployed than the unqualified workers; and female graduates are three times more unemployed than male graduates."[31]

So, it is quite easily to understand how fast rage mounted even during those labor protests. Very soon protests involved neighboring cities, such as Umm Larayes and Metlaoui. Several sit-in were set

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[30] Nicosia, Aldo. *La Tunisia dalla rivoluzione alla nuova costituzione*, In Corrao, *Le rivoluzioni arabe*, cit., p.123.

[31] Filiu, Jean-Pierre. *The Arab Revolution. Ten lessons from the democratic uprisings*, cit., pp.31-42.

on the street, but as soon as another strike were picking a major number of participants up, the harsh repression of police inevitably came on 6 April. The fact would be recalled many times by Tunisian protestors until the breaking out of the Arab uprisings in 2011. Many bloggers entitled their dissident web pages or group of protest with this symbolic date. This clearly attests how dissent gradually built its roots among people in the course of recent years.

On 6 April police and military forces shot several protestors and their leaders were consequently jailed. Also in 2010 other protests broke out in Skhira, while struggle between protesters and police inflamed in Nefta, Gafsa and M'dhila.

Finally, a young street vendor set himself on fire in order to protest against government denies which impede him to sell and exercise his profession in March. His funeral instantly evoked an anti-government demonstration.[32]

But when can we fix the beginning of the so-defined Tunsian spring, also known as the "Jasmine Revolution"? How did the Tunisian uprising catch fire? Some authors have answered with the story of Muhammad Bouazizi.[33] Other ones have investigated deeper reasons, some of them yet explained in the course of this paragraph focused on the Tunisian case.[34]

On December 17, 2010, Muhammad Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the governor's office in Sidi Bouzid. He was another street vendor who had uselessly tried to fight an inspector' small fine, but he was beaten by security officials. They not only refused to welcome their requests, but also humiliated and frustrated the man, fact which awoke the popular protests, especially when Muhammad Bouazizi eventually died in a local hospital on January 4. The occurred could seem a usual fact in the kind of Tunisia we have described before. Otherwise it represents even today not only the spark of Jasmine Revolution, but also of so-called Arab Springs.[35] In spite of this, two rumors have dogged the story of Muhammad Bouazizi. The first is that twenty-six vendor was slapped by the policewoman who confiscated his wares in the market in front of others. Probably she did not.

The second is that Bouazizi was a university graduate. He was not.

Whatever their validity, however, the rumors might seem true to many Tunisians because they reaffirmed two features of daily life they confronted. This detail will be interesting when we are going to examine the

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[32]Nicosia, Aldo. *La Tunisia dalla rivoluzione alla nuova costituzione* , In Corrao, *Le rivoluzioni arabe*, cit., p.123.

[33] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp.18-20.

[34] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.27-28.

[38]Ben Mhenni, Leena. *Tunisian girl, la rivoluzione vista da un blog*. ROMA: Edizioni Alegre, 2011, cit., pp.5-7.

effect of social media over public, just to say that today alleged truths ride media very fast without the certainty of fact-checking, aspect surely to be raised in the third and fourth chapters, when virtues and vices of traditional and social media will be dealt.

In so doing, it is important treating Muhammad Bouazizi case in order to affirm strongly the implication of social media, and their contributes in the growth of revolts in 2011.

"The events that took place between Bouazizi's suicide on December 17, 2010, and the departure of Tunisian president Ban Ali close to a month later are straightforward. The day after the suicide, a crowd made up of fellow vendors, youths, labor activists, lawyers, and even some politicians began demonstrating in front of the local municipal building. Some in the crowd videotaped the demonstrations and posted the videos on Facebook, where al-Jazeera picked them up and broadcast them back into Tunisia. When the government cut internet connections, demonstrators sent cell phone images directly to the satellite channel. About three weeks later, unemployed graduates and students in the nearby town of Thala clashed with police, who shot five of the protesters."[36]

The development of the protests clearly attest the important role media played even during the first steps of the revolts. How number of protestors increased and how other spheres of society could be engaged. These reactions reveal undoubtedly how much relevant the *glocalization* of social media is. "Glocalization" is that process which allowed social media to aggregate public around a specific part of the country, even an apparently meaningless one, and spread news coming from that regions around the world, thanks to the possibility to share contents on the web independently from the national borders, especially in social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Understandably would be rightfully to add that, while Facebook enjoy a major number of members, Twitter has the power to engage their accounts in the debate without relying on friendship circles.

So, independently from not completely proved details about the death of Muhammad Bouazizi, people yet shared some feelings which should just read and post on the new social platforms, and in so doing they could enlarge the debate on the most recent facts.

In fact, another question we would try to reply is the following. Why did not the Tunisian uprising take place earlier? We should shortly answer "because of the spread of social media". However, in spite of their huge role in growing up those protests in numbers and in multiple form to diffuse social dissatisfaction, there are other factors which scholars have taken into account.

For instance, on March 3, 2010, a street vendor named Abdesslem Trimech set himself on fire in front of the office of the general secretary of Monastir, a town on the Tunisian coastline. Reason of his protest had been the revocation of vending license. He lingered for a week while angry residents of Monastir clashed with the police. Tens of thousands attended his funeral according to the same modes which would characterize Bouazizi's. Such an event turned into a furious anti-government demonstration. So, why the differing

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[36] Gelvin, James L. The Arab Uprisings. *What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.46-48.

reactions to events that were fundamentally similar?

On the one hand, some observers have mentioned the economic conditions, referring to a worse situation in Sidi Bouzid, compared to the Monastir's one. But other overlapping cases, regarding for example the city of Metlaoui, where seven Tunisians had committed suicide by burning themselves to death for similar reasons, took place in one of the poorest regions of the country as well.

In fact, on the other hand, some other observers argue instead that there was one significant difference between Bouazizi's suicide and the others, not for economic reasons.

Bouazizi's case was not merely recorded on social media, but *Al-Jazeera* picked up those videos and rebroadcast them endlessly throughout Tunisia and the Arab-speaking world. This increased the awareness, if not the significance, of that event.

Al-Jazeera intervention, those we could call an "old media", or simply a traditional one, made the difference. The fourth chapter of the thesis will be dedicated to the role played by traditional media during the Arab revolutions, sometimes helping the movements of protest, in some other times helping the government to procrastinate the advent of uprisings. But social media would soon change the nature of the relation among media, government, and people anyway.

That is to say social media imported some significant novelties to what was occurring in Tunisia after Bouazizi's death. One of the aspects worth taking into account is surely the broad sharing characterizing videos of Bouazizi at the hospital, suffering after an attempt to denounce the corruption of politics. In fact, the realization grew as people watched and uploaded YouTube videos, not only about Bouazizi's case, but also about the abusive state. A large public could read foreign news coverage of political corruption online and share jokes about dictators over short messaging services (SMS) as well.[37]

Communication networks was able to avoid state censorship and quickly people began crafting strategies for action. Broader participation and internet capability to raise more vigorous reactions, sometimes beyond the effectiveness of the social violations people faced, led faster to necessity of a collective goal: to depose their despot. This process had not found means to ignite in the case of other victims who shared their tragedy with Muhammad Bouazizi.

Nonetheless, several accusations of political corruption had come from the blogosphere for many years, where independent blogs appeared the unique example of investigative journalism in the country. While Bourguiba's government was being generally remembered also for a partial liberalization in media sector, during Ben Ali's one, censorship prevailed affecting newspapers, radios, and televisions as well. The Tunisian protests in 2010-2011 and the subsequent change in government may bring significant novelties in this domain. To give an illustration, on April 29, 2011, the Minister of Interior announced authorization for fifty-one new newspapers and magazines published since the beginning of the revolution. However, because of the impact of social media, popular participation had significantly grown from

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[37] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.19.

Bouazizi's immolation, in December 2010, to the fall of Ben Ali's regime, when the dictator officially resigned after fleeing to Saudi Arabia.

Social networks spread around Tunisia, from the richest cities to the poorest rural regions, any issue could mounted the popular rage, even legitimated by the active participation of common people. Discontent was not only topic to be dealt on a dissident's blog, but quickly became matter of public and private communication, by using personal computers and mobile phones. Like a big box where people could express their ideas often avoiding the government censorship, social media collected all those factors which would push thousands of protestors to manifest their grievances on the streets. The critics of president Ben Ali had dominated virtual spaces, but after Bouazizi's death, these critics began occupying public spaces. Needless to say that regime vigorously cracked down on Youtube, Facebook, and another online applications, especially in case of direct satire against Ben Ali's and his wife. In fact, since 1995, Tunisia has interfered with digital networks for political reasons more times than almost any other state, but activists and bloggers knew how to create and produce alternative newscasts and virtual spaces. One of the most curious aspect, nice to remind, is that several dissidents even used dating websites to communicate and transmit encrypted messages to overcome state censorship. The most powerful weapon people used properly was their creativity in order to exploit any imaginable opportunity the Internet could offer. The virtuous process deriving from these anonymous online conversations about public policy, began working when so-called traditional media decided to participate in the game.

If, at the first moment, images of Bouazizi, hospitalized with burns, passed along networks of family and friends, and eventually strangers, Shameseddine Abidi, a 29-year old interior designer, posted regular videos and updates to Facebook which *Al Jazeera* used as main content to carry news of Tunisian events to the world. Consequently to *Al Jazeera'*s headlines, an aggressive internet campaign called on fellow citizens and unions to set up committees to support the uprising, firstly in Sidi Bouzid, then in other parts of Tunisia.[38] Ben Ali tried to ban Facebook, Twitter, and video sites such as DailyMotion and Youtube, but within few days people either used another sort of website, less suspected like the dating ones, or moved their communication to SMS networks. Probably, the latter made protests stronger, because if less than 20 percent of overall population, in spite of digital advancement of Tunisia, actively used social media websites, almost everyone had access to a mobile phone. In such terms, protests spread more significantly, and by broader means.

Furthermore, another government reaction to the uprising which did not provoke profitable consequences for the regime, was mass-imprisonment. In fact, the government tried to respond against its tech-savvy opponents, jailing a group of known bloggers in early January. Yet, what we have already reminded the political uprising was leaderless in the classical sense for the most part, and repression only fomented a

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[38] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp.19-23.

broader popular participation, mounting further grievances and calling other protestors to take streets. In comparison, a regime hugely based on the central figure of a dictator like Ben Ali's would be toppled by a furious leaderless revolution. There was no long-standing revolutionary figurehead, traditional opposition leader, or charismatic speechmaker who radicalized the public.

There are several figures worth being cited, but none of them could be associated to the classical model of revolutionary leader. Most part of activists contributed to revolution according their possibilities, but strongly using the communication power, and engaging skills owned by social networks. Slim Amamou blogged the revolution, before taking a post in the national unity government and the Arab World's first "Pirate Party". Sami Ben Gharbia, a Tunisian exile, monitored online censorship attempts, helping their fellow with technical support. "El Général", a middle-class Tunsian rapper, streamed digital soundtracks and songs for the revolution.

But the case we will underline in this paragraph, and again in the course of the thesis, is the Lina Ben Mhenni's. Lina Ben Mhenni is a Tunisian activist and blogger who decided to write on her blog "The Tunisian Girl", without the comfortable advantage of anonymity. Briefly, she decided not adopting a pseudonym to protect her identity, a relevant aspect during risky social upheavals against government, when digital activists had to face harsh repression of the regime.

Her blog, as well as her Facebook and Twitter accounts, were censored by the government, while she was covering the revolution publishing photographs taking from local hospitals hosting those protestors harmed by police. Posting continuously photos and videos of the protests and regime repression, Lina Ben Mhenni wanted to sensitize people about government responsibilities. Moreover, in January 2011, she covered the early weeks of Tunisian Revolution from Sidi Bouzid Governorate, not a casual place for the uprising. She was the only blogger present in the interior cities of Kasserine and Regueb when government forces massacred and suppressed protester in the region. Thanks to her courage, posts and reports, Mhenni provided uncensored information to other Tunisian activists and the international media. This kind of activism has surely led to receiving death threats. Nevertheless, one of the relevant things about Mhenni is that she used to argue that the Tunisian Revolution should be defined an "on the ground" revolution, and not an "internet" one, due to the popular movement which made Tunisian streets packed of dissidents.[39]

Nonetheless, Lina Ben Mhenni was not the only female activist emerged within the revolutionary Tunisian context. Educational female rate has grown constantly in the Arab world in the last twenty years, leading a higher number of female students and teachers compared to their male colleagues in some countries of the Middle East. In the modern Arab cities where Mosque generally prevails as gathering place, Internet has

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[39] Ben Mhenni, Leena. *Tunisian girl, la rivoluzione vista da un blog*, cit., pp.35-36.

represented the alternative, where women overall have gained the possibility to know other social models and express themselves through forums and a great variety of websites they could visited, also in order to meet people and share their personal ideas.[40]

Internet networks represented for many girls platforms where they could escape from family's control, in Tunisia even, where blogger and activists could take part in the political debate and share their ideas.

Other platforms worth mentioning are the Arab Network for Human Rights and the uncountable chat-rooms animating the political debate among students and young people, especially girls and female activists. Contribution of women was huge during the Tunisian Revolution but, in certain terms, just showed what new means of communication have gradually created within localized communities. Women who had remained for too long time alienated from the political context gained the means to express their opinion sharing knowledge and new ideas, mostly taken from their Western colleagues. Role played by social media on women was as much unperceivable as effective. Reading websites and managing a political blog at home was not as evident as giving a speech in front of a public audience, but surely the first made more powerful the second. Years of gradual acculturation in political processes, and in the real condition of their country even, enlarged the future dissident participation on the street.

Lina Ben Mhenni is right when she prefers giving all the merits to people who risked their life clashing with police forces and directly challenging the repression of the regime, but undoubtedly a huge push was supplied by social media and alternative communication systems, which enlarged the participation and strongly sensitized public sphere through the spread of pictures and videos demonstrating government responsibility in the struggles.

All this considered, less than a month after the beginning of the protests, Ben Ali was obliged to resign after fleeing to Saudi Arabia. By early January, urgent appeals for help and amateur mobile phone videos were streaming across North Africa. Ben Ali's position seemed precarious, in spite of minimal covering about events by the state-run news media. In addition, government apparatus immediately became a target for the hackers and state information structure quickly suffered the active campaign for civil disobedience against authoritarian rules. The Tunisian successful uprising, inspired by this way, several other protests across the Arab world, where upheavals were growing in Jordan, Oman, and Yemen as well.

What will be particularly evident in the course of the following paragraph dedicated to Egypt, is that opposition leaders drew direct inspiration from what they were tracking in Tunisia. Because, compared to Tunisia, only Egypt's civil society, politically active and cautiously observing developments in Tunisia, was more wired. Successful revolution in Tunisia, which soon became more apparent, however helped the largest

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[40] Corrao, Francesca Maria. *Le rivoluzioni arabe, la transizione mediterranea*, cit., pp.60-64.

protests in Cairo in 30 years in their rising.[41]

How Jasmine Revolution had overwhelmed Ben Ali's regime appeared surprising to many observers, and according to the impact of media, both the traditional and the digital ones, Tunisian popular uprising's consequences generated a domino-effect, in some parts of the Arab world stronger, in some others weaker. Neighboring countries, the governments as the potential dissident among people, have seen both the successful means used by the protestors and the reaction put in play by Ben Ali. People took the street asking for employment, less food inflation and corruption, and also for political freedoms like the right of expression and better living conditions. This represented the most dramatic wave of social unrest in Tunisia in three decades. Death toll was high and mostly appeared the result of action by police and security forces against demonstrators.

To sum up, first reaction of the government in Tunis to events was to offer both carrots and sticks. On the one hand regime promised the protesters fifty thousand new jobs, enough for only about a third of estimated number of unemployed university graduates. Moreover another rumor, presumably true, which rode throughout the social platforms, but it did not seem to be enough to angry people on the square, was that Ben Ali would keep the constitutionally mandated age limit for president at seventy five years, making him ineligible to run for another term.

In certain ways, the protesting wave resulted impossible to prevent, in spite of the invitation of the regime to involve political opposition engaging a national dialogue about the country's future.

Ben Ali, initially worried of possibility that protests were scaring off foreign tourism and investment, had wanted all schools and universities closed to prevent students from massing. Unfortunately, this did not avoid, probably encouraged, youth to feed the protests.

In the first encounter with protesters, army refused to open fire, but after the carnage at Thala, upheavals suddenly turned from economic demands to political ones. Fueled by new media, represented by social networks, blogs, and text messaging, as by the traditional ones, represented by *Al Jazeera*, demonstrations of dissent rose dramatically and quickly. On January 13, 2011, the chief of staff of the Tunisian armed forces ordered the army to stand down. The following day Ben Ali left the country.

Having said that, we can argue that this was the first time in the modern history of the Arab world a popular uprising forced the ouster of a ruler.[42]

But what consequences did the Tunisian uprising bring to Tunisia itself in 2011? How can we judge that democratic wave today? Overall, what outcomes did social media provided to Tunisian citizens, still

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[41] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp.20-22.

[42] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.184-186.

valuable today?

After Ben Ali departure from the country, Tunisia knew a fragile transition, but surely better than other North African countries, such as Egypt and Libya.

A state of emergency was immediately declared, and protests did not end in few days, because of the participation of Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR), Ben Ali's party, in transition. Demonstrations lasted until temporary Prime Minister Muhammad Gannouchi removed all former CDR members on 27 January. Eventually, party was dissolved, as protestors has demanded, on 9 March. Because of further protests Gannouchi himself had resigned on 27 February, and Beji Caid Essebsi became Prime Minister. On 3 March elections for the Constituent Assembly were declared and the Islamist Ennahda Party won the plurality of seats, 41 percent of the total votes.

Finally, Tunisia voted for parliamentary elections on 26 October 2014 and for President on 23 November 2014. On 12 December 2011, former dissident and human rights activist Moncef Marzouki was elected president.

Very briefly, if we move on the following years, contrasts emerged among political parties on what role sharia would play in the new Tunisian Constitution, makes us understand that transition in Tunisia remains fragile. Overall, political conflict about the opposing position of Ennahda compared to hardlines islamists who would make sharia main source of Tunisian legislation, picked up and became harsher with the death of Chokri Belaid, leader of the leftist opposition and prominent critic of Ennahda, assassinated on 6 February 2013.

Likewise a double terror attacks on foreign tourists in 2015 hit seriously the country. On the one hand, 38 people were killed at the Sousse beachfront, on the other one, 22 visitors were massacred at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis.

As we will return repeating many other times in the course of this thesis, political process begun with the so-called Arab Spring is not concluded. Way to democracy is long and needs for time. At the moment, what is necessary to remind before closing the paragraph is that social media enormously affected the Tunisian transition, allowing this little Mediterranean country to make the difference. The final destination of this process is unknown even to experts, but the Tunisian case inspired all the Arab World, from North Africa to the Middle East.

The use of communication technologies widely contributed to the dissident movements, and to mobilization of the protests. Another award, regarding online media freedom, was finally given by *Reporters Without Borders* to the Tunisian blogging group *Nawaat*, for their activism since 2004, based on reporting those information that national media often ignored.

Beyond all the young activists, labor unions were said to be an integral part of the protests. Not just a case if

the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet was awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize for "its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the Tunisian revolution in 2011".[43]

All this considered, Tunisian revolution in 2011 helps understand how much digital tools, Internet and social networks, widely used as social media, contributed to the success of uprising, through the activism of a new generation of digital-savvy protestors. Let us to see in the course of following paragraphs dedicated to Egypt and Libya, how much Tunisian transition affected instead the neighboring countries, inspiring almost a contagion of the digital platforms. These tools do not know national borders but surprisingly worth analyzing is how, and why, they led Egypt and Libya to different outcomes, although involved in the same digital democratic wave.

2.2 Egypt

In Egypt apparently occurred the same political process but we have to necessarily contextualize it according geographical and national sociopolitical features of Egypt. We want to start from this point in order to outline the historical passages of revolution in one of the most influential Arab states in 2011.

If we want to understand better the uprising that occurred in Egypt soon after the Tunisian one, let us go back to the historical context, just to mark some relevant steps which have affected the current situation in the country.

Firstly, this paragraph will deal with Egypt in itself. Secondly, it will treat analogies and differences with Tunisia referring to how crisis conditions emerged developing the popular upheavals. Thirdly, we will see how and why revolution in 2011 did not bring to Egypt better political and economical conditions. Finally, last but not least, with a reference to media representing core of this thesis, the current paragraph will conclude its argumentation analyzing historical virtues and vices of journalism in Egypt, and what was the impact of social media on it.

That said, there are some basic aspects to remind about a country which usually results strategically important and manifestly followed by its economic and political partners, as well in the region as in the

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[43] Malcangio, Livia. *Being Nobel.* GERMANY: Elanders Germany, 2015, cit., p.20.

international context.

Officially known as the Arab Republic of Egypt, the State is geographically situated in a transcontinental position spanning the northeast corner of Africa and the southwest corner of Asia, via a land bridge formed by the Sinai Peninsula. Some defined it as the only Eufrasian nation. This Mediterranean country, extremely bigger than Tunisia, is bordered by the Gaza Strip and Israel to the northeast, the Gulf of Aqaba to the east, Sudan to the south and Libya to the west. In spite of its very long history, since the earliest development of writing and civilization in very ancient timers, although Christianized in the first century of the Common Era, it was slowly Islamized long after the Muslim Arab conquests of the seventh century. It was ruled by foreign military dynasties until the Ottoman conquest in 1511. An Ottoman officer freed the country from Napoleon invasion (1798-1801) and gained some independence from the Ottoman empire. After the Urabi revolution in 1879 was occupied by the British that left at the time of the young officer revolution in 1952. Egypt is the third-most populous country in Africa, just after Nigeria and Ethiopia, with its over eighty million inhabitants. As it has always been, the majority of people live near the banks of the Nile river, while densely populated centers are Cairo, its capital, and Alexandria as well, one of the biggest cities.

Today, Egypt represents one of the most influential political and military power in North Africa, while its economy is as much diversified as fragile at the same time.[44]

Specifically, strongmen ruling for very long periods of time have controlled Egypt for well over half a century. After the age of colonialism and the monarchy, more precisely since 1952, Egyptians had known only three presidents: the father of Pan-Arabism Gamal Abd al-Nasser who ruled from 1952 to 1970, Anwar al-Sadat from 1970 to 1981, and Hosni Mubarak from 1981 to 2011, year of the so-called popular revolution.

Like Bourguiba in Tunisia, Nasser abolished monarchy to become Egypt's first president, closing the so-defined liberal age in order to make country stronger and more independent. Undoubtedly press was relatively less free, and from a parliament where seats were contested, Nasser imposed one-man politics and one-party rule. In 1956 the crisis of Suez Canal, after its nationalization, finally pushed French and British forces, who had intervened in order to defend their economic interests, to withdraw. Nevertheless, the illusion about a major power gained in the international context, disappeared after military defeats against Israel, especially during the Six Day War, just as the bleak end of the United Arab Republic, a dream which was never restored.

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[44] *Atlante Geopolitico Treccani*, cit., pp.339-348.

However, in the impossibility to track all historical Egypt's passages, we will look at the main information in order to move briefly on with more recent facts.

To sum up, after Nasser's death, Sadat, the hand-picked vice president, became president. Yet when an Islamist assassinated Sadat in 1981, his vice president, Mubarak, through similar ways, assumed the presidency. Making an additional point, like Nasser and Sadat, Mubarak came up through the military, for his case the air force, then he formally won the presidency three times.

We will soon look at how longtime President Hosni Mubarak's regime was toppled by mass protests, but all things considered, we will see also why, after the rise of Muslim Brotherhood in later elections, it was ousted by the army on 3 July 2013 through a coup d'état. Before involving the different variables raised by the specific role played by media, overall the social ones, during the Egyptian popular uprising in 2011, with good judgment we may underlines Egyptian political and economic features in order to make a short comparison with Tunisia and explain better what kind of regime Mubarak had built in three decades, from 1981 to 2011.

At first glance, it would seem that no two states in the Arab world can geographically differ from each other more than Tunisia and Egypt. As we have said in the previous paragraph, Tunisia has an estimated population of about 10.9 million. Egypt is geographically six times larger and its population is over 82.5 million. On the contrary, Tunisia is generally richer and urbanized, while 40 percent of the Egyptians live on less than two dollar a day. What should be underlined is that Egypt lived an economic boom between 2003 to 2008, thanks to huge international investments and a dramatic growth in the internal demand. Nonetheless, the global financial crisis and the political instability sharply interrupted its positive trend. At the same time, what should be clarified is that common economic results gained by country, because of the political features or general social divide as well, are rarely reflected on real conditions of its population, with the consequence to make those outcomes vain.

On the other hand, about proximity to Europe chants and slogans during the uprising in 2011 could be emblematic. In Tunis people shouted "Dégage!", in French, while in Cairo protestors said "Irhal!", in Arabic. All this to ask for the toppling of the regime, that would simply means "Get out!", in English.[45]

The latter indicates how much Egypt represents, in certain terms the heart of political Arabism, compared to a more Mediterranean country like Tunisia.

Despite their structural differences, these countries share a number of key characteristics. First, about religion. Over ninety percent of population in both of them is Sunni Arab. Second, about the evolution of the upheavals in the two states, what mostly regards us in the course of this thesis. In fact, Tunisia and Egypt were relatively homogeneous. Dealt with the first one in the previous paragraph, now we treat the second

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[45]Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.39.

one, mentioning those steps which immediately obliged Mubarak to resign and Egypt to transform its politics due to the popular uprising.

But how Mubarak's regime was like on the eve of the uprising? And why do these features result particularly significant to deal with the Egypt upheavals through the lenses of national traditional journalism and international digital media? What is extremely important to remind is that "in Egypt the state put in place an all-pervasive security apparatus to monitor, frighten, and repress the population. The term *security apparatus* covers a variety of formal and informal groups with overlapping and often ill-defined jurisdictions... Mubarak was ambitious when it came to his security forces. In fact, an estimated two million Egyptians participated at any given time in Egypt's security apparatus... During the 1980s, government officials, members of the ruling party, and private businessmen began to outsource their security needs to local hoodlums, known among Egyptians as *Baltagiya*, "hatched men". The Baltagiya were drug runners, common criminals, gang members, former prisoners, or unemployed or underemployed slum dwellers whom the government, politicians, and businessmen hired to terrorize neighborhoods and political opponents, break up demonstrations, bust strikes, and in general contribute to creating a menacing atmosphere to cow the population."[46]

This aspect appeared a particularly significant reason that awoke popular rage and common contempt. In these terms, under the Mubarak's regime, general corruption spread throughout Egypt, vanishing its economic growth. In Egypt tales of corruption took on almost mythic proportions. Economic gains gradually fed the corruption, until making it a clearly perceived problem among population, who too often did not see economic boom converted into general welfare.

This perception was particularly strengthen by social media coverage. If, on the one hand, traditional Egyptian journalism, despite its efforts, was severely limited by strict regime rules, on the other one, social media journalism make popular perception wider and stronger on the eve of the uprising, in spite of the real state of the country.

Before to deal with it, and just to anticipate what will be treated better in the course of the following chapters, we remind, through Naomi Sakr's words, that "in recent years, thanks to the rise of new leads and political information in expanding informal online spaces, journalists in mainstream media had the means to challenge misinformation from the dictatorial regime of Hosni Mubarak and his ruling National Democratic Party... But elements of media repression continued even after Egypt's first civilian president, Mohammed Mursi... For more than 50 years, laws and intimidation had obstructed professional behavior and driven many journalists abroad, where they worked to diverse standards of autonomy and objectivity, depending on their employer... Nonetheless, young people, demographically important but sidelined economically, had by

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[46] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.44.

then already circumvented licensing restrictions through online radio and news services using Facebook and YouTube... So, the web of influences on Egyptian journalism gives rise to certain recommendations."[47]

Without forgetting that digital media never caused the Arab revolutions, it is rightfully to underline that, about Egyptian regime, Mubarak in the course of his presidency had illegally accumulated 2-3 million dollars, not 70 as people blamed him during the protests. Just like the president, other eminent figures were directly accused in the angry demonstrations, such as Ahmad Ezz, close Mubarak's friend, who came to control 60 percent of the Egyptian steel industry by exploiting his political connections, Amin Abaza, former minister of agriculture, whose company was the largest exporter of Egyptian cotton, and Zuhair Garrana, whose holding company owned luxury hotels and cruise ships.

But to demonstrate the close linkages between media and political issues, and in light of all things considered, let us move to analyze when, and how, the Egyptian uprising caught fire, in comparison with the Tunisian Bouazizi's case.

Accordingly, what was yet mentioned in the previous paragraph, in spite of quite differences, Egypt was strongly inspired by the events which characterized the ignition of the Tunisian revolution.

Finally talking about media in Egypt, almost everyone has access to a mobile phone in 2011, and the country has the largest internet-using population in the region, second only to that of Iran, which is not technically part of the Arab world. This meant that Ben Ali's departure was seen, and news spread rapidly, through Egypt's social strata.[48]

Nevertheless the coverage of the Egyptian state-run media should not be forgotten, although it maintained its reluctant modes towards political upheavals. At the same time we would fall into a black hole overlooking the large and active online public sphere where political parties, radical fundamentalists, investigative journalists, and disaffected citizens interacted since the advent of the Internet. All of them were considered illegal by the regime, but following the Muslim Brotherhood case, when the political movement moved their server infrastructure to London in order to keep their online deliberations and spin after the official regime's ban, some groups were able to survive the censorship.

In 2011 some rumors about Western countries intervention, probably wrong, emerged, especially about the involvement of Wikileaks and April 6 movement, which according several scholars brought the democratic transition.[49]

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[47] Sakr, Naomi. *Transformations in Egyptian journalism*, cit., pp.vii-x.

[48] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp.20-21.

[49] Cadalanu, Giampaolo. *La guerra sceneggiata per i media occidentali,* in Limes, Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica, *(Contro)Rivoluzioni in corso*. ROMA: Gruppo Editoriale l'Espresso, (3-2011), cit., pp. 209-214.

Nevertheless, what this thesis will closely regard are those processes which, almost like a contagion, led the fallen of Hosni Mubarak's regime by examining the perspective of media.

The Tunisian general upheaval left an immediate and powerful impression on many people in Egypt. In fact, more than a dozen Egyptians copied Muhammad Bouazizi's suicide-by-fire. One for all of them, the most representative according to the consequences, Khaled Said.

Said was a twenty-eight-year-old owner of a small business in Alexandria. He managed to videotape two policemen splitting up drugs and cash they had confiscated from some just arrested criminals. Because to the video publicly posted on social networks, the policemen firstly chased him, then beat him to death. Consequently, other brave activists posted his beaten face on the web, raising the reaction of the public.

About 473,000 visitors learned of the protests from it, and several pages about Said's case suddenly spread. Gradually, the Egyptian uprising picked up main slogans and tactics, such "the regime must go", or the idea to post photos and videos on the web to sensitize more the public. In fact, a number of those who organized the initial protests in Cairo knew their counterparts in Tunisia and were similarly young and technology-savvy. In this phase the use of social network became essential for anyone wanted to join the general upheaval, but what hugely made the difference was the revolution originating in media sector itself. In a complex society like the Egyptian one, several journalists, banned for decades, could now express their ideas, or just carrying their reportages, through those social networks that would be defined according these modes *social media.*

For instance, Asma Mahfouz, well known as the "veiled blogger", learnt to use the web in order to achieve political ends. She belonged to the "6 April" group, an activist movement created in memory of the labor protests mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Asma Mahfouz, joining several other bloggers and activists, invited people to take streets and protest against the regime, asking for a less corrupted government, justice, and respect for the human rights.

While we will specifically deal with these notions in the next chapter, what is worth cite at the moment should be the facts occurred just after Said's death.

As we began saying, several groups calling for protests on 25 January 2011 were inspired by the "April 6 Youth Movement" who had worked together in oppositional politics for almost four years making the protests international. This political process definitely lost its national borders as Wael Ghonim, a regional executive at Google, started the Facebook group, "We are all Khaled Said", to keep alive the memory of the blogger who bravely faced the corruption of the Egyptian regime. In fact, "just as digital images of Bouazizi in the hospital passed over networks of family and friends in Egypt, an image of Khaled bruised face, taken as his body lay in a city morgue, passed from one mobile phone to another, until thousands had seen the picture and were actively developing protest strategies online. And just as videos of a young girl dying in the

streets of Tehran had inspired hundreds of thousands of people to take the streets in the summer of 2009, the webpage to memorialize Said became a portal for collective commiseration. But more than being a digital memorial, Egyptian police have long tormented bloggers, this webpage became a logistical tool and, at least temporarily, a very strong source of community. Ghonim fast became the country's most prominent Tweeter, linking a massive Egyptian social network writing in Arabic with networks of interested English-speaking observers overseas."[50]

Wael Ghonim himself was not initially in Egypt, just to remind how international these processes through social media can be. Azzurra Meringolo mentions the bravery of young people who decided to take Tahrir Square risking their lives and looking for justice. Social media and mobile phone cameras were just able to take the images of an awaken generation ready to face the regime censorship and their privations of freedoms.[51]

But, in order to defend their rights, popular escalation would have been impossible without those features by which social media enriched people. Rumors are not as effective as a photo posted on Facebook, or a video posted on YouTube. It would seem like web pages directly pushed activists to protest, thanks to the possibility to realize better what had happened to their fellows or simply other Egyptian citizens. Wael Ghonim himself soon offered his gripping chronicle of how a fear-frozen society finally toppled its oppressors with the help of social media, making the power of the people greater than the people in power through a 2.0 revolution.[52]

Yet, with this in mind, political consequences in Egypt resulted to the international public's eyes more sensational than the Tunisian ones, like such outcomes could lead a contagion in all the Arab world, without discrimination and suddenly ride the wave of democratization, even westernization.

In spite of the latter, representing a wrong, more than optimistic estimation, with good judgment we may remain faithful to facts. For instance, in the Egyptian case, beyond Tahrir Square's young dreams, the so-called Arab Spring was followed by a hot summer, and long political winter even.

In spite of their future bleak consequences, Egypt knew a strong democratic wave anyway, although that leaderless uprising, we yet mentioned in such terms, resulted unable to track a stable historical phase. Let us see why.

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[50] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.21.

[51] Meringolo, Azzurra. *I ragazzi di piazza Tahrir*. BOLOGNA: Cooperativa Libraia Universitaria Editrice Bologna, 2011, cit., pp.25-55.

[52] Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0.*, cit., p.294.

Just like in Tunisia, Egypt lived a short but very intense revolution, where people belonging to any age and social class took the streets, and in which a silenced and censored public for so long time, from January 25 to February 11 manifested obliging Mubarak to resign and flee Cairo. Egyptian citizens suddenly became able to turn completely that political course that had lasted thirty years.

Political activism is intertwined with Egyptian history, however, as we try to attest, social networks were decisive in the raise of general opinion, tired of corruption and determined to topple the autocracy.

Facing the general upheaval, Egyptian army decided to assume the power to govern, while, after Mubarak's resignation jubilant celebrations broke out in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, became de facto head of state *ad interim*, but on 13 February, the army dissolved the parliament and dissolved the constitution.

Writing a new constitution was not so easy, due to the uncertainty of the army, quite afraid of the people's anger and some irregularities affecting the procedural process.

First, a referendum confirmed some constitutional changes wished by the military in power in march. Second, constituent assembly yet elected was dissolved because of lack of transparency in the choice of members. Finally, after a harsh struggle between army and Muslim Brotherhood, the main oppositional group, Egypt found a partial solution in the victory of Mohammed Mursi in presidential election in spring 2012. The known figure of the Muslim Brotherhood defeated Ahmed Safiq, last Mubarak's minister and man close to military.

In the course of 2013 some novelties were brought by ruling of the new government, in favor of Muslim Brotherhood's candidates and attempting to marginalize that part of army which had supported Mubarak and Tantawi. Unfortunately Egypt did not find its rest, because some Mursi's policies did not like to liberal and secular groups, provoking their return to manifest in Cairo.

In fact, Mursi was trying to impose strict Islamic practices when several constituent assembly's members walked out of the negotiations and began to oppose the Muslim Brotherhood majority. In a still agitated country, this conflict led to further massive protests and violent action throughout Egypt.

Country split into two opposite groups. Those who were completely pro-Mursi and those who were totally against.

At first glance, this could be a new kind of conflict just after thirty years of Mubarak's regime, but in reality, according to the history of Egypt, the raised struggle summed up ancient rivalries and old hatreds. After the revolution of 2011, hostilities prevailed with an outcome clearly visible still today.

Even if Mohammed Mursi offered a national dialogue with opposition leaders, refusing anyway to cancel the 2012 constitutional referendum previously blamed to propose a constitution too favorable to Muslim Brotherhood, tens of thousands of supporters and opponents of the president clashed on the streets. The so-defined largest violent battle between Islamists and their foes since the country's revolution inevitably led to

a new coup d'état.

At the aftermath of the constitutional referendum people continue taking the streets and organizing strikes across the country, from Suez to Aswan. The revolution had not resolved neither the economic crisis nor the fall of tourism. In addition, work perspectives for young Egyptians remained very bleak, representing one of the hard challenges to face for anyone who will rule this country, hopefully trying to build an effective democratic state.

This process is in the making. Even if difficulties are actually harder after the revolution, social activism in Egypt today, the so-called "Republic of Tahrir Square" is more dynamic and represent both workers and students. A street politics also formed by brave journalists and intellectuals that carefully follow and raise the political debate. In this period citizens are probably attending a counterrevolution, mainly the struggle between the army and security forces and people asking for more liberties in spite of the risk of the unrest of extremism in the country. A new political season full of contrasts, but at the same time definitively signed by the young revolution of 2011, the so-called *Shabab al-Thawra.*[53]

Nonetheless, Egypt is facing a very tough aftermath of revolt, both economically and politically.

In closing this part, it is only rightfully to add that economy slowed down in the last years of Mubarak's regime due to the international financial crisis, while at the moment revolution has enormously affected any sector of production, import-export partnerships, and foreign investments as well. In the Mubarak age social costs were high, but Egypt seems to live a period of economic crisis without social benefits today, in the light of what we have just said about the recent political facts.[54]

"Bread, freedom and social justice" was one of the repeated refrain at Tahrir Square. Independently from the effective goals achieved in so long inspired revolution, what is worth underlining is why the soul of change found its concrete roots to develop just in 2011, not before, in spite of historical dissidence that characterized Egypt since the times of the British protectorate.

Many Egyptian bloggers such as Wael Abbas fulfilled virtual platforms with interesting contents on the web. Anything that could not be published by official media became gradually object of vivacious debates on those forums that for long time were able to avoid regime censorship. Where censorship shut down online pages, judged politically sensitive by the regime, digital activists found other ways to share their propaganda, through encrypted messages on dating websites or online videogames for example. On the web most part of population, generally silenced, could engage a political debate with their fellows, as much as develop a public opinion about the regime. Popular uprising was predictable when, who was directly

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[53] Gervasio, Gennaro. *Egitto: una rivoluzione annunciata?,* In Corrao, *Le rivoluzioni arabe*, cit., pp.159-161.

[54] Mafodda, Giovanni. *La primavera egiziana presenta il conto*, in Limes, Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica, *(Contro)Rivoluzioni in corso,* cit., pp.233-239.

affected by the regime violations and military forces abuses, could witness his or her contempt by sharing videos and images uploaded on YouTube. That was exactly the case of Khaled Said.[55]

As we will see, a community enabled to interact thanks to internet contributes became in few years, after decades of political activism, strong enough to destroy the regime's apparatus, from the communication strategies to the main political ones which propaganda was based on.

What will be extremely important in the next chapter is why, such platforms as Twitter and Facebook, resulted even more decisive in the extension of propaganda throughout people, independently from sex, age, social class, economic conditions, and pushing all of them to criticize the government on the web before, and on the streets after, managing to overthrow the regime as never they have been able in the previous decades. Nonetheless, what was the position covered by traditional media in Egypt? This is an aspect that should not be overlooked because of the complexity of media under the age of three regimes, from Nasser to Mubarak. Obviously, according to the same ends, Egyptian journalism after revolution of 2011 should not be ignored. In fact, Journalism has a long tradition in Egypt, many years longer than the decades that constitutes the consolidation of the military regime and just after the end of the British protectorate.

Historically, the printing press was first introduced to Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte during his French campaign in the north of Africa and in the Middle East. To give an illustration, *Al-Ahram*, translated "The Pyramids", is a daily newspaper founded in 1875, not casually run by the state since 1960. Another newspaper, *Al-Akhbar*, "The News" was very younger because of its foundation in 1952, and became in the same way state-run since 1960.

What should be noticed is that, though freedom of expression is commonly accepted, several aspects of the journalistic profession are actually severely limited for political reasons. Like the mentioned newspapers, several other kinds of media were, and unfortunately are, practically controlled by government. Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that the media in Egypt are highly influential not only in Egypt, but also in the Arab world. That has to be attributed both to its large audience and an apparent increasing freedom from governmental control. A further explanation just to clarify what could be considered a contradiction. Freedom of the media is guaranteed in the constitution, and the ruling class is increasingly respecting this. However many laws still remain restricting this right.

As the scholar Naomi Sakr says, "decades of censorship, imposed through laws, intimidation and direct government control of giant press and broadcasting entities, thwarted the forging of a national consensus on norms of journalistic autonomy and objectivity. The trajectories of individual journalists and their wrangling with media owners and institutions reveal a wealth of professional experience and commitment, enthusiasm

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[55] Meringolo, Azzurra. *I ragazzi di piazza Tahrir,* cit., p.43.

for cross-media collaboration with bloggers and social media users, and divergent approaches to what constitutes fair reporting".[56]

Significantly, deontology of the profession should be surely contextualized, because what is obvious from a Western approach, based on the tradition of British media, is not automatically true to completely different contexts.

Some words are worth being spent on the political use of media regarding the history of the Egyptian media. Just as in more recent years social networks have been able to ignite the Arab revolution along paths they could not followed before, radio had managed to do it through its political usage. Since the beginning of the president Gamal Abdel al-Nasser's government radio has played a huge role in spreading the Pan-Arabism's principles as yet cited in the previous chapter. In fact, as Nasser came to power, he realized that radio could be utilized as a powerful political tool for two reasons. Firstly, illiteracy of Egyptian at that time was dramatically high. Secondly, radio allowed to propagate political ideas toward people faster, even toward those who simply enjoy hearing, compared to other less involving media such as the newspapers.

This revolutionary propaganda, as one knows, heavily influenced the facts occurred in the 1950s. Media are able to create an illusion about politics and the real state of things, even ignoring possible concrete and ideological defeats. On the one hand, the failure of Nasser's Pan-Arabism, on the other one, military debacles suffered for the Israelis.

In the case of Egypt, several other newspapers, magazines and televisions, even in digital forms, were born in the 21st century. In fact, after Egyptian presidential election of 2005, Ahmed Selim, office director for information minister Anas al-Fiqi, declared the era of "free, independent, and transparent Egyptian media". Today the written press is hugely diverse in Egypt. If, on the one hand, there are over six-hundred newspapers, journals and magazines, on the other one, the majority is state-owned, or strictly monitored by political parties. In spite of the numbers, what matters is the quality of the news reported. This apparent freedom of expression declared by Ahmed Selim provoked a contrast with the constant censorship or simply limitation to the independent exercise of profession. Journalism's autonomy is still an oasis to conquest. The 21st century did not avoid the imprisonment of several journalists from private newspapers and televisions. They were jailed for breaching laws which prohibited criticism of the president, state institutions and foreign leaders, or putting out so-called "false news" harming the reputation and interests of the nation.

In spite of this, activism achieved some goals in the last years, such as the introduction of rules stopping the criminalization of defamation. Some exceptions and extremisms exist also in favor of journalists, naturally. For instance, when Hilmi Salem wrote some blasphemous lines in which God figured like a peasant, the authorities of *Al-Azhar University* themselves exposed petitions in order to declare that freedom of the press should be used responsibly and not touch on the basic foundations of the Egyptian society, religion, family,

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[56] Sakr, Naomi. *Transformations in Egyptian journalism*, cit., p.21.

and morals. However, *Al-Azhar University* censored one more than 196 texts. It is difficult to think they all were highly offensive.

Moving on television, in spite of the presence of two main broadcasters and an increasing number of private channels, Egypt was the first Arab nation to have its own satellite. This detail soon allowed people to watch pan-Arab television, such as *Al-Jazeera*, which quickly became very popular among the viewers. Notably, it should not be forgotten referring to the uprising of 2011, because all novelties brought by social networks were accurately channeled by *Al-Jazeera* in the fruition of the news, since the first cases of protests occurred in Tunisia. As we are attesting for the Egypt, then it will be extremely important defining the role played by *Al-Jazeera*. On the on hand Qatari television was the unique example of international broadcaster able to follow the facts very closely, showing great professional experience and raising huge investments to the international community even, on the other one, as single actor, it could orient its preferences, heavily affecting politics in the neighboring Arab countries, very often symbol of historic rivalries with the Al-Thani's kingdom. In certain terms *Al-Jazeera* exercised a new fourth power making the world aware of two relevant aspects in the media world. First, today overlooking role played by social networks in the communication process would be impossible, and the Arab revolutions are proof of that even in political issues. Second, journalism has definitely lost its national borders, when talking about local news becomes pleonastic. The domino-effect characterizing the Egyptian revolution against Mubarak's regime, in spite of all the problems we have dealt with, is undoubtedly related to the impressions felt by watching the success of the Tunsian popular uprising against Ben Ali, thanks to *Al Jazeera* coverage. New kind of journalism does not know frontiers as much as it is ever more relying on big broadcasters and international brands.

International viewers have followed world news channels, such as *BBC*, *CNN*, and *Al Jazeera* itself, in order to know the main information current politics could offer. That was exactly the case of the so-called "Arab Springs", phrase entirely created by international journalists in front of a process seeming the complete turning point of the modern Arab world. But that was only the perception provided by media.

Variables are infinite, even in journalism. About this paragraph dedicated to Egypt is important remember that political developments in the country were hugely affected by the Tunisian ones through the impact of social media, we treat in deeper terms in the course of the next chapter. However, ignoring the differences characterizing the two countries analyzed should be a fault. Historical and geographical features remain significant in the comprehension of the political process, although referring to media is noticeable how journalistic practice is becoming every day more international. Domestic politics is overlapping the foreign one, while social networks themselves have made political debate broader.[57]

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[57] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.26.

Wael Ghonim's case is emblematic. The activist who many people consider one of the heroes of Egyptian revolution today, definition he continues to deny every day "because - as he generally used to say - we can all be heroes, thanks to social networks" [58], lived most part of those days at home, managing the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said".

He was particularly afraid of the possibility both activists and government officers initially found out its identity that he strongly strived to remain anonymous to the public he interacted with on Facebook. Sometime, he told in his book "there was a horrifying moment. Mahmoud told me not to worry, and he swore he would not tell anyone. He implored me to hide my name somehow. I started to sweat. My heart beat faster. the five hundred might include some from State Security officers or even people who knew me personally. In either case my identity might be leaked. I tried to calm down and think rationally. I finally realized that I could change my Facebook name to Mohamed Ahmed, so users would see that pseudonym instead of Wael Ghonim. But on my page the username was "ghonim".[59]

Shortly, a digital propaganda could be led anonymously. Sometimes, this is the only profitable way to accomplish the activists' mission. Wael Ghonim gathered most part of people who took Tahrir Square on 25 January 2011 through his page "We are all Khaled Said". He had joined Google in 2008, rising to become head of marketing for Google Middle East and North Africa. Today he supports education and technology in Egypt, considered one of the activists who overcome the strict censoring rules of the Mubarak's regime until its fall.

Yet, to conclude, as Naomi Sakr urges, something else should be the goals to achieve for Egyptian media, we do not know if possible in short terms but it is evident the turning point, at least in communication issues, surely not in political ones, inflamed by the impact of digital media on the Arab revolutions both in Tunisia and in Egypt.

Two aims worth being achieved by the Egyptian media are the public service ethos and a new deal able to protect effectively freedom of expression. To give an illustration public service media are only one element in a democratically diverse media landscape, alongside private commercial media, party political media, minority media, community media, and so on. Egypt's landscape is dominated by state-run publishing and broadcasting entities with a combined workforce of some 74,000 and debts estimated at $3.5 billion. Journalists have led the call for transformation of state-run operations into public service media, but doubts remain about the wider vision for financing and regulating Egyptian news media as whole. The latter represents in itself one of the sensitive problem in media industry. Media owner are those who finally take

[58] Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0.*, cit., pp.292-294.

[59] Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0.*, cit., p.115.

decisions about the orientation of a newspaper, just like a television or a websites. On the other hand, a virtuous process begun during revolution of 2011 was the implementation of Egypt's international commitments on trade union pluralism, because many journalists felt that their rights were unprotected. Briefly, due to a deeper analysis in the course of the following chapters of this thesis, the task has fallen to individuals to work with media owners thanks to digital media. People can set unwillingly editorial standards inside organizations and create cross-cutting professional networks to promote good practice in both management and journalism. This sort of collaboration calls for liberalization of laws on freedom of association, a significantly aspect regarding not only the media sector of Arab society.[60]

Provided that, let us moving on the following paragraph, last of this chapter, about Libya. We will see how the Libyan case has more differences than analogies with the Tunisian and Egyptian one.

2.3 Libya

The third country, hugely involved in the popular wave provoked by the Arab revolutions, we talk about in the course of this paragraph is Libya. Proportions and changes occurred in politics after forty-two years of uninterrupted Gaddafi's regime are quite notable and worth taking them into account. In fact, Libya represents another political system which was suddenly toppled by people, and not only as we will see for this case, and, at the same time, resulted significantly interesting for international and strategic equilibrium of the region. It will be possible to see how much influential not only national media, but also international ones during the uprising in Libya were. But if, on the one hand, international military intervention led different consequences to Libya, on the other one, and according the same schemes, the impact of social media had been essential in the ignition of the upheaval. All thing considered, this resulted even more evident under a severe regime like the Gaddafi's, compared to the Ben Ali's and Mubarak's, which in spite of all their vices were surely less harsh in the violation of people's rights.[61]

Moreover, as exactly provided for Tunisia and Egypt, first topic to analyze will be the geographical one. What is curious to see, is that Libya is perfectly situated between Tunisia and Egypt, evoking the idea of a

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[60] Sakr, Naomi. *Transformations in Egyptian journalism*, cit., p.89-93.

[61] ST John, Ronald Bruce. *Libya, from colony to revolution.* OXFORD: Oneworld Publications, 2012, cit., pp.268-270, 278-281.

real contagious democratization wave overcoming the old regimes and leading a new political course. It is sad to admit again that transformations and processes have not still ended, but, how one will be able to consider at the end of the paragraph, uprisings' outcomes in Libya are completely different, by looking at the fragile democratic system in Tunisia and the consolidation of a new military regime in Egypt, after a short break with the Muslim Brotherhood in power.

Briefly, Libya is another Mediterranean country, in the Maghreb region of North Africa. What is not still provided about its borders is represented by Algeria to the west, Sudan, Chad and Niger to the south and southeast. Libya is characterized by three traditional parts, namely Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica, finally resulting the fourth largest country in Africa.

An information absolutely not to overlook, economically relevant even, is that Libya has the tenth-largest proven oil reserves of any country in the world. The latter is very important to reconsider at the moment of analyzing the international interests towards Libya, especially owned by Western countries.

Tripoli and Benghazi are the most populated cities, the first situated in Tripolitania, the second in Cyrenaica, but both of them are located at the Mediterranean seaside.[62]

Historically, after the Ottoman ruling, Libya became a colony from 1911 to 1943 with the Italian occupation. As Italy was eventually defeated in the Second World War, during the African Campaign war, Libya became an independent kingdom in 1951. After steady period under King Idris I, Libya was affected by a coup d'état in 1969, beginning a period of sweeping reforms. The military coup was perpetrated by the harsh charismatic leadership of Muhammar Gaddafi, commonly known as Colonel Gaddafi, came from a rural area outside the town of Sirte. He grew up in Bedouin culture and this childhood's aspect characterized all the rest of his life.

It is quite interesting how during Gaddafi's ruling Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan seemed to have found their balance, in spite of their troubled history. In fact, about its borders, Libya is partly a colonial product, where different geographical regions found their unity through a western political project, exactly when the General Assembly of the United Nations applied a resolution over the former Italian colonies, and proclaiming the reign of Libya on 21 November 1949. Anyway, just using anticolonialism as topic for achieving national unity, Gaddafi started building his Libya.[63]

Briefly, as coup d'état was accomplished in 1969, Gaddafi was immediately considered both a popular and

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[62] *Atlante Geopolitico Treccani*, cit., pp. 519-525.

[63] Baldinetti, Anna. *La formazione dello Stato e la costruzione dell'identità nazione.* In Mezran, Karim. Varvelli, Arturo. *Libia, fine o rinascita di una nazione?* ROMA: Donzelli Editore, 2012, cit., pp.3-8.

people's leader. Risen from people and ready to service his people. So, the most prominent coup conspirator, was ultimately able to fully concentrate the power in his own hands during the Libyan Cultural Revolution, remaining stable in power until the Libyan Civil War of 2011.

Contrarily to the Tunisian and Egyptian cases, for Libyan one is necessary to distinguish the first revolutionary phase from the civil war. Gaddafi would not have fled without Western countries and NATO's intervention, like Ben Ali and Mubarak did. With good judgment, we may assert that for Libya, political situation seemed more similar to the Syrian revolutionary features, especially referring to a harsh regime like al-Asad's one, stable and deeply immerged within social substrates, and, last but not least, faithfully supported by the national army.

Main differences appearing today regard the international intervention and the consent of UN's security council. After the unexpected outcomes of Libya, Russia and China decided to exercise their veto power to impede Western powers to intervene in Syrian civil war. Independently from peculiar elements characterizing the single cases, today establishing what current situation is better, if Libya's, if Syria's, would be very difficult.

However, path which will be followed at the moment, regards exclusively what happened in Libya during the revolution of 2011, and consequently during the civil war, how media affected the political course, and finally what is the current situation in the country.

Having said that, what were previously the main features of the Gaddafi's regime in Libya? After launching the *Al Fateh Revolution*, Gaddafi was immediately referred to as the "Brother Leader and Guide of the Revolution" in government statements and the official Libyan press.[64] In spite of wide consensus towards Gaddafi, who defined himself to be not more than a symbolic figurehead, dissidence against the new political system was not tolerated.[65]

Culturally, an element to take into account in setting the propaganda was the *Green Book*. Published in 1975, it provided all the elements of Gaddafi's system of governance. A sharp development on the one hand, militarism and sponsoring terrorism on the other one, Libya under Gaddafi represented a strange creature full of contradictions within geopolitical international context. For instance, per capita income dramatically rose becoming the fifth-highest in Africa. Instead, Human Development Index became greater than that of Saudi Arabia, without borrowing any foreign loans, and maintaining Libya debt-free.

Furthermore, financial support was provided for university scholarships and employment programs. Economically, oil exporting determined the highest national profits. But according some scholars, most of

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[64] Oakes, John. *Libya, the history of Gaddafi's Pariah state,* cit.*,* pp.110-114.

[65] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.89-92.

those profits were spent to finance illegal activities, arms purchases, and on sponsoring several paramilitaries and terrorist groups around the world.[66]

The latter led Libya to be labeled by United States as a "rough state". In the meanwhile, an American airstrike failed to kill Gaddafi in 1986. In addition, Gaddafi's Libya was highly influential in migration policies, especially for its strategic position in the heart of Mediterranean Sea. Libya was also put under United Nations' sanctions after the bombing of a commercial flight, which provoked the death of hundreds of travelers.

Nevertheless, "there was initially some debate within the ruling group about the proper use of the country's growing oil revenue after the nationalization of the industry in 1971. But this was soon won by Gaddafi himself, who forced the more technocratic members of his team to allow him to distribute the new wealth to key groups of supporters in the form of jobs, loans subsidies, and concessions, while also using it to promote a series of experiments in popular democracy designed to force Libyans to participate more directly in their own modernization. Whereas other Arab rulers chose to take their time over what they believed was, inevitably , going to be a lengthy process, Gaddafi, conscious of Libya's small size, scattered population, (less 6.5 million)[67], and almost complete lack of an educated, professional class, seems to have felt that he had no choice but to resort to more direct methods not to be found in other models. Hence his proclamation of Libya as a "state of the masses", in his Arabic neologism, a Jamahiriya in 1977."

Mainly, under the Jamahiriya system, political issues were raised locally around the country, in order to encourage the popular participation to politics, with all predictable limitations included. In fact, there were about 2,000 local people's committees, formed by elected members. Central general committee had to be influenced by the decisions taken by the local congresses. To give an illustration, this almost federal process guaranteed local tribes to participate, stopping their hostile tendencies towards a central power and developing effective mutual gains, both for them and for Gaddafi's ruling system.

All things considered, before talking about the revolution against Gaddafi's regime and the consequently civil war, what about the conditions of national media and freedom of expression's status in Libya? For the Libyan case is necessary to establish some elements which will define how many differences with the Tunisian and Egyptian media are.

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[66] ST John, Ronald Bruce. *Libya, from colony to revolution,* cit., 246-261.

[67]*Atlante Geopolitico Treccani*, cit., p.519.

First, media of Libya do not have a long historical tradition. The spread of several newspapers, broadcasters, televisions was provoked by the end of the Libyan civil war, due to the impact of novelties brought by the influence of transnational digital media. Revolution allowed to remove tight restrictions previously imposed to freedoms of speech and expression. In fact, a broad range of newspapers, TV channels, radio stations, and web pages or blogs were mostly set up in the summer of 2012. It felt like an economic boom, but of a journalistic sort. Over two-hundred newspapers, twenty televisions, and almost two-hundred radio stations were officially registered. Paradoxically, for the Libyan case digital media and social networks diffusion encouraged the proliferation of traditional media, most of them politically built on the spirit of revolution. Naturally, free media and independent politics of reportage let Libyans take advantage of unprecedented freedoms, especially about the possibility to participate in the political debate.

Most part of media yet appeared during the revolution and civil war, just to encourage people's needs for more opportunities and respect of their rights. Through radio stations, particularly in local context, population strive to express their voice for regional audiences. In spite of some financial doubts about economic sustainability, the private media sector is regularly expanding.

Just to give an illustration, the majority of media are in Arabic and are owned by private companies. We can cite *February Newspapers,* state-run newspaper with an online version, or newspapers such as *Al-Bilad* and *Brnieq* which are private instead. On the contrary, two cases of Libyan media managed in English are represented by *Tripoli Post* and *Libyan Herald*. Passing to TV channels the most relevant are *Lybia Al-Wataniya TV* and *LRT* (*Lybia Radio and Television*, inspired by the Italian model of RAI), state-owned, while the private most significant examples are *Al-Asimah TV*, *Allibya TV*, *Libya Alhurra TV*, and *Libya TV*. Referring to the national radios could be emblematic just the names. *Tribute FM*, with programmes in English, and *Voice of Free Libya*. These channels were born during the revolution and literally represented the rebels supporting their propaganda throughout the country by transmission broadcasted in Benghazi, symbolic city of the dissidence against Gaddafi's regime. By contrast, *Libya FM* was Egypt-based, suggesting a partial transnational process also occurred in the traditional media.

Notably, after the end of the civil war, Article 14 of the Interim Constitutional Declaration adopted on 3 August 2011have, for the first time in Libyan history, truly guaranteed freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The following is a comma of the just cited article:

"Freedom of opinion for individuals and groups, freedom of scientific research, freedom of communication, liberty of the press, printing, publication and mass media, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom of demonstration, and freedom of peaceful strike shall be guaranteed by the State in accordance with the law".[68]

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[68] The Constitutional Declaration, 2012.

This approach was completely new. If it is possible to attest that there are worse problems in Libya today, especially of political nature, media formally enjoy a revolutionary era after decades of strict censorship. However, the National Transitional Council placed state media under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Civil Society.

All things about Libyan journalism considered, seeing how revolution broke up and which way civil war followed with all its aftermaths is undoubtedly necessary. The so-called Arab Spring of 2011 "brought protesters to the streets of Tunis and Cairo. Protesters in Benghazi appeared to be emulating them but with a difference. There is oil and gas below the surface of Libya and Gaddafi was a different character to Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali or Hosni Mubarak. He was not short of supporters. His family and tribe were not about to go quietly."[69]

So, now what is interesting to ask is, what was political life in Libya like before the uprising there? Referring to dealing with the revolution, the civil war, and also the impact of digital media on the political change is necessary to track a very short background, beyond those concepts we have just expressed, immediately before the popular upheaval, probably that which provoked more victims at the first stage of the Arab revolution, surely if one compares it to the apparently smoother Tunisian and Egyptian cases. Until a certain moment, Gaddafi tried to recreate the Nasser-style institutions modeling himself on the charisma of Gamal Abd al-Nasser. Providing an example Gaddafi ordered Libyan soccer players to wear only their numbers not their names on their jersey, in order to avoid a possible rivalry that could harm the popularity of the supreme leader. Similar approaches, in accordance with this megalomania could be found also in the Green Book. As we yet partially mentioned about Libyan economy, when the price of oil spiked in 1973, Libya suddenly became the largest oil producer in Africa by making high profits. The though leadership established some committees exclusively oriented to the destruction of any dissidence. They assassinated regime opponents wherever they might be found. Brutality and torture were ordinarily part of the repression.

Nevertheless, this cruelty was one of the main reasons which make people easy to ignite in front of clear opportunities for an uprising. One of the notorious case was Abdullah al-Sanusi's.

In 1996 Al-Sanusi was the head of the Jamahiriya Security Organization, and took charge of putting down a riot at the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli.

Plenty of the rioters belonged to the Islamist opposition to Gaddafi and took hostages in order to demand better living conditions. As the negotiation between al-Sanusi and the prisoner representatives began taking place, guards called all the prisoners into courtyards. Then, they opened fire and launched grenades to

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[69]Oakes, John. *Libya, the history of Gaddafi's Pariah state,* cit., p.165.

slaughter them. The arrest of the lawyer representing the prisoners' families seeking information about their "disappeared" relatives was the event that mostly inspired the Libyan uprising of 2011, at least that which could be associated to the Bouazizi's case in Tunisia and Said's case in Egypt for the reactions it evoked in communication process, if media were still completely silenced by regime censorship.[70]

In light of this, it is rightfully time to kick off talking about the Libyan uprising. How did it begin? Consequently to the facts regarding Abu Salim prison, as Fathi Terbil, the lawyer representing the relatives of the "disappeared" prisoners, was arrested by the Libyan government on 15 February 2011, a digital-savvy groups of activists tried to involve Libyans to participate in public protests through the use of social media. A so-called Day of Rage where not only people could ask explanations, but also they could protest economic and political miserable conditions in Libya. The chosen date was February 17, 2011, two days after Fathi Terbil's arrestment.

In the aftermath of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolution six thousand protesters took the streets of Benghazi calling for the fallen of the regime. What is important to observe is that these protests risen in Cyrenaica, in the eastern part of the country, where government control was less concentrated and population's conditions were worse, especially for higher rate of unemployment and misery. A significant difference with the Tunisian and Egyptian cases, is that Gaddafi immediately considered protestors as combatants or terrorists, suddenly turning demonstrations into violent struggles on the streets. From the beginning, security forces and the military used weapons, helicopters and tear gas to put down the uprising, especially when it spread throughout Tripoli.

In spite of the composition of his army, including Islamic Pan-African Brigade and fighters, overall mercenaries, coming from Chad, Niger, and Sudan even, military forces remained loyal to the regime. That is the point explaining why Gaddafi could remain, for a while, stable in power without fleeing from Tripoli, at least during the uprising and at the first moments of the civil war.

Gaddafi maintained that consensus and appreciation, in spite of his harsh methods to rule, which had lacked or immediately disappeared in the case of Ben Ali and Mubarak, where security military forces renounced to put down the protests by using though reactions. Encouraged by the determination of his faithfully men, it is possible to recall some words Gaddafi used to say in that period.

"I am not going to leave this land . I will die as a martyr at the end. I shall remain, defiant. Muhammar is leader of the revolution until the end of time. We only have a choice, we will stay in our land dead or alive.

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[70]Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.91-92.

We will not kneel. We will not surrender. We are stronger than your missiles, stronger than your planes, and the voice of the Libyan people is louder than explosions. The rebels are rats and traitor. Our mujahedin forces are capable of exterminating the gangs. The end of the rats is close."[71]

The latter sentence was not effectively true. History has showed how, in reality, public opinion changed its point of view about regime due to the influence of what has just happened in the neighboring countries. Willingness to know more about the world matters gradually pushed people to ask for more freedoms, especially about the opportunity to enjoy independent information in order to get more transparency about politics and social issues.

Undoubtedly, Gaddafi partially misread the origins and intensity of the Tunisian revolution as demonstrations began in his own country in mid-January 2011. That had been not just due to the Wikileaks disclosure of diplomatic cables detailing the corruption of Ben Ali regime, but revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, and Libya as well should be associated by economic grievances and a general call for a more dignified way of life.

More than in other countries, what people asked were proofed in Libya because of the political approach Gaddafi kept toward his citizens.

"Socially, the Gaddafi regime, fearful that civil organizations would become centers of opposition, had systematically destroyed civil society after 1969. There were no political parties, independent trade unions, civic clubs, or parent-teacher organizations in Libya. Gaddafi, derided the very idea of civil organizations, contending that his system of direct democracy made them redundant. In contrast, political parties, trade unions, and other civil bodies existed in Egypt throughout most of the Mubarak era. Denied civil organizations, Libyans turned to the family and the tribe for individual and group support."[72]
Asleep consequences soon awoke at the beginning of the Arab Revolution of 2011, and Libya, less than other countries, could be an exception.

Finally, as Gaddafi decided to make Tripoli his fortress in order to defend him and his family, historical Libyan regionalism emerged during the struggle between protestors and military forces, resulting one of the most relevant elements within the civil war.

For forty-two years Gaddafi strive to maintain the unity of Libya, almost an illusion which suddenly fell with the breaking out of the upheavals, vanishing all the refrains chanted in several years of regime.

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[71] ST John, Ronald Bruce. *Libya, from colony to revolution,* cit., p.262.

[72] ST John, Ronald Bruce. *Libya, from colony to revolution,* cit., p.279.

"Benghazi is with Tripoli" and "Libya is one Nation".

Not only Gaddafi was losing his convictions, but he also became unable to effectively reply to the slogans of the protestors on the streets both in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. People blamed government of corruption. In addition an editorial in Libya press accused the armed forces of widespread incompetence. Media, silenced and censored until that period, suddenly sympathized with protests and pushed for the change of political system assuming an active role in the propaganda against Gaddafi.

The tight ways to rule belonged to Gaddafi regime had made protests stronger and more aggressive. Regime measure of repressions were as tough as people's reactions. More than in Tunisia and Egypt, where regimes had been less directly oppressive, in Libya revolution immediately turned into civil war. Gaddafi yes, Gaddafi no was the evident cleavage. As well Gaddafi paid well his men to defend the *status quo* of the regime, poor and exasperated people on the street were ready to sacrifice their lives in order to gain another way of life, free from the regime restrictions.

Making an additional point to demonstrate how much important social media were in this context, we will provide some examples. By reminding the capability of tools such as Facebook and Twitter, more difficult to censored compared to a newspaper or a TV channel, in the case of Libya the civil war dynamics impeded government to react quickly to the digital media offensive. That said, they were not the main reason obviously, but deeply ignited the hostile feelings of people towards the regime, enormously nationalizing their grievances and claims.

For instance, and to give a practical illustration, during the first week of February 2011, after the breaking out of Tunisian and Egyptian popular uprisings, in Libya large protests obliged government to adopt a carrot and stick approach, but all the tougher part were oriented to harm media, as soon as Gaddafi understood risks they could bring. On 3 February Libyan national authorities released twelve political prisoners about the same time in a move the online edition of *Quryna*, a Libyan private-owned newspaper, attributed to the efforts of the Human Rights Society. Furthemore, as police killed two demonstrators in al-Bayda in eastern Libya, and in Zintan, a town southwest of Tripoli, Gaddafi regime released 110 Islamist political prisoners and began, paradoxically, to distribute 150,000 laptops to select Libyan youth.

Significantly, at the same time, government failed to shut down or block social networking sites, such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, where dissidence were establishing its roots and motivation to continue until the fall of the regime. The Internet would be decisive on 17 February 2011, the so-called Day of the Rage.

On the contrary, authorities removed *Al Jazeera* from the state-owned cable television network. But it remained however available and accessible on satellite networks. The following were the hardest day for the revolts. To the Day of Rage government responded with force, killing as many as fifty demonstrators in

Benghazi alone. Death toll amounted one-hundred when military forces opened fire against protests raised during funeral for demonstrators killed during that day. In so doing, perpetrated violence produced a spiral-domino-effect escalation. Furthermore, Wikileaks cables about the abuses of Gaddafi regime posted on social networks instantly spread throughout people's laptops and mobile phones at the end of February.[73] As news encouraged population to gather on the square to ask Gaddafi to flee, regime seemed to lose their mind unconsciously exploiting the only weapon it got: violence and unconditioned repression. Backlash for government was huge and for Gaddafi unpredictably bad. Not only he was going to lose the civil war, but was also provoking an international intervention since consented by the United Nations and led by European NATO powers since March 2011, the so-called resolution 1973.

Between February and March the civil war spread in the country, both due to the harsh and repression which had called on the streets other citizens, and clearly due to the citizens' willingness to achieve the same outcomes of the Tunisian and Egyptian Arab springs, constantly transmitted through digital devices to everyone.

But why did outside powers intervene just in Libya? According to what we have just said about this country it should not be surprising. As matter of fact, Americans decided to remain on a second state, while France and Great Britain effectively acted, intervening in Libya with not so clear intentions in providing a post-Gaddafi political and diplomatic solution after the civil war. However, Europe has great interests in Libya. On the one hand, an economic one. Before the uprising, the European Union imported about 10 percent of its oil from Libya, and Italy is the largest market, importing about 25 percent of its oil. On the other one, the immigration fluxes. Europeans feared not only a massive wave from sub-Saharan Africa, but also the consequent wave due to the Arab revolutions and their potential backlash within North Africa society. Honestly, we have to specify that in the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring several other problems emerged, making worse social and political situation in Libya, but surely, the UN resolution did not help the current condition in improving.[74]

In 2005, a doctrine known as "responsibility to protect" was approved by the UN Security Council as international norm. After multiple failures of humanitarian intervention in the 1990s, such as Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda, international community seemed now to be able to prevent effects of natural disaster or atrocities. Therefore, Security Council resolution 1973, was approved in order to protect Libyan population by Gaddafi's military forces. The plan was constituted of a "no-fly zone" which would possibly stop the regime repression, particularly by putting in place an authorized air campaign. Inevitably, but not so

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[73] ST John, Ronald Bruce. *Libya, from colony to revolution,* cit., p.278.

[74] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., pp.103-106.

unpredictably, the mission of a simple "no-fly zone" somehow expanded into a more open-ended military commitment, and from protecting civilians Europeans ran an effective military intervention against Gaddafi, until the dictator's death on 20 October 2011 in Sirte after some months of battle.[75]

Rebels, helped by the close NATO intervention, had obliged dictator to flee toward his city of origin, while some Gaddafi's relatives, sons even, were executed publicly and lynched by the angry Libyan crowds. In spite of great promises that immediately followed the end of Gaddafi regime and the constitution of a Libyan Transitional National Council closely observed by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron, Libya entered a disturbing period, more uncertain than the civil war itself. In Libya difficulties would soon emerge and the traditional regionalism would bring new problems awakening ancient tribe struggles. It could be emblematic observe how much immigration towards Europe and terroristic infiltration became worse in the following years, and even political situation is not still resolved today.

Nonetheless, "the image of the dead dictator was spread instantly and widely by means of mobile phone images. Indeed the power of personal communications has escaped the control of even the most dominant of despots and will shape the democratic process in ways we have yet to understand. Mobile phones, Facebook and Twitter played a crucial part in the Arab revolution and will help to undermine other dictatorial regimes in the future... Libyan people have fought for their freedom, this time they have won."

But what about internal discord? They will certainly be watched with interest and some anxiety as they shape their future. Gaddafi was not completely bad. In fact, always with good judgment, we may testify that his regime was able to marginalize some ancestral features characterizing Libya even today. The tight repression, although full of atrocities against human being and several freedoms and rights, had shut down all tribal conflicts within the country until that time. Without Gaddafi, but with the uncertainty of the international community which had been able to do nothing but bombing, everything suddenly became chaos. Libyan anarchy appeared an ideal environment where international terrorism, tribes, criminals, and uncontrolled migration fluxes of desperate refugees found their perfect conditions to proliferate. About this context, negotiation to rebuild stable state are not absolutely ended. In Libya are two governments today, one in Tripoli and another in Tobruk. Notwithstanding elections were held to the Council of Deputies in January 2014, after and during a long negotiation within and outside Libya, also with the participation of the UN Security Council, a political solution, widely accepted, seems not to be found. The General National Congress, charged to form an interim government, drafted a new Libyan constitution, approved in a general referendum. The latter improved media conditions in Libya, regarding what mostly we treat in the course of this thesis, but was politically unable to establish an effective turning point to Libyan

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[75] Oakes, John. *Libya, the history of Gaddafi's Pariah* state, cit., p.177.

society. Sectarianism prevails even today and unity of Libya seems definitely undermined. Counterparts appear capable to engage dialogue and negotiation in order to prevent further internal wars, but a homogenous political system, democratic and widely accepted at the moment seems impossible to achieve. Briefly, pluralism in Libya is an open challenge. As it is possible to see, pluralism had not existed within Arab societies before the Arab revolution, or, more correctly, it was tightly silenced, not only in political process, but also in communication one. During his regime, Gaddafi had systematically destroyed the opposition. In fact, current situation represents not only a political challenge, but also a huge effort for the Libyan society itself.

According to literally definitions, "pluralism can be best defined as the fundamental commitment to political diversity at all times. It means that no party has a monopoly on the truth and no party can impose its views on the rest of society. Such a commitment must include developing a system of checks and balances that redistributes power away from the executive and towards the legislative and judicial branches of government."[76]

If in some Arab countries executive branch remains too dominant, secret services typically play a role in domestic affairs that far exceeds their security mandate. This challenge has been tackled by media, because, if positive political outcomes are still difficult to achieve, media gained their results just as Libyan problems were treated after forty-two years of silence.

Dealing with three main Arab countries involved in the wave of revolution, we see how each of them, after similar developments of popular upheavals, reached to three different points. Tunisia began structuring a fragile democracy, where different political forces are now allied to contrast the Muslim Brother's party of Ghannouchi. Egypt knew a long turmoil where the country had returned to a military regime after the Muslim Brothers government represented by Mohammed Mursi. Feared of the return in power of the Muslim Brotherhood, several other political forces are effectively supporting general Al Sisi's government. Otherwise, post-Gaddafi Libya is dominated by internal conflicts, where several local tribes have picked up their weapons again to fight in order to defend their regions and conquering others fomenting a never-ending struggle.

In spite of all things considered, what Tunisia, Egypt and Libya share among them is the deep participation of media in transitional process, and their huge contribution independently from the results they achieved. In fact, dealing with the communication process means surely analyzing an aspect that should, and could overall, positively determine the building of conscience within social context in North Africa. As media have

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[76] Muasher, Marwan. *The second Arab awakening and the battle for pluralism.* NEW HAVEN AND LONDON: Yale University Press, 2014, cit., pp.165-167.

resulted an essential means to determine the fall of these affirmed political systems after decades of ruling, they can also bring a gradual development in the building of new and better sociopolitical system, integrating innovation with tradition.

Passed away the historical and geographical introductive part of this thesis, let us move on with their fundamental arguments.

In the course of the next chapters, it will possible to see what was the exact media's impact on the Arab revolution, strictly examining their dynamics and tools.

First, the third chapter will regard the analysis of the Internet distinguishing the 1.0 kind from the 2.0 one, especially to underline what of substantially new social networks brought, by highly affecting the popular uprisings.

Second, the fourth chapter will concern the traditional media, such as newspaper, radio and television, according to the reactions they had facing new digital means to get and produce information. From virtues of those which got actively the novelties, to those which did know how to face the digital revolution both within the Arab world and the Western one.

Finally, we will express some considerations about social media in front of censorship, alternative modes to protest and possible consequences not only in the Arab countries but also in order to analyze future political processes.

Part III - What role did social networks play during the Arab revolutions?

When a social network can be defined "social media"

This chapter will be rightfully focused on more technical matters. Referring to all things considered, we try to develop a specific elaboration about those tools which emerged during the Arab revolutions assuming an enormous political meaning. How did protestors become suddenly able to organize demonstrations against the regime? How did they overcome strict government censorship? How did digital tools made the difference in the course of these popular uprising, achieving those goals that had been so long wished by political activists?

The Internet, blogs and social networks revolutionized the communication system leading a democratic wave which could not be neither recognized nor associated to regimes addicted to the articulation of old journalism according their ends.

Recent years were distinguished not only by new revolutionary spirit, yet present in Arab countries' history, but also by the introduction of tools that definitively provided opportunities previously considered impossible to get.

The third chapter is formed by two paragraph. The first one is about the advent of the Internet 1.0 and on which features it rely. The second, divided into three sub-paragraphs, treats the Internet 2.0 and specifically refers to three relevant tools during the Arab Revolution of 2011. Namely, the blogging sphere, Facebook, and Twitter.

Significantly, explaining with some definitions the characteristics and differences between 1.0 kind of the Internet and 2.0 one should initially correct. Basically, 1.0 is based on contents. By contrast, 2.0 is focused on the interaction between web users. Beyond any possible disquisition on pure technical matters about technology, it is important understanding the semiotic approach to this topic.

In fact, what actually articulate communication processes is the perception of people towards technology, and the relation that, not only digital-savvy users, but also common ones, engage with it.

While 1.0 web was based on broadcasting communication model, featured by asymmetric roles, one for the producer and one other for the consumer, 2.0 web relies on the figure of *prosumer,* a user enabled to consume and produce information he or she finds by surfing on the web spaces.[77]

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[77] Cosenza, Giovanna. *Introduzione alla semiotica dei nuovi media.* LECCE: Editori Laterza, 2014, cit., pp.137-142.

Same case for traditional media, that due to the new digital tide were obliged to renovate their broadcasting scheme introducing several instruments honoring the change of times. All this will be taken into account in the course of this chapter and referring to the Arab revolutions' case, we can fairly explain also the distinction between terms *social networks* and *social media*, which are so important for us.

Social networks are platforms where anyone can subscribe and log in, in order to manage a profile with personal information. In so doing, acquiring the membership of the platforms it will be possible reading contents, participating in the activities, and producing something original to enrich the web site. In fact, a social network is mainly a web site where several people can gather.

Because of a well detailed explanation in the following paragraphs, we will specifically limited ourselves in the distinction with *social media.* Accordingly huge importance they got in the course of Arab revolutions, social media were simply a journalistic mode to use social networks, following a path extremely focused on the news and aware to find its fertile ground in the digital platforms.

People suddenly understood that a great political turmoil could be spread faster and broader through Facebook and Twitter, the main social networks exploited during the so-called Arab Spring, if we compare them to traditional broadcasters. Furthermore, Newspapers and televisions were not only unable to rapidly engage common people and enjoying high numbers of participation, but also, as yet said, were continuously victims of censorship and constant limitations to their freedom of expression, when they were not directly controlled by regime communication and propaganda apparatus.

Moreover, journalists and communication scholars seemed for a while misreading and even underestimating the impact of social networks as social media. Everyone knew that these platform were able to entertain with innocuous web videogames and silly surveys, but very few understood in time, dictators even, that participation of many in trivial activities, could be translated, yet possessing suitable tools, into relevant political and social initiatives. What is sensational is represented by the historical passages we have examined in the course of the second chapter. Recent Arab history of was not only characterized by notable political changes, but also by the awareness of the entire world, as always, to due the advent of new digital tools. In fact, another element to underline is the totally lack of borders in these 2.0 processes. If, by simply navigating on 1.0 web, people had already enjoyed information about what was happening throughout the world, now they could engage political debate developing new ideas and providing model to Arab digital-savvy activists in real time. International broadcasters' public itself had the possibility to closely follow the events, independently from the place where they were living.

Starting from recent years before the Arab revolutions of 2011, the first paragraph of this chapter deals with birth and development of digital activism both in North Africa and in the Middle East, just to explain more

specifically what substrate the Internet 1.0 built in order to make smoother the advent of social networking platforms within the Arab society, and even how much easily they were turned into social media.

3.1 Internet 1.0

Today the Internet is widely a common element ever more affiliated to our existence. Nonetheless, or probably just for that, it seems very difficult to explain, because not only of its digital and technological complexities, but also of semiotic and communicative revolutionary processes.

In spite of its broadcasting approach, the 1.0 kind of the Internet gave for the first time opportunity to the public to choose information they wanted to consume, beyond a strict schedule provided by radios and television, or just without the proverbial lack of flexibility of the newspapers.

One could suddenly decide to follow and listen to their interests without waiting for them, loosed from the tight constrains of a time schedule. In fact, through a search engine is possible to consume any kind of information without limits, without the technical aspect of owning a working and connected router.

Taking into account the specific world area we are dealing with, namely the Arab world, it is significant reminding some features of the globalization, that process which closely related to an invention like the Internet.

As a matter of fact, the age of globalization has allowed people to connect anyone, anywhere and anytime. Social media scholars talk about *media glocalism*[78] to defined all that array of processes which characterize contemporary society. For the first time in history human beings can feel themselves living a limited world in their habitual experiences. Briefly, thanks overall the support of digital media, people can come to know local features of foreign affairs, overcoming any physical or immaterial border. Surfing on the web you basically know whatever about regional aspects or specific issue of a determined part of the world, independently from distance. In spite of a dream that journalists have always striven to achieve, by facing high costs and huge efforts, just a blogger can today accomplish that mission in a less expensive way. Glocalism of media has represented, on the one hand, the introduction of a lot of added values to journalism. On the other one, it has opened several scenarios, raising a broad and complex debate on the future of this profession. Anyway, all this inevitably established new challenges even within the Arab world.

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[78] Sorice, Michele. *Sociologia dei mass media.* ROMA: Carocci Editore, 2012, cit., p.261.

The Arab uprisings in 2011 were broadly welcomed all over the Western world, often by passing the context and affected by guilty of high superficiality. Just for that, it was due to the Internet apparently new information and possibility to follow closely the events that in several countries and political administrations the complexity of Arab political framework was highly underestimated.

"Upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt were greeted exuberantly by Western political leaders and media as a regional, youth-led revolution on behalf of liberal democratic principles. The United States officially endorsed the protesters' demands, baking them as undeniable cries for freedom, free and fair elections, representative government, and genuine democracy, which should not permitted to fail. Yet the road to democracy was to be tortuous and anguishing, as became obvious in the aftermath of the collapse of the autocratic regimes."[79]

By contrast, the Internet has permitted Arab people to acquire new skills, interpreted also, if not exclusively, according to their own Islamic culture. As a matter of fact, it should not be forgotten that most part of population that took the streets in the Arab revolutions wanted a change in politics, more freedoms not at all more westernization. What that should not to be overlooked is that, in spite of several less precise considerations, in the Arab world not always democratic process means a westernization one. This was not absolutely the case of the so-called Arab Spring.[80]

This is an important element to take into account in order to understand better how the Internet worked within the Arab countries, during the popular upheavals in 2011 and even before.

Until the 1990s, the Arab world had an odd relationship with the Internet. This sentiment was broadly felt for two reasons. Firstly, there was initially a technical difficulty of using Arabic on the Internet. Its use was restricted to those could work in English or, in some cases, for example the Tunisian one, French. Secondly, costs for connection charges were still high where there was often a government-controlled monopoly. Saudi Arabia and Iraq were the last countries to provide public internet access, in 1999 and 2000 respectively. In spite of these troubles, "by the middle of 2008, more than 38 million Arabs were believing to be using the internet at least one a month and overall internet penetration had reached 11.1 percent. This was still only about half the world average (21.9 percent) but all the signs pointed towards continuing rapid growth. The largest number of users were in Egypt (8.6 million), Morocco (7.3 million) and Saudi Arabia (6.2 million). As it might be expected, the highest penetrations levels were found in some of the wealthy Gulf states: the United Arab Emirates (49.8 percent), Qatar (37.8 percent), Bahrain (34.8 percent) and Kuwait (34.7

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[79] Kissinger, Henry. *World Order.* NEW YORK: Penguin Group, 2014, cit., p.122.

[80] Limes, Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica. *(Contro)Rivoluzioni in corso*, cit., pp.7-21.

percent), all well above the world average. Further down the list Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Morocco were near or slightly above the world average.

Having accepted the inevitability of the Internet, the first instinct of Arab regimes was to look for ways to control it. This was based partly on their fears of political subversion but also on the fears of conservative and religious element that it would affect traditional values. The favored approach often reflected the broader mindset of the regimes concerned: for instance, the Saudis opted for an extravagant high-cost, high-tech solution, while Iraq under Saddam Hussein surrounded internet use with barely-penetrable bureaucracy.[81]

Therefore, the most relevant part of this paragraph inevitably concerns the internet censorship in the Arab countries. Those regimes which ruled until 2011 were highly worried of the consequences of the spread of the Internet throughout the Arab states, where tight censorships had been imposed to newspapers, radios, and televisions before, without facing the same difficulties. Nevertheless it is necessary to make some distinctions, case by case.

Although Saudi Arabia posed strict censorship on Internet attracting a lot of attention and criticism, evidence of tight filtering was present at least in six other Arab countries, namely Oman, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. A selected filtering characterized countries such as Bahrain, Jordan, Libya and Morocco. These states, specifically for internet web sites, addressed a target-oriented censorship according to the contents of the single pages. By contrast, no evidence of blocking was officially found in Algeria, Iraq, and paradoxically, Egypt. But, what is more, should take into account the possibility of hidden block, specifically against a single web page, or managed by uncomfortable groups of pressure for the regimes. Anyway, all situations in which regime could innocently justify its actions with a false technical problem or an effective menace, so perceived even by common public, also in front of manifesting protests and evidence.

Nevertheless, technical advances gradually made attempts of regime to censor futile. Plenty of diverse ways of accessing the Internet appeared, such as wikis, RSS feeds, dynamic web pages, plus growing of multimedia, podcasts and videos. Last but not least, the opportunity, as we will see in the next paragraphs to post news on Facebook and Twitter without internet connection, but just with a traditional mobile phone SMS. Moreover, centralized censorship, often through a state monopoly on internet access, can raise some

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[81] Whitaker, Brian. *What is really wrong with the Middle East.* Cambridge: Saqi Books, 2009, (https://www.aub.edu.lb).

difficulties.

Internet cannot be labeled for one specific use. It is fundamental also in economic matters and made sensationally simple a huge quantity of international financial transactions. What is more is that by limiting the Internet, the Arab regimes were heavily harming their economy.

This is exactly the case of Mubarak's Egypt, when in January 2011 security forces invited communication ministry to shut completely down all the internet functions. As a matter of fact, the country was isolated and less harmed people were just the protestors. They found alternative ways to communicate, for instance by contacting foreign friends who could refresh information on their web pages, blogs, Facebook or Twitter accounts, and in addiction were invisible for the authorities now.

"Governments interfering with digital networks often justify their actions by saying they are merely protecting public officials and state institutions, or preserving the "public good". Authoritarian regimes often do so during election crises, to eliminate propaganda and mitigate dissidence in the purported interest of national security. Public officials cite "terrorism threats" and preventing the spread of "state secrets" as reasons to do so."[82]

The truth is that there were no secrets in 2011 about regimes' behavior, and several protestors, already aware of it, wanted just to publicly manifest, unlike the world of censored traditional media, how freedom of expression's condition actually was in the Arab countries. Despite some differences all of them affected by a deontological problem in the journalistic mode to report facts. As Arab professional journalists clearly perceived, thanks to the opportunity to keep in touch with Internet, to share the same troubles, they began collaborating with political activists, who notably emerged using new digital tools and, in so doing, they revolutionized the world of media.

The North-African uprisings witnessed how, circumventing regime censorship, the virtual sphere, based on internet connection, has been an effective platform to coordinate the upheavals. Producing broader forms of citizen journalism, digital-savvy activists would open another and alternative way to the mode of protest. Contents could be quickly exchanged organizing revolts, finding solutions and providing services. The impact of the Internet generated deep changes within the Arab society, hugely strengthening that collective conscience previously known at the "Arab Squares".[83]

Even if all thing considered appear magical to democratize the world and overcome any kind of repression, the advent of digital media is not so simple to explain.

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[82] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.82.

[83]Sibilio, Simone. *La rivoluzione dei (nuovi) media arabi,* in Corrao, *Le rivoluzioni arabe,* cit., p.84.

This is due to two main factors. The first one is represented by the uncertain future of journalism today. How traditional and digital media will collaborate in the future can determine an emancipation of an end of all those features developed during the Arab revolutions. In 2011 this impetuous tide seemed completely unpredictable for the great political results it achieved. The release of media, endorsed by new digital tools, risks today to lose their appeal by the possibility to serve the logic of more ancient powers. Questioning ourselves would be wise, looking at the actual results achieved by Arab revolutions, "springs" that has never meet their hoped summer. But if some considerations will be taken into account in the course of the last chapter of this thesis, the misunderstanding of such digital tools in media process should raise new accountabilities. As Naomi Sakr tells journalists talking about the Egyptian case, "the implication that objective reporting is a form of anti-government activism presents a challenge to all Egyptian journalists, but it is a challenge that is more or less relished depending on the experience and horizons of the journalists concerned. The range of experience is considerable, not only because of Egypt's own different categories of media outlet, but also because of job openings in Arabic-language or Middle East-oriented radio stations in Europe and the USA, as well as the Pan-Arab media, which expanded dramatically during the 1990s and early 2000s."[84]

Instead, the second one is represented by the neutral nature of media, that cannot be defined as good or bad at all. They are just tools, and lacking a prescribed aim, are possible to use according to different ends. Media have had a double function in the relationships between the Mediterranean peoples. Sometimes they have favored citizens, some others media have harmed them. The majority of the Arab countries backed Kuwait against Saddam's military invasion according to the international law. Nevertheless, public opinion was soon alienated from the West, due to the war of images perpetrated not only by *CNN,* but also other actors. Some images were usually censored in the West and, at the time of the war, just the Algerian journalists transmitted what Western public could not see. Although we should not forget that they were backing Saddam, this struggle in the diffusion of pictures, directly taken from the war, was gradually destroying the monopoly of state-owned media in the maintenance of internal political order, and even the leadership of the Western news organizations in the international communication process.

The advent of new technologies brought deep transformations to the Arab society. As for the Nasserian radio, today the Internet has led a profound destabilization spreading a culture based on images and new political discourses. In spite of the actual uncertainty of all the possible consequences, digital media put pluralism into politics, hugely affecting the explosion of the Arab revolutions. As a matter of fact, with good judgment, we may consider this a positive point, independently from the mystified outcomes the Arab world is finding today, within an almost never-ending period of transformation.

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[84] Sakr, Naomi. *Transformations in Egyptian journalism*, cit., p.25.

Referring to the Internet, all these processes were suddenly accelerated.

As the Internet appeared, new scenarios were opened within the Arab society, generating a process which had yet started inside the houses. New devices inevitably and gradually affected the social sphere, by influencing the relationships among people. Public interests were anymore topic belonging to elites or groups of experts. Through the explosion of the media consume, more accessible for anyone, interest for public matters could involved part of population once excluded by public debate, such as women, youths and political oppositions.

Through the Internet they could intervene through writing a comment on a web page, managing personal web sites, or as we will see, blogs, or participating in online forum's conversations. Just women could write on a keyword comments and opinions, they had not ever expressed on the streets. While Mosques had represented the public opinion emerging as a gathering place in the previous decades, the Internet could now "invites" women, girls, boys, students, and activists to talk about any social topic and exchange opinions without the more or less limitations imposed by historical tradition.

It felt like a completely different situation. What was said online seemed to be considered virtual, lacking of the same effects could provoke something said offline.

As the Internet widely entered Arab houses and became accessible for all the members of families, many unpredictably ignored such an impact within society, while many others underestimated it, judging that process as smoother, where instead there had always been difficulties in the full recognition of freedom of expression.

Some data worth taking into account. After a dramatic growth in the last decade, the Internet was accessible for 43.1 million Arab speaking users in Egypt, 18.5 in Morocco, 16.5 in Saudi Arabia, 8.1 in the United Arab Emirates, 8.0 in Sudan, 6.4 in Algeria, 5.9 in Syria, 5.2 in Yemen, Tunisia 4.8, Iraq 3.0 in 2013. According to the respective population numbers, 49.6 percent in Egypt, 56 percent in Morocco, 60.5 percent in Saudi Arabia, 88 percent in the United Arab Emirates, 22.7 percent in Sudan, 18.1 percent in Algeria, 26.2 percent in Syria, 20 percent in Yemen, 43.8 percent in Tunisia, 9.2 percent in Iraq.[85]

In spite of natural differences being due to history and various approaches toward technology, each one of them registered a sharp growth in the number of users, evolution which easily determined analogies and an apparent contagion of the spirit of revolts. It is rightfully to remind that, according to the single contexts, deep differences among the mentioned Arab states eventually prevailed, making those considerations just a wrong perception provoked by the international media and broadcasters.

Nevertheless, the Arab revolutions of 2011, more than for its concrete political consequences, made world aware that the Arab world had received the globalization's pulses, although with several contrasts.

The internet private access made suddenly people conscious of whatever was happening not only in their

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[85] Source: *Internet World Stats*, www.internetworldstats.com, 2013.

own country, but also in Europe and America even. This impact is not to underestimate even to understand the dynamics of revolts which did not ask the fall of the Arab government, but entire political system of the regimes, such as those of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

What is more, for the first time, as Arab citizens began to read about facts outside their own countries, they realized that national matters, such as the economic crisis, the lack of free and fair elections, the discourse over the human rights were not only personal battles, but also issues could concern the international public. Foreign audiences, through the media boom in the 1990s and overall the spread of social media in 2000s participated in discussions on the Arab political debate, deeply influencing their counterparts in North Africa and in the Middle East, thing that should not be considered always positive.

Notably, a consideration about language results extremely interesting. In spite of a dramatic growth in Arab speaking users, at the same time it should be noticed the spread of several web pages and online newspapers that provided a second version of their contents in English. Globalization through the Internet had eventually pushed some private users and online administrations of web journals to engage the international public in the Arab debate on political and economic matters, by basically sharing news and personal columnists' opinions.

Moreover, in the next paragraph, we will see how the linguistic factor resulted more evident during the so-called Arab Spring, especially referring to the Twitter's hashtags.

However, Internet strongly hit also the traditional approach of journalism, because of the dramatic spread of several online pages, often managed by students, young digital-savvy and activists that for a determined expertise or geographic position appeared more reliable to readers and internet users than any other web journals situating less close to facts.

Therefore, there are new communication dynamics to explain in order to understand better media processes during the Arab revolutions. What several scholars began to study in the aftermath of the Arab uprising is how this kind of collaboration between official and unofficial journalists developed, introducing new actors and ways of providing information to digital audiences compared to the old consolidated system. In fact, "one of the more dominant research approaches to describing the relationship between mainstream and alternative journalism has been to analyze the effects of alternative media practice and social media on the traditional structure of professional journalism. These effects are often related to the structure of institutions and economies related to traditional forms of journalism and new media... This process is called "paradigm shift" towards the collaborative, iterative, and user-led production of content by participants in a hybrid user-producer, or *produser* role. More broadly, the social repercussions of technological change, such as blogging, citizen journalism and alternative media, have meant that it has been the act of interested individuals or groups, rather than professional journalists, which have allowed for reporting, analyzing and

disseminating of information on a global scale."[86]

At the first time, the Internet was obviously the basic means, then it was hugely exploited with the advent of social networks.

Anyway, all things considered exactly explain how a simple tool able to connect people, which may be just an online forum to exchange recipes or a dating one, suddenly became a powerful means to disseminate information, not only at a national level, but also at an international one.

So, how did social media, an alternative mode to find out news for international public, affect the Arab revolution? The short answer is: enormously, by providing activists and common individuals to enjoy political debate and information which, until then, had always been censored to them.

Another mention worth doing is related to women. In fact, high female presence on the streets suggests that women played a huge role during the popular upheavals, making international audience aware of a longer process of emancipation in the Arab world, they had yet followed in the spread of image-based media, such as television. Even if this discourse will be more deeply dealt with in the next chapter, we just remind that female emancipation in the Arab world is not just related to media, in spite of the big influence they traditionally exercise, even within this discussed regional context.

In fact, in 1997 a popular revolt in Egypt was ignited just because of the contribution of women, determined to protest against the increase in bread's price level. Several years after, Essra Abdelfattah, just an Egyptian girl, by connecting textile factory workers of Al-Mahalla al-Kubra and cyber-dissidents, spread their protest on the Internet in order to fight misery.

The debate about the internet tools as gender equalizer and means to empower emancipation of women is still open and controversial, although their huge use within domestic spheres and sharp increase in female users is well known, independently from the concrete outcomes achieved today. On the path of the Internet's success within the Arab countries, social media eventually realized a decisive turning point, especially in the battle for freedom of expression against gender violence, by looking undoubtedly relevant campaigns organized by plenty of female cyber-activists and bloggers.

In addition, as a matter of fact, there are some steps to underline in the passage from an innocent approach to the online world to a social relevant implication of dissidence and protest in the virtual sphere, more risky for tough regimes and *status quo* conditions of the Arab politics.

In the 1990s Arab society was hugely affected by the advent of the Internet, but at first glance it appear just a technical instrument void of meaningful consequences in the effective perception of reality. Nevertheless, just to give an illustration, some users decided to exploit the web space to denounce a sex assault against Egyptian women participating in Ayd al-fitr Feast in Cairo in 2006. This fact was a turning point, in

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[86]Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., p.3.

particular to demonstrate how online sphere would affect the journalistic mainstream. In truth, that aggression would never find the opportunity to be treated by national state-owned media if forums and private web pages would not have disseminate that fact throughout the digital audience, provoking also a public demonstration.[87]

That is quite interesting whether, for instance, we try to understand what kind of feeling could mounted in public hearts and minds. The sex assault during Ayd al-fitr Feats, like several other cases in the Arab countries characterized by freedom of expression censorship and media repression, eventually provoked two consequences.

First, that there was something wrong in the media mainstream in Egypt. Second, that in believing so, common audience acquired confidence in alternative modes to provide information, such as unofficial forums, personal web pages, and online spaces managed by political dissidence.

All of them were, at the same time, easily influenced by specific political preferences, which completely overlooked those principle regarding the deontology of journalism.

Anyway, potential new challenges in contemporary media system, did not affect the broad success of citizen journalism, and we will see why the advent of blogs and social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, determined an added value in the empowering of Arab dissidence against political regimes.

Briefly, what the Internet provided is the technological substrate of this revolutions, as well as defining the uprising of 2011 a "social media revolution".[88]

But, another point worth adding, how did regimes in the Arab countries, before and during the revolutions of 2011, try to prevent the risks derived from the spread of the Internet in order to survive to popular uprising? Undoubtedly, we live today in the era of cybernetic wars, where, how it is possible to understand in the course of this paragraph, the Internet became a such strong means to provoke some comprehensible fears in the regime communication apparatus.

Just in case of a new war, with good judgment, in the contemporary age we may affirm it should be heavily affected by cybernetic struggles to control the virtual sphere. The balance of power is obviously more determined by these virtual spaces rather than some years ago.

In 2012, World Conference on International Telecommunications took place in Dubai confirming great

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[87] Dalla Negra, Cecilia. *Online e Offline, le donne arabe tra autorappresentazione e partecipazione. Il caso egiziano e tunisino*, in Pepicelli, Renata. *Le donne nei media arabi, tra aspettative tradite e nuove opportunità*. ROMA: Carocci Editore, 2014, cit., p.42.

[88] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., pp.123-134.

relevance this area of the world have gained in the last years, in order to define as much as possible a shared opinion over digital tools and the regulation of the Internet.

Great powers, such as the United States, has shown how important this kind of matters is. Proofs were provided by some scandal like the Wikileaks' one, or the Edward Snowden's disclosures. Data war, or more peacefully data journalism, are both based on the control of these new spaces that, how we are seeing, are able both to create regimes and destroy them at the same time. In Dubai a never-ending debate about global security was raised. Espionage and broad control of digital devices by political regimes, not only the dictatorial ones but also the apparently democratic ones, is commonly known today. However, all last things considered will be better clarified when we are going to talk about the mobile devices which embedded all the new opportunity provided by a magical technological means like the Internet.

So, are people more safety under strict control which could prevent even terroristic actions, even sacrificing their personal right to privacy? [89]

The aftermath of this conference is as confusing as its background, but what about the Arab world? It is evident how much the impact of the Internet can undoubtedly influence the political discourse, but going back to tight regimes such as Ben Ali's in Tunisia, Mubarak's in Egypt, and Gaddafi's in Libya, what were their reactions to the huge internet tide which had awaken a so feared and threatening popular rage? In so asking, we move to the conclusion of this paragraph, just before dealing with the main part related to Facebook and Twitter.

In conclusion, focusing on the regimes' response to digital activism is essential. The Internet had been resulted a dangerous weapon for government, and truly seemed to be a large exploited means to keep protests forward against stability of the regimes.

Facing an accurate organization for protesting and demonstrating contempt toward government behavior toward innocent citizens, such as Bouazizi in Tunisia and Khaled Said in Egypt, response of North-African regimes was not always the same. "During the heady weeks of protest, authoritarian governments responded sometimes with concessions, and then sometimes with violent crackdowns. But every single government that faced public protests, regardless of regime type, had some kind of digital-response strategy. There was a range of responses, and some more sophisticated than others."[90]

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[89]Mainoldi Luca. *I Padroni di Internet,* in Limes, Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica, *Media come armi*, cit., pp.9-16.

[90] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M., *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.14.

The Tunisian and Egyptian regimes had significantly different responses to the digital organization of protests. One aspect to take into account is that before the upheavals in December 2010 and January 2011, Tunisian authorities had a long, repressive tradition of monitoring and surveillance, by targeting individuals engaging in online political activism. In comparison, how they paradoxically underestimated the advent of a wide uprising in 2011 is incredible. In fact, the Tunisian government did not effectively limited information networks by stopping the outflow of local economic and political conditions which had raised people grievances. With the same approach, they apparently seemed to ignore the inflow of international reaction and support, heavy notable in a digital era where globalized information apparatus and spheres have overcome national borders. Protesters obviously enjoyed from government's failure to manage sensitive information and gained their victory just at the level of organizing dissidence and well-informed uprisings. Alike, Mubarak's regime enormously suffered information networks, even if it tried to shut them down by closing mobile networks. Unfortunately, the truth lies on what Waleed Rasheed said, "I would like to thank Mubarak so much...He disconnected mobile phones on January 27. More people came down to the streets on the 28th of January because he disconnected."[91]

Some effects would surely be unexpected for anyone. It is quite awkward to say, but probably many of those protestors who took the streets that day were not at all interested in political matters but they simply enjoying the Internet for personal diversion. In fact, the private internet access has made digital system more involved within daily people's lives. Its consequence was inevitably a worse outcome for the government censorship. Protests embedded more different interests and that malaise which had belonged just to historical dissidents or digital-savvy activists, began to regard other spheres of society, at the precise moment in which the Internet had became essential even for Arab common people.

Although all things taken into account will be understand better referring to the dynamics of Facebook and Twitter, and blogging sphere in the next paragraphs, we will use the words of Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain just to conclude the general regimes' approach to marginalize and dissolve power of the Internet. "For civil society actors around the world, digital media and online social networking applications have changed the way in which dissent is organized. Social movement leaders from around the world use online applications and digital content system to organize collective action, activate local protest networks, network with international social movements, and share their political perspective with global media systems. In the past, authoritarian regimes easily controlled broadcast media in times of political crisis by destroying newsprint supplies, seizing radio and television stations, and blocking phone calls. It is certainly difficult to control digital media on a regular basis, but there have been occasions when states have disabled a range of marginal to significant portions of their national information infrastructure...

Sophisticated repressive regimes often preemptively respond with a digital counterinsurgency strategy and

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[91] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.70.

often prepare for the day they need to battle their citizens either in the streets or in an information war. States such as China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are excellent examples."[92]

But what resulted uncontainable was the broad participation in a leaderless protest. In fact, one of the most revolutionary added values just the Internet 1.0 gave to dissidence was the dispersion of leadership. Regime communication structures suddenly appeared unable to prevent sit in, strikes and wider general uprising because of the lack of clear targets to break down. They did not know how to arrest the upheavals. Web pages were al lot, written in different languages even, thanks to the international level of the protest. The latter was a relevant element in circumventing the word-based decryption of the governments.

A broad participation gave to the revolt also different codes of action, which differed from a social group to another. In addition, the impact of glocalism in media introduced other difficulties for the national surveillance of the regimes. Popular protests could break out in capital such as Tunis, Cairo, and Tripoli, while at the same time rural portions of the territories could be affected by similar citizens' unrest. Therefore, target-oriented reactions and responses led by governments seemed impossible to be put in action, and the only possible solution to apply looked dismantling the entire system. There from, as regimes eventually decided to shut completely down the Internet, their defeat seemed to be written. Last but not least element to consider is that the Internet has become so much universal that economic costs deriving from the loss of that tool heavy affected North Africa economy, while most part of dissidence enjoyed indirect connection asking for foreign support and managing of their web pages and coordinating through traditional phone calls. In so doing, the only possible solution to restore a national order seemed to accept people's will, strongly desiring the overthrow of the regime. This is what exactly occurred in Tunisia and in Egypt, where authorities drew their support for the ancient, authoritarian, political leaders.

But to give a clearer illustration for all thing considered let us see the three key digital elements, namely blog networking, Facebook, and Twitter, which determined the certainty of authoritarian government's fall.

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[92] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.71.

3.2 Internet 2.0

The Internet has been a revolution in itself, technologically. The advent of social media was not a notable technological advance, of course, but was able to provoke revolutions in users' participation, by encouraging debates, embedding opinions and different points of view, establishing a new culture based on the continuous and uninterrupted connection with the world. In some cases this is not completely positive, but undoubtedly is producing huge changes in people's daily life. The interaction-based Internet 2.0, compared to the content-based Internet 1.0, was something completely new, by looking at the social effects it has generated.

Firstly, with the broad diffusion of the blogs, we can see today an entire blogosphere which has allowed to anyone to participate in the general public opinion over any kind of issue. Secondly, with the success of social networks, overall Facebook and Twitter, internet audiences have gained an active role in the virtual platforms. What is worth saying is that the phrase "virtual" has completely lost its meaning today. One used to sum up the role of social networks arguing that today they represent a half truth or one truth and a half. They strictly refer to a single individual, showing what user decide to post online or surely hiding what he or she chooses to maintain offline. While the blogosphere had yet opened this online space to people, just the most digital-savvy one could effectively manage a blog. Revolution led by social media actually regard the peculiar element to be substantially user-friendly, allowing to a high number of individuals to take part in the digital sphere. In spite of causes that could seem virtual, consequences are becoming more effective in real matters every day.

In fact, the Arab uprisings were initially defined a "Twitter revolution" or a "Facebook revolution", after two kinds of social networks the protestors used. In spite of the usage of other platforms, alternative social networks or blogs, those did not seem to have the cachet of Twitter and Facebook. As yet happened in the past, these journalistic definitions were attributed also to the Iranian revolution in 1979, called "Cassette Tape Revolutions", and even in 1989, uprisings in the Seychelles, Eastern Europe, and Tiananmen Square were pointed as "Fax Revolutions". That because technologies purportedly enabled them. However, at the same time is wise to specify that, since 2004 have been so-called digital revolutions in Moldova, Ukraine and Iran without achieving their goals, just to say that digital supports in popular uprising not always have brought protestors to victory.[93]

Nevertheless, without overlooking the relevant role played by several other factors in the course of Arab

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[93] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.55.

revolutions, social networks were decisive in achieving considerable results, worth raising public opinion against those contemporary authoritarian regimes and leading protestors towards an alternative mode to use the Internet, by exalting those features that we will taking into account referring to specific examples. The social media revolution was mainly semiotic, because raised not simply thanks to technology, but also thanks to an accurate and meaningful usage. In fact, the specific usage of users elevated social networks to the level of "media", according to the goals and aims to achieve.

In so doing, if a social network basically allows users to interact and collaborate on the web, also putting new contents directly produced by users themselves (user-generated contents), it is possible to understand that this process could inevitably revolutionize the world of media.[94]

We have defined social networks as "user-friendly" tools. There are several researches about human-computer interaction, but that revolution which could be directly attributed to social networks is based on their easy accessibility for any kind of individual, even that who is not highly digital-savvy. Today almost anyone, even in the Arab world we dealt with, has an internet access. Sometime, using a personal computer represented a specific skill who belonged to few portions of population. In comparison, in recent years, any man, woman or child even can use a PC and navigate on the Internet without complex technological support, but there is another factor which has notably extolled this gradual process.

What is more, tablets and smart-phones put the Internet into the pockets. As someone could interact with other users in very short time and everywhere he or she was at the moment, publishing photos and videos, commenting facts, and underlining those news traditional and silenced media could not transmit, revolution could be accomplished. This is what exactly happened looking at Bouazizi's case in Tunisia or Khaled Said's in Egypt.

These digital tools, by assuming the role which traditional broadcasters were unable to cover because of tight regime censorship, helped to individualize, localize and turn community-specific dissent into a structured movement with a collective consciousness about both shared plights and opportunities for action. "It makes more sense to think of conjoined casual combinations: the strength of existing opposition movements, the ability of the regime to buy off opposition leaders, and the use of digital media to build opposition networks. It may be that casual combinations vary but the one consistent component is digital media."[95]

The peculiar characteristic was that the Internet has provided, as means and medium, a decisive and effective

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[94]Cosenza, Giovanna. *Introduzione alla semiotica dei nuovi media,* cit., p.164.

[95] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp.103-105.

weapon for political resistance across countries. Information infrastructure can affect political communication and public opinion formation in several ways. Nonetheless, influenced by very different histories and very diverse political cultures, the Arab countries have known similar changes to their systems of communication since the advent of digital technologies.

Although these regimes are very different, they enormously opened up in recent times, due to the proliferation of digital and networked information technologies.

Another survey worth citing is that which regards online news use. Researchers have found out that number of internet users who generally get information through web pages, both official and unofficial, dramatically increases in times of crisis or during elections. In spite of some considerations over an amateur usage of the Internet in Western countries, it is important underlining that in some regions, such as the Arab one, Internet suddenly became an heavily exploited political tool. Reasons are not clear, but probably because of a still difficult accessibility in some portions of the territories, or just for an essential need in front of less reliable information provided by broadly censored state-owned newspapers and televisions, digital-savvy individuals followed the path of dissidence, enlarging the participation in the popular uprisings.

A mention to provide concerns the "active audiences" model in communication social studies.

In fact, the advent of social networks where any consumer could be a communication producer at the same time, revolutionized the sociological approach towards mass media. Social networks provoked the decline of the so-called "linear" model, passing from broadcast to wide interaction, where web users are contents-producer at the same time, playing a double role.

Public audiences were not actually passive anymore, gradually generating new sociological studies about reader-response and reception theory models. Experience of mass media could be simply commented and even contested, making audience's opinion more relevant in front of the news. All things considered produced a new paradigm, in which modern massages have assumed interaction as a quality more important than content itself. It is not important what you are saying but how you react to it.[96]

In so doing, regarding implications that discourse can evoke within the Arab countries, referring to education to pluralism, is very important.

There are some bases talking about pluralism, but several transformations affecting the Arab world should be taken into account even considering the wide usage of social networks, and their great numbers in membership and active participation.

For instance, democracy means a culture that accepts diversity, respects of different points of view, considers truth as relative rather than absolute, and tolerates, even encourages dissent. This culture can

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[96] Sorice, Michele. *Sociologia dei mass media,* cit*.,* pp. 215-258.

redistribute power. In spite of this, without such a culture, it is impossible to build a democratic state. By parliamentary and presidential elections, coalition governments, constitution writing and the like, a country can move to pluralism, but not necessarily it will be sustainable. Respect for diversity is not an innate characteristic, because what makes pluralism permanent is "accepting different points of view and respecting the will of the people to choose their governments and to change those choices depending on the record of those governments in power."[97]

Pluralism must be fostered by the community, particularly at school. However, social networks are playing a huge role today. Also without totally accepting the optimistic point of view raised by Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's founder and tireless social activist, the social networking platforms are not probably revolutionizing the educational systems in the country they reached, but surely emerge as great factor of change, not necessarily visible just in the future but also nowadays.

Briefly, we are going to see why the Arab revolutions of 2011 were however possible and social networks, covering the role of effective media (there from the phrase "social media"), gave dissidence the force to make the difference in the uprising leading dictators such as Ben Ali, or Mubarak, to flee, and establishing the success of the popular upheavals.

Provided that, social media were not the only factor which determined the fall of the regimes in North Africa, but were the most evident, due to their personal characteristics, by emerging as "microphone" for the voice of dissent. World perceived the so-called Arab Spring as "Social network revolution" because this revolutionary wave appeared to international media audiences through digital tools, thanks to the effectiveness of such instruments and the censorship imposed over North Africa national media until there. Briefly, we can just remind a definition for social media, and in so doing for the Internet 2.0, that should not be ignored concerning the huge consequences those tools provoked in the distinguishing feature of the Arab revolutions. "Definition of digital media is a deliberately extensive one: digital media consist of the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content that has individual value but reflects shared values. The content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, and ideas, that becomes central products, and the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume both the tools and the content."[98]

So, social media can surely be a big aid for the development of pluralism within the Arab world, but at the same time, although they notably encouraged the popular uprisings, have to be studied not only according to their benefits but also their possible defects.

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[97] Muasher, Marwan. *The second Arab awakening and the battle for pluralism,* cit., pp.123-124.

[98] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.13.

To give an illustration through a simple question to ask, but very difficult to reply to. Are these so long waited digital revolutions effective today? Does the revolutionary wave of 2011 have deep roots in countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya nowadays? We should be pushed to reply "no".

But we have necessarily to consider that, referring to the case of Tunisia, a new reality has also brought some improvements.

For instance, talking about the quartet which is leading the political dialogue in Tunis (formed by Houcine Abbassi, Wided Bouchamoui, Abdessatar Ben Moussa and Fadhel Mahfoudh), even awarded with a Peace Nobel Prize in 2015, we may attest that it has attempted a transition towards peace, but not without the inevitable problems raised by an approach never used in the country before.

The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet has actually worked to improve a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia, but the current difficulties are attesting a troubled path to follow, where religious and traditional constrains remain truly strong. The transitional government, at the end of the revolution, allowed free and fair elections of the national Constituent Assembly, but the following governments elected would have heavily affected by the social conflicts concerning either the inclusion of Sharia in the law, or its exclusion. The second option was surprisingly backed by the Ennhada's government of Rached Gannushi, that inevitably provoked several protests in the country, among especially hardline Islamists. Nevertheless, all this certifies a new vivacious debate in a country which strongly wants to find its personal way to reach peace and stability.

Concerning to other countries, political regimes have changed without overcoming the social crises in the Arab world. By contrast, evoking the bases of this thesis, today social media are essential in order to strengthen any kind of popular uprising, and more than other sorts of media in the past, they have affected new portions of population, by enlarging active and effective participation.

In other cases, sometime popular uprisings were led sometimes by charismatic leaders, some others by an intellectual elite. They had been, by introducing their convictions or peculiar elements (a good example is Muhammar Gaddafi himself, leader grown up by tribes and determined to be ruler for the common good of Libyan tribes), spark for any kind of unrest for the victory of dissidence. Instead, what exactly happened during the Arab uprisings, was the totally absence of recognized leaders, while forums, blogs, and social networks were collecting a shared dissent towards the governments and encouraged by the same digital participation itself.

Anyway, even social media are powerful tools to elevate consensus in political propaganda, and political extremism, and terrorist groups even, are exploiting these means apparently finding a very similar leaderless model. Following the world news it will be clear how widespread mobilization of terrorism is, by looking at those little groups are participating in terrorist attacks throughout Europe.

Through the same means, it will be possible to see how related to these new communication processes the

phenomenon of foreign fighters, leaving for the Middle East in order to collaborate with the Islamic State, are. Notably, it would be impossible overestimating the role played by social media within the Arab world, while in some other regions all over the world they have seemed to have a less political impact, although huge in other social spheres.

In this regard, referring to the communication means people can actually use, the Internet 2.0 is affecting enormously not only the political dynamics of the Arab world, but also of general Islam, very involved in a tough period of transformations and comparisons.

The advent of a globalizing technology has opened a lot of challenges to face, but what most regards our work is how social media affected the development of the Arab uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East.

Since 2000, technology and digital tools proliferation has been notably quick in these regions of the world. This has brought improvements information literacy, overall in extended cities. More people got news from the overseas and began connecting with friends and relatives abroad. Obviously, it is not that people in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya decided to have political uprisings and turned to digital media for support. They were wired men, women, girls and boys who actually maintained their social networks with digital media and then they knew best to elaborate new ideas to keep upheaval forward.

Briefly, social media apparently became one of the reasons of political uprising precisely because an high-numbered community of users was already able to use digital media before the political crisis began. They gradually turned the historical dissidence from some tools to several others, probably more effective in the accomplishing of their mission.

It might be that social media broadly usage imported into political crises something new into the traditional communication process, like the battle between freedom of expression and regime censorship, by adding new elements and portions of population that had not taken into account until then. Especially for the inhabitants of Tunis, Cairo, Tripoli, and other capitals, it is the daily use of mobile phones that makes the technology 2.0 a proximate and reasonable cause of revolution, without overlooking all the other factors, such as weak economy, repression of dissidence, low possibilities to take part in the political debate. As people realized to have gained the latter with social media, overthrowing authoritarian regimes became almost vital, just for winning the opportunity to repeat and reproduce what digital users could do in front of their monitors also in the streets. Moreover, modern political activists were formally trained in working with consumer electronics. Just to provide an example, the US Congress approved 30 million to the US Department of State to train more than 5,000 digital activists all over the world. "General 'how-to' websites have become useful resources for activists, such as 'How to Set Up a Dial-up Server. The Alliance of Youth Movements developed a timely list of activities that sympathetic publics abroad could participate in to help

Egyptian connect. There were guides to launching a local Facebook protest and sharing images, helping Egyptians dial up through Telecomix, redirecting Egyptian ham-radio signals to Twitter, running relays to increase activists' anonymity, or petitioning Vodafone to reopen their mobile social networks in Egypt."[99]

Briefly, that was the main sign of social media implication in the popular uprising: the ignition of revolts is often provoked by precise acts of violence, caused by security forces and services, which are instantly captured and memorialized online but overlooked by state-owned broadcast media. For instance, there is a fact or incident that is not usually covered by the mainstream of traditional media, because of both political and technical reasons. But it is covered by protestors who produce their own stream through social networks. As we know, in Tunisia, the inciting incident was not Bouzizi's self-immolation, although emblematic, but, similarly, also several others.

"In Egypt it was not just Khaled Said's death, or the inspiring success of protest in Tunisia. It was the participatory creation of news and discussion about these events by networks of family, friends, and then strangers when the state-run broadcast media did not air coverage of such activism. When *Al Jazeera* did not cover the digital activism in Syria, civic leaders there lobbied to have it covered. *Al Jazeera* produced a long documentary and featured Syrian activist content on its website. Consequently, interest in Syria's opposition movement, both within the country and across the region, grew rapidly.

Something worth adding, broadly well mentioned yet, the ignition of social protest in this latest wave of political upheaval does not seem to come with recognizable leaders.

All things taken into account , mostly concerns the revolutionary advent of the Internet 2.0, but we have surely to look at the specific digital, social and political dynamics of each tool we have considered until now. In the course of the following paragraphs we will start with the blogosphere, then we will move to Facebook and Twitter, the most influential social networks exploited during the so-called Arab Springs in 2011.

3.2.1 Blog

"This is a YouTube war, said the diplomat from the United Nations, leaning towards me, his voice low and

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[99] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp.82-87.

throttled with anger. He pulled on his cigarette and sat back in his chair. We were in the bubble of their headquarters. This man was watching the news, constantly. It was dominated by images uploaded by tech-savvy teenagers armed with a video camera and a broadband line... He told me at the time that these images had driven much of the reaction in the West to the crisis."[100]

That said, it is evident that the popular uprising in 2011, especially in North Africa, particularly awoke thanks to digital platforms playing the role of entities able to enlarge public, engage new portions of population, disseminate the rage towards dictatorial regimes after having showed their crimes and vices. Anyway, what social networks began to do during the first year of the second decade of the 21st century, several blogs had yet started some years before, enough to create a digital-savvy generation and a broad digital dissent. One explanation more is needed in order to avoid potential misunderstandings. In the course of this thesis, we will use the adjective "digital" just to underline the added value of new tools supported by internet connection and user-friendly features. In fact, this could raise a further issue to take into account if we overlook the real impact of the revolution, mainly developed on the streets. Protestors's purposes at Tahrir Square in Cairo were achieved as people decided to effectively take the streets and put into difficulty the government army and security services. Those boys and girls who desperately wanted to realize their dreams, actually achieved their digital purposes passing into real action, until the risk of losing their lives themselves.[101]

Nevertheless, how blogs made the difference before and during the so-called Arab Spring is an essential aspect to consider, just before implying social networking elements.

Basically, if blogs and dissident forums had been "microphones" for the initial weak voices of protesters, consequently, social networks, through those peculiar mechanisms we will see in the next paragraphs, emerged like microphones of the microphones themselves, inspiring a domino effect which relied on exogenous causes and goals achieved by other means, but basically depending on the communication process constituted by an unpredictable intensification put on the table by those digital tools. Through Facebook and Twitter a lot of bloggers began to share their posts on the blogs making their messages viral. In other words, Arab revolutions were not digital, as some Western journalists defined them too early, but heavy exploited those huge qualities which allowed social media to make dissidence's victory possible. All things considered, asking a precise question is needed. How did blogs create an effective background, yet in the first decade of the 21st century, so that digital knowledge allowed protestors to win their oppressing regimes? And what were their initial purposes, especially in the Arab world?

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[100] Danahar, Paul. *The new Middle East.* UK: Bloomsbury, 2014, cit., p.84.

[101] Meringolo, Azzurra. *I ragazzi di piazza Tahrir*, cit., pp.37-55.

Technically, a *weblog*, or *blog*, means "online travel diary", a web site that allows to anyone to publish different kinds of contents in real time thanks to internet connection. It is not necessary being an expert or owning a professional expertise (user-friendly peculiarity). By managing a blog, anyone has the possibility to make photos, video, link, article public, in order to create original contents.[102]

According to the ends of journalistic deontology, the advent of a huge amount of blogs, known as *blogosphere*, evoked new challenges to face, in order to preserve the virtuous spirit of profession. In fact, most part of the world has not yet elaborated a specific jurisdiction in order to regulate the potential risks of alternative information streams. The blogosphere suddenly became place of disinformation or interest-oriented news, by exposing just the point of view expressed by blogs' curators.

Nonetheless, despite all the problematic aspects blog introduced into traditional broadcasting schemes of classic journalism and storytelling, that aspect which at the first time was judged as bad by many communication purists and experts, resulted the most powerful weapon to use in order to circumvent regime censorship and develop an alternative mode of journalistic practice. If some scholars prefer to discriminate between being a journalist or being a blogger still today, and we agree with them in certain terms, in the context of Arab uprising in 2011, the hybrid role played by blogs became actually source of a new storytelling, previously censored with strict government responses, due to the only presence of traditional media, easy to control.

As the scholar of Arab media Naomi Sakr attests, such changes yet appeared in the context of the Arab media, certifying some transformation within Arab society in the last decades of 20th century, but all things taken into account lead to the advent of digital platforms, not just new in themselves, but able to revolutionize kinds of media which already existed, such as television and newspaper.

Incredibly, what arrived later became suddenly source of inspiration for older communication process, thanks to the careful forecasts of those mindful journalists, expert, manager or private media owners even, who immediately tried to conciliate innovation with tradition. Dogmatic and classic ways to check and disseminate news with broader and faster digital platforms, able to engage other audiences and attract who, until that time, felt not to be interested in political discourse.

Blogs themselves, due to the quality to be user-friendly, allowed to intervene both young people, women and marginal portions of population, in the public matters. In fact, by looking at the media, we can also understand the renewal of Arab society, even if all these transformations will be easier in understanding just in the next chapter, proper dedicated to reactions of the traditional media, and for specific reasons. Going back to the example of Leena Ben Mhenni, we specify that this girl was just one of a multitude of

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[102] Cosenza, Giovanna. *Introduzione alla semiotica dei nuovi media,* cit., 139.

bloggers who heavily exploited not only the Internet but also the blogosphere, in order to denounce the crimes of autocratic regimes in North Africa, such as in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

"I'm a blogger. I'm sure of that, because this is my best role, in order to tell and denounce all the facts worth being written, for those who sacrificed their lives to achieve freedom."[103]

Personal blogs, as many as the number of more or less digital-savvy activists who inhabited in the Arab world, enlarged the Arab blogosphere compared to the Western one, and especially elevated topics and issues taken into account awakening some fears in regimes' communication apparatus and national security services.

In fact, blogging usage is increasingly higher in many countries around the world in the last few years, including those under oppressive political regimes. In the Arab world, where we know that broadcasting media are controlled and monitored by the government still nowadays, blogs and other forms of new media gave further opportunities for a new public sphere suddenly able to instantly provide information to citizens and overall, something enough revolutionary, to exchange their personal opinion concerning several topics, including politics, economics, culture, love, life and religion.

Briefly, the impact provoked by the blogosphere in the Arab countries was significant, just to underline new opportunities to rediscover all fervor Islamic and Arab culture could offered, in spite of all the censorship it suffered in the previous years. Strict censorship usually fears a simple public debate even.

Blogs broadly covered extended debates over different topics to raise and issues to face. A sort of cultural renewal through new technological means. This gradual process in the first decade of the 21st century, as in North Africa as in the Middle East, generated a background where citizens became suddenly able to publish by their platforms both silly contents and serious ones.

As in the Arab world emerged signs of a possible malaise towards government, provoked by both political matters and economic miserable conditions, the interaction properties of the Internet 2.0 were notably intensified, not only among the users, but also among digital platforms exploited. The Arab blogosphere emerged as a fundamental point in order to instantly solve another traditional problem that hugely affected countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, i.e. the lack of freedom of expression.

So, if in the western countries scholars and experts in journalism questioned themselves about the protection of deontology in the case of storytelling in front of new revolutionary platforms, in the Arab ones, those digital tools resulted the direct means to raise, spread, develop, and also organize, a potential popular upheaval in order to provoke the fall of the oppressing regimes.

Uprising became evident as the protest for Bouazizi and Said's deaths found their motivation in the wide engagement which popular blogs had been able to produce. Therefore the government's response would have

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[103] Ben Mhenni, Leena. *Tunisian girl, la rivoluzione vista da un blog*, cit., p.11.

to be immediate, but it could not.

In fact, the well known "error 404" was just the censorship against precise targets, by affecting specific dominions characterizing single blogs. A response commonly used by regimes, but very ineffective at the same time.

Broad constellation of the blogosphere relied on single and independent entities, lacking a common structure except the Internet, and in so doing it was very difficult to censor. In the meanwhile, some years of experience in blogging had allowed the most influential bloggers, such as Leena Ben Mhenni, to easily solve such kind of technological problems and limitations.

Many reunion and public events had yet taken places in several part of the world, and even in Arab realities. One of the most important occasions to remind was the convention of Beirut in 2008. This event has been one of the most important meetings gathering a high number of Arab bloggers. An occasion where a lot of Arab digital-savvy girls and boys, both professional and simply hi-tech lovers, got the possibility to share their opinions and suggest new ideas to improve the blogosphere, in order to achieve social purposes in particular.[104] This is a significant aspect to take into account, overall when the most apparently meaningful examples usually provided by Western media are those disseminated by the international digital-savvy terrorism.

Unfortunately, it is evident how much terrorism itself has understand the infinite potentiality of digital platforms, but in the course of this thesis we will continue strongly to attest that there are more virtuous example than vicious referring to the usage of blogs and social networks, at least by analyzing the Arab context.

In particular, by going back to some differences between the Western world and the Arab one, cyber-activism in North Africa and the Middle East soon became a very effective space in order to raise a public debates on political and economic conditions. Some features to remind are the following. First, thanks to the opportunity to enjoy a domestic internet access, anyone could participate, even in the decision-making. Second, in a positive way, the blogosphere encouraged yet existing pluralism within the Islamic world, probably constrained, due to authoritarian regimes, in the last decades.

What is more, this represented exactly the historical course followed by the Arab revolutions in 2011, at the first moment in Tunisia, at the second one in Egypt.

As already provided, the Tunisian and Egyptian societies were very fervid, in spite of what could appear from a superficial, or just external, point of view. Since 2000, if one was interested in studying the Arab society, without overlooking natural differences state by state, he or she should looked at the blogosphere to

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[104] Ben Mhenni, Leena. *Tunisian girl, la rivoluzione vista da un blog*, cit., p.43.

understand what people actually thought. Blogs made effectively the difference because they were able to offer those information, about anything even, that probably nobody would follow watching state-owned Arab television, or reading national newspapers.

It is not as easy as appears. Arab media context is full of satellites, so making a too marked distinction between traditional and digital media would feel like a superficial judgment.

As we will see in the next chapter, broadcasts have managed to exploit, after an initial shy behavior, all the good features social platforms had introduced into Arab society. However, it is essential to admit, with good judgment, that this challenge was more easy for pan-Arab *Al Jazeera* than state-owned televisions, such as *Libya Radio and Television* in Libya or *The Arab Radio and Television Network* in Egypt, just considering media dynamics which characterized the Arab uprising.

However, in this case the web 2.0 applications that made the revolution of blogging possible have been *primo motu*. Through the evolution of technology, what people did at home, could suddenly developed on the streets, thanks to exceptional mobile phones provided of camera and a broader internet connection. An effective response for the government was quite impossible because of the peculiar composition of the blogosphere. In fact, the infinite variety of blogs which inhabited the blogosphere could not be controlled as easily as a single broadcast to censor or a web site to ban. Consequently, the only viable solution for the regimes seemed the complete block of the entire Internet. A decision, such as in the case of Egypt, which led the country to further economic damages, without weakening the digital-savvy dissidence, but strengthening it.

Nonetheless, that does not mean governments during the so-called Arab spring were unable to control digital networks. Simply, for those reasons which have been just explained, regimes' strategies put into play during the upheaval were weak and insufficient to contrast the digital democratic tide. At the same time it is clear how that democratic tide, despite its victory against the contemporary regimes, did not bring an effective transition to democracy. Political results are different, but the balance of the freedom of expression in countries such as Egypt, is still to achieve. Anyway, some different regime responses were evoked by national security apparatus in order to oppose the braking out of blogosphere in the Arab political discourse. Generally, "states interfere with digital networks using many tactics with various levels of severity. All states, including democracies, emerging democracies, authoritarian regimes, and fragile states, have targeted members of civil society. They have done so online by shutting down websites or portals, offline by arresting journalists, bloggers, activists, and citizens. By proxy through controlling internet service providers, forcing companies to shut down specific websites, or denying access to content the state considers disagreeable, and, in the most extreme cases, shutting down access to entire online and mobile networks."[105]

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[105] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp.72-76.

Nonetheless, during the Arab revolution, the counter-response of digital-savvy citizens was impressive, stronger and more conscious than other times in the past, where regimes had been eventually able to shut down the protests, by marginalizing digital sources and inspiration, and censoring online debates. An added value that should not ignored is also the process of internationalization of the Arab blogosphere.

For instance, what notably helped the Tunisian and Egyptian bloggers was a major participation of the Western and foreign ones. In fact, today the Arabic speaking blogosphere is a complex network including both bloggers from Arab speaking countries and Arab citizens who actually live in the United States, South America, or Europe. That made the Arab social dissent notably dispersive, enough and significantly spread to enjoy other means which a national regime security apparatus could not exploited.

Therefore, such dynamics made the blogging tide unstoppable. Finally, the secret of the success relies also on a quantitative factor. Like a trend, huge portion of North Africa and Middle East population wanted to manage a blog.[106] It does not matter whether initial purposes were different. Just like a trend again, those moments of the uprising in Tunisia and Egypt had to be necessarily followed through the blogosphere and publicly disseminated through personal blogs.[107]

Every kind of citizen seemed to participate in this process, independently if he or she was boy, girl, student, young, old, woman, richer or poorer man.

Enjoying this digital background, blogosphere could particularly affected the Arab uprising, and Bouazizi case was notably meaningful.

The so-called "virtual" sphere, moved an increasing participation in social tragedy, fomenting the civil society's rage. After Bouazizi's, Khaled Said's death turned revolution from Tunisia into Egypt, inspiring a sort of contagion. More people could follow the facts, more citizens began blogging everything could register, taking, and publish, from videos to photographs, from revolutionary anthems to article about how to act in order to win the oppressive regimes.

But what really made the difference had been the birth of new tools to organize protestors, decisive to maintain protests strong and convinced until the accomplishment of its goals. These new tools have to be found in the social networking platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter properly during the Arab revolution in 2011.

These innovative digital platforms, social networks which were suddenly used as social media, not only

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[106] Sibilio, Simone. *La rivoluzione dei (nuovi) media arabi,* in Corrao, *Le rivoluzioni arabe,* cit., pp.86-88.

[107] Nicosia , Aldo. *La Tunisia dalla rivoluzione alla nuova costituzione,* in Corrao, *Le Rivoluzioni Arabe,* cit., pp.124-125.

encouraged blogosphere by making it broader and recognizable to more common portions of population, but also introduced some notable elements, impossible to overlook in the course of this kind of thesis. Next paragraphs of this chapter deal with them in more extensive terms.

3.2.2 Facebook

We are a 2.0 generation and live according to the schemes provided by social networking platforms, directly or indirectly. Today, people not only spend plenty of their time refreshing unofficial news, photos, videos or links posted by other users on their personal social networks' profiles but also have begun to live following the specific logic of these tools, partially changing communication and language to express themselves even. In spite of personal interests owned by anyone, Facebook, among a considerable number of other digital social networking platforms, has quickly become leader in this sector thanks to the cleverness of its founder, the visionary, eccentric and young tycoon Mark Zuckerberg.

He has not only been able to lead the market of new digital technology, but also has imposed its online creature as the most popular social network all over the world. Just to cite some numbers, today this social networking service is populated with about 1.65 billion monthly active users, and its revenues amounted almost 18 billion dollars in 2015. Moreover, it is multilingual and about 12.691 are currently working to improve and develop its net services. Finally, some of Facebook's subsidiaries are Instagram and WhatsApp, two other social platforms broadly spread around the world. These information are worth saying in order to go back to Arab revolution and understand why Facebook has been so important in encouraging popular uprising. Its role was combined with the instantaneity of Twitter, but we may say, with good judgment, that Mark Zuckerberg's social network actually remains at the top of the ranking, for its spontaneity, accessibility, popular features and general characteristics, congenial to any kind of user. If Twitter is remaining a platform for journalism-loving users, and in the meanwhile Instagram seems to be a digital tool for fashion brands or companies which attempt to advertise their goods, Facebook has given to anyone the possibility to know new people through friendship circles and diffusion of digital personal diaries. Like a huge gossip magazine where narcissism and curiosity could find their ideal space.

Beyond any theory over the success of Facebook, what matters for our discourse instead, is exactly how certain features of this social network produced a huge engagement which resulted decisive in the course of the so-called Arab springs, also defined "Facebook revolution".

We start with some effective points. For instance, its multilingual nature has allowed it to occupy a relevant space even in the Arab countries, where the Arabic version is one of the most widely used in the international context.

In fact, some data clearly attest how big has been the impact of Facebook, especially in regions where digital platforms, in spite of recent positive trend, historically has not a long tradition. First, the total number of Facebook users in the Arab world as of beginning of May 2014 is 81.302.064 up from 54.552. 875 in May 2013, certifying a uninterrupted growth, started yet before the Arab revolutions, in the public attraction towards this digital tool. Second, the percentage of female users has fluctuated between 33.4 percent and 34 from 2010 to 2012, although it is remaining still significantly lower than the world average of roughly 50 percent. This second point is crucial if we want to prove how much digital means could affect daily life of certain portions of population generally had not had the possibility to participate in the social and political debate, freely or at least publicly. Third, another significant trend in order to put in common digital activism with the actual protest on the streets, the percentage of youth. This number, referred to the Facebook users who are under thirty has notably decreased until May 2014, when the percentage of youth between fifteen and twenty-nine years old was 67.[108]

All things considered are useful, just to explain what role effectively played Facebook during the Arab revolution, and why the advent of social network was not so marginal, like if had been only a digital-savvy peculiarity, even in the development of the protest carried on along the streets of Tunisi, Cairo and Tripoli, but also in the rural areas of countries involved.

Overall, something completely new produced by the Arab revolutions was a new kind of interaction within journalism itself. Therefore, "while user-generated content is nothing new in the online age, the interaction between activists and different media and news organizations to disseminate information had not been seen on this scale. This was evident in the number of references in the news to Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms, and blog posts from citizen journalists and activists. The so-called Arab spring was also noteworthy for professional journalists use of social media to report...

The reliance on social media for reporting was particularly evident during Internet and communications blackouts and at times when it was too dangerous for journalists to report using their true identity. For example, many major news organizations, like *CNN* and *Al Jazeera*, were not given permission to enter Libya during the initial days of protest...Reporters relied on mobile phones, social media and media-savvy

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[108] *Arab Social Media Report* - www.arabsocialmediareport.net, 2015.

witnesses to help them to report on the crisis."[109]

This new practice in journalism clearly implies some risks, overall fact-checking ones, but at the same time was the only possibility to refresh news, possibly by embedding all the information regimes and censorship would generally ban. Specifically, the importance of Facebook during the Arab uprisings is double-face. First, because Facebook, in certain terms, completely revolutionized journalists' behavior. Secondly, because it hugely encouraged protestors to organize themselves in carrying on revolution without losing motivation until the fall of Ben Ali, Mubarak, or Gaddafi.

One topic is about journalism, the other about upheaval's key of success.

In spite of uncertainty in checking news, Facebook, such as in this precise case Twitter as well, has permitted people to read different information, both official and unofficial, and comment news, gaining an active role in the perception of the facts were occurring. Facebook offers to its users not only the opportunity to enjoy their friends' updates, but also the possibility to join groups or follow pages provided of a specific content. Despite the common and innocuous activity to stalk own idols or celebrities, activists spontaneously began to create several web Facebook pages about whatever could appear quite unacceptable for people, by denouncing the reluctant behavior of governments, and in helping their people to make living standards higher in one hand, misery and poverty lower on the other one.

One thing heavily affecting the advertising market today, we should mention is the following. The success of platforms such as Facebook, not only as digital places to entertain, but also as well-known "environments" where spending some time of daily life, by looking at personal updates or general news, pushed people to pay more attention to Facebook than other ways to get news, once very common. Men, even in the Arab countries, read less newspapers and watch less television. The real perception of what was actually happening was given by social networks, and Facebook has offered the most natural approach of people in seeing the world they lived. So, digital activists and bloggers suddenly became aware of how much a tool such as Facebook could be decisive in the spread of propaganda, in order reach higher numbers and more active participation.

This was exactly the case of Wael Ghonim, who, thanks to his Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said", achieved his goals by structuring a unique direction that activists on the street could follow in order to overcome the regime repression.

As we have certified several other times, dissent had always existed, but only with the advent of social networks it gained enough power to accomplish its mission.

As Facebook was becoming an actual social media, thanks to the interaction between digital platforms and

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[109] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., p.123.

traditional modes of the journalistic practice, protestors took the streets according to the ends established in wide Facebook conversations, by broad chatting-groups or just following the initiative which had emerged during long exchanges of opinion in these digital spheres.

A sit in, or a protesting meeting, was not result of the case. For instance, tens of thousands citizens knew exactly where they had to gather, what to bring, and what to do even. Times and days for protesting demonstrations were established and anyone could participate, even coming from the rural outskirts of the country. The peculiar *glocalism* of social media have allowed each citizen to simply follow or to directly intervene in the revolutionary uprising. There were no borders in digital activism and at that time any sort of censorship on the Internet appeared worse than the strict control over state-owned or private televisions and newspapers.

As we have yet reminded, a significant number of people decided to participate in protest just because their internet connection has been shut down.

Let us go back to Wael Ghonim case to explain in better and more specific terms what was the exact impact of Facebook in the developing of the popular upheaval.

One point worth underlining, in comparison with blogs, is that social networks could directly touch the sensibility of the users not simply remaining a digital article written by a passionate blogger, but actually reaching those friendship circles which were able to rise more rage and contempt to people, just because the victims of regime repression could have been friends, or friends of friends, or friends of friend of friends, and on, and on, and on. This was exactly the process which brought Bouazizi's and Said's cases to become national and international topics of debate, in Tunisia before, and in Egypt later.

"From 2005 to 2008, Wael Abbas actively published every torture document, image, or video that he received from anonymous sources. He was arrested several times by State Security, yet he and other brave bloggers continued to expose the horrifying violations of human rights that were taking place in Egypt. I apologize for posting pictures of torture cases, but I swear that I had not seen most of them before. It seems I lived on another planet... A planet where I went to work in the morning and watched soccer games and sat at cafés with friends at night. And I used to think people who discussed politics had nothing better to do. But I am appalled to see a terrifying Egypt that I never knew existed. But by God, we will change it!... I posted links to other torture videos, which were numerous and easy to find. One of them that I published on the page was removed from YouTube, I noticed, because it violated that site's content policies. Many users had reported it as an inappropriate and gruesome video. I did not try to use my employment at Google to resist this decision in any way. My activism had to remain independent of my job."[110]

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[110] Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0*., cit., p.64.

These presented are just few lines written by Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian head of marketing for Google Middle East and North Africa, and anonymously the curator of "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page, which successfully reached over tens thousands activists.

These apparently confusing thoughts are actually meaningful in the comprehension of some features which have peculiarly characterized the development of the so-called digital Arab spring, until the definition "revolution 2.0".

Sensitized by the images of the dead corps of Bouazizi and Said, despite at the first time there had been several protests against the diffusion of cruel images and tough videos realized by protestors in order to make public aware about the ferocious oppression of security forces, activists enlarged its participation through ways impossible to apply for any kind of traditional medium. It felt that, for the first time, social media had become the only means to produce independent information and tell the real facts occurring in North Africa.

Passing to the initial responses of government, for the Said's case in Egypt, Ministry of Interior, worried about the popular contempt, tried to stain Khaled's reputation. In an unprecedented public statement, government declared that the cause of the death had not been torture rather asphyxiation. According to the Egyptian Ministry of Interior Khaled Said had swallowed a pack of Marijuana.

But, while the state-owned *Al-Gomhouriya* newspapers labeled Said "The Martyr of Marijuana", several activists decided to take the streets joining Said's friends and began to enlarge dissident participation engaging people through pages and groups on Facebook.

In addition, there had been the Bouazizi's example. In spite of its geographical location, by the never-ending updating of social media this fact was immediately associated with Said's. Social networking services do not know national borders, and foreign participation amounted almost at one third of the entire engagement collected by such digital platforms.

Step by step, protestors found news about upheavals by following specific pages, such as Wael Ghonim's or "Kullena Khaled Said"[111], and consequently took a never before so-organized initiative.

The embedding power of Facebook pushed people towards the same demonstrations, making those events unstoppable for government security apparatus themselves.

Social media provoked some decisive effects. First, the engagement of more users taken from the general audience. Compared to censored televisions or monitored newspapers, any web user could now enjoy certain kind of information, and the wide popularity of Facebook was able to engage not only elites but also other

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[111] Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0.*, cit., pp.65-70.

portions of population in more effectively ways.

Second, digital audiences were as much as sensitized by videos and images taken from police tortures that common people, not necessarily political activists or dissident bloggers, decided at least to show their contempt towards the regime, until the extreme claim for the fall of the entire regimes and political systems, not just the current governments.

Thirdly, the digital nature of the revolt had internationalized it, making impossible any attempt to react for every government which faced it.

However, another point to take rightfully into account is why similar situations, state by state, gave different outcomes. As well-explained yet, It is common gathering all the Arab revolts under the same roof, considering Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan, Yemeni, Syrian, and Bahraini uprisings as result of the same democratic tide. Not exactly. We are seeing how much social media have been able to make the difference as tools capable to improve the organization of revolts in these countries. It is a functional analysis, not qualitative.

As both history and current political affairs within these countries attest, all causes and effects are actually relying on political, cultural and economic reasons, probably historical even.

Moving back to Facebook, there are no doubts that it revolutionized the approach of journalism and people in producing and consuming news, but clearly, there is no evidence that digital spheres will bring a democratization, or westernization even, as some scholars predicted at the beginning of the uprising in 2010, to the Arab world in short times. Probably, one following news today, even through digital platforms, could say exactly the opposite.

Despite current conditions are different state by state nowadays, key features of social networks, such as Facebook, have notably affected the life of the Arabs. It is possible to see it through the observation of both traditional media and communication government apparatus. What had seemed to be just a toy before, then should be considered a dangerous weapon. Social media processes were truly exploited by activists in order to lead popular revolt to victory, but were consequently and suddenly used by terrorists and authoritarian apparatus as well, with the aim to strengthen their evil propaganda.

Anyway, what these three different entities have in common is that the communication process suddenly enjoyed shorter time and space in its elaboration.[112]

In fact, what actually made different kinds of propaganda stronger, was the opportunity offered by a communication system, just like Facebook messages and notifications, where users enjoyed news in real time, even about the course of the protest. Basically a SMS system, but extremely wider in number of participating and not relying on the government censorship. Overall there is another interesting aspect to

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[112] Cosenza, Giovanna. *Introduzione alla semiotica dei nuovi media,* cit., 146-153.

consider. During the Arab revolutions whoever did not enjoyed internet connection outside, in spite of the broad diffusion of mobile phones within the Arab countries in 2011, had the possibility to synchronize his or her analogical and older mobile phone with Facebook personal account, by using the traditional SMS service. Briefly, digital-savvy activists, the majority at the time, could refresh news and produce contents, even if with the disadvantage of more technical limits, in order to oppose the regime censorship or the entire block of Facebook. This was just a silly application to associate your phone number with your personal digital spaces, even with an older device.

In closing this paragraph, Facebook significantly affected the Arab society both in economic and cultural matters, and during the Arab revolution of 2011 in more political terms.

In the next paragraph, by paying our attention more extensively to Twitter, we will see other features that will support the huge influence exercised by social media in the Arab countries, just before the reaction of the traditional media in front of the digital revolutionary wave dealt in the course of the next chapter.

3.2.3 Twitter

"Social media certainly played a role in the uprisings, but they did not cause the uprisings: they facilitated communication among the participants and would-be participants who elected to take part in the protests, and they broadened the range of tactical options, such as organizing demonstrations in *real time* for example, open to those participants."[113]

More than Facebook, Twitter was that kind of social network which has been able to revolutionize communication in real time, needed aspect to outline in order to look at the impact of social media on the Arab uprisings. In fact, thanks to their support, protestors stood against regime repression and violent responses without losing established goals and missions to achieve.

During national turmoil, risk wasting opportunities and occasions due to the presence of too many heads in the revolt actually exists, and very often in the past, this weak feature had brought social uprising to defeat.

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[113] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.57.

Instead, in spite of the unlucky journalistic false perception that social media were not the true cause of uprisings, they could provide new decisive communicative skills to any single citizen. A lot decided to intervene in the protest directly, several others supported the upheavals, even using only the digital platform, by encouraging them through likes, retweets, comments, sharing and making the Arab revolution an effective trending topic around the world.

A viral topic fearing even old and steady regimes. Digital perception could be wrong, but, day by day, political consequences became real. That is exactly the reason we recall to explain why these digital platforms could not be defined "virtual". They cannot be associated with videogames because social networking interaction have a strong impact on daily life of any citizen. The politics of reportage, and communication between digital-savvy activists during the Arab revolutions clearly took inspiration from long and vivacious interaction taken from social media groups, or, in the case of Twitter, from its trending topics. First of all, it is rightfully important underline the main features of this famous social network, more "media" than Facebook, just in order to extol its peculiar features. The latter was not only the aspect which made Twitter, since its foundation in 2006, well-known all over the world, but also essential in the course of any kind of prepared or flash upheaval trying to overcome *status quo* elements owned by general political systems.

In 2006, some employees of Odeo, a US podcast and digital company, were working at a new idea, mainly based on a tool able to transmit information instantly, in order to improve business communication. Jack Dorsey, Twitter's co-founder wrote his first tweet in March 2006, "just setting up my twttr". At the time nobody knew that a system relying on messages necessarily shorter than 141 characters should involve not only several other companies, but also deeply interest common public both in professional matters and also free time. Twitter was awarded best web service of the year in 2007, but people effectively understood its powerful qualities later.

In fact, thanks to its capability in providing and receiving messages (tweets) instantly, before its broader and successful usage in the course of the Arab revolution in 2011, there had been at least two other attempts of Twitter-ized revolutions, without achieving the same goals. Different outcomes can easily be result of two different reasons. Firstly, only since 2011 citizens have probably reached a minimal number in order to effectively make the difference in a potential political transition. Secondly, it should necessary embedding into our discourse all the other factors which affect the outcomes of those popular uprising in a more decisive way, recalling the phrase that states "social media certainly played a role in the uprisings, but they did not cause the uprisings".[114]

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[114] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.57.

The other two historical examples we allude to are the following. Outside the Arab context, we are referring to the mass demonstrations that have occurred in Iran and the Ukraine, as well as the recent "Occupy"[115] movements, to critically analyze the political mobilization supposedly driven by the use of new communication technologies.[116]

So, while technology seemed to provide new modes of communication, it ensures that individuals, student, men, and women especially, become part of an existing framework of power relationship. In both the case of Iran and the Ukraine, only after in the actual context of the Arab world, true power began to be not located in its military strength, but rather its moral instrument. New communication apparatus actually relies on digital propaganda for the government or the assumption of political change, just according to the ability to enact that change thanks to the usage of communication technology for digital activists and popular dissent. For instance, by looking at the example of Iran, the 2009 protests raised for allegations towards a disputed election, probably not fair as government used to state at that time. Thanks to internationally features which traditionally constitute social networks, Twitter was used to spread information in support of pro-democracy protestors, but hugely strengthened by Western sympathizers. In fact, many thousands of people outside Iran intervened in the protest, fomenting general turmoil in the country. This was positive for making international audiences aware about what actually happened, but, at the same time, the unpredictable outcome was a distortion in the dimension of the revolt, generating false expectancies in Iranian dissident demonstrators. However, what protestors really did by using Twitter was circumventing the dramatic shutdown of all forms of media in Iran by the government, even through analogical opportunities we have explained in the previous paragraph. In doing so, digital-savvy activists could use proxies to sidestep the Iranian regime's blocking of Twitter. They sent messages and images to denounce the violent repression of the government to the world outside of Iran.

Unfortunately, letting down several high purposes towards the so-called "biggest cyberwar ever led thanks to social networking sites", this does not yet means that social media can always be a viable and effective path to follow in order to prevail sociopolitical order or the state security services themselves.

Therefore, "while the political demands of many of the participants are clear enough in and of themselves, there is neither agreement among the participants nor a set of developed alternatives to what can be considered a political power structure determining the trajectories of people's lives in Iran. Winning the cyberwar does not necessarily mean winning the political contest, nor does it mean that the prevailing power

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[115] Ríos, Carmela. *Cómo el 15#M cambió la información. Una guía de periodismo móvil.* ESPAÑA: Libros, 2015, cit., pp.23-27.

[116] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., pp.1-8.

structure is challenged to a level that will push for political change on the ground. It may represent such a possibility, but it cannot be assumed as a fait accompli"[117]

Briefly, it is needed examining case by case, while in the Ukraine digital-savvy protests against Viktor Yushchenko would be known as the Orange Revolution. We take into account this older example just to define another aspect about popular uprisings. There are two kind of processes history of revolutions has attested. The first is due to its "top-down" leadership. The second lies on "down-top" scheme.

Some scholars have suggested that the Orange revolution may have been the first in history to be organized largely online, but lacked lucky factors and political support to Ukrainians. Anyway, this upheaval was the first case in which a pro-democracy movement emerged in Ukraine through internet tools that morphed common citizens into coordinators of mass protest. For instance, the Ukrainian *Pora*, a digital-savvy movement of protest, was designed as a means to give an alternative to the state-controlled media, truly an alternative mass media.

The Ukrainian case, despite its failure and consequently political turmoil not at all concluded, is emblematic even to explain better what we are dealing with in the course of this thesis, how social media affected the Arab revolutions, and also why, in this precise case, they overcame state apparatus and regime censorship. The main reason about the importance of the Orange revolution is that clearly emerge in the Ukraine a cleavage between protesters unable to rule social media and online processes and those who quickly were coming to know their incredible powers, even in political and revolutionary matters in order to strengthening propaganda.

Unfortunately, social media remain just a tool to exploit, and where contrasting opinion emerge political *status quo* difficulty will change. The Ukrainian and Iranian are two examples we will not deal with further, but in the Arab context it is easy to find failures of other potential revolutions. Namely, Bahrain and Yemen, where politics assumed tragic consequences. Instead in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, protestors either were few and weak, or richness allowed governments instantly to provide economic compensations to dissolve the rage. These countries could be alike affected by the contagion of the so-called Arab spring but true reasons to maintain the existing order prevailed, breaking dreams of the dissent.

Anyway, dynamism towards change and cultural activism within Tunisian and Egyptian societies seemed to be yet written, in spite of the actual results they brought.

Yet, how do all these things considered concern Twitter? So much, we may reply with good judgment, because Twitter remains just a tool to exploit, even according different political ends, but users has the last word towards what direction to give it in order to follow social change or permanent orders.

So, although some aspects are very similar to Facebook's ones, how did Twitter affect the Arab revolutions?

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[117] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., p.109.

We start saying that a lot of people, on the contrary of Facebook, does not immediately understand what is the actual function of this social network, where you can just write short messages. Twitter has its own language and is not so as intuitive as Mark Zuckerberg's creature.

Mainly, we will examine three elements. First, the following-follower relationship. Second, the hashtag, truly that revolutionary element in social media matters which gave a new life to that apparently useless symbol, yet existing on our keywords and represented by #. Third, like a tongue-twist, the well-known trending topics' trend.

In fact, by using Twitter, it is not possible adding friends who necessarily have to confirm our friendship request as on Facebook, but you have the opportunity to follow personal or institutional accounts according to your personal interests. In so doing, you will be a follower. At the same time, those accounts interested in your Twitter activity, probably for the topics you deal with in your tweets (short Twitter messages), can alike became your followers. [118]

During the Arab revolutions this aspect resulted so important in a context where newspapers and televisions were banned or commonly censored, but where people could follow their personal news-stream by interacting or simply reading interesting tweets, both about daily life in Egypt and Tunisia told without political manipulation and about the development of the protests.

Secondly, the so-called hashtags appeared an effective added-value to Twitter-users timeline, aiming to a easier fruition of what really mattered, for instance even during the popular protests, as in Tunisia, as in Egypt and Libya as well. Circumventing any kind of censorship hashtags #Tunisia, #Egypt, #Libya, which through mathematical algorithms used by Twitter could attest a new relevant mainstream without the interference of politics, digital-savvy activists and common citizens logged in the digital platform could actually enjoy an alternative mode of journalistic practice, lacking the constrains of any previously defined schedule. [119]

Debate and organization of the demonstration in real time occupied each digital conversation on Twitter from December 2010 to March 2011, just to remind how important social media interaction and social networking systems were.

Dealt with the hashtags, moving to the third element is quite natural. Trending topics of Twitter, ten phrases or hashtags themselves which are currently influencing the debate among users revolutionized media sector until redefining broadcasting schedules. Communication and media process has gradually lost its top-down

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[118] Paniagua, Soraya. *Twitter práctico y profesional*. MADRID: Ra-Ma Editorial, 2015, cit., pp.35-36.

[119] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., pp.33-40.

nature, favoring a down-top one, exactly as the development of popular uprisings. A top-down process implies political leaders, even belonging to opposition, or at least opinion leaders such as famous bloggers or heads of communication systems. These new direction, both referring to the news and popular upheavals, on the contrary lies on features we have yet treated in the course of the previous chapters.

Opposing corrupted or simply censored journalism apparatus, and the regimes' will to monitor any kind of information stream, people heavily exploited freedoms offered by Twitter, and when it was shut down, they passed to other platforms chasing the same mechanism. On the one hand, protestors could refresh their accounts relying on friends living abroad, or using digital tricks offered by older mobile phones through SMS services. On the other one, they reinvented other micro-blogging platforms such as dating web sites or cooking forums, in order to carry on the revolt by using encrypted messages.

Anyway, the initial underestimation of social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as important means able to encourage general uprisings against government, allowed digital-savvy activists to engage people in quantitative and qualitative standards they have not ever reached before. Any crime perpetrated by regime repression were systematically put on the social media sphere, as well as photos, videos, witnesses provided by common citizens. There is no possibility for the governments to totally control these mechanisms, as in the meanwhile citizen-journalism was overcoming the broadcasting one in confidence and credibility. As we have yet said, there were also lucky circumstances which permitted social media to make the difference. Through Twitter we can rightfully say that social networks have acquired the right to be called "media", precisely "social media", referring to its broad usage to spread and read news coming from North Africa and the Middle East. Anyway, it is important to certify how relevant the historical contingency which allowed protestors to find other alternative means to maintain the digital media streaming alive was. We significantly cite the quite weak reaction of the national armies, that, thanks to also the wide perception and engagement provided by social media themselves, preferred to respond without overcoming certain limits, at least in Tunisia and Egypt. The optimistic approach of the Western countries, represented by their military forces during the intervention, substantially made the difference in the Libyan context.

Going back to journalism, without forgetting the advent of social media within the Arab context, we will see in the next chapter how the contribution of certain so-defined traditional media, such as television, played a similarly important role.

To conclude, during the Arab uprising of 2011 social media simply established themselves as new means to express the battle for pluralism which already existed in the Arab society.

We may sum it up using Marwan Muasher's words.

"The Arab world will go through a period of turmoil in which exclusionist forces will attempt to dominate the landscape with absolute truths and new dictatorship. These forces will also fade, because in the end,

exclusionist, authoritarian discourses cannot answer the people's need for a better quality of life. Economically, politically, culturally, and otherwise. As history has demonstrated overwhelmingly, where there is respect for diversity, there is prosperity. Contrary to what Arab societies have been taught for decades by their governments to believe that tolerance, acceptance of different point of view, and critical thinking are destructive to national unity and economic growth."[120]

Arab societies are evidently living a period of sharp turmoil, but social media, despite history has attested that success of a revolution does not simply lies on their mechanism able to provide an alternative information stream, can notably improve the battle for pluralism against the spread by regimes homogeneous thought. Undoubtedly, there is still a long path to follow, but dissent has notably learnt to enjoy other means at communicative level for the future. The so-called Arab springs, independently from concrete political outcomes achieved, has clearly caught the opportunity offered by social media, and how they can help public opinion in making its voice louder.

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[120] Muasher, Marwan. *The second Arab awakening and the battle for pluralism,* cit., pp.184-185.

Part IV - Reactions, virtues and vices of traditional media

From Al Jazeera to the Western channels. New opportunities and challenges

With all things considered in mind, what was the reaction of so-called traditional media, such as newspaper and television, in front of the unstoppable social networking wave characterizing media sector and upsetting journalism which definitively broke out during the Arab revolutions?

Although inside a more complex context where politics, economy, and social conditions determine the spread of popular uprisings, social media have notably affected the way to do information influencing the course of the event and completely changing the relationship between journalists and their readers or audiences.

In this chapter our challenge is to see how the reactions of traditional media were, especially televisions, and how much broadcasting news business was affected by well yet mentioned alternative modes in journalistic practice which Arab uprisings successfully presented to world. Particularly, we will try to redefine, some years later, what was the exact response that, both Arab and Western news brands, carried on in order to renovate the world of information without losing appeal but integrating new digital tools. Some companies did it well, other ones did it bad, falling in the trap of superficiality, especially for a less integrated point of view within the Arab society.

Aiming to accomplish this goal, this chapter has been divided into three parts. Firstly, we deal with the phenomenon *Al Jazeera.* The Qatari news channel not only has been able to propose to audiences new ways in the fruition of international news, but also transformed hierarchy inside TV channels ranking. For the first time an Arab television, specifically Pan-Arab, became an absolute and excellent competitor to Western broadcasters such as the English *BBC* and American *CNN*, in order to attract wide and varied international audiences. We will see the keys of this unexpected but well prepared success. Secondly, we moved to *Al Jazeera*'s first internal competitor, the Saudi-owned and Pan-Arab television news channel broadcast *Al Arabiya*. The Arab journalistic context in the last three decades has proved to be very dynamic and active, both in order to create new opportunities of business and offering alternative points of view to the dominating Western leadership in the sector of media. The rivalry between *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* is obviously an ideological matter carried by two different and conflicting countries within the Arab context but also the attempt to build a new reality relying on the creation of Arab wide "leading opinion" channels.

Contemporary age cannot divide media from sociopolitical matters anymore, and in the past so-called fourth power has not ever been so important.

Arab society has gradually acquire the need for expressing their opinion inside global context, in particular after historical facts that have attested particular interest and inclination of the West toward North Africa and the Middle East, presumably due to natural resources, political instability, and a deep background of balance of the powers in this regions. In fact, we may say, with good judgment, that, while specific national contexts have generally presented media as victims of regime censorship, a wider analysis can offer different dynamics, heavily affected by social media-traditional media discourse, in order to influence the course of political events, such as during the Arab revolutions in 2011.

Thirdly, not considering reactions and vices of Western broadcasts in front of so-called Arab Spring phenomenon would be impossible, just starting from the not at all correct phrase "Arab Spring". Western countries, both United States and Europe countries, strongly supported the revolution in Tunisia and Egypt, while directly decided to intervene in Libya in order to overthrow Gaddafi's regime, until provoking the lynching and death of a fleeing dictator.

Perception of the contemporary facts in the Arab world at the time assumed particular perspectives within Western societies, and any kind of information were filtrated with the lenses of media, unfortunately too bad-prepared in Arab culture and politics.

Having said that, we will seek to pay more attention to two specific points. One is more journalistic, the other has to be associated with political events. First, it is relevant to see how *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* reflect the struggle between different souls within the Arab political context and why they are the most significant examples to take into account in order to explain new frontiers and challenges of contemporary journalism. Therefore we will examine reactions of Western Media not only to see how they dealt with the Arab revolutions in 2011, but also to understand new relationships with Arab media and how important the possibility to imply new digital tools into the traditional journalistic practice was.

To conclude this brief introduction, the relations of broadcasting channels without borders will help us to understand better what could be the direction of international media process, according to economic ends and opportunities offered by new technological means, despite transformations in this increasingly large sector have not ended at all.

4.1 Al Jazeera

The last decade of the 20th century was characterized by the development of televisions, news channels, and broadcasts without borders in some parts of the world, in order to satisfy the audience's needs for something more general and attracting due to the increasingly importance acquired by the international context in a more globalized world.

The traditional example of that, and generally taken into account by academic scholars, is the Gulf War between Iraq which had invaded Kuwait and a coalition of thirty-four nations led by the United States. This war was the first heavily televised. For the first time, people all over the world were able to watch live images of missiles hitting their targets and fighters departing from aircraft carriers. Naturally, allied forces were keen to demonstrate their weapons' accuracy.

CBS, *BBC* and *CNN* extensively covered the events, in spite of U.S. policy regarding media freedom was much more restrictive than in the Vietnam war.

This example should be provided looking at the change of media according to the development of technology. Nevertheless, this is not only a change in means, but also a transformation in processes meaningfully relevant. Through offering, or not offering, to audience pictures and videos directly taken from the battlefield it was possible create different feelings in the mind of people. It felt exactly like a rebirth of the fourth power and what mainly concerned was the unilateral managing according Western ends and sensibilities.

In this scenario the foundation of Pan-Arab channel *Al Jazeera* appeared something completely new, and as well as revolutionary to substantially modify the existing media sector hierarchy.

Obviously, there were political reasons for *Al Jazeera*'s existence. The goal that its chairman Thamer Al Thani had established was providing a public service, likening the public funding of *Al Jazeera* to that of the *BBC*.

"Some pointed out that Qatar was moving towards parliamentary elections, which called for media to enjoy freedom and credibility. Others attributed the funding to self-interest on the part of a Qatari government seeking to maintain a precarious balancing act in its relations with conflicting interest groups in the region, notably bigger neighbors in the Gulf, its close and powerful ally the US, and various strands of Islamist and Arab nationalist sentiment in the wider Arab world. *Al Jazeera* seemed to serve the Qatari leadership by providing a forum in which Arab resentment against US foreign policy could be freely expressed, thereby portraying Qatar as a defender of Arab nationalist interests and pacifying qualms about the ruling Al Thani

clan's alliance with the US."[121]

Adding a reference to more notional information, *Al Jazeera*, literally "The Peninsula", referring to the Arabian Peninsula, is a Qatari state-funded broadcaster, founded in 1996 and Doha-based, which is partly funded by the House of Thani, the ruling family of Qatar. It is a current affairs satellite TV channel, but has quickly expanded into a network with several outlets, including the Internet and official accounts on several digital platforms and social networks, and adding specialty TV channels in multiple languages. *Al Jazeera* is practically owned by the government of Qatar, although its editorial independence is been politically disputed. Some consider this channel result of a well practice of traditional principles of journalism, others associate it with the ideological struggle between existing broadcasting powers in different countries of the Arab world.

Although *Al Jazeera* is accused of promoting the Muslim Brotherhood, especially during the aftermath of revolution and the transition from Mubarak's regime to Morsi's government in Egypt, and of having an anti-Western bias, it represents an extraordinary example of broadcast, properly structured in order to tell news according to technological development.

In fact, one of the luckiest choices their owners did in the course of the last decade, was the foundation of a 24-hour English language news and current affairs TV channel which has four working headquarters today. Namely in Doha, London, Washington, and Kuala Lumpur. Each of them covers specific matters regarding significant part of the world, just to internationalize the brand.

In spite of maintaining of two different approaches for each channel, the Arabic one and the English, Al Thani family has necessarily understand the need for a open-minded decision, which has rightfully implied the use of the English language.

Apparently, so little seemed to change. *Al Jazeera* was remaining the voice of the government of Qatar while *BBC* and *CNN* firmly maintained the leadership in news world business.

Nevertheless, just the popular unrest of Arab society in North Africa decisively signed the course of the events and the destiny of media sector's ranking. *Al Jazeera* gained huge power and Western media suddenly seemed to rely on Qatari channel.

How did all this happen? What were the lucky circumstances which allowed *Al Jazeera* to make the difference within the Arab political context and international communication one?

On 25 January 2011 an anonymous caller, probably an activist on the streets of Cairo, told director of *Al*

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[121] Sakr, Naomi. *Arab television today*. UK: I.B. Tauris, 2007, cit., p.144.

Jazeera network: "If you switch off your cameras tonight, there will be genocide... You are protecting us by showing what is happening in Tahrir Square"

A Wikileaks' tweet would tell later, precisely on 29 January: "Yes, we may have helped Tunisia, Egypt. But let us not forget the elephant in the room: *Al Jazeera* + sat dishes."

Finally, Mubarak himself said: "This is why I no longer have the control over the country that I once had", pointing to the forest of television antennas below.

So, why has *Al Jazeera* become so important? In the previous chapters, directly referring to the Arab revolutions in 2011, we attested the ways in which social networking services established new capacities and constraints on a range of political actors, from digital-savvy demonstrators to traditional political parties and cruel dictators. Anyway, overlooking the role played by official news organizations in the region could be a mistake and *Al Jazeera* is the most emblematic case worth mentioning.

There have been relevant changes in how journalists work and at the beginning of the second decade of 21st century the gap between open-minded broadcasts and those which being not, was actually represented by using technologies like mobile phones and the Internet to consume and eventually produce news. As we have yet seen, in many of the countries caught up in revolutionary fervor, there were just elites of activists and bloggers able to use digital media in varied ways to reach a wider public who would have supported the political change. Nonetheless, in recent years new portions of population began using consumer electronics gradually changing the existing features of news market. As a news agency, *Al Jazeera* was the only one able to satisfy audiences' demand at that time. [122]

With this in mind, and in spite of any political consideration, due to the huge interest of *Al Jazeera* in overthrowing steady regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, we will analyze for a while those elements which gave *Al Jazeera* the power to definitively change news market international hierarchy.

In fact, Qatari channel was apparently nothing revolutionary, but it knew to understand the main signs of the shift in media power which had happened in the last years, undoubtedly more evident during the so-called Arab springs. In addition, taking into account the new mediated public sphere, even within the Arab context, was absolutely needed.

To give an illustration, "historically, global crisis reporting has been mainly controlled by mainstream journalists, where audiences around the world receive their knowledge of political happenings through dominant media players, such as *CNN* and *BBC World*. Yet the wave of political unrest in the Arab world has somehow tipped the power that such dominant news networks hold and left them struggling to control the flow of information. The so-called Arab Spring, therefore, has brought about a shift in power where

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[122] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp.91-95.

alternative media reporters on the streets have risen to play a prominent role in the coverage of these political events. This has been made possible through social media technologies which have allowed alternative reporters, activists and protesters to disseminate information globally. It is therefore necessary to theoretically understand relations of power that have emerged from the interactions between established media and alternative media practitioners, within the mediated public sphere."[123]

That are exactly new challenges international journalism had to face. *Al Jazeera*, thanks to both good visionary choices and lucky geographical and even cultural factors, led the networking news coverage in the course of the Arab popular uprisings. But let us see more specifically why it had this opportunity.

First, reportages on the ground are actually very expensive today, and few news organizations enjoy the same level of richness owned by Al Thani family, especially if correspondents have to cover ongoing war, or simply risky areas of the world. In spite of the wide economic crisis concerning any kind of newspaper or television, especially in Europe and America, without including the exception of big broadcasts, such as *BBC* and *CNN*, *Al Jazeera* had a wide impact in the international news streaming, more relying on a globalized media structure.

Second, while the Internet was proving to be situated at a lucky juncture between the public and private sphere in the Arab world, energized in the social networking services, *Al Jazeera* website is among the top twenty in every Arab country, with the emblematic exception of Saudi Arabia.[124]

It felt like *Al Jazeera* could offer original modes of journalistic practice providing also exclusive contents that Western media generally demanded, or bought even, from Qatari broadcast. In the past some of the most famous examples had been provided by messages sent by terroristic organizations in order to spread their propaganda. Although that issue is currently debated, if basically transmitting videos and images regarding terroristic actions and menaces, very cruel sometimes, to international audiences is right or wrong, these undoubtedly represented an attracting material for any kind of broadcast or television, especially those which belonged to very far parts of the world or different cultural contexts.

Moreover, there is a growing participation of citizens, across North Africa and the Middle East, that consumes more international news than ever before. Expectedly, those news organizations which usually gather most part of viewers are just *Al Jazeera*, *BBC* and *CNN,* those characterized also by a vivid online presence.

Referring to the political crisis of political regimes in North Africa this aspect is quite interesting, because

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[123] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., pp. 123-125.

[124] Filiu, Jean-Pierre. *The Arab Revolution. Ten lessons from the democratic uprisings*, cit., p.45.

partly explains why those restrictions national security services imposed to media suddenly became ineffective. At the same time citizens easily learned about what was occurring in Tunisia and compared reasons of the revolt to actual economic and social condition in Egypt, instantly generating a domino effect. "*Al Jazeera* is a fascinating case study in how traditional news media helped create new linkages among civil society actors within and between countries. Unlike many Western news cultures that socialize journalists to maintain a healthy distance from the subjects of their coverage, news cultures in North Africa and the Middle East operate more nimbly and cooperate with citizen journalists. Embedded in digital environments, participatory citizen bloggers upload user-generated content through mobile phones, and activists reach out directly to journalists. Newly established news organizations such as *Al Jazeera English* played a critical role operating not only alongside digital activists, but acting hand-in-hand with them."[125] Briefly, an apparently virtuous cycle where traditional and digital media were deeply intertwined. Despite this, there are also political consequences to take into account. By contrast, to give a more impartial illustration, is needed to underline some points, which, as they had given a significant advantage to news coverage carried on by *Al Jazeera*, at the same time provoked some odd and quite awkward effects in that specific, and apparently successful practice.

In fact, regarding what role the Gulf monarchies have effectively played during the popular uprisings in North Africa, Qatar-based news service was eventually affected by political interests of Al Thani family, gradually losing part of its, newly established, reporting virtues.

"*Al Jazeera* spread the news of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings well beyond those countries, ensuring copycat Days of Rage in a number of places. Unfortunately, its coverage of Egypt during and after Morsi's presidential tenure, which the King of Qatar supported and of Syria where it was hardly fair and balanced because of his hatred of the Assad regime, tarnished its reputation, perhaps irreversibly. Qatar sent troops to fight in Libya and, along with the United Arab Emirates, deployed its air force there." For instance "both Qatar and Saudi Arabia have supported the Syrian opposition, although the groups they have supported differ. Until 2014, Qatar was the largest supplier of aid to the opposition, estimated at 3 billion dollars in the first two years of the uprising alone."[126]

All things considered bring us to assert two comments, the first is positive and the second negative. The first is that, in the international context a strong competitor for dominating Western broadcasts in news business actually exists, and its key of success was determined by the breaking out of the Arab revolutions

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[125]Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.90.

[126] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.160.

itself, where *Al Jazeera* appeared able to give an added value to the traditional news coverage, including the Arab sentiment expressed by blogs, social networks and web pages directly managed by activists, a part in the communication process which could not overlooked anymore.

On the other hand, the second comment exactly seems to admit that impartiality in journalism actually remain an utopia still to realize. Yet at the same time we may attest, with good judgment, that truth inside events could be accepted as the gathering of different points of view, expressed through varied lenses, deeply affected by culture as well.

However, considering the Arab context in the course of this thesis specifically, is quite reassuring the fact that Pan-Arab media, spread throughout an extended context, are attracting the attention of a wider public, very interested as well, while in the past it remained to anchored to very biased opinions, traditionally channeled by media too focused on the Western culture.

As a matter of fact, pluralism in international media market can strengthen dialogue between different cultures, by helping public to know different political realities, also through the lenses of local media organizations. Arab media can cover the Arab political matters as well as European ones cover the European information flow. At the same time a broader presence of alternative channels has provided more points of view to read the fact occurring in same realities. This novelty encourages both a more accuracy in telling news due to more active audiences and foments the struggle between different news networks which are focused on achieving most part of the viewers overcoming rivals and competitors.

Nevertheless, how did *Al Jazeera* imposed itself just during the Arab uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt? We have mentioned some aspects that helped Qatari state-owned news service in leading the sharp changes would have occurred in the world of news, but how did *Al Jazeera* effectively collaborated in the news coverage embedding new modes of the journalistic practice and including novelties of powerful tools widely used by activists during the demonstrations?

As we have said, *Al Jazeera*'s behavior could be difficulty judged completely good or bad according to the most virtuous journalistic ends, while on the contrary it is possible recalling some other aspects worth citing. First, the closer news coverage led by Al Thani's news service alongside Arab protestors. In fact, where broadcast journalists were not present, protest unrests seemed to be less successful and regime responses to uprisings more violent, as demonstrators themselves at Tahrir Square in Cairo admitted.

Second, the visionary intuition subsequently applied during the news coverage of the so-called Arab springs in order to make more inclusive the web storytelling carried on by bloggers and digital activists. Notably, there was an accurate and quite long *Al Jazeera*'s fact-checking in the examination of materials taken by the Internet, both written or directly posted in the form of pictures or videos taken during the popular demonstration in Tunisia, or in Cairo as well. Significantly, well-known video regarding the last moments of Gaddafi, where the Libyan dictator was practically lynched by ferocious crowds, was outcome of citizen

journalism posed under the lenses of a careful filter sifted by broadcasting media, and only then offered to audience, on the basis of its authenticity.

The Arab revolutions have represented for *Al Jazeera* simply the smoothest way to show to the world news competences acquired in the course of the previous decade. In a world of cultural complexities the attempt of *Al Jazeera* was to impose a new leadership in media coverage and storytelling, practices which are becoming increasingly important in a context dominated by the information flow of international broadcasts. In addition, a trick necessarily to exploit was the right combination of both traditional and digital modes of the journalistic practice, alternating the exclusive content offered by citizen journalists on the ground with a wise interpretation of the facts occurring throughout the Arab world.

"Despite the diverse and active digital mediascape made possible by the proliferation of social media and broadcast media, it is *Al Jazeera English* (*AJE*) that played a significant role in amplifying the distributed and diverse voices of the Arab Spring. Since 2008, *Al Jazeera English* has laid the groundwork for a unique style of storytelling that presents compelling narratives, but also a mix of citizens' voices with political elites. For example, during the 2008 Gaza War, *Al Jazeera* reporters lost contact with the network's Doha headquarters. Instead of stopping coverage, they turned to mobile phones until live feeds were restored, winning prestigious awards in the process, such as *Best 24 Hour News Programme* at the 48th Monte Carlo Television Festival, and AdBuster's *Broadcaster of the Year* in 2010."[127]

Therefore, for visionary managers of *Al Jazeera* networks, this has represented nothing new. On the contrary, Qatari news service seemed to be able to correctly read the changing was happening in the organization of news, surprisingly including even women as factor of novelty, especially in the Arab context.

In fact, there is an increasing pluralism of female model and more freedom of expression for women, thanks to the empowerment exercised by digital platforms. Broadcasting companies began to be affected by the wider model provided by blogs and Facebook fan pages where more women than men found their opportunity to freely express themselves, enjoying technology as a way to circumvent social prejudices. Tunisian blogger Lina Benn Mhenni, Nobel Peace Prize candidate in 2011, is just an example. Digital platforms are heavily influencing news organization market, even if, after 2011-2012 popular revolts, women continue to find difficulties in intervening within the public sphere of Arab society, in spite of the fall of authoritarian regimes. What these new spaces of freedom in the Arab society will exactly provide in

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[127] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.99.

the future actually remains quite unpredictable.[128]

Anyway, people living in the Arab context have learnt very well how to exploit digital tools in order to make their voice louder to obtain political and economic concessions. Nonetheless, huge aid was provided by *Al Jazeera*, gathering Arabs' opposition claims through successful reporting approaches to combine digital news frameworks and traditional ones.

Furthermore, Qatari news service managed brilliantly to raise some doubts about its competitors' behavior, for instance referring to the Iraq war. For instance, *New York Times* and *The Guardian* consistently considered the Iraq War as a project in rebuilding the country. For the first time, another actor within the international scenario of broadcasting media judged the events from another point of view, for example by framing the Iraq war in terms of conflict and using negative tones in front of a conflict that seemed to lose their initial reasons to be.

"Online news sources still exhibit cultural biases: news sources from the United States and countries in the Coalition of the Willing produced positive content, human-interest stories, and media self-coverage; news sources in Egypt, Malaysia, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates framed the war in terms of responsibility. For many Arab citizens, online news sites are not just an alternative to state-run or state-censored sources but are an alternative to Western news sources. Regular Arab readers find *Al Jazeera* online more respectful of religion, culture, and tradition than the *CNN* and *BBC* websites."[129]

In so doing, *Al Jazeera* unsurprisingly had great influence not only in the covering but also in the inspiring of consequences derived from its footages taken on the ground or collected from any kind of digital platform's content or blog's contributions quite credible to be spread.

In the course of the Arab revolutions is so rightfully to wonder whether facts were affecting news coverage or almost the exactly opposite. During the popular uprising, without overlooking that actual reasons of the revolts are to be put outside the journalistic context, there was a point in which people seemed to be more affected by the perception provided by media, such as *Al Jazeera* itself than the real events that were concerning the course of the uprising. This has to be assumed just to justify why, probably making some mistakes of superficiality, some scholars were pushed to consider that revolts as a political turning point for the entire Arab world, while there was actually no effective changes within the Arab society, if we strictly take into account disillusioned hopes of the protesters and political results they wanted to achieve, especially in terms of freedom and civil rights.

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[128] Dalla Negra, Cecilia, *Online e offline: le donne arabe tra autorappresentazione e partecipazione. Il caso egiziano e tunisino*, in Pepicelli. *Le donne nei media arabi*, cit., pp.48-50.

[129] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammill M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.91.

However, from the end of 2010 and the first months of 2011, the so-called "networked journalism"[130] was the powerful means put on the table by *Al Jazeera* to revolutionize international media market, just to underline some elements that we have only mentioned in the course of the paragraph.

With the phrase networked journalism we suggest that traditional and digital media platforms, called old and new as well, are not divided, but the two are intertwined. Process is quite simple, and the Arab revolutions are a proper example to explain that. Basically traditional broadcasts often amplify those who use social media, exactly while users 2.0 circulate information taken from traditional news sources.

Novelty in this process mainly lies on a more collaborative or participatory news-gathering process, and this journalistic practice resulted essential in the Arab context of 2011 where both regime apparatus and state-owned news channels were censoring facts regarding the uprising in their countries.

Therefore, audience can enjoy a wider array of news media platforms, available at all hours of the day, interactive and inexpensive as well.

All things considered have allowed to generate more valuable information flow, thanks to the professional journalists' adapting into the curatorial work which began to include significant contents provided by people on the ground.

Obviously, we should not make confusion. Merely picking up information online is not enough to be considered a new mode of journalistic practice. Briefly, networked journalism has to entail interaction with the public, exactly according to the purposes of the Internet 2.0, and it cannot be led with unilateral information flow processes as broadcasting journalism had been before.

In the light of all things considered, just to give an illustration, there are two emblematic TV shows daily transmitted by *Al Jazeera* and based on networked journalism practice. On the one hand *The Stream,* on the other one *Inside Story*.

The first, launched in mid-2011, represents a sort of online community where viewers directly participate in the debate proposed. The editorial process also enjoys selected hosts according to contents and specific expertise. This combination is counterbalanced by viewers' participation through digital platforms such as the official Facebook fanpage or Twitter account of the show, in order to enrich the conversation in real time. A prepared staff of journalists works gathering digital contributions to accomplish that every day. Otherwise, *Inside Story* is more institutional using its establish editorial office to host proper figures to deal with facts in a deeper way. That was exactly the case of some bloggers and activists of the Arab revolutions in 2011, who told the uprising in real time, just as, on 14 February, Alaa Abdel-Fattah, Mohamad Waked and Gigi Ibrahim actually did during a segment of *Inside Story,* talking about what was happening in Egypt in the immediately following days after the fall of Hosni Mubarak.

To sum up, in conclusion, *Al Jazeera* has showed a path to follow for journalistic practice in the next years,

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[130] Lafi Youmans, William. *Al Jazeera English's networked journalism during the 2011 Egyptian uprising,* in Bebawi, Bossio. *Social Media and the politics of reportage,* cit., pp. 57-65.

including all the vices of a partial storytelling but virtuously introducing a new, and essential, point of view in the reporting of the Arab revolutions, even implying new digital platforms into broadcasting news organizations.

Beyond the political outcomes that Arab societies have actually reached, a new pluralism within international information flow is not to underestimate, and possible further changes have not still ended. Nonetheless, now we quickly passed from *Al Jazeera* to its direct rival *Al Arabiya*, before dealing with the Western media later, in order to make a wide comparison for completing our scenario about the relationship between Arab uprising in 2011 and the contemporary perception of international broadcasting media organizations.

4.2 Al Arabiya

Al Jazeera was widely recognized as opinion leader in the reporting of whatever was occurring during the Arab revolution, overall for the attention paid by important Western news organizations.

Anyway, in the course of this paragraph we are going to deal with *Al Arabiya*, main *Al Jazeera*'s Arab competitor, aiming to provide a deep comparison between different voices also within the Arab context itself.

Differently from *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya* was founded only on 3 March 2003, and the channel is based in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. Because it is owned by Saudi broadcaster *Middle East Broadcasting Center* (MBC), *Al Arabiya* presumably expresses the willingness of Saudi Arabia, inevitably embedding its rivalry with Doha, Qatar, and news channel *Al Jazeera*. Pan-Arab media are increasingly important within the political context of the region, and how communication apparatus of the governments have quickly learnt, transnational broadcasts are fundamental in order to maximize the political influence in the Arab world by making soft power stronger, even more invasive.

These new communication processes have found their reason to exist in a hybrid media culture where, as we have yet seen, broadcasts are intertwined with advanced digital platforms which imply both the blogosphere and the apparently unlimited powers of social networks.

Al Arabiya literally means "The Arab One" or "The Arabic One", according to its ends to engage the challenge to overcome *Al Jazeera* in the covering of facts happening both inside and outside the Arab context. Like *Al Jazeera*, also *Al Arabiya* constantly tries to attract the international audiences. In so doing, it has four main channels, the main in Arabic, another in English, two additional in Persian and Urdu. Their

existence clearly represents an accurate strategy for managing to achieve not only those portion of the Middle East which are not part of the Arab world, such as Iran, and in spite of any expectable political and ideological conflict between Saudi Arabia and the most influential Shia state, but also Western audiences, that are increasingly interested in Arab affairs or simply in the point of view expressed by the Arab peninsula.

As any transnational news channel with great ambitions, despite the strict monitoring of the owners, mainly the Saudi monarchy, the traditionally so-called "pro-Saudi Agenda", *Al Arabiya* freely covers news, current affairs, business and financial markets, sports, talk show and documentaries. It is also presumably rated among the top Pan-Arab stations by Middle East audiences.

This approach has evidently to be attributed to the initial perspective of Saudi Arabia in creating a counterbalancing channel for *Al Jazeera* in credibility and exercise of information leadership.

In fact, the political rivalry between the two monarchies in the Arab Peninsula is worth reminding, and the match led by Pan Arab news organizations cannot be underestimated, in order to play an hegemonic role not only within the Arab context, but also at an international level, providing information, comments and points of view to the Muslims around the world.

Just to give an illustration about the huge international impact of journalism, the President of the United States Barack Obama himself, gave its formal interview to *Al Arabiya* on 26 January 2009.[131]

Nevertheless, some accusations define this channel as the machine of Saudi Royal Family, eventually set just to impose Saudi Arabia as the most politically influential Sunni country in the Middle East. Rivalry with Qatari channel *Al Jazeera* was not so evident during the Arab revolutions, where the two states could mainly share their points of view, but it becomes harsher when they strives to appear the only credible voice within the Arab context, especially fomenting internal political or religious conflicts or simply interfering with the domestic jurisdiction of weaker states in jeopardize such as Syria, or Libya itself.

Yet, on the other hand, something virtuous has to be taken into account. In fact, investigative journalism is basically the ambitious goal that *Al Arabiya* seek to accomplish every day. These virtuous ends are attested by its most followed program, i.e. *Special Mission*.

Special Mission has won many awards for investigative journalism, and is a notable example for the fair combination of local content and relevant documentary stories from many parts of the world. The program generally presents reporters deeply investigating a single topic of interest which very often involves corruption, crime, and economic and political scandals as well. Briefly, journalists have to accomplish the mission to uncover the truth about those topics which are unclear to the public. A deep sense of realism is expressed thanks to the way of leading the program, according to a step by step process into the investigative disclosures, able to create an atmosphere of secrecy and caution. Moreover, one of the most interesting novelties of *Special Mission* is that the show is carried by correspondents themselves, who suddenly assume

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[131] "http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/01/27/65087.html".

the role of presenters.

In addition, some economic reasons are worth underlining. Among new Pan-Arab networks *Al Arabiya* represent the most emblematic example to attest Saudi accurate projects in making Arab broadcasts leader for production and distribution of news contents, for the first time independently from the satellite invasion provoked by the advent of global Western channels. Saudi Arabia seemed ready to make the effort to fund a proper regional culture that other realities had provided to the Arab Peninsula until that time. An Arab version of the transnational media broadcasting was extremely needed in the Middle East, and the rivalry between different rich monarchies in the region suddenly became predictable, providing the ideological bases to the never-ending conflict between *Al Arabiya* and *Al Jazeera*.

This process was actually represented by the passage from a phase where monarchies tried to control news coming from foreign sources, very often Western ones, to a phase where, cleverly, rulers themselves could produce the content, filtrating news and giving more pro-Arab interpretation of the facts, in order to counterbalance Western dominating broadcasts. Pluralism in international media production notably improved impartiality, simply adding different point of view into the information and conversational flow. Significantly, all that provided was realized through private funds in Saudi Arabia, because, differently from other Arab countries, entertaining industry cannot be directly financed with state-owned public money. In fact, it is culturally relevant that the Islamic information paradigm lies on a reaction to the Western existing models, and refusing to realize a cleavage between tradition and innovation, it is based on a strict relationship between public and private sphere, according to the unity *Ummah*, and its cultural approach used to inspired within the Islamic society.

Therefore, closely influenced by Wahabite elites, Saudi Arabia has constantly to reconcile the traditional and religious spheres with the advent of new technological impulses. Saudi law is very strict about the state intervention into television, but it actually presents more flexibility for private actors.

Characterized by this sort of background, Saudi media found easier trying to develop their structures abroad, or at least exercise soft-power influence outside the Wahabite kingdom.[132]

Same effects had yet been provoked by the strict imposition on *Al Jazeera* to mostly overlook the internal political affairs related to Al Thani family, focusing the attention on the most interesting facts occurring abroad. To demonstrate this, we have yet provided the example of the Arab revolutions, when both *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* seemed to interfere with national political affairs in North Africa. Undoubtedly, we will see how much the spread of transnational broadcasts have actually established a more interference perpetrated by the Western media, and unfortunately military forces and economic interests as well.

At the same time, role played by new digital platforms should not be forgotten. As well explained in the

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[132] Della Ratta, Donatella. Media Oriente. *Modelli, strategie, tecnologie nelle nuove televisioni arabe*, cit., pp.144-153.

third chapter of the thesis, transnational social networks and media, famous blogs, and opportunities that the Internet has provided to engage public, have actually included Arab citizen into the information flow and pushed foreign citizens to closely follow the Arab revolutions, compared to other Arab popular unrests happened in the past and in the course of history.

For instance, analysis of articles published has attested a lot of readers' responses revealing that Arab citizens not only challenged the views of *Al Arabiya*, or *Al Jazeera*, about the revolutions, but they also offered their own versions of events.

In addition, just to ride the wave of change in communication media process, more recently, "*Al Jazeera* helped satisfy a hunger for debate in the Arab world by covering Arab issues in depth and hosting debates from a diversity of perspectives: from feminist and traditionalists, Arab nationalists and non-Arab separatists, mullahs and secular parliamentarians, apostate scholars, and authoritarian apologists."[133] The latter is an extremely positive novelty to take into account if we presumably hope to see improvements in several debates within the Arab society which imply both democratic demands and recognition for freedom of expression.

In such terms Pan-Arab broadcasts, heavily supported by their digital means, have attested a new season in North Africa and the Middle East for the development of pluralism. Incredibly, in spite of that or just for that we do not know, what is interesting to analyze is that harsh conflicts are currently jeopardizing the development of pluralism still today.

Pan-Arab broadcasts and new digital platforms have provided more tools to the Arab citizens, but a major awareness about events, economic conditions, and actual political regimes have gradually raised new demanded which rarely have found their space during political talk shows. In hoping this could happen very soon, let us go back to the Arab revolutions in 2011, by seeing why *Al Arabiya* had not been as so influent as *Al Jazeera*.

In fact, concerning *al Arabiya*, a sad aspect worth taking into account according to the ends of this thesis, is represented by Saudi channel's official internet news service, because, in spite of some virtuous ambitions, it met a lot of technical difficulties, especially during the Arab revolutions. As we have yet mentioned, alarabiya.net was launched in Arabic in 2004, then it was followed by an English-language service in 2007, and Persian and Urdu versions in 2008. However, the English websites of *Al Arabiya* have had to be re-launched in 2013, because of several problems it had during the revolutions.

Significantly, the *Al Arabiya* web sites suffered numerous technical difficulties, especially during the Egyptian protests at the end of January 2011. Unfortunately, the site was usually offline with error messages

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[133] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., p.92.

as such as the following: "The website is down because of heavy traffic to follow up with the Egyptian crisis and it will be back as soon as possible" [134]

On the one hand, this kind of consequence could be appreciated for the increasingly Arab public's participation in the revolution, just to certify the prominent role the Internet have begun to play within the Arab context, especially for the active and wide approach in following the information flow. On the other one, this awkward, almost grotesque, *Al Arabiya*'s technical limits, allowed *Al Jazeera* to be the only credible voice within the Arab context of broadcasting media, among less reliable state-owned televisions and presumably censored independent sources as well.

As a matter of fact, the Arab revolutions seemed to award *Al Jazeera*. In truth, the course of the political events in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 have attested the Qatari news channel as opinion leader in the broadcasting information flow for the Arab context, partly overlooking its political interests, and one of the most influential television around the world, directly challenging giants such as *BBC* and *CNN*. Yet all things considered should be judged also positive. Thanks to the news organization market not only the Arab world have acquired a pluralism in more peaceful matters by the existence of varied and quite credible broadcasts, such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*, but also its transnational features have permitted to engage in a debate different cultural spheres. This exactly means that by the spread of international broadcasts even the Arab world has opened its doors to a kind of public coming from many areas of the world. As we will see in the next paragraph, Western media have deep professional and political vices as well, and it is significant going back to the novelty represented by the birth of *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*, in order to explain again the relationship between journalists and increasingly active audiences.

Just to give an illustration, the Arab uprisings in 2011 have been, for the first time, the political event which highly attracted both the Arab media, certifying freedom of expression problems and willingness to do better at the same time, also by using digital platforms, and the Western ones, closely focused on the revolutions thanks to social networks themselves.

Key of this change is also represented by how much social media affected traditional broadcast.

Furthermore, Pan-Arab channels knew to read better the signs of change than their Western competitors. This change laid on the same transformations that communication process was meeting. Today we should call "mobile audiences" all those users who daily enjoy mobile tools, such as smart-phones or tablets, that actually represent new cultural product to consume information flows, by viewing videos, spending time on the social networks, reading news not only taken from official sources but also personal blogs and web pages. [135] Alternative modes to consume news were extremely important especially within a context unable

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[134]"*Al Arabiya News Global Discussion: Princess Rym of Jordan calls on Arab world to fight discrimination*". Al Arabiya, 1 December 2013. Retrieved 6 January 2015.

to guarantee news independently from strict state censorship.

Specifically, there is an explanation for the contemporary development of Arab media ecology. We should divide it into parts: the state-dominated broadcast era and the post-broadcast digital era. Referring to these periods it is significant to put pan-Arab broadcasts, such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* in the middle, because these channels wisely knew to interpret the development of journalism according new schemes imposed by revolutionary technology.

"Before the 1990s, media ownership in many Arab states was largely dominated by governments under strict political censorship norms. In this era, Arab citizens found it difficult to learn about political events and engage in political discussion. In addition, broadcast media did not enjoy political liberty. Media ownership before the 1990s was mainly locally based, and top down organizational hierarchies made it easy for non-democratic governments to coerce journalists to play by party rules...

However, about a decade later, new satellite stations and print newspapers hosted themselves online with the growth of internet accessibility, making it easier for more uncensored sources of international news information. Therefore, for citizens whose political discussions were often marginalized to the safety of the private sphere, online discussion spaces allowed for more autonomous and semi-public political discussions and public opinion formation."[136]

All things considered are extremely important to understand what changes were occurring within the Arab society, while all those transformations broke effectively out with the Arab revolutions.

Finally, just to conclude our chapter about features and reactions of the traditional broadcasting media to the Arab revolutions, we deal with the Western ones, those which in few elements probably inspired Arab media, more due to contrasting than analogical terms, but those, at the same time, certainly provoked several misunderstandings in the correct comprehension of the facts was occurring in North Africa and the Middle East. We will see how much a Western-centered point of view could deviate the storytelling of the events, just to analyzing the actual consequences that could be provoked by superficiality and cultural relativity of media.

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[135] Sorice, Michele. *Sociologia dei mass media*, cit., pp.285-288.

[136] Howard Philip N., Hussain Muzammil M. *Democracy's fourth wave? Digital media and the Arab spring*, cit., pp. 32-34.

4.3 Western Media

Something worth in order to properly conclude this chapter would inevitably imply the Western media point of view and relationship with the Arab world. This topic represents absolutely a wider issue, sometimes complex, sometimes affected by too many misunderstandings.

Anyway, what this paragraphs aims to, is exactly dealing with the Arab revolutions of 2011 by recalling those Western media's errors suggested by superficiality or ignorance. With good judgment, we may attest that some problems in the comprehension of Arab matters have raised, and raise today, because of multiple reasons.

On the one hand, there is still too much ignorance about history, politics and culture in North Africa and the Middle East, and it should be due to the unfortunately widespread Euro-centric model, gradually passed from Europe to the United States, that notably affects judgments, comments and opinions about the Arab world. That is clearly evident about religion, especially around all the principles of the Islamic culture and tradition, too easily associated with radicalism or propaganda to instigate terrorism and violent actions. On the other one, all those new interactive media processes that seem merely to be an opportunity to communicate faster, also are, as a matter of fact, cause for superficial messages. Retweeting, posting videos, publishing pictures on Facebook, in order to enjoy the viral process which has allowed to share incredibly quicker, is also an activity incredibly influenced by the impossibility to analyze a fact or political event in deeper terms. That is notably risky when we deal with different cultures.

As we know, Western media has embedded a world coverage many years ago, but whenever without losing their cultural approach oriented by a more "Western" and less impartial information flow, always moved according to schemes based on prejudice or arrogance even.

It is worth saying that several political conflicts between different cultural entities, such as the Western world and the Arab one, just to cite our case study, are still today fomented by dubious professionalism of media, today increasingly important to establish the soft power, as well as in positive as in negative terms also.

Let us to see why the Arab uprising between 2010 and 2011 is an interesting example to recall the risky practice of a superficial journalism.

Firstly, we will analyze those definitions used to outline the events which were occurring in North Africa and the Middle East, just to give instantly an illustration of how much journalism matters for building personal opinion and ideas in the minds of international public.

In fact, we should not forget that today the relationship between media and society is one of the most important topics of political sciences and lies on the essence itself of mass communication sociology. Media

can carry even ideologies by controlling technologies and sharing specific experiences. Some scholars usually refer to media-institutions characterized by an uninterrupted and huge network of relationships, notably increased with the advent of new technological platforms. Referring specifically to the cultural studies, built on the two-step flow of communication model, the truth is enormously affected by our construction of the truth, and media can transform what is artificial into apparently natural dynamics, by transmitting images according some criteria or underlining some features and overlooking others.[137]

Yet what is actually related to the Arab upheavals in the Arab world about five years ago?

The specific question we are asking now is the following: where did the phrase "Arab Spring" come from, and how appropriate is it to describe events in the Arab world?

Firstly we specify something about the style of our thesis. If not clearly noticed before, we have not literally used the phrase "Arab Spring" to talk about the turmoil which happened in several Arab countries at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011. In fact, this phrase is the evident representation of a journalism expression that, beyond successful contemporary headlines, did not find an effective reference to the real political situation Arab society were living at that time.

"Springtime has always been associated with renewal, so perhaps it was inevitable that the Arab uprisings would earn the title 'Arab Spring'. This is not the first time commentators have invoked the term *spring* to describe political events. The raft of revolutions that advocated liberalism and nationalism in Europe in 1848 earned the title *Springtime of nations*, and the brief period in 1968 when Czechoslovakia flirted with liberal reform before Soviet tanks crushed Czech aspirations will forever be the *Prague Spring*.

Nor is this first time commentators have invoked the phrase *Arab Spring*. Conservative commentators used the phrase in 2005 to refer the events in the Arab world that occurred in the wake of, and according to some, as a result of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the announcement of President George W. Bush's *freedom agenda*."[138]

Considering effective outcomes, some witnesses could laughing, due to the lack of actual fulfillment of a happy summer after this so-called hopeful political spring. In fact, taking into account the track record of that Arab spring, why would anyone, within the Western media context, want to burden the Arab uprisings with this title?

The power of media relies on making a wrong definition durable, in spite of all the evidences that could prove the inaccuracy of such phrases. Everyone might notice how much headlines can affect our lives. The fairest man, proved in his behavior by colleagues, friends and relatives, could not escape suspicious

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[137] Sorice, Michele. *Sociologia dei mass media*, cit., pp.39-49.

[138] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.37.

judgment in front of headlines which accused him, even if proofs are corrupted. So, going back to the phrase "Arab Spring", there are three main reason to discourage its use. "First, it is calendrically inaccurate: only one of the uprising s, the uprising in Syria, actually broke out in a month that is in spring, although it broke out before the actual arrival of that season. The others began in the dead of winter, a season hardly appropriate for an uplifting title. The second problem with the title *Arab Spring* is that it is misleading. Since spring is commonly associated with joy and renewal, the use of the term Arab Spring raised expectations so high that they were bound to be dashed, as can be seen from a seemingly endless stream of articles with titles like *Was the Arab Spring Worth It?*, *The Year the Arab Spring Went Bad* or *How Syria Ruined the Arab Spring*. Finally, the terms implies that the struggle for political, economic, and social rights in the Arab world might be contained within the span of a single season, one that began in December 2010. We know there are millions of Algerians, Bahrainis, Syrians, Kuwaitis, Egyptian, Moroccans, Lebanese, and others in the Arab world who would dispute that."[139]

In addition, several other mistakes were made by Western media just in progress of the so-called Arab Spring. As much in the United States, as in Europe as well, many commentators expressed qualitative judgments about the Arab revolutions, just like a political process that should necessarily be good or bad, towards freedoms or towards new dictatorship and turmoil or the spread of terrorism on the territory.

According to their own point of view, a lot of Western countries were observing the popular uprisings as the turning point which could allow Arab societies to pass from a petrified and closed tradition to an open society based on liberal principles, directly inspired by Western political features. These considerations mainly attest two kinds of ignorance.

The first, lying on the ignorance of history in North Africa and the Middle East. Certainly, the Arab revolutions could not be outcome of single impressions and feelings inspired by Western media and principles in order to gain new freedoms and rights, but they actually were result of a longer historical process which, as we have yet seen dealing with an always existing dissent, brought the Arab society from the first political activists who used to write metaphoric poems at the age of colonialism to digital-savvy protestors able to spread their contempt towards oppressing regimes by using blogs and technological devices.

The second, lying on the ignorance of contemporary facts in the Arab world themselves. In particular, while *Al Jazeera* had showed to be able to follow events by exploiting local footages and a broad coverage on the ground carried by unstoppable correspondents, Western media relied on digital platforms to manage to know the course of the event, also due to all the economic and conceptual difficulties they met when they wanted to talk about Arab matters.

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[139] Gelvin, James L. *The Arab Uprisings. What everyone needs to know*, cit., p.38.

Therefore, what can be labeled as a traditional vice of the traditional media in front of new technologies, such as the social media specifically based on networking processes, is completely depending on the digital information flow when other means for news covering lack. That is a critical point which determined an intensification of the risks derived by dealing with different cultures without hearing direct sources.

It is incredible how heavy the accusations towards Bashar al Assad, head of the Syrian authoritarian government before the birth of the Islamic State and the advent of a new season for international terrorism after the Osama Bin Laden's death on 1 May 2011, were. The complexity of the Syrian crisis pushed back the Americans, and its allies, in re-examining their position about the Middle East. In addition, several observers understood also how useless, even harmful sometimes, some military interventions had been, moved by the similar cultural miscalculations about the Arab world.

"The countries engulfed by the so-called Arab Spring are trying to find their way from dictatorship to democracy. To get there they will need to battle extremists and a resilient authoritarianism. It was the culture shock of imported Western modernity and Soviet-style dictatorship that first gave birth to much of the region's religious fundamentalism. Diplomacy with the old Middle East was based on a lie. Earlier negotiations and peace treaties were not agreed with countries, they were signed off with the ruling family business. But now the men and women of these nations finally have to say. Together they will shape the new Middle East."[140]

Assuming that talking about an old and new kind of the Middle East is too extreme by comparing this explanation to the history of dissent within the Arab society we have treated in the previous chapters, it is undoubtedly important to remind how many Arabs citizens expressed their participation in the political discourse of their country through new digital platforms and networking 2.0 forms of the Internet.

One time again, we do not say that social media were the main reason which allowed Arab revolutions to broke out, but certainly they have made political activism in the Arab countries more inclusive. On the contrary, this is exactly the reason that fundamentally prove further social conflict are characterizing some of these countries still today.

Taking Egypt as an emblematic example, we can see how the aftermath of the revolution in Tahrir Square have definitively opened the political debate inside a country which is still seeking equilibrium between maintaining of the public order and satisfaction of the rights people have begun to demand by taking the streets during the uprising in 2010-2011.

So, how was Western media's effective coverage of the Arab revolutions? Their practice is inevitably associated to US foreign politics. In fact, according to a certain point of view what generally moves public opinion, as well in America as in Europe, is the US approach to foreign matters. That is clearly a limit, in

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[140] Danahar, Paul. *The new Middle East*, cit., pp.421-428.

which we could raise some exceptions provided by the same internationalism of the news organizations we have already mentioned in the two paragraphs dedicated to two main pan-Arab media networks. For Egypt in particular, the country to which the West paid more attention to during the Arab uprisings, "America's democratic aspirations for the region, embraced by administrations of both parties, have led to eloquent expressions of the country's idealism. But conceptions of security necessities and of democracy promotion have often clashed. Those committed to democratization have found it difficult to discover leaders who recognize the importance of democracy other than as a means to achieve their own dominance.. At the same time, the advocates of strategy necessity have not been able to show how the established regimes will ever evolve in a democratic or even reformist manner...The Arab Spring started as a new generation's uprising for liberal democracy. It was soon shouldered aside, disrupted, or crushed. Exhilaration turned into paralysis. The existing political forces, embedded in the military and in the region in the countryside, proved stronger and better organized than the middle-class element demonstrating for democratic principles in Tahrir Square. In practice, the Arab Spring has exhibited rather than overcome the internal contradiction of the Arab-Islamic world and of the policies designed to resolve them."[141]

Yet, as a matter of fact, it is rightfully to repeat that that attempt of democratization, which is ongoing, has not to be considered as a westernization process, just like high expectations of the West seemed to forecast.[142]

Complexity of the Arab world is difficult to put inside the strict schedule of Western broadcasts which usually follow the will of the audiences without considering their real needs. Living in an increasingly multicultural society, for example, should lead Western media to deal with such topics more carefully, without forgetting the main educational role they traditionally have begun to play with the birth of broadcasts and the wide diffusion of media within personal spheres of daily life.

If misunderstandings in the relation between Western and Arab culture are not solved within media, it is obvious that people themselves, overall today, will not be able to grow in their opinion and thoughts.[143] Several Western media have cover the Arab revolutions by analyzing the history of freedom in America and Europe, as well as the Arab society was doomed to follow the same path, with great surprise when these attempts seemed to fail.

Just starting from the inflation of the phrase "Arab Spring", many other problems of this kind of approach, evident by looking at Western media coverage at the time of the Arab uprisings, emerged again. These

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[141] Kissinger, Henry. *World Order,* cit., p.123.

[142] Limes, Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica. *(Contro)Rivoluzioni in corso*, cit., pp.7-21.

[143] Branca, Paolo. *Introduzione all'Islam*. MILANO: Edizioni San Paolo, 2011, cit., pp.293-311.

clearly presented some points which should necessarily be resolved in order to improve the journalistic practice of the West. There are exceptions, and not at all Western media followed the same principles. However, without contextualizing, is very difficult reaching a more exhaustive comprehension of "exceptional" events like the Arab uprisings, on the contrary not so exceptional looking at the history of countries populated by historical dissents, but not provided of proper means before the advent of social media.

Tolerating differences and empowering virtuous diversity is the only means to reach peaceful relationships without cultural conflicts and interferences damaging other cultural in their process of democratization, as well gradual as original, according to cultural peculiarities belonging to each country.[144]

That should be a new journalistic practice to overcome the problematic tradition of media built on personal point of views, and a process of internationalization which is implying even Arab widespread broadcasts such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* is just a novelty that can improve this hierarchy of media around the world. Briefly, more accurate news organizations in order to promote the public's awareness towards these issues. That should be the initial mission of media, not supporting or contrasting outcomes of political processes in progress like football supporters. If, on the one hand Western media have broadly overcome censorship problems which mostly regards national news organizations in the countries embedded in the process of the Arab revolutions, on the other one they should start covering the news hearing the Arab voices, presumably more integrated and embedded in the course of the political events.

In conclusion, going back to social media, their virtues and vices can be represented in easily terms. Referring to virtues, we have widely seen how much power social networking services have provided to population, particularly enormous to its traditionally unfortunate portions, in order to interact and debate political issues, until the decision to take the streets and to coordinate the protest by using digital devices circumventing traditional censorship.

Referring to vices, they had firstly provided to the entire world the impact of the Arab revolutions thanks to the possibility to analyze the surprisingly numbers achieved by hashtags such as #Libya or #Egypt, but, at the same time, they gave a wrong perception about the meaning of the event. Western media mainly acquired news by using the digital coverage but, on the contrary of *Al Jazeera*, this was neither supported by coverage of correspondents on the ground nor help by a deep knowledge in Arab history and internal policies which partly provoked the wake of the popular unrest.

That provided, we moved to the last chapter of this thesis which will be divided into two paragraphs. The first deals with the political consequences in the Arab country we can see today or that we can forecast in the

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[144] Bhutto, Benazir. *Riconciliazione, l'Islam, la democrazia, l'Occidente*, cit., pp.365-378.

future by analyzing the impact of new technologies one time again.

The second treats, just to conclude with the most optimistic auspicious, the alternative modes to protest that social media have allowed population to realize and carry on. In so doing, we will try to answer again to the question "why did social networking services allow what had seemed impossible before, even considering an historical social dissent towards old authoritarian regimes as those in North Africa. Briefly, what was the impact of social media in front of censorship, not only in the Arab context but also in any other as well in the present as in the future. To sum up, we may attest that social media have become extremely important means to take into account for the success of a revolt which should not be just expression of an elite, but of an entire population according to the real needs of democracy.

Part V - Conclusions

What transition in the Arab world?

5.1 Political consequences in the Arab countries

At the end of this thesis, we have arrived into the point that allows us to make an evaluation about what we have dealt with so far. In spite of a relatively short work in order to sum up an incredibly broad issue that implies as much the course of Arab countries' history as the evolution of journalistic practice, both Arab and non-Arab, we have tried to present an organic, synthetic, and homogeneous discourse about the Arab revolutions and how social media affected them.

In the course of this last shorter chapter we have mainly two purposes.

First, we analyze the current sociopolitical affairs in the countries which have been characterized by the tide of popular uprising and what are the precise political consequences these revolutions reached, state by state. We will not overlook that this transition is still going on, and its way is not particularly either smooth to follow or simple to explain.

Second, we precisely evaluate the impact of the Internet, blogs, social networking services and social media, how they were able to represent an added-value for popular protest, how will they be able to represent it in the future, outside the Arab context as well, and what are, at the same time, the risks they could meet, in spite of their exceptional novelties and powers capable to circumvent the traditional censorship imposed by authoritarian regimes in order to control national communication apparatus.

Having said that, naturally, we have to specify the following aspect. All those features of the Arab revolutions we have treated in the course of this thesis are related to a media-centered point of view, based on the increasingly influential power of media, both traditional and digital, on daily life of citizens.

We provide this clarification in order to remind that the Arab revolutions were a wider historical event which was provoked by several other aspects, as much related to history as economic and political matters. Dissent in North Africa and the Middle East has a long tradition, based on a culture, the Arab one, incredibly more dynamic than that people generally think, especially in the Western context.[145]

At the same time, we did not ignore the influence of media and technology in the life of citizens.

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[145] Corrao, Francesca Maria. *Islam, religione e politica, una piccola introduzione*, cit., pp.103-125.

Furthermore, we chose to dedicate a thesis about them, just to precise that, in spite of a wider and deeper background which practically set the table for the uprisings, social media and digital platforms provided that decisive element capable to notably empower the spirit of dissent, simply through the so-called practice 2.0 of interaction.

The latter represents the main novelty social media introduced, by generating three very effective processes in the political consequences we will analyze later. As we have already said, today media are an increasingly essential component, both to understand the kind of society we are studying and to outline its evolutions according to the participation of citizens in shaping national public opinion.

Firstly, the information flow of media lost its elitist features. Despite its long tradition, journalism in the Arab countries, although in states such as Tunisia and Egypt it had already been dynamic and pluralist[146], only through the advent of the Internet general public and new portions of population were embedded by the communication process, with the notable possibility to intervene in the public debate. What was gradually offered by monitors and personal computers at home, quickly raised the needs for major opportunities on the streets, with the clear willingness to participate in politics using more concrete and recognized ways. Secondly, while in the course of history foreign political affairs have always remained unknown to general public, leaving the duty to decide to the ruling apparatus of the state, the Arab uprisings, thanks to their broad production of information flow within the internet sphere, both 1.0 and 2.0, have allowed citizens of different region of the world to be closer to the facts, and to carefully follow the course of event and express their personal opinion.

Thirdly, even including two things yet considered, social media usage completely renovated the international journalism practice, by globalizing that more than any other existing broadcast. In fact, embedding public in the 2.0 interaction, traditional broadcasts have naturally begun to follow the trending topics common users indirectly suggested, gradually generating a bilateral information flow. The elitist array of news proposed by personal choices of main news organizations suddenly became to rely on the stories people preferred to follow or demonstrated to be interested in. To become active public suggested topics that should be treated by official media as much as broadcasts proposed others at the same time. It felt like a mutual suggesting process. This has necessarily to be taken into account, and we deal with it better in the last paragraph. All that provided, Arab media have notably and undoubtedly advanced in the last few years as well. The revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East have attested the unstoppable evolution and expansion of the Internet 2.0 in the sociopolitical process. With good judgment, we may certify that the Arab uprisings

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[146] Sakr, Naomi. *Arab media and political renewal*. Hahn, Oliver. *Cultures of TV news journalism and prospects for a transcultural public sphere*, cit., pp.13-19.

have provided a widespread fame to both Facebook and Twitter users and bloggers as proper political actors, something new in the course of history of dissent. Mainly, political consequences lie on the introduction of these new agents in the development of political debate. [147]

Something worth affecting the course of the events, but, at the same time something unable to make the difference without including, or just considering, all the factors which feed the internet processes. When social media were effectively containing popular willingness for a transition towards a participatory democracy, not only led by traditional political parties or entities, facts brought political scientist and international public to assume this process as capable to completely renovate the Arab world.

In spite of this perception, when political events and popular uprisings seemed to lose this boost, due to the difficulties presented by building a new democratic regime able to conciliate the conflicting pluralism in countries such as Egypt and Libya, social media themselves lost their purposes according to the disillusion that activists and citizens gradually began to feel.

One more time we are obliged to admit that social media are a powerful and wonderful means to use in order to share ideas and promote personal-public purposes, but they always remain just a means, not the key element able to generate and accomplish effective political transitions towards better political systems. So, providing an explanation to the current political affairs in North Africa and the Middle East could seem quite easy, although it is not. The aftermath of revolutions is not certainly an happy example of political transition towards democracy.

We do not think someone should be blame for that, although particular interests tends to dominate politics and economy within the Arab countries, bringing to pay more attention to the corruption of the strongest sector of the states involved and the dubious ethics of international and western intervention into the troubled course of political transition within the Arab countries.

Today the Arab revolutions seem to be a never-ending process where, state by state, we may outline varied and peculiar conditions, that, although different sorts of paths they follow, are creating a turmoil within the international context.

For instance, ferocious terrorism, characterized by transnational groups such as Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, or the Islamic State, and also huge immigration flows towards Europe which are due to the humanitarian crisis that North Africa and the Middle East are living, are well-recognized problems, worsened because of the political instability of the states involved in the so-called Arab springs as well.

That does not mean that Arab revolutions had not to break out in order to preserve the *status quo*, even if it

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[147] De Angelis, Enrico. *Media Egiziani Crescono,* in Limes, Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica, *Egitto. Rivoluzione usa e getta*. ROMA: Gruppo Editoriale l'Espresso, (7-2013), cit., pp.49-55.

had been built on apparently petrified societies and authoritarian regimes.

Historically, we can smoothly attest that democratic transitions have always entailed several problems, not only to be realized, but also, overall, to be consolidated according to stable elements capable to survive in case of new political earthquakes.

Just to provide some example, many other pages are needed if we aim to totally explain the complexity of the Arab revolutions aftermath.

Briefly, we can resume that: Tunisia has reached only a fragile democracy, constantly threatened by terrorism and immigration flows. Egypt has been characterized by two transitions. One from Mubarak to Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, the other from Morsi to another military regime led by the general Al Sisi. Libya definitively seems to lose their territorial unity, today more evident due to the presence of two different kinds of government, one in Tripoli (Tripolitania), the other in Tobruk (Cyrenaica).

Other states, we have not deeply treated in the course of this thesis, such as Syria and Yemen, are still affected by never-ending civil wars that, beyond great embarrassment of the international community, are provoking unprecedented crises since 2011, both in military, civilian, and humanitarian sector as well. That is the clear demonstration that, in spite of the popular purposes demanded through the wide usage of social media, factors determining the effective outcomes are others and characterized by different nature. Nevertheless, nothing in these political processes has been historically obtained without fighting many battles against oppression, violation and apparently anarchical conditions in which seems impossible to build a new peaceful national order.

In so doing, we cannot establish precise results Arab countries are going to achieve in the future. Independently from that, we are firmly convinced that this transition was necessary, in order to satisfy Arab citizens' need for change. Its initial progress are due to the incredible empowerment to revolt provided by digital platforms, but this is clearly insufficient at the moment to establish a new consolidated sociopolitical order.

Social media can be, and have to be, used in order to make population's voice louder in front of the injustices of such wrong political orders, oppressing human rights and personal freedoms, but they should necessarily associated with a strong demand carried on by new political actors, namely digital-savvy activists particularly able to gather the needs of citizens, just as Leena Ben Mhenni in Tunisia, or Wael Ghonim in Egypt did in order to promote the wishes of their fellows.

Briefly, the aggregating power of social media is huge, just considering the international impact the so-called Arab Spring got compared to all the upheavals already occurred in the Arab world in the past. But that said, digital trends cannot notably affect the aftermath of the revolts, in which is not needed just the "microphone" but also a credible voice capable in achieving concrete and stable political outcomes.

Anyway, we will see in the next paragraph why all things considered are important to prefigure a more optimistic future for the progress of dissent.

5.2 Alternative modes to protest. Social media in front of censorship

Moving to the conclusion of this work, we want to underline again the shift in media power which has happened during the Arab revolutions and, in so doing, we recall the importance for citizens to enjoy new alternative modes to protest, not only in the Arab countries, but also in many other contexts where freedoms are limited and rights are breached. Mainly, we sum up also why social media in front of censorship are dangerous tools, indeed resulting so difficult to contain for the monitoring information apparatus of each regime we have seen so far.

With this in mind, let us move to the novelty brought by social media into the communication process one more time.

In the Arab countries, social media users went beyond their interaction with broadcasting media and traditional mainstream to spread their own news, possibly circumventing the influence of censorship. "Social media users were using social media platforms to communicate within their countries and amongst themselves, whilst also acting as a tool to inform the international community of events inside their country which were not being picked up by mainstream news organizations. This form of independent reporting is another notable aspect of the power shift that took place during the Arab Spring, as audiences around the world would go to Twitter directly, for example, to follow the events as they unfolded since they knew that institutional reporters were doing the same. In this sense, mainstream media were overridden as the middlemen between the news and the audience. Social media are accessible to audiences around the world who have Internet connection, unlike international news agencies, which used to be only accessed by institutional journalists. The fact that audiences can access social media directly weakens the gatekeeping role that mainstream media have traditionally played."[148]

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[148] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., p.134.

As a matter of fact, social networking service has acquired two functions, which have mainly provided to social networks the right to be called *social media*.

First, users began to exploit Facebook and Twitter to mobilize protestors, then this digital tools became amplifying means to disseminate news directed to people's phones in real time.

Second, social media eventually became a common international communication tool in times of crisis, according to the features of new *glocalism* in media processes.

Two tweets just to clarify this concept are:

-" #Benghazi: Pharmacies distributing medicine for free; youths taken care of city's security, not a single case of looting reported #Libya"

-"Benghazi hospital has run out of anesthesia a day ago, have to perform surgery without painkillers, please send supplies."

Such examples can also be considered as a demand for help and supplies from outside Libya.[149]

In so doing, digital media have evidently emerged as considerable players in crisis reporting in the Middle East. Digital mediated spheres can enjoy new opportunities nowadays, even in very practical examples. Although mainstream media mainly remain dominant in reaching global audiences, social media have definitively acquired their ability to shape social reality, even according to more democratic and independent ways. The most evident sign of this shift in media power is clearly represented by the behavior of mainstream and professional journalists who have found themselves depending on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs for the coverage of the event.

As we have already said, this practice implies some risks deriving on the dubious reliability of this platforms, less subjected to the constrains of journalistic deontology.

Nonetheless, these tools have showed to be more reliable in any context in which freedom of expression is menaced, also due to the oppression of an authoritarian regime, because of their power to circumvent censorship. According to these ends, or just by cases due to precise historical period even, the Arab uprisings of 2011 have been the first case of broadly digitally mediated revolution.

It was not casual that in the following elections, even in the Arab countries, political candidates began to widely use digital platform in order to create consensus by attracting digital-savvy citizens. In such terms the digital scaffolding have provided the possibility to build a modern civil society, in spite of the difficulties the Arab societies continues to meet today. In fact, a conjoined combination of causes behind regime weakness and social movement success for weighing multiple political, economic, and cultural conditions, is due to the unstoppable interaction realized by social media platforms which currently exists between different sectors

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[149] Bebawi Saba, Bossio Diana. *Social Media and the politics of reportage. The Arab spring*, cit., pp.129-135.

of society.

Briefly, what we are strongly trying to attest with this thesis is that today the countries with the lowest rates of technology and Internet diffusion, or citizens who cannot enjoy proper digital resources, have less possibility to make their uprising successful. In spite of the different and sometimes tragic outcomes reached in the course of this political transition so far, the important role played by digital media in the Arab revolutions cannot be diminished. Social networking platforms have allowed more people in North Africa and the Middle East to be involved both in the production and consumption of international news, consolidating their role as activists as well by actively using digital application and organizing day by day the action of the protest.

This should not be underestimate even in the future of political events, especially in order to guarantee, by the wide usage of digital platforms, another kind of watchdog for the public, probably more artificial and technological, but always according to the principles of virtuous journalistic practice.

These are our more optimistic auspices, although for the reason social media remain just means, even if incredibly powerful, organizations and groups of users could always use them in order to promote their personal interests, even encouraging false perceptions of reality.

Nonetheless, the advent of the Arab revolutions in 2011 has not provided clear predictable results of this transition. Instead, with good judgment, we may to attest that Arab society is currently characterized by an experienced revolutionary portion of population, mostly represented by youths and women, who actively mobilize the public debate towards goals that openly conflict with the harsh character of authoritarian regimes, recalling traditional political and intellectual vanguards, existing especially within the Egyptian society. The combination of courage, experience, and organization, showed in Tahrir Square, exactly explained the historical evolution of dissent. Thousands of citizens have challenged the warm by taking the streets, in order to demand what they have widely requested through the debates carried on the digital platforms.[150] Even if this democratic wave has been partly stopped at the moment, this new awareness of Arab population, notably empowered by digital platforms, cannot be overlooked.

Social media in front of censorship have demonstrated to be powerful means to satisfy the needs of a popular protest beyond the petrified schemes of traditional information flaw and media mainstream by providing new opportunities to common people.

The most democratic aspect that social media gave is represented by the broad usage of these platforms in the course of the years, especially through the sharp growth which has characterized the Arab world. For the first time demands expressed on the streets were not only the claim of a single elite, even if intellectual, but

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[150] Corrao, Francesca Maria. *Le rivoluzioni arabe, la transizione mediterranea*, cit., pp.60-64.

was, at least, the general perception own by a wider group of people, even heterogeneous within society. One more again, how did social media affect the Arab revolutions? Notably, incredibly and broadly, influencing the current sociopolitical affairs and the future ones. The impact of social media within the Arab society has been very huge, even if we perfectly know at the time that it cannot be the only element able to find a solution for all the issues that are characterizing the sociopolitical and economic troubles in North Africa and the Middle East.

Nonetheless social media remain a powerful tool that should be used in virtues way and to promote good purposes around the world. Today they represent the best "microphone" to make our voice louder and express our necessity to improve the world. This perspective will work both for the Arab context and the non-Arab one, thanks to the other cases we have already presented in the course of this thesis, in Eastern Europe and in Iran.

Briefly we can just remind that "this Arab revolution - still going - is a democratic renaissance. It will suffer backlashes, betrayals, defeats and vicious repression. Once the initial enthusiasm fades away, this uprising and its actors will be slandered, vilified and caricatured. Even if its most radical demands are to be fulfilled in the political arena, the rehabilitation of governance will be only one part of a daunting challenge to cope with the deficits in the labor market, in the housing sectors or in the public infrastructures. Those are the Arab deficits, they bear no relation with culture or religion, and they need decades to be addressed."[151] History is in the making. This Arab renaissance is neither the end nor the beginning of this historical path. Social media are the best means we can enjoy nowadays in order to make an effective sociopolitical difference, according not to the personal interest of traditional politics, but finally following the true wishes of people.

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[151] Filiu, Jean-Pierre. *The Arab Revolution. Ten lessons from the democratic uprisings*, cit., pp.147-148.

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"How did social media affect the Arab revolutions?"

Abstract

Something worth fighting for in the Arab world existed, and exists until today, such as liberty, freedom of expression or just better economic and social conditions. But why did people in the Arab world decided to take the squares, protest in the streets, and strongly wish the fallen of so durable regimes, independently from their age, sex, social status, and economic conditions, in the same way, singing identical chants and slogans, organizing themselves perfectly even, almost if they possess more power to react in front of their dictators?

Above all, why did such protestors beat the regimes' censorship and their constrains only in the second decade of the 21st century, and not before, after several years of participation in dissenting events which directly blame their political systems?

This thesis wants to attest that social media surely did not either provoke the Arab revolutions, or result as the main cause of a social upheaval in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and so forth, but it wants to certify they certainly inflamed the political debate in these countries, by awaking more democratization through new digital environments, and by supporting the organization of protestors' groups.

Briefly, this thesis wants empirically to demonstrate that toppling such regimes would be more difficult, quite impossible in short time, without the involvement of new modes to report news, to inform people, to organize sit-in or protesting marches even, by giving voice to other portion of population, so long generally silenced or shut down to public spheres of society.

A sort of participation very far from the owned-government broadcasts and televisions, known to those few elites of people involved in the balance of power of the regimes, too close to the dictators' families, and unable to express an opinion not embedded by the mainstream of the national media.

Especially by looking at how the Arab uprisings were born in 2010, and how they developed later, the importance of social media is not in dispute today. Their role resulted particularly relevant in those countries where people were suffering a never-ending censorship, constantly imposed by each sort of regime apparatus, from the block of whole Internet to a more target-oriented limitation against the freedom of expression.

What this thesis is going to explain will be the course of different processes that involved professional

journalists who followed apparently unexpected events, political activists who took the streets, digital dissidents able to create new networks for the public participation in some social spheres where most people had been excluded before. Moreover, all this changed the lives of everyone who needed to know more about the actual status quo of their country, revolutionizing so-called petrified societies within the official media politics, as the unofficial one, during the so-called Arab Spring.

The Tunisian and Egyptian cases are mostly significant to understand what we are talking about, but to do that correctly, this thesis is made up of five functional parts.

Each one is about a specific aspect to analyze in order to avoid, where possible, superficiality or deficiencies within a quite short dissertation on a so huge topic.

First, in the following paragraphs of this chapter, we will examine the geographical context. The Arab world is not so intuitively understandable, and it is worth considering all those minimal details could result relevant by a careful study and according to the ends of this work. Where did the Arab uprisings break up, and how have they become revolutions? What was political life in the Arab world like on the eve of the uprisings? Why have authoritarian governments been so common in the Arab world? What was the state of economy in the Arab world on the eve of the uprisings?

Historically, needless to say is the role who played media, from radio to Internet in the Middle East, and how were they able to inspire revolutions and social change. Having said that, we will evoke the most relevant features which exalt social media as alternative modes of journalist practice within the news mainstream, making them extremely useful in a political transition, hopefully toward a freer and more democratic world.

Second, we have surely to consider what made Arab states vulnerable to uprisings and what was the spark that ignited the Arab upheavals. In the second chapter we are going to do that by analyzing some of the main Arab countries involved, such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. How and when social rage grew, what made the uprisings effective, spreading it across the countries, almost in a contagious process which seemed to change everything. All these steps will be taken into account by embedding similarities and differences that characterize each countries we deal with.

Thirdly, more specifically, heart of this thesis will be presenting every personal experience which regards the key figures who quite anonymously brought a revolutionary wave, curiously and apparently, as sign of novelty, from leader-based regimes to leader-less uprisings. Following these goals we ask ourselves what role social networks covered during the Arab revolutions, and since when we scientifically can call them *social media.*

In so doing, this thesis aims to achieve a clearer explanation by summoning the differences between web 1.0, based on contents and web 2.0, based instead on interaction. The second one, of course, most part of the concepts here exposed will rely on, is going to involve on the one hand the spread of several blogs, especially managed by women in the Arab context, but on the other one those social networks, namely Facebook and Twitter, that thanks to their natural aptitude of involving people, and due to the predisposition to be user friendly, made upheavals successful. A lucky revolutionary wave which enjoyed means other generations of protestors could not use in their grievances. In other words we will try to explain how the power of people resulted greater than the people in power in those times.

Then, after an analysis of the rulers' reactions and their politics of censorship, the thesis will look at the virtues and vices of the traditional media by providing some empirical examples. For instance the *Al Jazeera* case. The Qatari channel born in 1996 and partly funded by the house of Thani, imposed itself as opinion leader in news broadcasting spreading the Arabic language and becoming very known through its English version during the Arab revolutions. We are going to explain the technical advantages while we are of course taking into account the social role played by direct footages and witnesses. In particular, during the height of the protests in Tahrir square (Cairo, Egypt), for example, activists pleaded with *Al Jazeera* to not stop filming, saying, "If you switch off your cameras tonight, there will be genocide...You are protecting us by showing what is happening in Tahrir Square."

But this is not the only example. Several other ones will help one to understand the huge media's role within the political transition which affected the Arab world. Naturally, in the course of the paragraphs of the fourth chapter, we are going to compare *Al Jazeera* to its main rival *Al Arabiya*. Then, we will sum up the Western media's point of view during a general upheavals expected by few experts, but misunderstand by most part of the European and American journalism. In spite of the conflict among broadcasts which seemed initially just professional, we will imply all the consequences emerged in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions.

Curiously what did not appeared so different in the following years from a political and social point of view, resulted sharply modified from another one which would involve reportage discourses and effective novelties affirmed in the media. We cannot assert that Arab revolutions were just a series of phenomena which merely regarded the world of information, but could guess that their aftermath has been more decisive for international journalists than for the citizens of the countries involved. Accordingly, we need to add that this political spring has not ended, and surely, it could be said metaphorically that this Arab season have brought a warm summer made of transitions, disappointed hopes, new consciences to listen and new goals to achieve. Just a part of this long path has been crossed, but with a modest approach this thesis will explain why this specific kilometer of the marathon was so important for media and Arab citizens, main characters of an intertwined discourse.

With good judgment, we may present all these points in the course of the fifth chapter, the last one this thesis is going to include. Firstly, it will regard the political consequences in the Arab countries in the aftermath of uprisings. Secondly, it will explore all the alternative modes to protest examined during the previous chapters. Will social media in front of censorship be able to win again, or do they risk to be included in a mainstream where new regimes and form of dictatorship will constrain contemporary citizens to comply with their will? These questions regard not only the Arab world and the whole Middle East, but also can be referred to every country, freer or not, where the balance of power constantly relies on determined features, where surely both traditional media and digital ones are covering an ever more predominant role. According to the latter, old and new democracies could enjoy the virtues of the fourth power as, nevertheless, could instead suffer ancient and common broadcasts' tendencies which take care of few people, so resulting newer and more dangerous dictatorships for all the other ones.

In the Arab countries, as a matter of fact, social media users went beyond their interaction with broadcasting media and traditional mainstream to spread their own news, possibly circumventing the influence of censorship. "Social media users were using social media platforms to communicate within their countries and amongst themselves, whilst also acting as a tool to inform the international community of events inside their country which were not being picked up by mainstream news organizations. This form of independent reporting is another notable aspect of the power shift that took place during the Arab Spring, as audiences around the world would go to Twitter directly, for example, to follow the events as they unfolded since they knew that institutional reporters were doing the same. In this sense, mainstream media were overridden as the middlemen between the news and the audience. Social media are accessible to audiences around the world who have Internet connection, unlike international news agencies, which used to be only accessed by institutional journalists. The fact that audiences can access social media directly weakens the gatekeeping role that mainstream media have traditionally played."[152]

In so doing, social networking service has acquired two functions, which have mainly provided to social networks the right to be called *social media*.
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Briefly, what we are strongly trying to attest with this thesis is that today the countries with the lowest rates of technology and Internet diffusion, or citizens who cannot enjoy proper digital resources, have less possibility to make their uprising successful. In spite of the different and sometimes tragic outcomes reached in the course of this political transition so far, the important role played by digital media in the so-called Arab springs cannot be diminished. Social networking platforms have allowed more people in North Africa and the Middle East to be involved both in the production and consumption of international news, consolidating their role as activists as well by actively using digital application and organizing day by day the action of the protest.

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