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Bachelor Thesis

The Arab Spring and Mass Media

An Analysis of the Role of Al Jazeera in
the Fall of Mubarak in Egypt

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the role of media in political change, specifically with a focus on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and the role played by Al Jazeera. The research question that guides this study is whether Al Jazeera had a significant impact on the development of the turmoil in Egypt. Using a comprehensive approach, this study will employ a content analysis of Al Jazeera's coverage during the Arab Spring protests in Egypt from 2010 to 2011, using four major mass media theories. This exploratory and descriptive study will provide a deeper understanding of how the network framed the protests and the role it played in shaping public opinion.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Egypt, Al Jazeera, Political Change, Mass media

Resumen

Este estudio pretende investigar el papel de los medios de comunicación en el cambio político, concretamente centrándose en la Revolución Egipcia de 2011 y el papel desempeñado por Al Jazeera. La pregunta de investigación que guía este estudio es si Al Jazeera tuvo un impacto significativo en el desarrollo de la agitación en Egipto. Utilizando un enfoque integral, este estudio empleará un análisis de contenido de la cobertura de Al Jazeera durante las protestas de la Primavera Árabe en Egipto de 2010 a 2011, utilizando cuatro grandes teorías de los medios de comunicación de masas. Este estudio exploratorio y descriptivo proporcionará una comprensión más profunda de cómo la cadena enmarcó las protestas y el papel que desempeñó en la formación de la opinión pública.

Palabras clave: Primaveras Árabes, Egipto, Al Jazeera, Cambio Político, Medios de Comunicación

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List of terms and abbreviations

Table 1 below portrays the different abbreviations and acronyms employed throughout the present dissertation:

Table 1

Al Jazeera	AJ
Al Jazeera English	AJE
Agenda-Setting Theory	AST
Cultivation Theory	CT
Middle East	ME
Raqeb, Sawer, Dawen	RASSD
Reception Theory	RT
Resource Mobilization Theory	RMT
United States	US

1. Introduction

The year 2011 left an indelible mark in our collective memory as a time of significant global events. It was a year marked by historic moments, including the devastating earthquake and subsequent tsunami that ravaged Japan, the United States' (US) successful capture of Osama Bin Laden, and the sweeping protests across Arab nations that led to the downfall of many autocratic regimes.

The year 2010 had ended at a peak with the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian street vendor. Soon after his immolation, protests began in Sidi Bouzid and rapidly spread across the country and onto the entire North African strip (Seib, 2008). Still early on, on January 6th 2011, political scientist and Middle East (ME) specialist Marc Lynch wrote in an article for Foreign Policy:

“I don't expect these protests to bring down any regimes, but really who knows? It's an unpredictable moment. Many of these regimes are led by aging, fading leaders such as Hosni Mubarak and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali”

(Lynch, 2011)

Ironically, those protests which turned into the violent popular revolt of 2010 and 2011 led to the exile of Ben Ali and his family on January 14th, 2011, just a few days after Lynch's statement (Al Jazeera, 2011). Ten days after Ben Ali's departure, protests in Egypt commenced. On January 25th, 2011, a massive crowd of thousands of Egyptians flooded the streets of Cairo, marking the beginning of what would later be known as the 2011 Egyptian Revolution (United States Institute for Peace, 2019). As events unfolded, the newsroom of an Arab media network based in Doha that only had four correspondents on the ground emerged as the leading source for broadcasting the events in Egypt, providing unparalleled coverage and analysis that helped shape the narrative of the revolution. This news network was Al Jazeera (AJ) (Gillard & Wells, 2012).

This study aims to examine the role of mass media in political change, specifically with a focus on the 2011 Egyptian revolution and the role played by AJ. The research question that guides this study is whether AJ had a significant impact on the development of the turmoil in Egypt and the subsequent fall of the regime. To answer this question, this

study will adopt a comprehensive approach. Firstly, the history of the AJ network will be presented, followed by the establishment of a theoretical framework based on mass media theories that relate to the coverage of political revolutions. Next, a brief historical review of the political and media landscape of Egypt before and after the Egyptian revolution, followed by an in depth analysis of AJ's coverage during the Arab Spring protests in Egypt to determine whether the strategies used by the network have had in fact an impact in the fall of the Mubarak regime.

2. Methodology

This study will employ a comprehensive approach that will involve a content analysis of AJ's coverage during the Arab Spring protests in Egypt from 2010 and 2011. The content analysis will be conducted using the five major mass media theories: agenda-setting theory, cultivation theory, reception theory, resource mobilization theory, and contraflow. The content of AJ's coverage will be coded using these theories, allowing for a deep understanding of how the network framed the protests and the role it played in shaping public opinion.

The research design of this study will be explanatory and descriptive in nature. This study will be qualitative and will rely on secondary data sources, such as academic journals, books, and news articles. The theoretical framework of this study will be based on five major mass media theories, providing a robust framework for analyzing the content of AJ's coverage. The data analysis process will involve coding the content of AJ's coverage using mass media theories, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the role of media in political change. The study will also consider limitations, including the reliance on secondary data sources and the potential subjectivity of the coding process.

3. Theoretical framework: mass media theories

To ensure a comprehensive analysis of the phenomena investigated in this study, it is essential to present a clear theoretical framework. The framework presented in this section will serve as a solid foundation for understanding the various aspects of the research topic and guide the analysis. The focus of this study will be on the role of mass media theories in exploring the impact of AJ on the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The theories that will be explored include the agenda-setting theory, cultivation theory, reception theory, resource mobilization theory, and contraflow theory. These theories provide a framework for examining the relationship between media, audiences, and social change. By analyzing these theories, we can gain a deeper understanding of how media influences society and how it can contribute to significant social and political changes.

3.1. Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory (AST), as proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, explores the influence of media on shaping the presentation of news reports and issues, ultimately impacting in the public's perception. Through the prioritization and emphasis given to specific items, the audience tends to perceive those as the most important and relevant. This cognitive process, known as *accessibility*, is facilitated by the media's provision of information that resonates with the audience, highlighting major societal issues and reflecting people's concerns (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In simpler words, the media decides what the public will consume.

The theory operates at two different levels. The first level focuses on the media's objectives and the influence it exerts on individuals. This level examines the immediate thoughts and responses triggered in people when exposed to media content, it tells people what they should focus their attention on, what topics. The second level examines how the media directs attention to how people should think about particular issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), making the public believe the media's opinion as theirs. To capture the audience's interest, news reports may be sensationalized, aiming to implant specific thoughts and ideas. Media plays a role in making certain issues go viral by strategically crafting and framing news coverage (Scheufele, 2000).

Agenda-setting theory finds applications in various domains such as political advertising, campaigns, business news, and public relations. A key concept associated with the theory is *gatekeeping*, which involves the selection and control of content disseminated through the media. Editors serve as gatekeepers, determining which events are deemed newsworthy and deserving of public attention. (Lewin, 1947)

Another strategy used in AST is framing, which, on the other hand, involves shaping and contextualizing news content within a particular frame of reference.¹ The media frames news in ways that influence how people attach importance and perceive the context of an issue (Scheufele, 2000). Different frames can lead to varied interpretations and perspectives among the audience.

Several factors influence agenda-setting, including gatekeepers, editors, managers, and external influences such as government officials and influential individuals. The close relationship between the media and elite society can significantly impact the media agenda and, in turn, shape the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Despite the insights provided by agenda-setting theory, some criticisms should be considered. Media users may not pay close attention to details, and the theory's effect may be weaker for individuals who have already formed strong opinions. It is important to note that media cannot create problems but can influence awareness, priorities, and perceptions by altering the level of public attention and importance given to specific issues (Scheufele, 2000).

3.2. Cultivation Theory

The cultivation theory (CT), initially developed by Professors George Gerbner and Larry Gross in the mid-1960s was first published in their research “Cultural Indicators Project” and later expanded in the article “Living with Television: The Violence Profile”. This research aimed to examine whether watching television could affect viewers’

¹ According to the framing theory, the presentation of information to the audience, referred to as "the frame," has a significant impact on how people interpret and process that information. Frames can be seen as conceptual frameworks that help structure and organize the meaning conveyed by a message (Goffman, 1974).

perceptions of the everyday world. The theory argues that consistent television programs can shape a person's attitudes and opinions, even if it does not make them more likely to engage in a particular behavior. It reinforces existing attitudes and values in society, making them more powerful and influential (Gerbner & Gross, *Living With Television: The Violence Profile*, 1976). Meaning, watching television shows that portray violence may shape a person's perception of the world, making them think that violence is more prevalent in society than it actually is. This could influence a general belief that the world is a violent and dangerous place, even if it does not make people more likely to engage in violent behavior. Also, heavy television viewers are more influenced by the framing of the world in television programs than light viewers, especially regarding topics of which the viewer has little knowledge.

This theory was applied in many surveys conducted by Gerbner and Gross during their first research, one of them was conducted on about 450 New Jersey schoolchildren and showed that heavy television viewers were more likely to be fearful about walking alone in a city at night than light viewers. The cultivation effect suggested then that heavy viewers' attitudes become more consistent with the world of television programs, leading to a distorted perception of reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1967).

The theory was also later applied to foreign policy in the study "The Gulf War: A study of the media, public opinion, and public knowledge". This report found that during the Gulf War, heavy American television viewers were more familiar with the military terminology used in the coverage of the war and more supportive of it. But they were also less informed about other issues in the ME (Lewis, Jhally, & Morgan, 1991). On the other hand, the study "Growing up with television: Cultivation processes" conducted by Professors Morgan, Shanahan and Signorielli found that the amount of television news repeated coverage in the US given to the conflict in the ME was positively related to the viewers' perceptions of the region as being violent, especially among individuals who had never visited the region. But this heavy showing of violence in the news did not affect their actions (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2001). Americans did not become more violent. This is because, as Gerbner and Gross explained, the representation of violence constitutes a message about law and order rather than a cause of more aggressive behavior by viewers (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

Overall, the cultivation theory highlights the power of mass media in shaping viewer's reality, as Gerbner and Gross explained, the over representation of violence in the television constitutes a symbolic message that is not a reflection of the world, but a world in itself (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

3.3. Reception Theory

In 1973, Stuart Hall introduced the reception theory (RT), also known as audience theory in this essay "Encoding and Decoding Television Discourse". According to this theory, media texts are created with encoded messages by producers and then decoded by audiences. The audience's understanding of a media text is merely a re-representation of the encoded messages conveyed by producers. The encoded messages often contain shared rules and symbols that are commonly understood by people. Decoding the messages successfully means that the audience understands the message sent by the encoder completely, as intended (Hall, 1973).

Hall proposed three ways in which audiences can perceive and decode media messages. The first way is the dominant or preferred reading where the audience accepts and agrees with the messages presented in the media text. This audience takes the work as given without any extra notes (Hall, 1973). For example, in a movie, a character portrayed with a black cloak, cruel voice, and sunken eyes is easily recognized as a villain. The second way is negotiated reading, where the audience agrees with some parts of the messages but rejects those that are opposed to their beliefs. They accept the author's messages even though it goes against their personal convictions because they know it is necessary for the plot (Hall, 1973). For instance, in a movie where the character performs bad acts, the audience understands that it is essential for the storyline.

The third way is the oppositional reading, where the audience rejects the messages conveyed in the media text and does not agree with them. This is because the content may be morally wrong, emotionally disturbing, contain unnecessary adult content of violence and blood, or go against their religious beliefs (Hall, 1973). For instance, smoking was portrayed as a sign of prestige, image, wealth, power, and happiness in Indian films during the 1970s-1980s. However, the reality is that smoking causes cancer and is an unhealthy

habit.

In summary, Stuart Hall's RT explains how media texts convey encoded messages, which are later decoded by audiences. The way audiences decode the messages can result in a dominant, negotiated, or oppositional reading of media text.

3.4. Resource Mobilization Theory (social media)

Resource mobilization theory (RMT) is a sociological theory that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on how social movements can effectively utilize available resources to achieve their goals. It suggests that the success of social movements lies in their ability to mobilize resources such as money, organizational skills, and media attention (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). In the context of social media, RMT can be applied to understand how social movements use online platforms to mobilize resources. Social media provides a new avenue for social movements to raise awareness, promote events, fundraise, and connect like-minded individuals, leading to the formation of social movements (Edwards & Kane, 2014). One of the significant advantages of social media for social movements is its decentralized and horizontal organizational structure. By enabling communication and coordination without hierarchical leadership, social media allows for broader participation, adaptability, and flexibility within social movements (Golhasani & Hosseinirad, 2016).

The perspective of RMT addresses Olson's challenge by highlighting the need to consider incentives, mechanisms to reduce costs, and career benefits that motivate collective action. It emphasizes the aggregation of resources (such as money and labor) as a crucial factor in understanding social movement activity. This perspective also recognizes the importance of involvement from individuals and organizations external to the social movement. It applies basic supply and demand model to the flow of resources toward and away from social movements, while considering the impact of costs and rewards on individual and organizational involvement (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

In summary, the emerging perspective of resource mobilization theory differs from the traditional perspective in several ways. Regarding the support base, the traditional

perspective emphasizes aggrieved populations as the primary sources of support, while the resource mobilization perspective recognizes that supporters may not necessarily share the movement's underlying values.

In terms of strategy and tactics, the traditional perspective focuses on bargaining, persuasion, or violence as means to influence authorities, whereas the resource mobilization perspective highlights the strategic tasks of social movement organizations, including mobilization supporters and effecting change in targeted areas. Lastly, concerning the relation to the larger society, the traditional perspective often overlooks how movement organizations can utilize the environment for their own purposes, whereas the resource mobilization perspective acknowledges that society provides the infrastructure utilized by social movement industries and other sectors (Jenkins, 1983).

3.5. Contraflow

Contraflow theory refers to the concept within media studies that explores the reverse flow of information or media content against the dominant or mainstream direction. It challenges the conventional understanding of media dissemination by examining alternative or counter-narratives that circulate in society. In the 21st century there has been a rise of multi-vocal multimedia and multi-directional flows of information. This is attributed to the proliferation of satellite and cable television, as well as the growing use of online communication, enabled by digital technology (Kishan, 2019).

The deregulation and privatization of broadcasting and telecommunication networks have allowed media companies to operate on a transnational scale, seeking new consumers worldwide. Commercialization has led to media system primarily driven by markets and advertising revenues, viewing the audience as consumers rather than citizens. This shift has resulted in the expansion and acceleration of media flow across different directions and regions (Thussu, 2006).

The US, along with Western media, dominates the global media landscape due to its political and economic power. American media products, including news, entertainment, and information, have a global reach and influence. Britain, as a close ally

of the US, benefits from this globalized media environment. While some peripheral countries have become exporters of television programs and films, the US remains the leader in audio-visual product exports. The convergence of television and broadband has further opened opportunities for media content flow, with Western media conglomerates regionalizing and localizing their content to reach broader audiences (Kishan, 2019).

In this last century, other international media players, including private and state-sponsored flows have emerged. A clear example of this is Al-Jazeera. These media flows have both regional and global presence, catering to diverse audiences, this is called a “new media” age, where the power of media in shaping the contemporary global political arena is evident. Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” theory highlights the influence of media forces on international politics. The speed of the internet and the spread of information have elevated the significance of information control. News media play a vital role in today’s world (Bahador, 2011). To understand this, this paper will now delve into the concepts of the CNN effect and the AJ effect.

3.5.1. From CNN effect to Al Jazeera effect

Media’s role in politics and government foreign policymaking is undeniable. Media exercises agenda-setting on governments, compelling them to make foreign policy decisions, this is known as the CNN effect. The accelerant effect on real-time news media acts as a pressing factor on policymakers (Bahador, 2011). However, hasty decisions made under this effect may not always yield favorable outcomes. Conversely, the impediment effect allow media to obstruct certain government foreign policy decisions by challenging public support. When media perceives a decision as contrary to the nation’s interest, they broadcast news against it, striving to sway public opinion. The agenda-setting effect arises when media extensively covers specific news, influencing public opinion and pressuring policymakers to take swift action based on public reaction (Maimuna, 2021).

The central concern in the context of media agenda-setting is the consolidation of media power. During the 1990s, as the international communication sector underwent deregulation and liberalization, the media industry experienced a parallel transformation. New communication technologies such as satellite, cable, digital, and mobile platforms

emerged and contributed to the creation of a global market for media products (McChesney, 1999). This convergence of media and technology, combined with the pursuit of vertical integration within the industry, led to a concentration of media power in the hands of a small number of large transnational corporations, undermining the diversity of media sources (Daya, 2019).

The landscape of media corporations has undergone significant transformations in recent decades. In the past, these corporations operated within distinct sectors of the industry. However, the privatization of broadcasting and the convergence of industries have led media companies to diversify their interests and pursue mergers and acquisitions. This trend towards media consolidation has gained momentum in the 21st century, leading to a situation where a small number of conglomerates wield substantial control over both the content and distribution of media worldwide (McPhail, 2014). Consequently, the consolidation of media power poses critical implications for media plurality, as it limits the number of entities influencing the global media landscape. The concentration of power in the hands of a few conglomerates raises concerns about diversity, independence, and the democratic functioning of the media industry as a whole (Birkinbine, Gomez, & Wasko, 2016). As depicted in the provided Table 2, the top-ranking news sites based on average monthly audience in 2010 were dominated by American and British transnational corporations.

Table 2

Most Popular News Websites as Measured by, Three Research Firms <i>Average Monthly Audience in 2010</i>								
Top News Sites, Nielsen			Top News Sites, comScore			Top News Sites, Hitwise		
Rank	Domain	Unique Visitors	Rank	Domain	Unique Visitors	Rank	Domain	Share of Monthly Web Traffic²
1	Yahoo! News Websites	40459	1	Yahoo! News Network	94,509	1	news.yahoo.com	8.53%
2	CNN Digital Network	35658	2	CNN Network	67,845	2	www.msnbc.msn.com	3.50
3	MSNBC Digital Network	31951	3	MSNBC Digital Network	48,721	3	www.cnn.com	2.64
4	AOL News	20821	4	AOL News	35,017	4	news.google.com	2.04
5	NYTimes.com	15948	5	The New York Times Brand	32,386	5	www.foxnews.com	1.72
6	Fox News Digital Network	15502	6	Tribune Newspapers	24,666	6	www.nytimes.com	1.41
7	ABCNEWS Digital Network	13251	7	Huffington Post	24,542	7	news.aol.com	1.29
8	TheHuffingtonPost.com	11510	8	ABC News Digital	19,343	8	www.drudgereport.com	1.19
9	Google News	11382	9	USATODAY Sites	17,336	9	www.huffingtonpost.com	0.99
10	washingtonpost.com	10095	10	Washingtonpost.com	16,353	10	www.usatoday.com	0.95
11	CBS News Network	9947	11	Advance Internet	16,000	11	local.yahoo.com	0.90
12	USATODAY.com	9147	12	CBS News	15,332	12	www.topix.com	0.74
13	LA Times	8314	13	Wall Street Journal Online	13,673	13	today.msnbc.msn.com	0.60
14	Daily News Online Edition	7247	14	Mail Online	13,596	14	www.washingtonpost.com	0.59
15	BBC	6519	15	McClatchy Corporation	13,447	15	www.associatedcontent.com	0.53

Source: (Olmstead, Mitchell, & Rosenstiel, 2011)

The CNN effect emerged in the post-Cold War era, primarily during the Gulf War in 1990-1991. CNN, as the first 24-hour news network, gained prominence by providing live coverage from the frontlines of the war, shaping public perception. Subsequently, the CNN effect influenced American interventions in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo under the pretext of humanitarian crises. Moreover, the United Nations intervened in Iraq due to media coverage of the Kurdish crisis (Bahador, 2011).

The CNN effect had a Western-centric interpretation and was not entirely unbiased, often portraying Arab people negatively. The Al Jazeera effect emerged as a counterflow to Western hegemony as the result of a growing demand for a news media outlet that could provide impartial perspectives. AJ gained prominence during the Palestine Intifada in 2000

and significantly influenced policies during the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon in 2005. Its extensive news coverage led to policy shifts by Arab leaders during the Arab Spring (Wessler & Adolphsen, 2008).

The AJ effect had a transformative impact on the global dissemination of information, extending its influence beyond the Arab World. Notably, AJ English (AJE)² achieved unprecedented global outreach during the Arab uprisings, offering Arab perspectives to audiences in different regions, appearing as a clear example of contraflow (Hachten & Scotton, 2011). This led to a surge in viewership, exceeding 500% and setting a new benchmark. By successfully diverting Arab viewers from state-controlled channels, AJ not only reshaped public perceptions of their rulers but also revolutionized the practices of traditional media outlets. Its significance extended beyond the Arab World, paralleling the previously explained CNN's rise as a global news organization following the 1991 Baghdad bombing (Schattle, 2012). The influence of AJ has been so profound that in April this year, AJE was honored as the broadcaster of the year at the 2023 New York Festivals TV & Film Awards (Al Jazeera, 2023).

3.5.2. The new pan-Arabism

Pan-Arabism is a political movement that emerged in the late 19th century and aimed to unify Arab states and promote their political, cultural, and socioeconomic unity. It gained momentum in the 1960s and was closely tied to the history of colonialism and postcolonialism in the ME and North Africa. However, despite its anticolonial foundations, pan-Arabism failed to align itself effectively with the larger Global South struggle. Over time, it became more inwardly focused on intra-Arab issues and neglected potential alliances with other transnational movements, such as pan-Africanism and pan-Asianism. This limited vision ultimately contributed to the political drift of pan-Arabism, as it became

² In 2006, Al Jazeera launched AJE, an international 24-hour news channel that operates under the ownership of the Al Jazeera Media Network, which is itself owned by the government of Qatar. It holds the distinction of being the first English-language news channel headquartered in Western Asia. Unlike a centralized approach, the channel's news management rotates between broadcasting centers in Doha and London (Holmwood, 2006). It is part of the Al Jazeera Network which consists of: AJ Satellite channel, AJE, AJ Documentary, AJ Sport, AJ Mubasher (Live), AJ Media Training and Development Centre, Centre for Studies, AJ Mobile, Al Jazeera.net (the Arabic web site), Al Jazeera English Online (the English web site)

associated with postcolonial authoritarianism in many countries (Mohamedou, 2018).

In the 21st century, the concept of Pan-Arabism has undergone significant transformations, influenced by the events of the Arab Spring and subsequent developments. The region, which had long been governed by autocrats and dictators, witnessed a profound upheaval that shattered the old-order formula of stability at the expense of economic freedoms, cultural expression, and political rights (Lewis, Jhally, & Morgan, 1991). The fall of these once "invincible" leaders unleashed new forces and sparked cultural struggles, leading to sectarianism, tribalism, and popular autocracy in some societies. This marked the creation of the new pan-Arabism, one that is distinguished by the unifying seek of freedom from dictators in the region. This new pan-Arabism is portrayed in the political position of AJ. During its early years it covered important events in Palestine and the Arab Spring uprisings (Andoni, 2011). AJ provided a platform for Arab intellectuals, activists, and politicians to discuss and debate the future of the region. By highlighting the common challenges faced by Arab societies and the need for unity in the face of external pressures, AJ contributed to the reinvigoration of pan-Arabism as a concept (Mohamedou, 2018).

4. Al Jazeera

Al Jazeera's (AJ) establishment in 1996, through a decree issued by Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, providing a loan of 500 million Qatari riyals (equivalent to US\$137 million) (Miles, 2005). It was the first independent news channel in the Arab world marked a significant milestone in the region's media landscape. Breaking away from state-controlled narratives that had restricted information and stifled free expression, AJ aimed to provide audiences with a comprehensive and diverse range of news (Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, 2008). In 1999, the network achieved another milestone by becoming the first news agency to broadcast 24 hours a day, a groundbreaking move that revolutionized journalism in the region (Al Jazeera, 2006).

With a founding motto of "The Opinion and the Other opinion," AJ committed itself to presenting multiple perspectives and empowering its audience through informative and integrity-driven journalism (Powers, 2011). Within a year, its workforce grew to 500 employees, and it established bureaus in various locations, including the EU and Russia (Seib, 2008). Despite facing controversy, AJ rapidly gained influence as one of the most prominent news agencies in the Arab world, surpassing other major networks in terms of viewership (Powers, 2011). The network's reach expanded further with the launch of a free Arabic-language website in 2001 and the availability of its TV feed in the United Kingdom through British Sky Broadcasting³ (Al Jazeera, 2006).

The AJ effect emerged as a groundbreaking moment in the history of Arab and global media. Despite numerous challenges, including threats and attacks on journalists, AJ remained committed to its journalistic mission, earning international recognition and awards for its in-depth and unbiased reporting (Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, 2008).

The network gained significant attention in the West during the search for Osama bin Laden and the Taliban in Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 attacks. While some criticized AJ for airing videos received from bin Laden and the Taliban, it played a

³ British Sky Broadcasting, now Sky UK Limited is a prominent British broadcaster and telecommunications company. As the largest subscription television provider in the United Kingdom, Sky UK holds a significant position in the media industry. Notably, the company possesses exclusive broadcasting rights for the prestigious Premier League, showcasing live football matches to its vast subscriber base. Furthermore, Sky UK has secured nearly all domestic rights for Hollywood films, solidifying its dominance in the entertainment sector (Horsman, 1999).

crucial role in providing alternative perspectives during the war. The network's bureau in Kabul provided better access to capturing events, distinguishing it from other networks (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003). However, tragedy struck when the Kabul office was destroyed by a U.S. missile in 2001 (BBC News, 2001).

AJ faced further challenges as it grew in prominence. By 2002, it had a substantial budget, ad revenues, and an estimated viewership of 45 million worldwide. However, it faced competition from Al Arabiya⁴, backed by the Middle East Broadcasting Center and Saudi Arabia (Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, 2008). Controversy arose again in 2003 when AJ broadcasted a tape from Al Qaeda featuring Ayman al-Zawahiri⁵, who advocated for further terrorism against Western countries (Al Jazeera, 2011). Additionally, the network encountered issues related to the arrest of one of its journalists in connection with the Madrid train bombings, and tensions arose between AJ and the Bush administration, with pressure on Qatar to influence the network's news coverage (Dahl, 2016).

During the 2003 Iraq War, AJ's facilities and footage were highly sought after by foreign networks seeking alternative perspectives. The network made organizational changes, moving its sports coverage to a separate channel, Al Jazeera Sport, to focus on news and public affairs programming (Miles, 2005).

Today, AJ is one of the largest and most influential international news networks, with headquarters in the Arab world, over 70 bureaus worldwide, and a diverse team of more than 3,000 employees from 95 countries. Embracing innovation, the network pioneers new storytelling techniques, particularly targeting the younger generation, while remaining true to its founding principles (Al Jazeera, s.f.). AJ has revitalized the Arab news industry by introducing lively debates and raising critical issues, transforming political discourse and fostering active engagement among its audience. Its credibility and trust among viewers serve as a testament to its enduring impact and success (Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, 2008).

In the 2010s, AJ once again made history by being the first channel to air the Tunisian protests in 2010, which ignited the Arab Spring across other Arab countries. This coverage

⁴ Al Arabiya is an international Arabic news television channel based in Riyadh operated by the media conglomerate MBC. It was established by relatives of the Saudi royal family in 2002 as a response to Al Jazeera's criticism of the Saudi royal family. It is the second most frequently watched channel after Al Jazeera in Saudi Arabia (Kraidy, 2006).

⁵ Transcript of the audiotape can be found here: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3047903.stm

brought increased scrutiny from governments in the region (Miladi, 2011). Despite challenges and controversies, AJ has firmly established itself as a major global news network, reshaping the media landscape and influencing public discourse throughout the Arab world and beyond.

4.1. The role of Al Jazeera in the Arab Spring

AJ played a significant role during the Arab Spring, acting as a vital source of information and amplifying the voices of the people involved in the uprisings. Its coverage went beyond the traditional news agenda, collaborating with citizen journalists and utilizing new media platforms to provide a comprehensive and diverse perspective on the events unfolding in countries like Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Syria (Lynch, 2016). This approach allowed AJ to convey the authentic stories and experiences of those on the ground, resonating not only in the Arab world but also capturing the attention of global audiences.

The network's commitment uncovering the truth and its relative independence from government control positioned AJ as a credible and trustworthy source of news during a time when many state-controlled media outlets were discredited (Seib, 2012). Its comprehensive coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings earned AJ prestigious journalism awards and solidified reputation as a leading news organization. By filling the void left by previous regime-controlled media, AJ became a vital reference point for discussions and analysis surrounding the Arab Spring, influencing public opinion, and shaping the narrative of the uprisings both within the region and internationally (El Jammal, 2012). The network's coverage during the Arab Spring further cemented its prominent position in the global media landscape, highlighting the impact of alternative and independent news sources in times of social and political upheaval (Seib, 2012).

5. Politics and media in Egypt

5.1. Before 2011

The control of politics by the Egyptian government prior to 2011 was characterized by a tight grip on media and the manipulation of information to maintain the status quo. In the 2000s, Egypt experienced a series of political protests that focused on coordinating diverse movements rather than building traditional political parties. Opposition parties were deemed ineffective in bringing about change, leading activists to seek alternative modes of action outside parliamentary politics (Collombier, 2013).

During this period, the media landscape in Egypt underwent a process of semi-liberalization, resulting in controlled pluralism. State-controlled broadcasting channels and party-owned print media continued to hold influence, but the regime allowed limited pockets of free expression as a strategic move to appease Western allies and attract foreign investments. The economic liberalization of audio-visual media in 2001 and print media in 2003 led to the emergence of semi-independent private media outlets (Roll, 2013). However, these outlets were initially expected to align with the regime's agenda, as licenses were granted to a select group of regime-loyal business magnates.

A significant turning point occurred in 2004 with the launch of Al-Masry Al-Youm (المصري اليوم), the first private daily newspaper. This marked a shift in the media landscape, as it adopted a kind of professionalism to the narrative. It introduced legitimate controversies and alternative interpretations of the political reality (Kassem, 2017). This shift indicated a departure from previous media practices that were more aligned with the regime-loyalist agenda. The media started to prioritize professionalism and brought forth diverse perspectives, adding credibility to their reporting and challenging the dominant narrative. Private media outlets aimed to enhance their credibility and secure readership and viewership by incorporating Western-oriented journalism practices and diverse sources. This shift in the media landscape allowed for a more nuanced understanding of political events and provided the audience with a broader range of viewpoints to consider (Sakr, 2013).

During the country's first multicandidate election in September 2005, Hosni Mubarak's victory was portrayed as a significant milestone, with state-run television

ignoring anti-Mubarak protests and opposition party calling for a boycott due to perceived electoral manipulation (Lynch, 2016). At this time, for one of the first times, AJ provided a different perspective, airing an interview⁶ with political commentator Hassanein Heikal, a prominent critic of the president who was not allowed to appear on Egyptian channels. Heikal expressed skepticism about Mubarak's promises of democratic reforms, highlighting the limitations of state-controlled media in providing diverse viewpoints (Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, 2008).

The following parliamentary elections later further revealed the discrepancies between state-run Egyptian channels and AJ's coverage. While the official channels failed to report the violence and electoral violations, AJ presented footage of voters with injuries and thugs intimidating voters with machetes⁷ (Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, 2008). This contrast allowed AJ's coverage to challenge the state-run narrative and expose the flaws in the electoral process. As a pan-Arab network, AJ's regional approach connected various Arab countries and offered a more comprehensive understanding of political events that transcended national borders (El Jammal, 2012).

The Kifāya movement, formed in the mid-2000s, aimed to establish alliances among opposition groups and individuals rather than creating a single organization (Collombier, 2013). Simultaneously, the rise of blogs and social media platforms from the mid-2000s onwards created a new online public sphere for expressing oppositional views beyond the mainstream media. Social media platforms such as Facebook played a role in coordinating these movements. However, it is worth noting that internet access was limited in Egypt, with only about a fifth of the population having access to the internet in 2010, and a mere five percent of the population was on Facebook. Nonetheless, social media played a crucial role in building issue-specific networks and coalitions among the youth and activists, even though it remained a niche medium (Howard & Hussain, 2013). This means that although social media had a significant contesting potential, its impact was primarily observed in relation to other more traditional media forms such as television and

⁶ Interviews in AJ network of Hassanein Heikal can be found here:

<https://www.aljazeera.net/programs/with-haykal/2006/5/28/%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7>

⁷ Example of the article: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/11/23/man-killed-in-egypt-election-dispute>

print. The media landscape was characterized as a “hybrid media system” where different media platforms interacted and influenced each other, with social media serving as a complementary and amplifying tool alongside traditional media outlets. Despite their efforts, these movements remained largely limited to specific segments of society and failed to present a credible alternative to the regime (Chadwick, 2013).

In Egypt, the struggles for dignity emerged as a topic that resonated with a wide range of people. The feeling of not being treated as citizens but rather as subordinates by the regime and its institutions was exemplified in cases of police torture (Collombier, 2013). Various pressure groups, including the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, had already laid the groundwork for drawing attention to this issue by monitoring and documenting regime violations. Bloggers also played a significant role in breaking the silence on police torture by publishing audiovisual evidence. (Azimi, 2007)

The influence of AJ and other media outlets cannot be underestimated, as their news and talk programs shape Arab political opinion and provide a platform for dissenting voices (contraflow, Al Jazeera effect) (Seib, Al Jazeera English, 2012). These media channels present a common Arab narrative, creating a sense of unity and shared experiences among their audiences (contraflow, pan-Arabism) (Andoni, 2011). As a result, governments outside the Arab world cannot ignore the discussions and viewpoints presented on these channels. The coverage provided by AJ and its counterparts offers a daily and evolving portrayal of Arab political opinions, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the region (El Jammal, 2012).

One notable case was that of Wael Abbas, whose Misr Digital blog leaked a video in 2007 showing the torture of a bus driver named Emad Al-Kabir. The video sparked strong criticism and compelled the Egyptian authorities to put the responsible police officers on trial for unlawful detention, torture, and rape, representing a rare display of accountability at that time. (Cole & Schone, 2011)

The years leading up to 2010 were crucial in raising awareness and building networks around the contestation of police torture.

Case study: Khaled Said and the media.

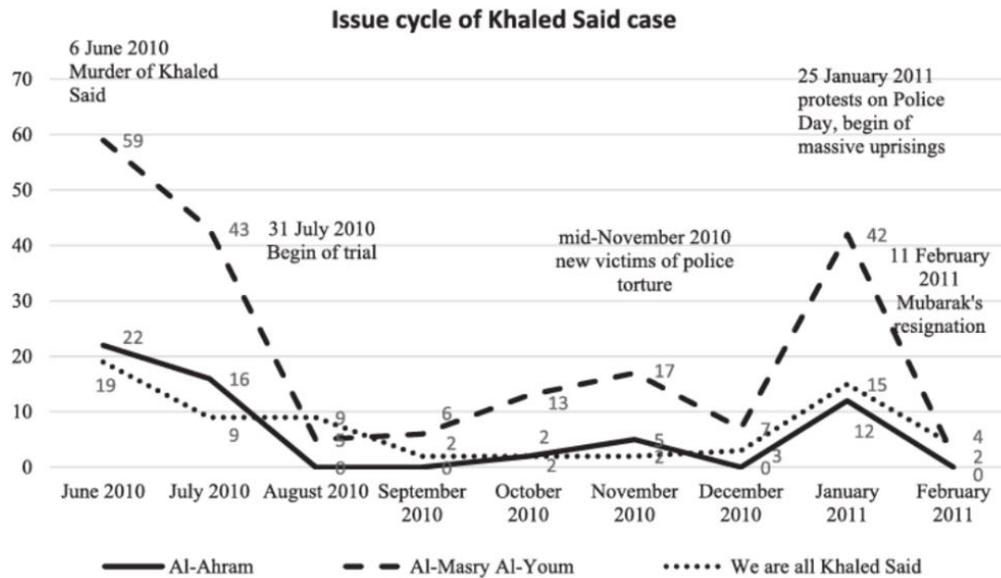
Khaled Said was a famous opposition figure and human rights activist in Egypt. In June 2010, Said was killed by two plainclothes officers in Alexandria, Egypt. Eyewitness testimonies recount the sequence of events that unfolded, involving Said's forceful removal from a cybercafe, mercilessly beaten near its entrance, and ultimately losing his life. The initial police justification, claiming that Said had choked on a bag of marijuana he allegedly concealed, faced substantial skepticism and was contested by Said's family. (Olesen, 2015)

In an act of defiance, Said's family chose to expose the truth sharing postmortem photographs of his injuries on various online platforms, capturing the attention of former presidential candidate and politician Ayman Nour, who was among the first to publish Said's pictures on Facebook, amplifying the growing public outrage and dissent. Motivated by the post, Wael Ghonim, a Google executive, anonymously initiated the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page (Richter, Dupuis, & Badr, 2020). This online platform garnered an extensive following and emerged as a symbol denouncing the Egyptian authorities' brutality and the culture of impunity. Following the creation of the page, the story began to circulate on various social media platforms and blogs, gaining momentum (Olesen, 2015). The increased public pressure led the state news agency MENA to finally publish an article about the incident, albeit with a significant delay after the event took place. On June 11, 2010, MENA released their coverage, while state-owned newspaper Al-Ahram and the private newspaper Al-Amasry Al-Youm picked up the story the following day. (Richter, Dupuis, & Badr, 2020)

The impact of the "We Are All Khaled Said" campaign can be observed by examining the data presented in Table 3. The campaign's content continued to gain traction and maintain momentum, particularly during the period leading up to and throughout the Egyptian revolution. It was the days that the revolution started (mid-January) that the campaign reached its peak, resonating deeply with the Egyptian population and fueling the widespread calls for change. Khaled Said's death was seen as a catalyst for the movement, positioning him as the first martyr and symbolizing the injustices that had long existed in Egyptian society. The campaign's influence persisted,

drawing attention to the oppressive regime of President Hosni Mubarak, and ultimately played a significant role in his eventual resignation.

Table 3.
Media coverage of Khaled Said, June 2010 – February 2011 (articles per month).



Source: (Richter, Dupuis, & Badr, 2020)

On January 14th, 2010, AJ initiated its coverage of the protests by featuring the case of Khaled Said. The network published an article titled "Police killing sparks Egypt protest" and subsequently broadcasted the following segment highlighting the incident.

Figure 1
Alleged police murder behind Egypt protests



Source: (Al Jazeera, 2010)

5.1. Al Jazeera during the Egyptian revolution

The Egyptian revolution that commenced on January 25th, 2010, exerted a profound influence on the course of the Arab world. By relocating the challenge against authoritarian rule from the periphery to the core of the region, Egypt's uprising posed a direct and formidable threat to the established regional order led by the US and Saudi Arabia (Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 2016). While previous waves of political dissent and activism had emerged in Egypt over the past decade, the January 25 protests stood out due to their unparalleled magnitude, rapidity, and intensity. Although the Egyptian security forces were initially prepared to handle the protests, the overwhelming response from the public caught them off guard. Building upon the success of the Tunisian revolution, which had inspired Egyptians who had long felt disillusioned, the events of January 25 instilled newfound optimism among ordinary citizens and galvanized their active participation alongside core activists in the pursuit of comprehensive political reform (Korotayev & Zinkina, 2011).

Throughout the 18-day revolution, Cairo's Tahrir Square emerged as a central hub for Egyptian national politics, captivating the attention of both regional and international media. The protesters congregating in Tahrir Square formed a heterogeneous coalition, encompassing secularists, Islamists, leftists, liberals, and diverse segments of Egyptian society (Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 2016). While they shared a common goal of ousting Mubarak, their opinions diverged on other matters. However, their unwavering determination and assertion of representing the Egyptian populace granted them significant leverage in shaping the unfolding events (Seib, 2008).

The Obama administration swiftly acknowledged the impossibility of Mubarak's survival amidst the massive protests, directing its efforts towards facilitating a meaningful transfer of power. Publicly endorsing the calls for regime change, the US aligned itself with the protestors' cause. However, Mubarak's regional allies, including King Abdullah of Jordan and Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, expressed support for his continued rule (Peters, 2011). Despite opposition from regional forces, Mubarak's departure on February 11 fulfilled the primary demand of the protestors, paving the way for the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to oversee a transition towards democracy. This resolution effectively served the interests of diverse domestic and international

stakeholders, ensuring stability while preserving the fundamental foreign policy orientation of the newly emerging Egypt (Lynch, 2016).

The Egyptian revolution, characterized by its monumental protests and calls for political reform, had a profound and far-reaching impact on the Arab world. It posed a direct challenge to the established regional order, offering hope and inspiration to ordinary citizens while prompting a backlash from other Arab regimes determined to maintain the status quo (Peters, 2011). The events in Egypt not only brought about a transition of power but also revealed the limitations of conventional instruments of power and diplomacy, pushing regional leaders to adopt an increasingly antagonistic stance toward democratic movements and the US (Lynch, 2016).

In essence, the Egyptian revolution served as a catalyst for transformative change in the Arab world. The uprising challenged the prevailing order by mobilizing massive protests and demanding political transformation (Seib, 2008). The remarkable scale and intensity of the demonstrations resonated with ordinary citizens who had long harbored disenchantment and discontent. While the revolution instilled hope, it also triggered fear and resistance among established Arab regimes seeking to safeguard their own power (Lynch, 2016).

The US played a significant role in the Egyptian transition by publicly supporting the demands for regime change. This stance had a profound impact on the Arab leadership class, engendering a perception of existential threat. Consequently, regional leaders responded by doubling down on their opposition to democratic change and tightening their grip on power. The events in Egypt highlighted the inadequacy of traditional power dynamics and diplomacy, as well as the growing antagonism toward democratic movements and U.S. influence (Peters, 2011).

Within the Egyptian context, the outdated language and strategies employed by the official media were increasingly exposed by the information revolution. State-controlled media sought to downplay protests hoping to limit their impact by ignoring them (Lynch, 2016). However, the advent of satellite television and the internet provided alternative sources of news and information, rendering the official media's strategy obsolete. The official media's shortsightedness in underestimating the reach and influence of satellite

television and the internet became apparent as these platforms reached all levels of Egyptian society. Frustration with the lack of transparency and the dissemination of propaganda led prominent figures like journalist Osama el-Ghazali Harb and Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz to criticize the official media and call for a change in its approach (Seib, 2008).

During the Arab Spring in Egypt, AJ played a pivotal role in extensively covering the events and supporting the revolutionary movement. Despite its limited reach in Egypt prior to the uprising, AJ managed to dedicate significant airtime to Egyptian topics, often critical of the regime. By documenting various aspects of Egypt's political climate, including the exposure of torture practices within Egyptian police departments, the network helped shed light on the harsh realities faced by the Egyptian people (Seib, 2012).

In the face of government efforts to suppress information, AJ demonstrated resilience. The Egyptian government issued orders for local television stations to obscure events and interrupted AJ's broadcast on the NileSat satellite (Richter, Dupuis, & Badr, 2020). Nevertheless, the network found alternative means to continue its coverage by collaborating with friendly stations and discreetly sending reporters from Doha. AJ remained unwavering in its support for the revolution, adopting a pro-rebellion stance and amplifying the voices of the Egyptian youth calling for change (Rinnawi, 2012). The network's presence in Tahrir Square, alongside the contributions of its reporters and studio guests like Azmi Bechara and activist Nawara Negm, further fueled the determination and spirit of the revolutionaries (Seib, 2012).

While AJ did not single-handedly orchestrate democratic change, it played a significant role in empowering the people to shape events and drive transformation. Despite facing numerous challenges, including the arrest of reporters and closure of offices, AJ remained committed to delivering comprehensive coverage. Its live broadcasts from Tahrir Square provided a platform for demonstrators, documented the actions of the Mubarak regime, and compelled political leaders to heed the voices of the protesters (El Jammal, 2012). Through the conveyance of messages and the display of powerful images from the revolution, AJ exerted pressure on international media outlets and actors, prompting them to pay attention and act (Seib, 2012). The groundbreaking coverage by AJ throughout the 18 days of protests ultimately culminated in Mubarak's resignation, marking

a historic moment of freedom in the ME.

6. Analysis of the tactics used by Al Jazeera

This study will now look in depth into the different tactics used by the network to mobilize the masses and push Mubarak to step down. Based on a study by Khalil Rinnawi, at the College of Management Academic Studies, there are two analyses to be made: visual analysis and narrative analysis (Rinnawi, 2012).

6.1. Visual analysis

The visual analysis of AJ's tactics to cover the Arab Spring refers to the examination of the visual language employed to gain a deeper understanding of the aims and objectives of AJ.

The first tactic refers to a visual glorification of the demonstrators (Rinnawi, 2012). AJ provided extensive coverage of the demonstrators in Tahrir Square, portraying their peaceful struggle for a liberal lifestyle and seek for freedom from the repressive regime of Mubarak. The network highlighted the legitimacy of the demonstrators as a united force working towards democratization. AJ focused a lot on the young leaders of the uprising, particularly the social network activists, were depicted as heroes by AJ. The network featured their presence in Tahrir Square and conducted interviews with them, highlighting their role in driving the revolution (Hijjawi, s.f.). Additionally, AJ made efforts to give a platform to the traditional opposition's leadership, showcasing their speeches and viewpoints, which further discredited Mubarak's regime. By highlighting the diverse voices and perspectives of the uprising, AJ portrayed a united front against the legitimacy of Mubarak's rule (Pintak, 2011). AJ conducted interviews with a wide range of prominent figures with Egyptian affiliation, including Mohammad al Baradia'i, A'mro Musa, and Omar el-Shireef. These individuals expressed their unwavering support for the demonstrators and openly criticized Mubarak's regime. By featuring the opinions of these influential personalities, AJ showcased the broad-based support for the uprising and reinforced the narrative of the people's struggle against an oppressive regime (Rinnawi,

2012). Following Mubarak's resignation, AJ extensively covered the scenes of jubilation and celebration among the demonstrators, symbolizing the end of an era. However, the network notably omitted any footage or mention of the old regime figures who continued to hold positions of power, except for the leadership of the army, which took over as the official authority in Egypt until a new political leadership was elected. Additionally, AJ did not show any supporters of Mubarak, creating the impression that the entire country had completely rid itself of any Mubarak loyalists (Rinnawi, 2012). These selective portrayals in AJ's coverage contributed to the narrative of a clean break from the old regime and a fresh start for Egypt under new leadership.

Second, mystification of the Egyptian security forces, where their portrayal was characterized by their passivity and lack of intervention during the revolution (Rinnawi, 2012). This depiction emphasized the notion that the military remained neutral and did not actively participate in suppressing the protests. By highlighting the military's perceived non-involvement, it further bolstered the legitimacy of the demonstrators' cause and their peaceful struggle. On the other hand, AJ's coverage painted a negative picture of other security forces, particularly the Interior Ministry Forces, which included the police and the president's troops. These forces were not only criticized but also portrayed as aggressive and brutal, physically assaulting, and injuring their own people (–Allah, 2012). The aim was to highlight the repressive actions of these security forces and to showcase the brutality of the regime, further undermining its legitimacy and fueling support for the demonstrators. One pivotal moment that had a profound impact on the uprising was when video footage of security forces dousing praying demonstrators with water on the 6 October Bridge was repeatedly aired.⁸ This powerful imagery had a dual effect: it bolstered the determination of the demonstrators and undermined the legitimacy of both the president's troops and the Interior Ministry forces. Consequently, these repressive security forces gradually vanished from the streets and squares, while the Egyptian military, perceived as more acceptable and legitimate by the people, assumed their positions (Rinnawi, 2012). This shift in power dynamics, prominently featured in AJ's coverage, not only reinforced the demonstrators' cause but also discredited the actions of the oppressive security forces.

Thirdly, AJ strategically aimed to discredit Mubarak's supporters by showcasing

⁸ Footage can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z94DH-S6Qao>

footage of them engaging in aggressive and unrefined acts, such as attacking demonstrators in Tahrir Square using horses and camels, and resorting to physical violence and shootings (Rinnawi, 2012). These deliberate portrayals created a strong negative perception of Mubarak's supporters and their actions.

Fourthly, the network actively marginalized the authorities of the regime (Rinnawi, 2012). It primarily focused on featuring Mubarak and his deputy Omar Suleiman, aiming to undermine the legitimacy of the government. Additionally, AJ made a conscious effort to minimize the visibility of regime authorities, instead prioritizing continuous coverage of the demonstrators. Even Mubarak himself was shown sparingly, only when he had significant announcements to make (–Allah, 2012).

Lastly, there was a clear and deliberate demonization of Hosni Mubarak himself. AJ repeatedly aired footage of Egyptians passionately chanting “the people want to change the regime.” Throughout the entire revolution, the network consistently presented images of the demonstrators, particularly from Tahrir Square, emphasizing their unwavering resolve in demanding the regime's resignation (Rinnawi, 2012). As soon as Mubarak eventually stepped down, the focus of the footage shifted towards showcasing the jubilant celebrations of the Egyptian people (Haigh & Bruce, 2017).

6.2. Narrative analysis

This section of the analysis will examine the strategies employed within the theoretical framework and their utilization in AJ's coverage of the Egyptian revolution. Firstly, a prominent aspect observed in the visual analysis is the deliberate focus on the contraflow created by the network (Zhang, 2022). Prior to AJ's emergence, the global audience predominantly received Middle Eastern news through Western media outlets such as CNN. However, AJ's introduction marked a notable shift in the flow of information, providing an alternative perspective and allowing the stories to be told by those directly involved. Particularly during the coverage of the Arab Spring, AJ played a significant role in promoting a new pan-Arabism in the region (Mohamedou, 2018).

A noteworthy example highlighting the portrayal of the Egyptian revolution by

Western media, specifically American media, can be found in episode 5 of the first season of “The Newsroom”, an American television series that chronicles events at a United States fictional News Channel. In this episode, the revolution is depicted as highly perilous for American reporters, leading them to seek alternative coverage while seemingly trivial news dominates the airwaves. Although this portrayal does not reflect the stance of all Western media outlets, it serves to illustrate that the prevailing Western flow of information was not necessarily focused on altering viewers' perceptions or providing comprehensive coverage of events in the ME (Mottola, 2012).

The first and foremost narrative strategy employed by AJ was AST. This theory posits that media has the power to shape public opinion by determining the importance of certain issues through the arrangement and coverage of news (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the case of Egypt, AJ played a crucial role in highlighting the corruption and human rights abuses under the Mubarak regime, effectively mobilizing people to participate in the protests.

To give extensive coverage of the Egyptian uprising, AJ rescheduled its regular programming and dedicated significant airtime to the events from the very beginning. The coverage extended beyond newscasts, permeating various programs and talk shows (Rinnawi, 2012). For instance, in the days leading up to the demonstrations, AJ aired a series of investigations on Palestinian negotiations with Israel, revealing what they deemed "political concessions" made by Palestinian Authority negotiators (Elmasry, El Shamy, & Auter, 2013). However, once the uprising in Egypt commenced, the focus shifted, and AJ adjusted its programs to cover the Tunisian case (which had concluded), as well as the Yemeni and Bahraini cases. Nevertheless, the depth and time devoted to these cases were not on par with the coverage of Egypt (Haigh & Bruce, 2017).

Figure 2

Al Jazeera report from Tahrir Square 8:30am, February 1



Source: (Al Jazeera, 2011)

In an effort to reach a wider audience during the revolution, AJ allowed other Arab TV channels to broadcast its live channel and expanded its broadcasting reach through alternative satellites and internet platforms (Rinnawi, 2012).

It is worth noting that AST does not necessitate a specific framing of content. However, from the early stages of AJ's coverage of the Egyptian uprising, there was a tendency to oversimplify issues by presenting them in stark black and white terms. All Egyptians were portrayed as being against Mubarak and actively protesting, while those associated with the regime and security forces (except the army) were depicted as staunch supporters until they vanished from the streets (Hijjawi, s.f.). This portrayal neglected the more nuanced aspects of Egyptian society, such as political parties, social change organizations, and religious authorities, who played significant roles in the opposition to the Mubarak regime. The focus remained on the masses opposing a single objective, Mubarak and his regime (Rinnawi, 2012).

What set AJ apart from Western channels like CNN was its deeper understanding of Egypt's economy, political system, and history. AJ placed more emphasis on contextualizing the news within Egypt's historical trajectory, providing a broader perspective beyond simply depicting angry Egyptians. In contrast, CNN predominantly focused on the narrative of Mubarak's resignation, reflecting their familiarity with that

aspect of the Egyptian protests, as indicated in Table 4. (Haigh & Bruce, 2017)

Table 4
Nominal level story frames employed AJ versus CNN

Frame	Network	Present
Economy	AJE (n = 37) CNN (n = 21)	11.5%
Political Strategy	AJE (n = 158) CNN (n = 119)	55.1%
Public Engagement	AJE (n = 180) CNN (n = 215)	78.5%
History of the Country	AJE (n = 63) CNN (n = 30)	18.5%
Future of the County	AJE (n = 95) CNN (n = 77)	34.2%
Victory Frame	AJE (n = 19) CNN (n = 56)	14.9%

AJE: Al Jazeera English.

Note: Coders coded if the frame was 0 = not present, 1 = present. Percents are shown for each category. The frame categories were originally developed by Nisbet and Hoge (2007) and Haigh (2014).

Source: (Haigh & Bruce, 2017)

Overall, AJ utilized AST to strategically prioritize the coverage of the Egyptian revolution, highlighting specific issues while oversimplifying certain aspects of the socio-political landscape. The network's comprehensive knowledge of Egypt's context and history contributed to a more holistic portrayal of the events unfolding, differentiating AJ from other Western media outlets.

The second strategic approach employed by AJ was the use of CT. This theory, as previously explained, suggests that media has a lasting impact on individuals' perceptions of reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Similar to the AST, the media's coverage of the protests in Egypt had the potential to shape people's beliefs regarding the legitimacy of the Mubarak regime and the possibilities for political change. Through the deliberate fragmentation of news, AJ aimed to influence viewers' understanding of the events unfolding during the uprising (Rinnawi, 2012).

AJ employed a strategy of news fragmentation, presenting information in small fragments that focused on specific details rather than providing a comprehensive overview. This approach can result in viewers losing sight of the broader context. For instance, during the coverage of the Egyptian uprising, AJ frequently engaged in detailed discussions

between their anchors in the studio and correspondents stationed in various locations like Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez (Seib, 2012). The constant questioning aimed to create a sense of live and immediate reporting, inundating viewers with specific details that often hindered their ability to grasp the larger picture. This information overload occasionally overwhelmed viewers, making it challenging for them to piece together a comprehensive account of the events transpiring in Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, and Egypt as a whole (Rinnawi, 2012).

Lastly, in relation to the RT, which suggests that the meaning of media messages is not fixed and is influenced by the interaction between the sender and the receiver, it is important to consider how the reception of media messages during the Egyptian revolution may have varied among different individuals based on factors such as age, education level, and political affiliation (Hall, 1980). This aspect is significant because AJ faced controversy for employing the aforementioned AST and focusing solely on the visual tactics discussed earlier. However, the controversy surrounding AJ's approach did not hold much weight. The network's content was intended for a specific audience: individuals who were actively engaged in the fight for Egypt's liberation. The objective of bringing down Mubarak and advocating for the creation of a new pan-Arabism took precedence over concerns about potential overemphasis or bias in the coverage (Rinnawi, 2012).

Under the framework of RT, AJ employed a tactic of presenting a mixture of facts and opinions, allowing the receivers to interpret the messages based on their own perspectives. A significant portion of the coverage during this period revolved around guest experts who offered evaluations and accounts supporting the necessity of removing Mubarak's regime (Hijjawi, s.f.). Alongside the news, which at times did not provide a fully accurate depiction of the situation on the ground, AJ predominantly presented various viewpoints, most of which opposed the regime and supported the demonstrators as representatives of the Egyptian people (Pintak, 2011). This inclination was evident not only in the contributions of military experts and political analysts featured on the channel but also in the perspectives shared by AJ's correspondents and the ordinary individuals interviewed during the demonstrations. Despite the limitations imposed by the regime on international media, including AJ, the correspondents, while not constantly engaged in field reporting, offered speculations and possible explanations for the regime's fall and the fate of President Mubarak. It appeared that the correspondents' viewpoints were deemed newsworthy,

surpassing the significance of the actual news items they reported (Rinnawi, 2012).

Furthermore, within the scope of RT, AJ employed the tactic of personifying Hosni Mubarak. As reflected in Table 4, the content portrayed by AJ primarily revolved around political and economic aspects. To achieve this, AJ aired documentaries and reports focusing on the president's corruption, wealth, and family. While reports on regime corruption were also featured, they consistently circled back to the figure of Mubarak (Haigh & Bruce, 2017).

In summary, AJ strategically utilized the Reception Theory by providing a blend of facts and opinions to allow the audience to interpret the messages based on their own perspectives. This was evident in the emphasis on guest experts and the viewpoints presented by correspondents and interviewees, contributing to a sense of collective opposition to the regime. Additionally, AJ employed the tactic of personifying Mubarak, shedding light on his alleged corruption and its impact on Egypt's political and economic landscape.

6.3. Citizen Journalism

The last and most prominent tactic that AJ used was citizen journalism. Citizen journalism refers to the practice of ordinary individuals, often without professional journalism training, participating in the process of gathering, reporting, and disseminating news and information. It emerged as a result of advancements in digital technologies and the rise of social media platforms, which provided individuals with the means to share news and opinions with a wide audience (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). This tactic is based on the RMT.

In the context of the Egyptian revolution, citizen journalism played a significant role in challenging the government's control over the media and providing alternative sources of information. The Egyptian regime, tightly controlled the media, suppressing political opposition and limiting freedom of the press. However, the emergence of social media platforms, like Facebook, provided a virtual space for young Egyptians to voice their opinions and share news (Wall, 2015).

RASSD (Raheb, Sawer, Dawen) was one such citizen journalism initiative that was established in Egypt. It started as a Facebook page created by a group of young Egyptians to provide media coverage of the 2010 parliamentary elections, aiming to expose electoral fraud and provide objective news to the public (Faheem, 2022). The platform quickly gained popularity and became a trusted source of information. During the Egyptian revolution in 2011, RASSD played a crucial role in covering and documenting the events on the ground. It mobilized a network of volunteer correspondents who reported on the protests, sharing videos, pictures, and firsthand accounts of the demonstrations. RASSD's coverage attracted a large following, and its live streaming videos became essential for global media organizations looking to report on the revolution (Sistek, 2011). Despite facing challenges, such as government crackdowns and the loss of their physical office, RASSD continued to operate and provide independent news coverage. The network of citizen journalists across Egypt proved instrumental in keeping the public informed, even as the government intensified its repression (Faheem, 2022).

In contrast, AJ leveraged citizen journalism by curating and disseminating user-generated content shared on social media platforms. Despite the imposed restrictions, this approach allowed them to sustain a continuous 24-hour broadcast of the revolution. AJ tapped into a network of individuals who actively shared content on their social media profiles, which the network then reposted and incorporated into their coverage (Wall, 2015). By harnessing the power of citizen journalism, AJ was able to circumvent the limitations placed on traditional journalism and provide a comprehensive and real-time account of the unfolding events during the revolution.

Figure 3
Voices from Tahrir Square



Source: (Al Jazeera, 2011)

The role of citizen journalism in the Egyptian revolution was twofold. First, it challenged the government's monopoly on information and provided alternative narratives that countered state-controlled media. Second, it empowered ordinary citizens by giving them a voice and a platform to share their experiences and opinions, fostering a sense of collective agency and mobilization (Faheem, 2022).

However, citizen journalism is not without its limitations. The lack of professional training and resources can sometimes result in the dissemination of inaccurate or biased information. Additionally, citizen journalists often face risks and threats, as they become targets for government repression and violence.

7. Conclusion and future lines of research

In conclusion, the visual analysis of AJ's tactics in covering the Arab Spring and specifically the Egyptian uprising reveals the significant role the network played in the fall of President Mubarak. AJ strategically employed various tactics to shape public opinion, mobilize masses, and discredit the Mubarak regime.

Firstly, AJ employed a tactic of visual glorification of the demonstrators, portraying them as peaceful heroes fighting for freedom and democracy. By highlighting the diverse voices and perspectives of the uprising, AJ presented a united front against Mubarak's rule, emphasizing the legitimacy of the demonstrators and discrediting the regime. Secondly, AJ employed the tactic of mystifying the Egyptian security forces. The network depicted the military as neutral and passive, while portraying other security forces as aggressive and brutal. This portrayal undermined the legitimacy of the security forces and bolstered support for the demonstrators. Thirdly, AJ strategically aimed to discredit Mubarak's supporters by showcasing footage of their aggressive acts and violence towards the demonstrators. This portrayal created a strong negative perception of Mubarak's supporters and their actions, further undermining the regime. Fourthly, the network marginalized the authorities of the regime by minimizing their visibility and focusing on the coverage of the demonstrators. AJ aimed to undermine the legitimacy of the government and reinforce the narrative of the people's struggle against the regime. Lastly, AJ actively demonized Hosni Mubarak himself by repeatedly airing footage of Egyptians demanding the change of the regime and showcasing the jubilant celebrations after Mubarak's resignation. This portrayal reinforced the narrative of a clean break from the old regime and a fresh start for Egypt under new leadership.

On the other hand, the use of the narratives by AJ played an enormous role on the revolution. The network strategically employed AST, CT, and RT in their coverage of the Egyptian revolution. They highlighted corruption and human rights abuses under the Mubarak regime, mobilized public opinion, and provided a comprehensive understanding of the events. AJ's coverage stood out by offering an alternative perspective and contextualizing the news within Egypt's history. They fragmented the news, sometimes

overwhelming viewers, and presented a mixture of facts and opinions, allowing the audience to interpret the messages.

Finally, AJ strategically utilized citizen journalism as a prominent tactic in their coverage of the Egyptian revolution. Citizen journalism, enabled by advancements in digital technologies and social media platforms, challenged the government's control over the media and provided alternative sources of information. AJ leveraged citizen journalism by curating user-generated content from social media, allowing them to sustain a continuous broadcast of the revolution. This approach circumvented limitations on traditional journalism and provided a real-time account of the events. Citizen journalism played a twofold role, countering state-controlled media narratives and empowering ordinary citizens to share their experiences and opinions.

Through the strategic use of these tactics, AJ shaped public opinion, mobilized support for the uprising, and contributed to the fall of Mubarak. The network's comprehensive coverage, alternative perspective, and the utilization of citizen journalism also played a significant role in challenging the government's control over the media and providing alternative sources of information.

It is important to note that while AJ's coverage was influential, it was not the sole factor in the fall of Mubarak. The Egyptian uprising was a complex socio-political movement driven by various factors, including widespread dissatisfaction with the regime, economic grievances, and the active participation of the Egyptian people. However, AJ's visual analysis highlights the network's significant role in shaping the narrative, mobilizing the support, and contributing to the overall outcome of the revolution.

During the drafting of this study, various limitations have emerged, primarily related to the constraints of time and length leading to the focus of this study. However, these limitations have also given rise to several potential lines of research that warrant further exploration.

One significant area that could have been explored is the examination of AJ's impact beyond the countries directly affected by the Arab Spring. This would have involved delving into diverse and contested opinions surrounding AJ, including those from American academics who question its funding sources.

Another valuable line of inquiry would have been to investigate the evolution of AJ and its current role in the media landscape. This would have entailed examining how the network has evolved over time, particularly in response to geopolitical changes and shifting media consumption habits.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis of AJ's role in different countries affected by the Arab Spring could have been interesting. Each country's unique political and social dynamics, as well as varying levels of media freedom and government control, would have influenced how AJ operated and the impact it may have had on shaping different public discourses.

Lastly, a compelling area of investigation would have been to examine how AJ covers specific issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in comparison to Western media outlets. Analyzing the differences in framing, and narratives on sensitive and politically charged topics.

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Annex I

Egyptian Revolution Timeline

Date	Event
January 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Day of rage”: Egyptians take to the streets in large numbers on a national holiday to protest against the government.• Protests reach: Cairo, Alexandria, Mansura, Tanta, Aswan, Assiut.• Police clash with demonstrators in Tahrir Square.• The interior ministry accuses the Muslim Brotherhood of inciting the unrest.• Social media platforms start playing a significant role in organizing protests (Facebook and Twitter).
January 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Police responds with violence.• Reports in Suez of major injured.• Robert Gibbs, spokesperson for President Barack Obama: “the Egyptian government should demonstrate its responsiveness to the people of Egypt” by recognizing their “universal rights”.• Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the Arab League: “the Arab citizen is angry, is frustrated”.
January 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mohamed El Baradei, former head of the UN nuclear watchdog, arrives in Egypt and expresses his willingness to lead the country's transition if called upon.• Protests persist in various cities, with hundreds of arrests.• Violence erupts again in Suez and Sheikh Zuweid, resulting in the death of a 17-year-old during an exchange of gunfire.• In Ismailia, hundreds of protesters engage in clashes with police.• Lawyers stage protests in Alexandria and Toukh.• Services of Facebook, Twitter, and Blackberry Messenger experience disruptions.
January 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internet and mobile phone services experience significant disruptions ahead of new protests in Egypt after Friday prayers.• An elite special counterterrorism force is deployed in strategic locations in Cairo.• Overnight, 20 members of the officially banned Muslim Brotherhood are reportedly detained.• Clashes between police and protesters persist throughout Egypt, resulting in 11 civilian deaths and 170 injuries in Suez.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Troops are deployed in Cairo, Suez, and Alexandria but do not intervene in the confrontations. • President Mubarak announces the dismissal of his government.
January 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a speech delivered shortly after midnight, President Mubarak dismisses the cabinet but refuses to step down. • Anti-government protesters remain defiant in Cairo's Tahrir Square despite troops firing into the air to disperse them. • Mubarak appoints Omar Suleiman, the former spy chief, as the country's vice-president, marking the first time he has held such a position. • The military is reportedly deployed to Sharm el-Sheikh, a resort town. • Leaders of Germany, France, and the UK express concern about the events in Egypt. • The Gulf Co-operation Council seeks a stable Egypt. • The US embassy advises Americans to consider leaving Egypt, and the UK advises against non-essential travel to the country.
January 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tahrir Square in Cairo continues to be occupied by a large number of protesters. • El Baradei addresses the crowd in the square, receiving cheers and declaring that their progress cannot be reversed. • Turkey announces plans to send aircraft for the evacuation of its citizens from Egypt, following the US embassy's advisory for Americans to consider leaving the country.
January 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mubarak refuses to step down despite increasing demands, while protesters defy the curfew and gather in Tahrir Square and Alexandria. • Internet access in Egypt remains unreliable. • The new vice-president promises dialogue with opposition parties for constitutional reforms. • The White House emphasizes the need for the Egyptian government to address the people's demands for freedoms. • Opposition groups plan a "million-man march" and general strike, while the military reaffirms its commitment not to harm protesters. • The EU calls for free and fair elections in Egypt, and investors withdraw capital due to the unrest. • Mubarak announces his new cabinet, including the appointment of Mahmoud Wagdi as the new interior minister. • Six Al Jazeera journalists are released in Cairo. • Israel urges restraint in criticizing Mubarak to maintain regional stability.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al Jazeera reports interference with its broadcast signal in the Arab region at an unprecedented level.
<p>February 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosni Mubarak announces on television that he won't seek re-election but refuses to step down. • Mubarak promises constitutional reforms. • Mohamed El Baradei criticizes Mubarak's announcement. • Clashes erupt between pro-Mubarak and anti-government protesters in Alexandria after Mubarak's speech. • Khalid Abdel Nasser, son of former President Gamal Abdel Nasser, participates in the protests in Tahrir Square. • The number of protesters in Tahrir Square is estimated to be over a million, with thousands more demonstrating in Alexandria and Suez.
<p>February 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google enhances its speak2tweet technology to assist people in Egypt. • Clashes erupt between anti-government and pro-Mubarak protesters in Alexandria. • Internet services in Cairo begin to be restored after a five-day blackout aimed at impeding protests. • Egypt's newly appointed vice-president insists that anti-government protests must cease before engaging in dialogue with opposition groups. • Violent clashes occur throughout the day around Tahrir Square in central Cairo, resulting in numerous injuries and at least three reported deaths. • Pro-democracy protesters accuse the military of allowing armed pro-Mubarak supporters to enter the square.
<p>February 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tahrir Square in Cairo experiences bursts of heavy gunfire targeted at anti-government demonstrators. • Reports from Cairo indicate that at least five people are killed, and several others are wounded in the incident.
<p>February 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A massive crowd of hundreds of thousands of anti-government protesters assembles in Cairo's Tahrir Square. • The protesters have designated this day as the "Day of Departure," calling for Hosni Mubarak to step down from power. • Chants demanding Mubarak's resignation echo throughout the square.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This marks the eleventh day of widespread unrest and large-scale demonstrations in the country.
February 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Egyptian health minister states that 11 people have died, while the United Nations suggests that around 300 people may have been killed nationwide since the start of the protests. News agencies report over 150 dead bodies in morgues in Alexandria, Suez, and Cairo. • According to Reuters, Egyptian state TV claims that "terrorists" have attacked an Israel-Egypt gas pipeline in northern Sinai. • The leadership of Egypt's ruling National Democratic Party, including Gamal Mubarak, the son of Hosni Mubarak, resigns. • Hossam Badrawi, considered a member of the party's liberal wing, becomes the new secretary-general of the party.
February 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Muslim Brotherhood announces its decision to participate in a dialogue round to assess the government's seriousness in addressing the people's demands. • Ayman Mohyeldin, a correspondent for Al Jazeera, is briefly detained by the Egyptian military but is released after seven hours due to appeals from the network and his supporters. • It is reported that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had a conversation with Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq on February 5, emphasizing the importance of meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Egyptian people and urging an end to the harassment and detention of activists and journalists.
February 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A symbolic funeral procession takes place for journalist Ahmed Mahmoud, who was shot while filming clashes between protesters and riot police. Protesters demand an investigation into his death. • The government approves a 15% increase in salaries and pensions as an attempt to calm public anger. • Wael Ghonim, a Google executive and political activist who was detained by authorities, is released. He is seen by some as a potential leader for the pro-democracy movement.
February 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The crowd of protesters grows larger, including Egyptians who have returned from abroad and new participants inspired by the release of activist Wael Ghonim. • UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon emphasizes the importance of genuine dialogue to resolve the crisis, emphasizing the need for a peaceful transition.
February 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive strikes begin across the country. • Egyptian state television reports the release of 34 political prisoners, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Rights Watch reports that the death toll in Egypt's pro-democracy uprising has reached 302, with 232 deaths in Cairo, 52 in Alexandria, and 18 in Suez. • Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit suggests that the army may intervene to protect the country from individuals attempting to seize power.
February 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Egyptian Prime Minister forms a committee to investigate "illegitimate practices" that occurred in recent weeks. • The criminal court in Egypt approves a ban on three former ministers from leaving the country, and their assets are frozen. • President Mubarak delivers a televised speech, promising not to run in the next presidential elections and to participate in a peaceful transition scheduled for September. • Protesters in Tahrir Square express anger and wave their shoes in response to Mubarak's announcement that he will remain in power until September. They demand the army join them in revolt.
February 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following widespread protests across Egypt, Hosni Mubarak steps down as president and transfers power to the military.
February 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new military rulers of Egypt assure the public that power will be transferred to an elected civilian government. • State television reports that travel bans are being imposed on former ministers.

Source: (Al Jazeera, 2011)