

# News Media in Arab Societies

B. Al-Jenaibi

**Abstract**—The paper examines the theories of media, dominant effects and critical and cultural theories that are used to examine media and society issues, and then apply the theories to explore the current situation of news media in Arab societies. The research is meant to explore the nature of media in the Arab world and the way that modern technologies have changed the nature of the Arab public sphere. It considers the role of an open press in promoting a more democratic society, while recognizing the unique qualities of an Arab culture.

**Keywords**—Arab media and effects theory, Arab new media, Al-Jazeera channel and critical and cultural theories of communication.

## I. INTRODUCTION

OVER the last several decades, a variety of theoretical views regarding mass communication have emerged to try and account for the effects that media has on its audience. From the limited-perspectives view that postulates media has only a minimal effect on audience thinking and behavior to the propaganda argument that media is used as a tool to control thoughts and attitudes, theories have emerged that address a variety of issues, themes and perspectives. These theories have developed in response to certain social issues that are of significant concern such how does is media used as a tool of control by the elite and powerful? What is the main role of media in the society? What is the relationship of democracy to media?

As described by Baran and Davis (2006) media is used as a tool of control, although the effects may not have the desired outcome [3]. This is the “view that mass communication is a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control. The archetypal case...then is persuasion, attitude change, behavior modification and socialization through the transmission of information, influence or conditioning” [3]. From this perspective, the authoritarian theory of the press and communication developed which postulates that all forms of communication are under the control of political/power elites [3].

Another view is that media is more a representation of the shared beliefs of a culture “where reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed” [3]. Similarly, another view is that the mass communication experience is more interactive, and that the audience assigns meaning to those messages, and people develop a way to create schemas or a way to interpret sets of symbols to make meaning regarding

experience [6]. The resulting theory hypothesizes that the way we respond to events and phenomena are in part mediated by our schemas and symbolic [7]. “Therefore, a person’s understanding of and relation to his or her physical is mediated by the symbolic environment—the mind, self and society that we have internalized” [3]. So, because of the influence of media and its reflection of culture, and its influence on culture, the effects paradigms were challenged with the critical and cultural theories of mass communication. These theories:

“...address questions about the way media might produce profound changes in social life through their subtle influence on the myriad of social practices that are the foundation of everyday life. These new perspectives argued that media might have the power to intrude into and later how we make sense of ourselves and our social world. Media could alter how we view ourselves, our relationship to others, even the image that we have of our body” [3].

For the Arab audience, the changes that are being introduced into the society because of the greater access to outside sources of media will undoubtedly have a transformational effect. There are some significant changes that are already being seen—the development of a more open public spheres [18]. This change in itself is remarkable; only the near future will reveal the many other social effects that might develop.

In order to gain a more clear understanding of media and its effects on an Arab audience, then, two important theories will be explored in relationship to Arab media—the dominant effects paradigm which explores the authoritarian function of the press, agenda-setting, and the spiral of silence effect, and the cultural and critical theories as applied to Arab societies.

Obviously, trying to understand the relationship of media to society is complex [17]. A good example of this complexity is revealed when trying to evaluate the relationship between democracy and media. The basic assumption is that in order for democracy to exist, there must be an open and free press, unfettered by the restraints of governmental control. [7] Whether a true and unfettered press actually exists is not the issue—the commonly accepted view is that one democracy cannot exist without the other (press freedom); the more limited and constrained the press, the more limited and constrained the freedoms and liberty of the citizens involved [15]. Currently, the views about democracy and freedom of the press are being applied to Middle Eastern societies, partly due to the development of open broadcast companies such as Al-Jazeera. Therefore, does the creation of allegedly uncensored news media open the door for more democracy in

B. Al Jenaibi is with United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, U.A.E. She is now with the Mass Communication Department, U.A.E University (e-mail: aljenaibi@uaeu.ac.ae).

the Middle East? According to the commonly accepted views about the relationship between freedom of the press and democracy, the answer would be, of course [15]. However, when the media is evaluated according to a more authoritarian view, “an idea that placed all forms of communication under the control of a governing elite or authorities,” [3], even the value of the American press and its relationship to democracy comes under question. When considering Arab media, then, the idea that a little bit more democracy and an open press will override the control exerted by the regimes in power may be a bit naïve [18]. Nevertheless, even if those powerful elite in Arab countries are able to exert more control than the powerful elite in America, that control is loosening just a bit because of access to more open media by Arab citizens.

This paper will examine the theories of media, dominant effects and critical and cultural theories that are used to examine media and society issues, and then apply the theories to explore the current situation of news media in Arab societies. This paper will emphasize the two theoretical approaches to explore the changes that have taken place since the advent of increased accessibility to a variety of media and messages for Arab citizens.

The research is meant to explore the nature of media in the Arab world and the way that modern technologies have changed the nature of the Arab public sphere. It considers the role of an open press in promoting a more democratic society, while recognizing the unique qualities of an Arab culture. Although democracy will not unfold in a way that is easily recognizable to Western observers, a more open press has certainly changed the landscape of Arab societies to one of more transparency and accountability from its regimes, and more accessibility and participation in public discourse on the part of Arab citizens [18].

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Media Effects Theories

Over the decades, theorists have debated how much impact the news media [21]. Interestingly, although there are many ways to examine the press and its effects, those who design and control news media mostly assume a normative view as Shaw (1999) mentioned [19]. Even in a democratic society, regulation to meet normative ideals is approved when “commodification” [10] of the press is apparent or other problems are apparent. Whether the resulting social responsibility agenda is to maintain order and the status quo of a totalitarian regime or to promote the ideals of democracy does not matter. What matters is that media does not usually serve as a “disruptive force” [p3], but instead it reinforces “existing social trends” and strengthens rather than threatens the “status quo” [3]. So, the effects theories and their relationship with power elites were studied for several years, and during the last few decades, other issues became more important to communication researchers. However, questions about how the power elite’s interests are served by media continue to be raised. For example, Baran & Davis (2006)

describe that when disasters happen, the media rarely raises important questions such as why did the disaster happen and could it have been prevented? Instead, reports provide details of the disaster itself and show how things are being resolved. “...85 percent of the news reports of social disruptions focused on restoration of order by social elites. But why does the news give so much attention to the actions of elites and so little attention to factors that cause problems?” [3] p. 298. New theories developed in recent decades argue that “powerful elites are playing an increasingly central role in determining how new media systems will be created and the purposes they will serve” [3] p. 302. In another word, the authoritarian or elite function of communication is being revitalized in communication literature, which seems particularly important for Arab audiences who are living in societies ruled by authoritarian regimes.

McQuail (2000) wrote that when examining the effects of media, some theorists are looking at the effects on individuals, some on the group, or the institution and/or the society as a whole. “To specify the level meaningfully also requires us to name the kinds of phenomena at several levels—especially opinion and belief which can be a matter of individual opinion as well as the collective expression of institutions and societies” [3]. And exactly what kind of effects are we exploring? Are we looking for media’s ability to facilitate, to prevent, to change, to reinforce and reaffirm? These are only a few of the complexities involved in mass communication research. Nevertheless, effect theories under the dominant effect paradigm have evolved that have been broadened, refined, changed, incorporated as time goes on and more is learned. In the early stages of mass communication research, the primary focus was on the power that mass media had in shaping beliefs and behavior, a propagandistic perspective, if you will. Noam Chomsky (2002) and others continue to study the effects of mass media and its role with propaganda. Chomsky (2002) and others like Altschull (1995) argued that media is powerful, but is used for “the wrong ends—in other words, no in the service of the public but rather for the political advantage of someone else” [12]). According to Chomsky (2002), media is used by the powerful elite to present propaganda that serves the interests of the wealthy against the needs and interests of the working class. The approval of the audience is gained regarding the status quo and power relationships because of the way the news is presented and framed, according to Chomsky. New stories are created to “manufacture consent by filtering the news according to the perspectives of the government and prominent private interests” [26]. Other theories have developed since then; it is interesting to note that even if communication scholars have perpetuated a more limited-effects view. Chomsky (2002) argued that those who control media in various societies seem to still assume that if you control the media, you can control the thinking of citizens in a particular society, a very clear assumption taken by modern Islamic/Arab regimes. Although mass communication theory itself went through an era where the power of the media and

its effects were dismissed to a certain extent, to modern times where the impact of media is believed to be more significant than assumed in the previous few decades. The way media has been used in non-democratic states emphasizes the more authoritarian view that media is a powerful tool of control.

For the most part, the authoritarian perspective of the role of news media is seen as negative in Western societies that believe that democracy cannot exist without a free press and free access of information (Chomsky, 2002). The Authoritarian theory first promoted by Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1956) describes that the news media's objective is to maintain social order and promote the political goals of the state. Amner (2006) described the Authoritarian assumptions:

1. Press should do nothing to undermine vested power and interests;
2. Press should be subordinate to vested power and authority;
3. Press should avoid acting in contravention of prevailing moral and political values;
4. Censorship justified in the application of these principles;
5. Criminalisation of editorial attacks on vested power, deviations from official policy, violation of moral codes (Amner, p 8, 2006).

The authoritarian theory regarding the effects of media upon its audience has branched out into several areas (Amner, 2006). For example, when the power elite influences media they have an agenda-setting purpose. As argued by Rogers & Dearing (2001) when discussing agenda-setting theory "The mass media softly but firmly present the perspective of the ruling class to their audiences...the result is consent and support" [20] p. 70. Chomsky (2002) wrote that in a democratic society, the expectation is that the media presents diverse views and is not controlled by ruling elite. However, as many studies and critics show, the American media is not particularly diverse and often reflects the interests of the elite. The audience does not often challenge the agenda. Why would an Arab audience that expects its media to be more controlled protest? This phenomenon of acceptance by both American and Arab audiences could validate to an extent the spiral of silence theory first promoted by Noelle-Nueman in 1981.

Chomsky (2002) believed that in a democracy, the assumptions are that the individual's right to freedom and liberty are more sacred than the society's right to maintain order. Some states justify their role from a different perspective believing it is their responsibility to create a stable and just society. It could very well mean controlling the sources of information in order to prevent social chaos. "Where authoritarianism stresses the importance of maintaining social order, libertarianism aims to maximize individual human freedom" (Benson, 2005, p. 3). In this light, the authoritarian regime would feel justified in maintaining a censored press, supporting the media's normative role. "At a minimum, the press is expected to avoid any criticisms of government officials and to do nothing to challenge the established order. The press may remain free to publish

without prior censorship, but the state retains the right to punish journalists or close media outlets that overstep explicit or implicit limits on reporting and commentary" (Benson, 2005, p. 3). In more extreme conditions, the press is closely censored to extend state control. The Soviet-communist press is a good example, as well as the function of press in several Islamic nations. Turkey, for example, has found it difficult to gain admission into the European Union, in part because of its censorship and control of its news media and persecution of anyone who dares criticize its governmental authority (Benson, 2005, p. 3). In recent years, however, the Islamic regimes, especially in the Arabian Gulf, have been unable to exert as much control over the media and access to outside media, and this phenomena is changing the policies of government and interactions of citizens to media sources.

#### Arab Media and Effects Theory

Hafez (2001) described the Arab media. He wrote that since the beginning of the 1990s, the mass media in the Arab world has undergone significant and radical changes. Because of new technologies like satellite television and the Internet, a more global discourse has developed with many citizens of the Arab nation states [12]. This has allowed Arab consumers to "bypass the limits of authoritarian information control" [12] p. 1. Trying to close media spaces to global forces is much less likely today than in the recent past. "The question remains, however, whether new access to external media and the widening of media horizons is sufficient to generate political and social changes in the Arab world and the Middle East" [12], p. 1.

As described by Hafez (2001), in the early 1990s, the media system of the Middle East was considered the most closed and controlled in the world by most scholars [12]. According to Hafez (2001) three different types of press were described in the Middle East: 1) the mobilized press, which is almost totally subordinate to the governments involved; 2) the loyalist press which is owned privately and not always censored, but usually supports regimes because the regimes control the resources (and persecute journalists who criticize them), and 3) the diverse press where the press is more free. [12] Kuwait and Morocco have had more free press in recent decades than the other Arab nation states (although Kuwait closed its free press during the Iran/Iraq war) [12] p. 1.

Amin (2001) agreed that before Al-Jazeera and others like it were introduced, if there was any freedom of the press, it was likely to come from newsprint stories. Radio and television were under the control of the absolute monarchies, most of them operated by government agencies. The reasons given for this model are:

"The Arab governments' desire to preserve national unity and the centralized system of government...the Arab governments' utilization of the broadcast media as a political and propaganda tool; and their interest in keeping those tools out of hostile hands' (p. 29).

Obviously, the reasons provided by Arab governments for their desire to control the media fall under a normative

approach to arrange and design media. Robison (2005) argued that in the early 1990s, Arab regimes resisted new technologies because they were a threat to the ability to control media [19]. However, in the last five to ten years, this has changed. Satellite television has been allowed, along with the Internet. These were not introduced, however, until the regimes could find further methods of control. As noted by Amin (2001):

“The lack of skill within governments to cope with what is defined as negative reporting about Arab leadership and Arab governments causes jingoistic responses, such as the banning of satellite dishes in Saudi Arabia, or the refusal to develop telecommunication structures....Arab media has responded to the cyber era by applying rules of censorship that are imposed by different nations. In the West, freedom of expression is a basic right to every citizen, and is protected at all costs. Within the Arab world, this type of censorship is easily tolerated, and even expected as a form of civic responsibility” (p. 39).

Should this acceptance of media control be so surprising? McCombs and Shaw (1972) investigated the agenda setting theory, which is one of the theories that answer different questions in my future research like what kind of messages the Arab media distributed? What are the issues that appeared in the Arab media? They wrote:

“creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. Two basis assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting: (1) the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it; (2) media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. One of the most critical aspects in the concept of an agenda-setting role of mass communication is the time frame for this phenomenon” [19] p 176.

#### Critical and Cultural Theories of Communication

The article “Communications vs. cultural studies: Overcoming the divide” by Douglas Kellner (1996), describes what he calls the bifurcation between cultural studies and communication studies. It is further complicated the examination of mass communication effects, especially when studying differences based on culture [14]. Kellner (1996) explains that two schools of scholarship, however, overcame this bifurcation to a certain extent, more specifically the Frankfurt school and the British Cultural studies perspectives [14]. The Frankfurt school integrated both culture and communication by developing a framework of critical social theory. Social critical theory promotes the idea that you should not only study the way society is, you should try to change it for the better. The theorists examined cultural artifacts in the context of industrial production,

“In which the commodities of the culture industries exhibited the same features as other products of mass production: commodification, standardization, and massification. The products of the culture industries had the specific function, however, of providing ideological

legitimation of the existing capitalist societies and of integrating individuals into the framework of mass culture and society” [14] p. 1.

Adorno, Lowenthal, Herzog and Horkheimer (1996) emphasized the importance of the so-called culture industries and the way they reproduce modern societies. Mass culture and communication are agents of “socialization, mediators of political reality, and should thus be seen as major institutions of contemporary societies with a variety of economic, political, cultural and social effects” [14], p. 1. Nevertheless, in order to be most relevant, these studies would need to be updated, according to Kellner (1996), with more work in the analysis of political economy and the production of culture, among other empirical studies. There are also problems with the way the school tries to distinguish between high and low culture. British cultural studies investigated the way that cultural forms can either serve to reinforce social domination or allow people to resist that same social domination [14]. Fontana (2000) agreed that wrote that using Gramsci’s model of hegemony, they studied both the hegemonic methods of domination and the counter hegemonic forces of resistance [11].

John Thompson developed the social media theory in 1995; he looked at the way media impact society through Thompson’s social media theory with the assumption that mass communication changes our frameworks of understanding [25]. He looked at both the communal and individual levels. Thompson’s theory can applied in the Arab region because of many reasons. One of the reasons is he purports that mass media has created new forms of social interaction which are more limited than everyday social interactions. This social interaction created by the mass media is slanted and probably prejudicial because mass media is used to create and generate propaganda [24]. Chaney (1995) defined Thompson’s theory and agreed that with his work, he wrote that “We must see ... that the use of communication media involves the creation of new forms of action and interaction in the social world, new kinds of social relationship and new ways of relating to others and to oneself” [24], p. 1.

Thompson (1995) works at three main levels of analysis. The first is cultural, which he describes the mediatization of culture [25]. For modern society, he addresses such issues as the mediatization of culture through changing sociopolitical structures, globalization, cultural imperialism, and the significance of traditions within the culture of media [24]. The second level of analysis focuses on collectivity and the nature of public life, specifically the character of the public sphere. Thompson (1995) examines the public sphere as a precursor of modernity, and how those in power have become most visible [25]. He states, “Thanks to the media, it is primarily those who exercise power, rather than those over whom power is exercised, who are subjected to a certain kind of visibility” (p. 134). As a result, power holders attempt to control and/or manipulate the outcomes of this visibility like how many presidents in Arab countries rule their countries. Thompson

(1990) explains this idea of visibility in depth [24]. He explains that skilled politicians use the media to their advantage, seeking to create and maintain a basis of support by managing their visibility in the arena of politics. In many Arab countries elite still control the media. So, using Thompson's theory is very important to describe the control of media in Arab region [24]. Thompson argues, however, that this visibility creates a double-edged sword for politicians because they are exposed to new dangers. "However much political leaders try to manage their visibility, they cannot completely control it: mediated visibility can slip out of their grasp and can, on occasion, work against them [24], p. 31.

The third level emphasizes social interaction, and how this interaction has been altered by new communication facilities. Here, Thompson (1990) is concerned with the social organization of what he calls mediated quasi-interaction, especially as seen in television, the ways the self is extended through mediated interaction, and the limitations of what he calls the institutionalized reflexivity in media culture [24] p. 31.

Baran & Davis (2006) argued about the current cultural theories regarding the relationship of media to culture examine the forms of culture that are disseminated by media. They believed that culture has actually become a commodity, according to some theorists. This "commodification of culture" [3] p. 302 results in unrealistic expectations about a person's society. Interestingly, in some ways the ideas of cultural influence under cultural theories and effects theories have been combined somewhat. For example, the commodification of culture that involves the cultivation of perspective is being increasingly controlled by the powerful elites, according to Baran & Davis (2006). So, while "the structure and content of our media system both reflect and create our overall social structure and our culture" [3] p. 302, those in power—the wealthy and the politically powerful, are more and more in control of how that media is created and what kind of structure will be developed.

#### Media, Democracy and the Growing Arab Public Sphere

Benson (2005) agreed that the Western press and communication research hold negative views of non-democratic approaches to a free press. However, the criticism of these non-democratic sources of media is not as pronounced in non-Western countries. As described by Benson (2005),

"Certain ideals in non-western societies are not necessarily anti-democratic, such as the poetic or literary ideal of the Arabic press. Democratic normative theories have been motivating forces behind emerging non-western media outlets such as the Qatar-based Arabic language cable news channel Al-Jazeera (modeled after the BBC and CNN). Even in the most repressive authoritarian states, the language of democracy has become commonplace" (p. 3).

In Western democracies, the role of the press is seen as critical to maintaining democracy as promoted from a libertarian point of view. The normative function of the press would be to promote the market place of ideas to support

individual liberty and freedom of choice by informing a citizenry of a variety of perspectives, news, stories, etc. Just as there should be a free marketplace for trade, so the Western ideal is a free market place of ideas. However, over the years, a free market place of ideas was often tainted by the need for profit making. So the radical libertarian view (which believed government was the primary threat to a free press and democracy), was replaced with the perspective that the media must also serve to promote social responsibility and accountability. Government regulation was created to curtail an unfettered profit-oriented press/media [3] p. 107.

The American press has many functions from a normative point of view. One is to be a watchdog against government abuse. Another is to allow for a diverse and rich source of opinions and images, "the proposition that the media should provide a robust, uninhibited, and wide-open marketplace of ideas, in which opposing views may meet, contend and take each other's measure" (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2000, p. 25). Still another function is the public's right to know of events, policies, phenomena etc. Although the western, democratic press hopes to fulfill these functions, many critics argue that considering American media is owned by a few giant media corporations, they are remote and closed to accountability; they do not offer a broad spectrum of ideas; they are bounded by a two-party political system, and they are primarily concerned with private enterprise and profits and the values of a "consumer society" (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2000, p. 25). So, even though the press may aspire to certain normative functions, those who control and manage media may have very different goals which often cause conflict and dilemma. Because of these factors, is the current state of the American press meeting its democratic goals? And now that the Arab media has become more open, does it really lag so far behind in meeting certain democratic goals?

Amin (2001) described the Arab audiences. He wrote that Arab people have always been passionate about politics and social issues, but heated debates often took place, at least in recent decades, in the private sphere. Perhaps because of the influence of a "spiral of silence" Neumann (1981) as described earlier, and because of very real threats to personal safety, too much criticism of powers that be were silenced, curtailed and subverted [23]. Amin (2001) wrote that the Arab audience was often passive, not believing in the legitimacy of the news media because of the function of the media as a mouthpiece for those in power. Again, this silence is being broken, and a new public sphere is emerging—one that has strong elements of democracy, at the very least, a call for ordinary citizens to have more voice in public affairs. Neumann (1981) who developed the spiral of silence theory discussed the meaning of her theory [23]. She mentioned that media have different influences under certain circumstances, and this influence is limited. Therefore, a large gap can develop between representation in the media and the attitudes of the people. She wrote "public opinion is here defined as controversial opinions that one is able to express in public without becoming isolated...this applies to fields subject to

changes, that is, fields of opinion that are in flux...public opinion is constituted by attitudes and modes of behavior one has to express in public if one does not want to become isolated" (Neumann, 1973, p. 145). In recent years, this spiral of silence is beginning to change as Arab citizens are more willing to speak out in public places about events and issues.

What is a public sphere? As described by Soules (2001), a public sphere began to develop in the 1700s when people began to congregate and socialize in coffee houses, volunteer associations, literary societies and so forth [22]. The success of the public sphere depends upon:

The extent of access (as close to universal as possible), the degree of autonomy (the citizens must be free of coercion), the rejection of hierarchy (so that each might participate on an equal footing), the rule of law (particularly the subordination of the state), and the quality of participation (the common commitment to the ways of logic) [22], p. 1.

Soules (2001) mentioned that no society has reached the ideal public sphere because there are always exclusions, to one degree or another, based on ethnicity, gender, class, religion, etc [22]. In recent decades, Habermas argued that there were other factors that "deformed" the public sphere including the growth of culture industries and large private interests, among others. For example, large newspapers and news organizations that are mostly devoted to profits "turned the press into an agent of manipulation: It became the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere" (p. 1). In most societies, the illusion of the public sphere is maintained, but mostly to provide legitimacy to the decision of those in power.

People are motivated by inclusion or exclusion much of the time. The spiral of silence theory explains why, even when expectations about media may not be met, people may not be too vocal if their views are not mainstream or appear confrontational. There is a big connection between the theory and the Arab countries. In an Arab society where confrontation is often avoided, the spiral of silence theory could easily be applied. Rejection or isolation is social death in an Arab society. And so, people will exhibit the spiral of silence in public opinion making. Those who are managing and controlling media according to an accepted normative view would gain even more power as those who have different opinions are often indirectly silenced [16].

In recent years, however, there has been a shift in Arab media that has already had a profound impact. With the introduction of Al-Jazeera and other open and uncensored (although not uninfluenced) media, the control exerted by Arab regimes has become relatively ineffective. "In fact, Al-Jazeera has triggered a profound shift in the way the Arab mediascape functions which may potentially contribute to the reconfiguration of the political systems in the Middle East region" [16] p. 67.

### III. CONCLUSION

The Arab public sphere was changed in the last decade, after the appearance of Al-Jazeera channel many Arab people decided to choose different sources of exclusive news like Al-Jazeera's news. Although as stated by El-Nawawy & Iskander (2003), Al-Jazeera is by far the preferred news and program channel in the Arab world, this does not mean that the audience believes Al-Jazeera is completely objective, 58% of those surveyed believe that Al-Jazeera is not entirely independent from the Qatar government, and that it still needs to establish more independence. However, "it is still seen as the best broadcast organization to present live events, a pro-Arab perspective, controversial events and content, which is all revolutionary to an Arab audience" (p. 49). Still many Arab audiences do not admit that new Arabic channel like Al-Jazeera is not governmental sponsored.

El-Nawawy and Iskander (2003) wrote that Al-Jazeera's managing director explains that the staff of the broadcast station all has professional backgrounds, many with Western media; however, the purpose was to transform that experience into an Arabic presence. He states, "We know the mentality of the Arabs—but we also want the expatriate Arab audience, who are used to Western media" (p. 54). Another criticism of Al-Jazeera is that in its desire for audience ratings, just like Western media outlets, the station is being led by the masses; it doesn't lead the masses. The question becomes, say the authors, should the media lead the masses? Is this the role of the media? Ideally, the news media is completely objective; however, in its role on commercialized television, it would be hard to find any media that is completely objective, being also driven to respond to local sensibilities. Others criticize Al-Jazeera for being sensationalistic to win ratings and being nothing more than a tabloid [20] Al-Jazeera has established itself by creating and driving controversy, and it appears that Arab audiences are ready for such controversy.

With an increasing number of young adults, both men and women, receiving higher education in the Arab world, along with their greater mobility and ability to access new sources of communication/information, there has been a "fragmentation of religious and political authority, challenging authoritarianism in many domains" [8] p. 40. Eickelman (2002) argues that because of new information technologies, Arab regimes have had to adapt to what some call the Arab street [8]. The term refers to the growing ability of Arab citizens to have access to uncensored television and international news coverage. This accessibility is influencing the Arab public's view of its leadership. Arab governments are responding, although it is not clear how much impact this new access will have on future policy. Still, even though Eickelman believes the Arab street, (public discourse) is still not overt, "...Nonetheless, its use indicates that policy makers at least acknowledge that even regional authoritarian and single-party states now have 'publics' to take into account" [8] p. 40. The current regimes can no longer ignore the reality

of the emerging public sphere that is growing in strength and vitality in the Arab world.

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