

**"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH
PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"**

Panel 2: The Political Economy of Media: Politics, Ownership and Technologies

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„Arab media after Arab Spring: A Study of Al-Jazeera’s Audiences“

Abstract

Initially it was called a Facebook revolution or that Twitter revolution, and then it came to Al Jazeera which was given much credit to provoke protesters against their regimes. Media’s own agenda was never associated with these kinds of projects because they claim to abide by values of objectivity and neutrality in any conflict. However there has always been a strong demand or expectation from many quarters that Al Jazeera and other Arab media play a ‘role’ in bringing a change sometime and somewhere and discourage change in some other places. Audiences are gradually appearing to influence many things in media’s agenda setting.

Why didn’t Al Jazeera succeed to provoke major public anger against Palestinian authority’s alleged “sell out” of Palestinian land under a swap deal which Al Jazeera disclosed via exclusive Wikileaks cables? This was most important news on Al Jazeera when Tunisian protests were engulfing from a village to other cities. Al Jazeera’s coverage of Egyptian protests also started very late and with less confidence of change. Then it took an entirely different shift when protests emerged in Bahrain and flip flopped again when it came to Syria. Al Jazeera’s position kept changing from one to other and hence its credibility went significantly down among Arab audiences. Now the question is if Al Jazeera has ability to facilitate change agenda from one direction to its logical end. After Arab Spring and successful democratic transition in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, the social and political landscape has become more diverse and more vocal. This new democratic wave will have another impact on media’s role in Arab society.

This paper intends to question Arab media’s basic assumptions and their failures to meet expectations of all stakeholders including the audiences. This paper will also look into how entire news media business is facing a resetting to adjust more local and regional voices and how this change is also redirecting typologies of Arab media. This paper will be based on a survey about Al Jazeera’s audiences’ responses after Arab spring.