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"Brand Al-Jazeera: a critical analysis of Al-Jazeera's self-branding and use of audience participation during the Arab spring"

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Chapter One

Introduction and Methodology

1.0 Introduction

Al-Jazeera English joined the global media landscape in 2006 as the first English news network to be based in the middle-east. Amidst much speculation and intrigue the network joined the international media sphere setting up base in Doha and establishing bureaus across the world. Boasting a highly skilled contingency of journalistic staff and financial stability provided for by its oil rich host nation, Al-Jazeera English has since successfully established a renowned brand identity within the news industry. By establishing home in a clear niche in the market, Al-Jazeera English claims to represent the Global South while explicitly creating competitors in global news broadcasters CNN and BBC. The success of this brand identity is of primary importance to this dissertation as it aims to explore the various factors that come to constitute Brand Al-Jazeera.

Amongst the variety of these factors lies the phenomenon of audience participation. Unique to the digital age in light of new media technologies, audience participation in relation to Al-Jazeera English exists as an interesting dynamic. In interrogating what has come to constitute brand Al-Jazeera this study premises audience participation as central to the overarching concern of branding taking into perspective the role it plays within this strategy. In combining two previously separated realms of research; branding and participation the dissertation posits and innovative study on Al-Jazeera English that seeks to unpack modern realms of converging media systems (social media in particular) with more traditional elements of brand identity. Prioritising on the three fundamental issues of branding, audience participation and its enactment through the convergence of old and new media, the research seeks to unpack the global news broadcaster Al-Jazeera English within the particular context of the Egyptian revolution one of many social uprisings in North Africa that has since been dubbed the Arab spring.

While the concept of branding has received increased scholarly attention in recent years most academic work on the subject is approached through the administrative tradition in communication. This field fails to comprehensively address the concept as it remains preoccupied with managerial and clerical aspects of communication rather than the critical implications. Branding is traditionally associated with a field of studies in marketing, Public Relations and communication with few studies adopting a more critical perspective to the

branding exercise as evident in contemporary societies. Within Media Studies in particular there exists a lack of research on the branding of media institutions. While most branding exercises are thought to be the work of media institutions very little attention has been paid to the branding initiatives deployed by media houses themselves. Traditionally branding has been associated with the sale of commodities and less with the sale of non-tangible products like the media. However, in an age of liberalization and highly competitive media sectors that signals the decline of public broadcasters, media institutions compete in cut throat environments for survival. Although political economy scholars have looked at the policy aspects of this changing environment, there is a need for a more cultural approach to the strategies that media institutions adopt within this environment.

Al-Jazeera English entered the global media sphere as a concerted attempt at countering the hegemonic threshold Western media enjoyed over covering news and information emanating from the East. Within this context, the station defines its mission as follows:

> Our mission is to provide independent, impartial news for an international audience and to offer a voice to a diversity of perspectives from under-reported regions. In addition, the channel aims to balance the information flow between the South and the North[1]

The peculiar position of the station within its immediate and distant locations has constantly elicited academic attention. However, as the Al-Jazeera English brand receives greater prominence within the international mediascape as the voice of the global South and purveyor of 'ordinary' sentiments through various initiatives the station's status and participatory potential are worthy of greater inspection.

With a mission statement clearly advocating a brand that seeks to promote the voices of the under-represented, Al-Jazeera obviously tenets the involvement of its audiences as central to its mandate. As such what has come to constitute brand Al-Jazeera is of central concern to this dissertation. This study seeks to critically analyze Al-Jazeera English's brand image created through avenues like audience participation. During the station's coverage of the Egyptian

[1]Al-Jazeera mission statement, available from URL http://english.aljazeera.net/aboutus/2006/11/2008525185555444449.html (Last accessed: 16 July 2011).

uprising audience participation took various forms from traditional modes like landline calls to more technological savvy methods of Facebook comments, emails and video clips. The convergence of old and new media technologies Using four of the station's flagship programmes *The Listening Post*, *People and Power*, *Empire* and *The Stream* along with a critical analysis of the network's Facebook posts from January – April 2011this research endeavors to interrogate Al-Jazeera English's brand imaging and quality of audience participation during the Egyptian revolt. The varying degrees of participatory options available at the time will be measured by its capacity as a medium to influence the content production of the station. Audience participation will be examined through three criterion. Firstly, through the coverage of ordinary people across the stations programming secondly, by looking at the inclusion of media content sent in by citizen journalists and lastly by evaluating the kinds of participation the station invited on its Facebook page and flagship programmes during the Egyptian uprisings. These serve to investigate how television is deploying new media technologies in involving audiences.

The case study will expound work on branding which at present remains largely focused on marketing perspectives and less toward more critical analyses. Furthermore it will provide a practical case study for investigating the true participatory potential offered by new media platforms which are often widely proclaimed without much in-depth study.

The potential for new media technologies to radically transform the manner in which old media has historically been produced and consumed has been one of the greatest champions of the medium. Celebrations around the medium often emphasize the participatory potential of these new technologies with ideals of enhanced citizenship and democracy being the high ranked proponents. The term convergence has come to signify a coming together of new and old media forms most significantly praised for the enhanced possibilities the realm offers to audience participation and by this I specifically refer to greater opportunities at influencing content production. The increasing incorporation of 'ordinary' voices across mass media channels ties into a broader international trend referred to as the "demotic turn" by Graeme Turner (2009). New media platforms like mobile phones and the internet have enabled old media institutions to adopt more interactive and participatory initiatives. These ventures have gradually changed the face of television opening up previously unchartered territories of audience involvement.

Proceeding from traditional media modes of participation like letters to the editor and landline phone-in calls, new media technologies such as the internet and mobile phones have drastically changed the realm of audience participation. The real-time efficiency of instant messaging services (SMS) along with social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and blogs mean that audience interaction with the media are instantaneous and efficient. Advantages of these mediums including the effortless ease with which pictures and video clips are transmitted indicate that audience participation have evolved from the fairly one dimensional character it once possessed into more interactive forms that incorporate multimedia technologies to produce undeniably more enhanced forms of involvement. The exclusive domain of media production once preserved for only media professionals has therefore been transformed into a vibrant sphere of interaction more modernly characterized by the term citizen journalism (Alan, 2009: 18).

As new media technologies like mobile phones become increasingly accessible to ordinary people, citizen journalism has in recent years been responsible for producing the iconic images and video clips that best captured major unpredictable events. Examples of these include the devastating Tsunami in 2004 which hit South Asia and claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Widely recognised as the most violent natural disaster in modern memory, the tsunami dominated international media coverage, most prominently propagated through the lens of tourist cameras. The magnitude of the disaster was best covered by ordinary folk who utilised the technologies at their disposal to document a tragedy that affected 11 countries across South Asia. While the mainstream media made good in due course, it could not compare to the real-time coverage of the quake captured by citizen journalists who through their video clips and photographs provided the most accurate account of an undersea quake for modern times (Gillmor, 2006: xiv). Gillmore (2006) refers to the phenomenon of citizen journalism as "we media", a unique dynamic form of media content produced at grassroots level by non-professionals who counter the threshold of media professionals using new media technologies. For Gillmore (2006) its represents an exciting period of transition opening up new avenues of advocacy but more importantly redirecting the dynamics of the mainstream media, forcing it to pay closer attention to the people it claims to serve.

In line with Gillmore's (2006) argument is an array of academic literature that celebrates new media technologies for the enhanced forms of audience participation they facilitate. Moving

from previously passive roles, audiences are in light of these creative innovations seen to be active agents in the kind of media content they are exposed to. More significantly is the idea that audiences now exert greater influences in producing media content, a sphere historically reserved for journalists and media practitioners. The argument here is that through agents like emails, SMS's, blogs and social media platforms audience engagement with the mainstream media is much more forceful propelling the voices of the ordinary and situating participation as integral to process of media production. Nico Carpentier has contributed immensely to work on audience participation. Ranging from content production studies to work on the role of participation during talk shows, Carpentier's work offers a critical approach to more hyper acclaims of audience participation. With a vested interest in researching the manner in which new media technologies like Facebook have qualitatively changed traditional media this dissertation seeks to utilise aspects of Carpentier's work to interrogate the participatory potential of new media technologies in conjunction with mainstream media.

1.1 Research Questions

1. How does Al-Jazeera brand itself?
2. What issues did Al-Jazeera cover during the Egyptian revolution and how did this assist their branding?
3. How has Al-Jazeera invited audiences to participate through social media (Facebook) and during programming?
4. How can we critically evaluate the quality of this audience participation?

1.2 Methodology

This study is premised on textual analysis and is therefore grounded by the qualitative approach. In exploring very specific interests within the case study, the qualitative approach through its methodological underpinnings and research methods enabled me to conduct in-depth research which was integral to deriving sound findings. Rather than being concerned with logistics (e.g frequency and occurrences) my research posited a critical approach to language and meaning

making which was chiefly the reason I chose to adopt the approach (Morley, 1992: 185; Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 22).

1.2.1 Data Collection

For the purposes of this dissertation I will be analyzing eight episodes of four Al-Jazeera English flagship programmes namely; *The Listening Post, People and Power, Empire* and *The Stream* during the periods of January 25th to April 30th, 2011 since they directly engaged with the Egyptian crisis and the time period following this seemed to have changed focus. The programmes were chosen according to the title's resonance with the Egyptian uprising. The Egyptian crisis was selected as a matter of personal interest largely because this particular uprising came to represent the face of what has since been dubbed the Arab Spring. While the ensuing unrest in Libya and Syria similarly received international news coverage, I argue that the zest and momentum with which these events were covered was propelled by proceedings in Egypt which arguably set the pace and tone. Below is a table of the programmes, their titles and the dates they first aired on the Al-Jazeera English network.

Programme	Title	Date of Airing
The Listening Post	-Reporting the Egyptian Revolution -Egypt's Media Squeeze	February 12, 2011 March 18, 2011
People and Power	-Seeds of Change -Building Egypt's Future	February 9, 2011 March 2, 2011
Empire	-Egypt Al-Jazeera Empire Academics Talk -Social Networks, Social Revolution	February 9, 2011 February 17, 2011
The Stream	-Post-uprising Tunisia & Egyptian Revolution 2.0 -Dr. Twitter- Crowdsourcing a Diagnosis	July 15, 2011 April 21, 2011

The four flagship programmes will be analyzed by critically analyzing the branding and participatory initiatives exercised within them. Branding initiatives will be assessed through a process of deduction using themes emanating from the data to categorize the initiatives. The following table indicates the criterion used to gauge audience participation.

1.	The coverage of ordinary people (activists etc.) across programming
2.	The inclusion of footage sent by non-professional journalists/ ordinary people via Facebook comments, sms's, tweets etc into the station's content
3.	Solicited Participation on the station's Facebook page during the above mentioned flagship programmes. This will be analysed by looking at the language utilized in Al-Jazeera's facebook posts and the manner in which they did or did not invite audiences to participate on the page.

The Listening Post is a weekly media watch programme that interrogates global media coverage across traditional and new media fronts. It aims to give a balanced account of these events adopting a critical stance to the issues that both receive and are denied global media attention. Since this programme is dedicated to surveying international media coverage, branding attempts at distinguishing Al-Jazeera English's coverage from its competitors are most rife. I will therefore utilize the programme to critically examine any apparent branding initiatives by the station.

The second programme *People and Power* is a weekly feature on the network that investigates the power dynamics that largely characterize the local and international sphere. Assuming a humanitarian stance *People and Power* has established a reputation for explicitly degrading the unequal stratification of power characteristic of dictatorships across the Middle East and beyond. Since the weekly prides itself on questioning power balances I will critically analyze the quality of participation offered during its course and its coverage of ordinary people.

Empire the third programme to be analyzed is a monthly edition that questions global powers and their agendas. The show features a panel of analysts and political commentators that discuss the most pressing political issues. With a dedicated approach to addressing the intentions of global powers this programme adopts a particular stance in questioning foreign intentions whilst employing the voices of analysts and commentators. Thus, I will critically analyze both the self-branding and participatory attempts exercised during the programme.

The fourth and final programme *The Stream* is Al-Jazeera English's latest recruit, a daily programme that investigates the potential and increasing power of social media to disseminate news. It highlights the extraordinary role of citizen journalism to enact positive change and challenge the status quo of power. The show exists as a response to the Arab spring that arguably occurred in large part due to the savvy exploitation of social media. The show is directly aimed at audience participation and will therefore be analyzed for the quality of participation it propagates.

Videos of the programmes have been obtained from the Al-Jazeera website and YouTube. All eight programmes were transcribed. In analyzing only eight programmes the research aims to conduct an extensively in-depth analysis of the data rather than chose a larger sample and pursues more fleeting arguments.

In addition to this Al-Jazeera English's Facebook posts during the period of January 25th to April 30^{th,} 2011 have been analyzed. The posts were analyzed in order to explore the way in which the page invites audience members to participate and as a means of investigating possible branding attempts by the network across the platform. The manner in which old media (television) and new media (Facebook) make contact with one another is of central concern to this study. An average of three Al-Jazeera Facebook posts per day was analyzed during this period culminating in a sample size of approximately 300 posts. The stipulated time period had been determined on the basis of relevance to the Egyptian revolution. Following April 30th focus on the page turned to the crisis in Libya.

1.2.2 Data Analysis

The dominance of textual analysis within academic research exists as a result of the two primary reasons. First, communication is a symbolic process where the objective of deciphering holds chief importance. Second, access and analyses of media texts happens to be a much simpler process than investigating the production and reception processes of these texts (Downing and Husband, 2005: 26). The use of textual analysis during the data analysis process of this dissertation is therefore a direct result of the above two grounds. Given the large volume of data that needed to be analyzed the method of thematic content analysis, a subsidiary of textual analysis, was used to analyze all eight flagship programmes and Al-Jazeera Facebook comments. The methodology has the potential to function effectively as the creation of themes provides a structured and insightful investigation (Wodak and Busch, 2004: 108). Given the large sample of Facebook comments thematic content analysis provides an enabling medium to find common thematic grounding across the data. The categorizing of comments according to themes is an apt means of investigating content under broader categories which invariably contribute to expounding analyses on wider Al-Jazeera ideologies.

Critical discourse analysis will provide a complementary service to thematic content analysis as the specific extracts from the programmes and Facebook posts will be subjected to CDA. Premised on the strongest themes emanating from the thematic content analysis process one episode of each of the above mentioned flagship programmes will be identified, transcribed in full and subjected to thorough critical discourse analysis. With a direct focus on de-mystifying ideologies and power through the investigation of semiotic data whether written, spoken or visual; critical discourse analysis provides an enabling medium that retains scientific methodologies while allowing ample room for the peculiarities of the research data to unravel (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 3). With a keen eye dedicated to exploring the Al-Jazeera English brand and the manner in which it advanced participatory avenues, discourse remains a key aspect of this research and its potential to contribute to fields of study on branding and participation. As such CDA's recognition of language as a social practice that prioritizes its contextual usage provides the most appropriate medium of data analysis for the dissertation (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 6). Put aptly, "Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship

between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institutions(s) and social structure(s), which frame it" (Fairclough and Wodak cited in Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 6).

Discourse can be defined as a system of language embedded with certain ideologies and connotations that dominate a particular society. The methodology is primarily concerned with language and considers it to be an integral component of social practice. It would therefore provide an apt medium to study the videos and Facebook commentary since language would ultimately act as the key signifiers of various agenda's (Fairclough, 2003: 128). More importantly the link CDA creates between discourse and the institutions and social structures which produce them is of particular relevance to this research given its positioning of branding and participation as the key focus.

More than a fixation with words, discourse suggests ways of representing. People share ideas and beliefs through a common medium of discourse (Fairclough, 2003: 128). Both cohesion and disunity are achieved through the medium of discourse. Taking this into consideration critical discourse analysis acknowledges the subsequent element of power within this dynamic. Critical discourse analysis pays particular attention to the relationship between language and power (Wodak and Busch, 2004: 108). Language is by no means an innocent medium of discourse. Inherent in language are loaded ideologies that often indicate power relations that position subjects in positions of authority and subservience. The most glaring examples of this dynamic are evident in the African context where colonial rule established camp and proceeded to name iconic structures in the native land. Through the processes of naming colonial rulers inadvertently asserted their power of ownership and authority. Since this research requires analyses of a large number of Facebook comments Thompson's (1984) version of critical discourse analysis will be utilised as it provides an encompassing platform with fleeting categories that permit large scale analysis. Thompson's (1984) version of critical discourse analysis provides a criterion of five general modes through which ideology operates. These are termed; legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification. In addition to these five modes Thompson (1984) identifies different kinds of symbolic constructions which are typically associated with these criterions (Janks, 1998: 198). The stratification of CDA across these five modes facilitates a well-equipped platform for understanding how language functions

in transmitting knowledge, organising social institutions and exercising power (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 7).

1.3 Limitations of the Study

Two notable limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. Firstly, within the landscape of Arab media and the Middle East, Al-Jazeera Arabic remains the most accessed and prominent satellite delivered news network. While Al-Jazeera English has undeniably established a firm foot within the global media-scape it cannot claim to enjoy the success and outreach of its Arabic sister network and largely attracts an educated English speaking elite many of whom are settled in the Diasporas. Due to the language barrier the Al-Jazeera Arabic network could not be analysed along with the rich archive of literature available in the Arabic language. Secondly. although the programmes analysed as part of this research have been established as hallmarks of the Al-Jazeera English network, the extent to which they represent the full content of the station is arguable. Ideally, research into the 24-hour running news coverage of the station would yield the most accurate results. Unfortunately the sheer magnitude and scope of researching 24-hour running news coverage for the duration of the unrest proved to be insurmountable for two primary reasons. One, the resources required for archiving the lengthy durations of coverage were simply unavailable to me and two, the scope of an MA was far too small to cover such wide research data. Nonetheless, the dissertation's inability to investigate Al-Jazeera English's live news coverage remains a limitation of the study.

1.4 Chapter Outline

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a detailed account of available literature on Al-Jazeera, branding and participation and media convergence. It then proceeds to discuss the theoretical frameworks of representation, constructionist theory and identity which conceptualise the study.

Chapter Three: The Al-Jazeera Identity: Mapping what has come to constitute Al-Jazeera English since inception

This chapter uses primary sources to analyse the brand identity Al-Jazeera English has established since its formation in 2006. Using statements made by Al-Jazeera English personnel and various other press releases the chapter analyses secondary material to determine the identity the network has propagated. The chapter provides a background to the network along with preliminary findings that begin to expound on Brand Al-Jazeera prior to the events of the Arab Spring.

Chapter Four: Audience Participation: Investigating Al-Jazeera's incorporation of audiences during the Egyptian uprising

The chapter is dedicated to investigating audience participation across Al-Jazeera English flagship programmes and Facebook page. It analyses the participatory avenues provided by the network during the programming and the quality of this participation within the broader context of the shows. It also analyses how Al-Jazeera English invited audiences to participate on the Facebook page through an in-depth study of language utilised by the station.

Chapter Five: Brand Al-Jazeera: An interrogation of the station's branding in flagship programming and Facebook commentary

This chapter takes a critical look at Al-Jazeera English's branding during its coverage of the Egyptian revolution. It does so by analysing language and also applying a critical eye to the kinds of issues the station covered across the Facebook page and programming during the period.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter presents a conclusion to the study drawing on findings to illustrate greater implications within the broader field of media studies.

1.5 Conclusion

While Al-Jazeera has established a prominent position within international news media, the Arab people's uprisings which spread across North Africa provides a unique opportunity at analyzing two fundamental aspects of the network which have thus far been overlooked in existing academic literature. Branding and audience participation have received much focus in their own individual capacities. The link between the two has thus far never been addressed. Using the

Egyptian revolution as a means of tackling the connection for a station that has catapulted in fame and recognition is therefore most promising. The following chapter presents a literature review of the thesis along with a theoretical framework which contextualizes the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction

Focusing specifically on the Al-Jazeera English case study, this dissertation posits three main foci as the basis of the literature review. These are first; a brief background on the Al-Jazeera English network along with a review of available literature on the station. Second, the concept of branding is addressed followed by a discussion of the current literature approaches to the term which indicates a strong alliance to the marketing tradition. Last, issues of participation and media convergence are raised in the final section of the review. This section pays particular attention to Nico Carpentiers work on participation. His immense contribution to the field provides an encompassing framework to the dissertation and its interest in audience based participation. The chapter then provides the theoretical framework of the study elaborating on theories of representation, constructionist approach and identity.

2.1 Al-Jazeera

Al-Jazeera Arabic has elicited academic attention since its advent. However, the introduction of its English channel; Al-Jazeera English (hereafter referred to as AJE) in 2006 has since increased scholarly interest as it contributed toward a growing trend from the Global South at countering the hegemonic thrust held over global news media by Western institutions. Literature on the station is in large part characterized by three primary fronts. First, celebratory notions of emancipation and a revival of the Arab public sphere. Second, the station's status of alterity that enables new and innovative ways of news reportage in contrast to its Western rivals and last through a foreign policy approach raising issues of propaganda and soft power.

Al-Jazeera has established a prominent position within the global media sphere by attracting a loyal viewership that appears to appreciate the station's alternative voice amongst an Arab region largely dominated by dictatorships and a lack of liberal media systems. With a distinctly hostile attitude to the prevailing governments in the Arab world, Al-Jazeera exists as the first Arab station located on Arab soil that dares to openly voice animosity and insult toward local regimes (Zayani, 2005: 209). In line with this, the vast majority of academic work on the station exhibits a celebratory nature that commends Al-Jazeera's role in providing a platform for public debate

and dissent, a feature previously absent within the Middle East media context (Lynch, 2006: 35).The extent to which the station has managed to annoy local leaders was aptly summed up when former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak toured the network's cramped headquarters in Qatar stating "all this trouble from a matchbox like this" (Seib, 2005: 601). Proceeding from an Arab to English medium brand Al-Jazeera has come to signify an Arab-based news network advocating a free press and investigative journalism amongst an extremely hostile local and international mediascape (King and Zayani, 2008:30).With a dedicated approach centered on highlighting the perspective of the global South and a concerted attempt at providing a platform for previously silenced voices, the Al-Jazeera brand image serves a three-fold objective. Firstly, the channel prides itself as being "the first news channel based in the Mideast to bring news back to the West" (King and Zayani, 2008 :31), thus radically challenging the status quo of a Western-dominated media sphere covering the Arab gulf. Secondly, the networks proficiency in both the Arabic and English mediums with bureaus based in London, Kuala Lumpur, Washington and Doha has resulted in an unprecedented viewership from the Western and Arab worlds providing an encompassing whole to a previously fractured relationship (King and Zayani, 2008 :30). And lastly, Al-Jazeera's apparent liberal stance within its relatively censored local media environment has provided a huge boost for the network's brand image.

The abolition of the Ministry of Information in Qatar in 1998 paved the way for the establishment of the Al-Jazeera network as Qatari press were allowed for the first time to compete in attracting better journalists and wider audiences (Bahry, 2001: 89). Borne out of the previous ruler Sheikh Hamad's desire to project a new image of Qatar, Al-Jazeera is a satellite all news channel created as part of the movement toward countering the flow of news and information emanating from the West. The station's popularity grew since inception as it provided a go-to source for Arab audiences who had long lost faith in local media stations subsisting as extensions of ruling elites (Bahry, 2001: 90). Much of the academic attention focuses on how the station has capitalized on the network's rivalry with western media giants. As a result there exists a sizeable amount of literature that compares Al-Jazeera to CNN and likeminded western media powerhouses (Al-Jenaibi, 2010; Miladi, 2006; Johnson & Fahmy, 2008).

In comparing Al-Jazeera to its western counterparts the station's peculiarities which characterize its distinctive stance and position within the wider media sphere appear to be points of particular interest in available academic literature. In an attempt to scrutinize the success of the first Arab news network, authors like Austin (2010) have highlighted the stations status of alterity and inversion of conventional American news values with a complex dynamic between sources, journalists and image-makers as leading agents in Al-Jazeera's success. In evaluating Al-Jazeera against rivals CNN and BBC scholars have highlighted the station's courageous visual reporting of warfare and confrontation as one of the favourable elements that draw audiences and cement credibility by capturing the 'truth' of such events (Fahmy & Johnson, 2007: 260). These occur in contrast to the coverage of Western media outlets that are charged with 'sanitizing' the violence and carnage which embody combat (Austin, 2010: 35).

In recognizing the functional similarities that separate Al-Jazeera from its Western counterparts, academics have similarly been vocal in establishing the distinctive rivalry between the Arab based news and foreign agencies. In an outright display of competition, Al-Jazeera made clear its efforts at producing a network that provides a "notable addition to the growing global efforts aimed at counterbalancing American-European domination over world media" (al-Najjar, 2009: 3). It is in this regard that a large body of literature on the station is approached through the lens of cultural imperialism (Rinnawi, 2006; Curran &Morley, 2006). As the successor to the failed experiment, BBC Arabic Television (BBCATV), Al-Jazeera entered the global media sphere facing largely pessimistic notions in respect to the station's viability and long term survival. While occupying a successful yet quiet initial few years of existence most academics agree that Al-Jazeera's defining moment materialized during the Iraqi war (Seib, 2005; Sharkey, 2004). The event provided the first real opportunity to portray in graphic detail the brutality of American warfare and its demand for civilian casualty. Rather than echoing the sentiments of salvation and emancipation purveyed by the Bush-Blair coalition evident on major broadcasters CNN and BBC, Al-Jazeera displayed the criminality of the war through never-before-seen live images of lifeless bodies and captured coalition troops (Seib, 2005; Azran, 2004). The international controversy surrounding the station's daring images and gutsy reporting has been lauded in available literature and its contribution toward countering hegemonic Western ideologies has been identified as one of the networks greatest feats (Rinnawi, 2006; Hamm & Smandych, 2005).

While Al-Jazeera propagates an independent front, the network's continued funding from the Qatari government has elicited scholarly attention since inception. Although the station's leading personnel appear to be independent from the government, the unique funding model which does not strive to attract advertising continues to raise questions. The station's complete funding by the Qatari government despite international pressures to privatize has been a point of concern for various scholars (Samuel-Azran, 2010; Hall, 2007; Hancock, 2007). Thus, the political economy of Al-Jazeera has led academics into discussions regarding the station's relation to foreign policy and propaganda. Branding of the Qatari nation through the Al-Jazeera station is often propagated as being soft power. Peterson's paper titled 'Qatar and the world: Branding for a micro state' provides an apt illustration of these sentiments. It attributes the global recognition and success of the small gulf state in large part to a series of public reforms and policies designed to put the country on the map, one of them being Al-Jazeera (Peterson, 2006:734). The paper cites Al-Jazeera's coverage of various Qatari social reforms such as female equality and democratic rights as an attempt to influence international foreign policy and portray Qatar as a favourable destination for foreign investment.

"Al-Jazeera's detractors have long dismissed the network as a vehicle for Doha's foreign policy, one driven by Sunni sectarianism and an overriding antagonism toward Iran" (Kessler, 2012: 52). Kessler's paper titled 'The Two Faces of Al Jazeera' provides a scathing critique of the network much of which is premised on the Qatari government's use of the station to further a national agenda. While propagating a distinctly open and liberal international political stance especially in light of recent developments in the Arab world, Al-Jazeera is often criticized for harboring a distinctly hypocritical nature. Al-Jazeera's dedicated coverage of the Egyptian revolution and in large part the Arab Spring is contradicted by a hostile political regime within its very own host nation of Qatar. Being neither democratic nor open to the widely propagated views of media freedom aired on the channel, inferences of Qatari political influence on Al-Jazeera are widely circulated. "Qatar is an absolute monarchy, governed by the extended Al-Thani family and the ruling elite is also the de facto owner of the country's vast economic resources, which derive chiefly from the discovery of one of the world's largest reserves of natural gas" (Mansour cited in Figenschou, 2010: 695). The Al-Thani dynasty maintains a tight grip over governance of the country by largely squashing any resistance to their power. They do this through stringent measures enforced upon the political sphere like the outlawing of political

parties and heavy regulation of civil society organizations. The launch of global news broadcaster Al-Jazeera by the Qatari government is according to Figenschou (2010: 965) "examples of pragmatism by the Qatari elite initiated to increase their own legitimacy rather than to undertake democratization processes."

Despite propagating a distinctly critical attitude that appears to annoy Arab leaders who condemn its audacity in covering taboo topics such as sex and polygamy along with aggravating US officials who often accuse it of being a mouthpiece for terrorists, Al-Jazeera has consistently failed to criticize its host country Qatar and the Qatari royal family (Johnson and Fahmy, 2008; Asquith, 2006; Figenschou, 2010). As the financial benefactor of the station, the Qatari government appears to exert significant influence over the network much of which is evident in Al-Jazeera's lack of coverage over internal affairs and the hard to ignore lack of criticism toward Qatar's personal stance on issues like human rights and democracy. The continued funding of Al-Jazeera by the deep pockets of the Qatari royal family has elicited significant academic work much of which condemns the network and accuses it of furthering a blatantly nationalist agenda (Kessler, 2012; Podeh, 2012; Figenschou, 2010). According to Figenschou (2010: 965) the purpose of the Al-Jazeera news network is to strengthen Qatar's ruling elite by placing the country on the global map and exposing regional problems while largely ignoring domestic affairs. Figenschou (2010: 966) attributes the Qatari government's success at maintaining this balance through the direct economic and political dependence of Al-Jazeera on the emir. Firstly, as the sole financier of the network, the emir of Qatar holds within his grasp the complete feasibility of Al-Jazeera and the staff which earn a livelihood from it. Secondly, as the ultimate head of the small gulf state, the emir undoubtedly holds significant clout over immigration laws and the allocation of work visas for expatriates working in the country. As such approximately 75 percent of Al-Jazeera's editorial staff are Arab expatriates thus the kind of journalistic output they are responsible for can be directly correlated on their rights to work and live in Qatar.

In modern societies wherein the mass media have often assumed the function of intermediaries between political officials and the populace they govern, the media plays an immensely important role in mediating the relationship between the administrators and the administrated. Al-Jazeera adds a further case study to the already wealthy archive on media and foreign policy. The fact that much of the literature dedicated to the station approaches it through this manner

indicates the level of cynicism most academics harbor. In line with this criticism issues surrounding propaganda are unmistakable. Propaganda in the media occupies a salient position. However, in times of crisis the extent of it has proven to be much deeper. The media during times of war are particularly vulnerable to propaganda, and Snow and Taylor's (2006) work on the "Framing of the 'Global War on Terror" is very significant. It aptly illustrates the manner in which the American government deployed propaganda through the media in its aim of establishing its position as legitimate against a terrorist organization of enemies (Snow and Taylor, 2006: 390). While Qatar enjoys a degree of stability and peace Snow and Taylor's work on state-led propaganda as a means of garnering legitimacy stands to enrich this research by shedding light on the manner in which the Qatari states enactment of Al-Jazeera can be viewed as a mechanism for establishing international credibility and less as a means of institutionalizing various proponents of democracy like freedom of the press et cetera.

Although literature on the AJE network is plentiful, the dwelling on issues of propaganda and foreign policy within this literature creates a void into the more compelling nature of the station. With a mission statement clearly intentioned to propagate the underrepresented voices of the world, AJE clearly operates within a market in an attempt to meet certain objectives. The brand which the station has come to signify within this market is of vital importance given its increasing prominence. In clearly identifying AJE's role as the purveyor of the under-reported this research aims to contribute to the existing literature by critically evaluating the extent to which audience participation in the station forms a crucial element of the network's brand imaging. The role of new media technologies in audience participation is of particular importance to the study taking into regard the hype surrounding the use of citizen journalism and social media during the Arab uprisings.

2.1.1 Participation and Media Convergence

Literature on new media is dominated by celebratory notions highlighting its potential for democracy and participation. Turner (2009) and Jenkins and Thorburn (2004) work on new media and convergence elaborate on these claims while Carpentier's (2001; 2009) extensive work on participation provides a much more complex understanding of participation and its potential. The debate around the potential of new media technologies has been polarized across two primary fronts firstly, scholars have highlighted the power of the medium as a voice on its

own to enact change and secondly they have raised awareness regarding the role of new media in transforming old media (Leckenby, 2005: 4). The latter has increased prominence within this dissertation as the issues of media convergence gain increased momentum and visibility in media corporations like AJE. This section will proceed to discuss the concept of participation within three specific contexts. Firstly, old/ traditional media and participation secondly, new media and participation and thirdly participation through new media in old media more commonly referred to as convergence.

The democratic potential of media systems has historically been evaluated according to their participatory options, and studies on participation have proved to be plentiful. Carpentier's extensive work on participation indicates a complex understanding of the term, one that refuses to naively adopt the one-dimensional perspectives often propagated. The participatory potential of new media have been one of its greatest champions. In distinguishing itself from traditional media forms new media are characteristically interactive allowing users a degree of selectivity and choice in their search for media content. The real time availability, responsiveness and social presence of information ensure a different engagement with media for new media users (Lievrouw, 2011: 13). Participation is in itself highly contested and according to Carpentier (2009: 407) "participation [becomes] an object of celebration, trapped in a reductionist discourse of novelty, detached from the reception of its audiences and decontextualized from its political-ideological, communicative-cultural and communicative-structural contexts". To consider participation in isolation away from the conditions which both promote and hinder its appreciation is highly problematic since these very aspects may easily reduce the possibilities of participation to nothing (Carpentier, 2009: 411). The context of any form of participation is paramount to its potential and therefore any naïve consumption of the term is dangerous.

Carpentier (2001) focuses much of his research on participation on audience discussion television programmes that actively promote themselves as purveyors of "ordinary voices". According to Carpentier (2001) the democratic principles which these shows pride themselves upon are far less appealing than they care to admit. Talk shows take delight in focusing on the common sense views of audience members in contrast to the professional advice widely screened across media channels. Furthermore these shows often claim to provide platforms for ordinary citizens to question the power balances which govern them. Carpentier's (2001) work closely

examines the real dialectics which underpin talk shows taking note of the various conditions which circumscribe real audience participation.

Taking into consideration the role of the talk show host and his/her power to grant or deny certain members of the audience a chance to speak, Carpentier (2001) denounces the potential of the medium as a true democratic means. Furthermore he highlights the highly structured nature of these shows which are largely pre-determined and therefore only elicit comments and opinions regarding particular issues. The hype surrounding new media and participation has been propelled with such momentum that the very fundamental conditions which constitute effective participation have suffered a washed-down barely evident definition. Concepts of democracy, empowerment and equality are according to Carpentier (2009: 411) just a few of the crucial prerequisites for participation which have unfortunately been largely ignored. In his denunciation of simple definitions of the concept of participation, Carpentier (2009: 499) cites the use of the term as much more of a ploy by media networks to invite audiences under the pretences of more democratic production processes. The emphasis on the participation of the "ordinary" exists according to Carpentier (2001: 500) as a concerted ploy by these networks to appear antagonistic to the large scale mainstream practices which remain focused on the elite and professional while oblivious to the ordinary. Thus, the authenticity of these attempts remains weak rendering the true effect of its participation null and void.

The degree of cynicism Carpentier exhibits regarding the quality and true potential of participation relates well to the broader reflections of the field of development studies. Within this field various authors denounce the over-exaggerated appraisal of participation that are said to promote democracy and boost citizenship (Cornwall, 2003; Escobar, 2009; Hickey and Mohan, 2009). In broad strokes, the field highlights the various ways in which participation is fractured according gender (Cornwall, 2009), economics (Escobar, 2009) and politics (Hickey and Mohan, 2009). In the light of the above mentioned filters, various works within this field support a less celebratory approach to participation that takes into account its limitations and vulnerability to structured influence. In response to the euphoria that has engulfed the democratic prospects of participation Hickey and Mohan (2005: 238) declare their intention to "examine the extent to which participatory reforms and approaches necessarily fails to generate transformations to existing social, political, and economic structures and relations in ways that

empower the previously excluded or exploited." Their statement provides a succinct synopsis of the larger pessimistic perception prevailing within development studies that advocates more critical debate on the subject.

The increased circulation of voices and opinions amidst a new media environment that seems to prioritize quantity above quality exists as one of the most damning criticisms against new media and its celebration of participation in particular. A review on available literature condemning the excitement engulfing new media and participation indicates a body of work that ceases to accept the proliferation of participation at face value (Dean, 2005; Couldry, 2010; Bardoel and Deuze, 2001). The literature exhibits a pessimistic view of new media and its potential to enhance democracy through the platforms of participation offered by new media. Instead it questions the true worth of participation in an environment where multiple voices are propelled but few are heard. At the heart of the celebration of new media and participation lies the anticipation for the enactment of social change. However, when participation merely provides a smokescreen of immediate yet temporary sentiments of emancipation and democracy without necessarily proving good on its promise its worth remains insignificant. Couldry's (2010) categorizing of the concept of voice into two segments skillfully confers this idea. He categorizes voices as either a process or voice as a value (Couldry, 2010: 1). In distinguishing between the two Couldry (2010) differentiates between voices as mere processes whether these are processes of accessing new media tools or merely speaking aloud and voices of value that are actually heard, taken heed to and able to enact certain change. His work discredits the immature celebration of new media and participation by pointing out how new media forms merely provides more 'processes' for voices instead of creating 'valuable' voices.

In line with this, van Dijk (2009: 41) asserts similar notions identifying the concept of a media "user" as much more complex term than online media powerhouses acknowledges. She undermines the participatory potential of online media suggesting that all online participation requires a certain degree of information. These range from e-mail addresses to age, ethnicity and gender which are in turn used as databases for advertising companies which "users" exercise no control over. Thus, while new media holds promise for enhanced participation it does so with terms and conditions attached to it.

Carpentier's more recent work on new media has strong resemblances to Livingstone and Markham (2008) who highlight the plight of participation amidst an environment peaked at celebrating the potentials of new media. Their work uncovers the façade of new media illustrating the idea that it merely represents a new medium while carrying the same burdens of old media. In his interrogation of new media and the potential for enhanced participation Carpentier (2011: 5) acknowledges the conditions for it possibility but concludes that online media environments merely increase participation "with" media organizations and content and not "in" media production.

Although Carpentier cites the talk show host as a personality of power who drives the content of the show he similarly acknowledges the potential of audience members to resist this power. They are able to do so by speaking without being asked to or posing questions that are not necessarily in line with the debate. Thus his work on audience participation is extremely relevant for this research in many respects as it sheds light on many of the participatory options offered by AJE. His work on participation is useful in critically analyzing the true participatory potential offered on the AJE network bearing in mind his extensive work on the managing of audience participation. While Carpentier's work provides a complex and compelling argument around participation his work simultaneously fails to address issues of participation in relation to branding initiatives. As participation becomes the buzzword of democratic societies the need to associate the self with such emancipatory notions becomes much greater. Thus while Carpentier questions the quality of participation in his research this dissertation aims to add a further dimension to this work by questioning the branding initiatives that warrant participation.

Much of the hype surrounding new media and participation appears to be exaggerated and premised on ideas of open access, a shortcoming which traditional media has not been able to completely overcome. Graeme Turner's book *Ordinary people and the media: the demotic turn* approaches the idea of participation in a much more complex way by questioning the kinds of participation online media invite. While Carpentier looks at participation and the manner in which it is both promoted and circumscribed, Turner (2010) highlights the manner in which new media platforms in particular facilitate opinion, a subsidiary of participation. According to Turner (2010: 159) new media technologies have manipulated the concept of participation by turning the idea of information into entertainment. He cites this technique as a capitalist initiative

that invites participation that ultimately gels with media organizations' commercial incentives. Turner's (2010) work is especially pertinent to the case study of AJE considering the station's active Facebook page and successful broadcasting entity. Of particular interest to this research is the kind of participation these platforms opportunities offer. While the station cannot be charged with commercially driven incentives, ideological inferences may very well be present. The continuous stream of posts emanating from AJE's Facebook page is undeniably determined efforts at promoting the station's particular agenda and ideology. The participatory options available across programming and accompanying these posts are therefore worthy of more critical inspection.

The rise of media systems within global information societies has responded to the unprecedented need for international audiences to keep abreast of events occurring in distant localities while enjoying dedicated coverage and in-depth analysis. The resulting dependence on media entities to inform and educate ordinary citizens around the world has established an omnipresent media character that people are constantly confronted by in all spheres of modern life. While traditional media like the television have historically performed the function of informing the world's mass population, the advent of new media have somewhat altered this dynamic. The rise of new media amidst an environment of growing cynicism against traditional forms of mass media has often been championed by the liberating potential of the medium compare to its less democratic predecessor (Jensen, 2010: 4).

New media forms have repeatedly been hailed for their qualities of emancipation that old media have proven time and again to blatantly ignore given their vulnerability to outside forces. Turner's (2010) work has been especially vocal in this regard as he interrogates the most recent phenomena of Reality TV and user generated Web content in an attempt to display the greater visibility of ordinary people across media forums where they exist as both performers and producers of media content (Turner, 2010: 4). Drawing on examples from Reality TV like *Idols* and *Big Brother*, Turner (2010) highlights the increased prominence attributed to ordinary people evident in their voting which ultimately impacts on these shows. According to Turner (2010) the degree of interactivity offered by new media forms such as SMS's and blogs has the potential to challenge the prevailing status quo of mass media that remains oblivious to ordinary people. Apart from questioning the kinds of voices and personalities that previously accessed the media,

new media technologies have promised to challenge the political regimes of various regions giving voices to minority and disenfranchised parties. It has the capacity to do so by providing platforms like the internet for these parties to establish themselves and disseminate news giving greater plurality to the concept of democracy (Jenkins and Thorburn, 2004: 4).

The flow of content across multiple media platforms along with the migratory behavior of media followers who seek certain forms of entertainment comes to define the latest buzz word 'convergence' (Jenkins, 2006: 2). The term signifies the symbiotic relationship enjoyed by old and new media whereby new media forms enhance and liberate traditional media while maximizing on the predecessor's loyal viewership. According to Jenkins (2006: 3) "In the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms". The statement highlights the encompassing nature of new media systems that infiltrate various spheres in an attempt to reach numerous objectives. Jenkins' extensive work on the subject seeks to uncover the fundamental point that convergence comes to signify more than just a technological process synthesizing multiple media functions, but instead represents a shift in participatory initiative as consumers depict individual drive to seek out favourable media content. Thus his work challenges the notion of passive audiences as he convolutes the relationship between media producers and consumers to mere participants interacting with each other according to a new set of rules sanctioned by new media systems (Jenkins, 2006: 3).

A review of literature dedicated to Al-Jazeera branding and participation and media convergence indicates various bodies of work polarized across different fronts. The lack of critical work on branding given its increased significance and popularity indicates a void this research hopes to contribute toward. Literature on participation and new media indicates a strong body of work that on the one hand celebrates it while on the other condemns the façade of it. Together the field provides a comprehensive survey of the current academic positions on the subject which undoubtedly adds a degree of value and significance to this dissertation. However, in combining the aspects of participation and branding this research hope to add value to an aspect of media studies that has received much attention too in separation but not combination.

2.1.2 Branding

A large body of literature is dedicated to the study of branding. However, much of this belongs to the marketing tradition and deals with initiatives centered directly on monetary value (Maguire, 2007; Weilbacher, 1993). With a keen interest on the branding initiatives of media houses this literature review accessed more critical literature on the subject that raised issues of legitimacy and value creation.

As capitalism establishes a firm foot-hold in modern societies the concept of branding has received increased scholarly attention. The pervasive character of mainstream media which confronts all sectors of contemporary life has propelled the segment of branding into a cut throat industry that strives to excel at unique and successful brand imaging. Traditionally branding could be defined as "the advertising of products in such a way that consumers have immediate, positive, brand-name recognition and association with particular company" (Kramer, 2003: 301-302). Media avenues have proved to be the greatest exploitation grounds for international companies that seek to propagate their brands and achieve cross-national recognition for their products and services. The omnipresent nature of these international company branding attempts has resulted in a global atmosphere where their presence and signified products have become accepted as natural. More importantly, however, is the manner in which ordinary people react to this branding, indicating its impact on values, identity and consumer habits (Kramer, 2003: 302).

While branding has traditionally been utilized for the marketing of goods and services as explored above, the last three decades have witnessed a radical shift in the concept as it begins to occupy an increasingly "promiscuous existence in ranging discussions about the management of identity, not only those of sneakers and coffee, but of cities, countries [and] corporations…." (Grainge, 2008: 21). According to Grainge's book *Brand Hollywood* the phenomenon evolved into a narrative of the marketplace that was no longer limited to manufacturers and industry but also to universities, government agencies and non-commercial bodies (Grainge, 2008: 21). His work enlists the gradual movement of branding from a primarily capitalistic based initiative to a more complex process of identity creation that seeks to signify more in-depth and narcissistic notions. It is in this regard that the concept of branding comes to hold chief importance to this dissertation.

While the station's brand image may appear natural and organic to some degree as a result of its large scale propagation, it does in fact exist as a concerted attempt by the network at assuming a brand identity with a market demand (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2008: 51). However, while the sensibility of this argument may gel well with most media corporations that vie for commercial revenue, the AJE case study appears to be more complex than first meets the eye. The networks peculiar funding model which remains intertwined with the politics of the host country, Qatar, does not compete for advertising revenue like most media corporations. Instead it relies on the deep pockets of its oil producing host country for sponsorship (King and Zayani, 2008: 33). Although the Amir of Qatar's funding of the station is not promised to be permanent, his continual loan lending to the station renders the particular model unique. While this field of study comprises of a sound body of literature dedicated to branding, it is approached through a distinctly marketing lens as authors thoroughly explore the nature of corporate branding alongside its financial and social values (Clifton, 2009; Healey, 2008; Dunn, 2004). A large component of this field is dedicated to branding strategies which utilize large corporations like Coca Cola as examples of successful branding initiatives as both guidelines and case studies for new and emerging brand identities (Hait, 2005; Mennen, 2010; Jones, 1999). The literature expands on the success of the Coke Empire and emphasizes the role of branding within this. However, as mentioned earlier, existing literature on this field emphasizes the market value of brands and is geared less toward a critical perspective. Thus, while there exists a vast amount of academic work on branding, the concerted attention this field dedicates to marketing leaves a visible void in the critical analysis of the concept.

As the concept of branding assumes an increasingly obscure nature encompassing far more than providing recognition to products and services, the notion of 'value' making becomes subsequently important. It is in this regard that Aronczyk and Powers' book (2010) *Blowing up the Brand* becomes very pertinent to the AJE case study. As one of the rare academic contributions to the field of critical branding studies, the book surpasses the role of branding within the corporate world by adopting a critical approach to the concept while tracing the non-commercial incentives it has recently come to pursue. As brand imaging saturates the media landscape, advocating international apparel and various other items, the need to brand the self has seeped into various other sectors that do not necessarily follow the grain. More often than

not, when capitalist incentives remain absent in branding, attempted notions of value creation achieve prime significance (Lury and Moor, 2010: 29).

Mechanisms for creating and measuring brand value are fundamental to the operation of branding in modern societies. Depending on their contexts, branding in contemporary societies involves diverse forms of representation and technology depending on the specifics of the strategic purpose (Lury and Moor, 2010: 32). For brands to command any kind of influence whether it be financial or ideological, their most valuable asset lies in the public standing of the brand. Thus, the position they have managed to assume within the lives of consumers directly correlates to the 'brand value' (Arvidson, 2005: 1). Alongside Aronczyk and Powers' (2010), Arvidson's working paper titled "Brands: A Critical Perspective" provides a complementary dialogue to the debate on critical branding. Together their work provides groundbreaking research into this field which this research aims to contribute toward using the apt case study of AJE.

Given the financial stability of the AJE network, branding for the station appears to exist at a much more complex level than that normally attributed to global broadcasters like itself. On a more critical level the stations branding appears to be concerted attempts at legitimizing the network and creating for it a degree of value which ultimately transcends into larger viewership numbers. "Like the intangible value embodied in the legal constructs of patents and copyrights, brand value-protected by the legal of trademark law represents an important immaterial asset in contemporary capitalism" (Arvidson, 2005: 2). The kind of ideals fostered around brand identity such as attitudes, lifestyles, experiences and most importantly loyalty are fundamental to their success. While there exists numerous examples to illustrate this through commercial achievement, AJE provides a case study of brand success primarily premised on value creation. AJE has managed to secure a position within the cut-throat international mediascape through a branding initiative which foregrounds the dissemination of 'ordinary' voices and privileging of perspectives emanating from the South. Arvidson's (2005) work on brand management which details the manner in which brands empower the freedom of consumers by providing ambiences of agency is particularly valuable in this regard. It sheds light on the station's participatory opportunities and the role this plays within the wider scheme of brand management.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Following a literature review dedicated to branding and participation in particular, the following theoretical framework aims to merely complement the various theoretical tools already derived by the literatures' in-depth analyses and largely theoretical nature. Hall's constructionist theory of representation which identifies the social character of language adds value to the current approaches to branding by highlighting the manner in which language exploitation contributes to the 'shared meanings' which come to constitute brand imaging in the minds of media 'consumers'. Furthermore work on identity serves to enhance the theoretical tools of value creation and legitimacy emanating from the literature by shedding light on the politics of agency which cause the process of identity formation to adopt certain degrees of value in opposition to the rest.

2.2.1 Representation

Identified as one of the central practices that produce culture, representation deals with the manner in which language assists society in making sense of their world and thereby contributing to their 'shared meanings'. Language manages to construct and sustain meaning primarily because it operates within a 'representational' system where the exploitation of signs and symbols stand to represent people and concepts (Hall, 1997: 2). According to Brito Vieira and Runciman (2008, viii) the concept of representation "encompasses an extraordinary range of meanings and applications, stretching from mental images to economic transactions, and from legal process to theoretical performance". Discussions around representation often assume various roles ranging from the aesthetic and legal to the philosophical (Brito Vieira and Runciman, 2008: viii). However, given the peculiar case study of this dissertation the manner in which representation functions in its own right to infer certain meanings and ideologies toward media corporations like AJE through the exploitation of language is of particular interest. Representation is used in the dissertation to unpack what has come to constitute brand Al-Jazeera through concerted efforts by the station to represent itself in very particular and specific ways.

2.2.2 Constructionist Approach

While the process of meaning production relies heavily on the use of signs and symbols, the practice of representation is by no means one-dimensional. In his extensive work on

representation, Hall (1997) details the distinctions between three different theories of representation; the 'reflective', the 'intentional' and the 'constructionist'. It is in this regard that the latter assumes the most significance for this research. Hall's constructionist theory of representation is immensely valuable to this research essay as it recognises the social character of language and acknowledges that cultural and linguistic backgrounds are integral to constructing meaning. With the most significant impact on Cultural Studies, the constructionist approach has been widely proclaimed as a result of its fundamental basis which asserts that things do not mean but are instead infused with meaning given various popular constructions through language (Hall, 1997: 25).

In situating language as the most fundamental aspect, the constructionist approach identifies the malleable nature of representation and highlights the 'constructed' nature of all representation based on the dialogue between language and meaning making. According to Webb (2009: 39) "Language is …what makes us human. It makes us, - that is, constructs us- in a very real sense because to be a member of society… you must have access to language."

The brand that AJE has come to signify within the Middle East, and amongst the various other news industries it competes against, is by no means a fixed entity but rather a concerted attempt of self-representation to suit its particular agenda and slant. Thus, all notions surrounding the station's reputation as being the whistle-blowing voice of the Arab region along with its blatant anti-West approach exists as part of the network's branding; the success of which lies predominantly within the spheres of language and representation.

Hall's constructionist theory of representation recognises the public and social character of language. It highlights the contested nature of meaning where things and people exist in relation to certain ideologies as a result of the language systems they exploit in order to infer certain ideas (Hall, 1997: 25). This theory is especially pertinent to the case of AJE since the station's established brand imaging as alternative to the mainstream subsists solely as a result of the savvy use of language that comes to deduce this branded motto of alterity. Crucial to Hall's constructionist theory is the idea that meaning is produced within language. In line with this, the kind of ideas or concepts attached to the AJE network is therefore a result of a deliberate means of self-representation. More aptly what the brand Al-Jazeera has come to mean in the current mediascape is testament to concerted attempts of self-representation which the theory is

adequately equipped to contend with. The intensity of Hall's constructionist approach to representation provides a sophisticated theoretical framework to explore representation in the AJE case study. His insights into the way in which signs organised into language stand to symbolise things other than what they materially are indicates an extremely refined theory that has the potential to explore what the station's brand has come to 'mean'. It debunks any attempts by Al-Jazeera and all media networks that claim to represent the 'real-world'.

2.2.3 Identity

In conjunction with Hall's (1997) theory of representation his work on identity is equally pertinent to this dissertation. The explosion of critical debate and academic attention focused on the concept of 'identity' in the past few decades indicates a greater awareness and vigilance to the tensions and efforts invested in the process of identity creation. At the centre of this study spurring on increasing interest lays a growing consciousness surrounding the performance of identity. In his work on identity and leadership, Ackerman (2000: 2) defines identity as "the unique characteristics of an organisation, or individual, which are the integrated result of particular mental, physical, and emotional capacities." His definition gels well with various other post-modern academics who highlight the various discrepancies in the formation of identity that is said to require a degree of management in an attempt to sustain validation from others (Cote and Levine, 2002: 6).

The kind of identity AJE has come to assume through its branding initiatives and the discourse it exploits is particularly interesting. Hall (1996: 2) situates the concept of identity in relation to the set of problems that require it to emerge. He cites agency and politics as the two main ushers of identity wherein the need to assert the self and adopt a position requires certain forms of identity formation. At the most simple and common level identity is constructed in recognition of common origins and characteristics with certain people, groups and ideals. However, Hall (1996: 2) adopts a discursive approach that views identity as a process of construction that is never finalised. At its most core identity "is conditional [and] lodged in contingency" (Hall, 1996: 3). In line with this Hall's (1996) work on identity strives to highlight the fact that identity is by no means essentialist but rather strategic. The concept is continually subject to intersecting and antagonistic discourses and positions whereby identity becomes an articulation and over-

determination instead of a subsumption. Most importantly however, is the idea that identity is constructed within representation not outside of it (Hall, 1996: 4).

It is therefore within the realm of discourse that identity formation occurs. The creation of which is often the result of role playing where the exercise of power warrants certain degrees of self-assertion. In one of Hall's most valuable contributions to the dialogue he cites, is the idea that identities are constructed through difference in the process of marking distinction and not similarity. It is primarily in this regard that the case study of AJE becomes more pertinent. In line with the fundamental aspect of branding, all initiatives on behalf of the network exploit discourse in an attempt to create an identity that is distinguishable from the rest. The concerted efforts at this process aligns well with Hall's (1997) theoretical framework that recognises all forms of identities as temporary attachments to subjective positions. Branding is inherently subjective; a practice that demands constructed identities, images and stand-points that are either aimed at profit generation or value creation. With the latter more applicable to AJE, self-branding in the form of identity creation acts as a means of successful articulation in invested positions (Hall, 1997: 6).

While Hall's work on identity concentrates for the most part on the individual, Ackermans's work entitled *Identity is Destiny: Leadership and the Roots of Value Creation* (2002) provides an apt complement to the theoretical framework by exploring the role of value creation in identities. Brand Al-Jazeera constitutes a corporate identity that constantly appeals its viewership to join its 'membership' which aligns with certain ideologies. The value that the brand conveys remains abstract and targeted at a particular conceptual mind-set/ideology. The identity of the station which is responsible for constructing this brand provides a direction for the flow of ideas and opinions. With a macro-scopic lens on the stations identity as a whole "Leadership [within the station] is about enabling the organization to achieve self-actualization, to reach its potential through relentless value creation" (Ackerman, 2002: 119). Thus, the link between brand identity and value creation is unmistakable and remains a crucial point of interest with regard to AJE.

Given the mechanical façade media entities often propagate, Hall's constructionist theory of representation and work on identity is crucial to exploring the case of AJE since it debunks any attempts propagated by the station's branding as being fixed but rather an active process that produces certain kinds of meaning (Hall, 1997:24). His work on self and Other is very useful to

this case study given the manner in which Al-Jazeera defines itself in opposition to its competitors. Furthermore while Hall's work on identity has gained prominence through this applicability to the individual employing the theory to the Al-Jazeera case study indicates the versatility of his work and the prospects it offers to analysing group identities.

2.3 Conclusion

The innovative approach of the research that seeks to combine the previously separated realms of branding and participation is one of the most potent potentials of the study. Thus, despite sound existing literature archives on either subject, the dissertation remains pioneering in its efforts at combining them. Adding to this is a strong theoretical framework that provides an enabling means to structure the research. The following chapter provides the first step into analysing brand Al-Jazeera. The chapter exists largely as a background to the stations brand identity detailing the brand AJE had come to constitute prior to the Arab uprisings of North Africa.

Chapter Three

The Al-Jazeera Identity: Mapping what has come to constitute Al-Jazeera English since inception

3.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a historical framework of the AJE network by exploring the media-scape of the Middle East and the conditions that spurred the advent of the channel through to its current position in the global media sphere. Following this the chapter has a keen interest in uncovering the branding strategy pursued by the station prior to the Arab Spring which began in January 2011. Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring became extremely pronounced during the various uprisings across the Arab world as the station offered dedicated coverage to the unrest. However, while this dissertation is primarily concerned with the role of AJE during the Egyptian revolution this chapter aims to investigate the station's self-branding prior to it in an attempt to understand the foundations of this brand identity. The chapter aims to uncover this by firstly analyzing primary sources, that is statements from the station downloaded from the internet along with interviews with senior AJE staff members. Secondly, secondary literature on Al-Jazeera and AJE composed of academic literature on the station will be analyzed. While the chapter aims to provide a clear illustration of AJE's branding exercise prior to the Arab Spring it does not aim to do so through an in-depth analysis. Instead it will provide an encompassing analysis of various data. Deeper and more extensive analysis of data will follow in subsequent chapters.

3.1 Historical Framework

Any study aiming to probe and investigate the Al-Jazeera case study needs to be rooted within the media framework of the Middle East since it is this landscape that has cultured the global phenomenon that is Al-Jazeera. The academic paradigm of media studies similar to most other social science subjects is principally embedded within a Western historical framework that approaches foreign media systems through a distinctly ideological and imperialist lens (Sreberny, 2000). Put more simply studies on mediascapes like those present within the Middle East are often assessed and gauged according to various assumptions regarding media dynamics in political, economic and cultural contexts that are in fact very much alien to their local milieu. To

be fair and present an accurate accord of the Middle East and the media systems which characterise the region, concerted attempts must be made to assess prevailing systems in relation to dominant political and ideological settings (Sreberny, 2008: 9). Curran and Park (2000) in their *De-Westernizing Media Studies* provide a rigorous attempt at countering this thrust with the intention of providing a more balanced account of media systems across the Middle and Far East.

The attempt to assess the media within the Middle East through distinctly anti-imperialist lens is complicated on various levels, the most glaring being the physical demarcation of land ascribed to as the 'Middle East' since it exists as a colonial decree popularised as lines drawn in the sand by colonial powers (Sreberny, 2000). Nevertheless, the Middle East is a region compromised of various dynamics despite its imperialist international media coverage that simplify the entire region into a naïvely seamless geographic land space of volatility and extremist Islam. Much of what embodies the Middle East in the media today and many years leading up to it is a problematic representation of Islam that appears to constantly warrant degrees of modernity and civilisation from the West (Said, 1997). For Said (1997), Islam subsists as the scapegoat of all things gone wrong in the Middle East and a convenient excuse to reserve any determined efforts at engaging with the cultures and populace of the region who remain a foreign and threatening Other. Covered as either oil merchants or terrorists, very little else connotes the Arab population. According to Said (1997) this biased and extremely distorted rhetoric of Islam and the Arab people who find a sense of identity and spiritual fulfilment in the faith is largely a result of an Orientalist ethnocentric tendency of Western media to divide the world into pro- and anti-American parts.

On the contrary the Middle East is a complex and multifaceted region compromising of much more than the simple classifications afforded to it by Western media. While Islam remains the dominant religion, sizeable communities of Jews, Greek Orthodox, Protestants, Druze and Copts call it home and while Arabic is the foremost language it enjoys many variants while Turkish, Hebrew and Persian persist as important regional languages. More importantly Islam extends to include much more powerful differentiations than the commonly propagated Sunni/Shi'ite divisions that the media exploit (Sreberny, 2008: 11). With this comes converging and conflicting attitudes regarding the role of religion in politics, therefore 'Cultural diversity might

not operate with the same categories as within Western societies, but that does not mean there isn't any." (Sreberny, 2008: 11).

Often condemned for its antagonistic attitude toward democracy and the lack of liberal media systems, the Middle East has historically been viewed as a region boasting a lack lustre political public sphere. The realities are however much more intricate and once again need to be rooted within the context of prevailing political systems, cultural codes and societies. While it remains valid that the Middle East is in large part hostile to the formal kinds of democracies existent in Western countries and epitomised by ballot box, the exercise of informal politics in the coffee shops and through graffiti in the street are important hallmarks of political communication in the region. These spaces speak to prevailing attitudes and concerns of the local people (Sreberny, 2008: 14). Moreover, while condemnation of the regions autocratic political systems and the subsequent tight grip on the media are often brought about by Western journalistic enterprises, more attention needs to be paid to the Western governments who until very recently provided unyielding support structures for these systems to thrive. As discussed earlier common stereotypes circulating through mass media channels charge Islam with the numerous setbacks facing the region, democracy being an important one of them. The realities are however, much more complex and instead reveal more significant factors such as repeated foreign intervention in the region and the unquenchable thirst for the immensely valuable natural resource of oil. Democracy has been especially slow in the Middle East as a large number of its countries owe their GDP and economic expansion to the extraction of oil. The implication being that states do not need to rigorously engage local workforces for the successful extraction of this mineral and are therefore under less pressure to enforce democratic establishments (Sreberny, 2000: 66). Western interests like the United States in particular have long supported the undemocratic regimes indicating hypocritical agenda's that support opposing forms of governance at home and away. The peculiar means of production has lead researchers into proposing a "historic incompatibility of oil and democracy" (MERIP cited in Sreberny, 2000: 66)

"The mass media have long been linked to the historical development and emergence of national identities and the modern nation-state by creating bounded spaces of political communication and discourse" (Nisbet and Myers, 2010: 347). Unsurprisingly political dialogue and platforms of dissent have never found home within the realm of the mass media in the Middle East.

Historically media in the region have been characterised by very tightly regulated state-run systems echoing prevailing political ideologies and limited opportunities for press freedom (Nisbet and Myers, 2010: 351). Television was first introduced in the 1950's by US military and by the early 1960's most countries in the region had established state controlled broadcasting entities (Sreberny, 2000:70). Egypt's particular system was considered one of the most successful operations and provided a complementary element to an already thriving radio industry. Like most neighbouring Arab governments, the Egyptian state owns and controls the local media system through a centralised model of broadcasting for radio and television. Boasting the most successful and influential radio broadcasting network in the Arab world, the Egyptian media model is an especially prominent model within the Middle East to explore. Second to radio, television in Egypt enjoys wide-scale penetration. While print media maintains a strong tradition within the landscape, the advancements of radio and television technologies resulted in a pioneering model of sophistication in the region and yet another tool for ruling political elites to maintain and legitimise their power. Furthermore it provided ruling powers with an innovative tool to access the large pockets of the illiterate populace at the time. Commencing television broadcast with verses from the Holy Qur'aan followed by a speech by then President Gamal Abdel Nasser the propagandist role of television in Egypt became clear from the very onset (Amin and Napoli, 2000:197).

The relationship between Egyptian media and the West has been one of repeated contestation. Until the 1967 state run television in Egypt provided news, entertainment and information from both within the country and abroad. However, following Egypt's defeat in the war, authorities imposed very specific censorship on broadcast content imposing particular restrictions on American programming. The move was symbolic of the breakdown in diplomatic ties between the US, UK and Egypt and the prevailing ideologies of state-run television which was in large part used as a tool for political motivation. Programming in the country was then largely sourced from the Soviet Union. The period did not last long and during President Sadat's rule which began in 1967 Egypt began restoring relations with the US and once more began broadcasting American media products. This tradition continued throughout the rein of the Mubarak administration which ended most recently and highlighted the close political ties forged between the Egyptian regime and American foreign policy (Amin and Napoli, 2000:182-183).

Of particular relevance and importance, the Egyptian case study reveals the manner in which the mass media within the Middle East has since inception existed as a means of political and ideological influence. Used as tool to forge internal political legitimacy and external foreign policy, mainstream media in the region has always been a means of political access to promote and furthermore specific agendas. Television has always been at the forefront of these initiatives as an encompassing medium that enjoyed wide reach and relatively easy consumption. The introduction of satellite technology in the 1990's complicated this dynamic somewhat as Arab publics became more familiar with the concept of transnational television and could now access foreign media content that was not necessarily constructed along national lines. The increasing prominence of news agencies like CNN and the BBC which became leading voices for the West on issues like the Gulf War became a particularly sensitive area for Arab governments who began to feel uneasy in the wake of media openness and their subsequent lack of control over the viewing preferences and habits of the local populace. Furthermore the agency of the Western media specifically the American news media to construct distinctly foreign narratives on international events prompted these governments toward creating more innovative local media environments. The result was a rush into broadcasting and the development of close to twenty pan-Arab satellite channels providing news, information and entertainment in both English and Arabic (Sreberny, 2000: 71).

The expansion of broadcasting in the Middle East to span transnational satellite television has been hailed by Nisbet and Myers (2010: 352) as an opening up of the Arab public sphere that broadened both pan-Arab and pan-Muslim identity and interaction. Lynch (cited in Nisbet and Myers 2010: 351) notes two structural characteristics of this public sphere; "First, it is differentiated from the traditional conception of a public sphere in that it is "disembodied" from any formal political structure or institution and is unbound by sovereign borders. Second, this public sphere encompasses an ongoing discourse within the region that primarily focuses on issues of foreign policy and international politics- and the role of national or religious identities within these arenas."

Satellite technology has undeniably led to an opening-up of the previously rigidly controlled mass media in the Middle East. Proceeding from media environments where most content had appeased ruling powers and was primarily produced to suit a 'national' agenda, satellite

technology has provided Arab citizens in the region with the possibility of consuming a wider and more diverse range of media. Of particular interest is the manner in which satellite technology has radically transformed news media within the landscape. Among the variety of bouquets available for subscription through satellite technology exists a sizeable number of news networks. Orbit was one of the first such networks, headed by a Saudi Prince based in Rome it provided an encrypted system carrying sixteen television channels and four radio networks and required a decoder to view programming. The network featured a number of global news channels including many Western channels like CNN and BBC. It was also one of the first networks to carry BBC World Arabic, the commercially self-supporting subsidiary of BBC World. The increasing prominence of global news broadcasters like CNN and BBC provided a compelling need for regional news channels to provide a counter narrative to the Western one propagated by these networks. Despite much hype and anticipation regarding the launch of BBC World Arabic, the station did not last the test of time. Following strong and unyielding pressures from opposing quarters like the Saudi government BBC World Arabic was pulled of the airwaves in 1996. Projecting strong objections to programming content and the kind of ideologies permeated through topics in the vein of human rights, the Saudi government like many other neighbouring regimes offered strong resistance to many of the Western news channels available across satellite networks in the region (Sreberny, 2000: 71)

A growing and concerted effort at establishing professionalised local media networks that captured audiences and redressed the Western influx of satellite media in the Middle East became very evident during the mid-nineties. The Egypt Radio and Television Unions (ERTU) massive investment in building a media production city, dubbed the "Hollywood of the Nile" was one such example. However, of particular interest is the idea that despite satellite technology opening up the scope of television media in the Middle East and providing Arab audiences with an array of viewing choices is the fact that with this rise came simultaneous state reaction. Along with the mushrooming of satellite networks across the region was a strong and dramatic state response which in many cases saw the banning of satellite television. Saudi Arabia was one of the earliest reactors and in 1994 the state put together a satellite bouquet of proscribed viewing that ultimately banned unfavourable channels deemed a "threat to traditional values". Following in these footsteps the Qatari and Jordanian governments promptly moved toward a multichannel multipoint distribution system (MMDS) which provided the state authority with the ability to

circumscribe programming by preventing content it did not approve of from the air and essentially controlling the kind of viewing choices on offer to their people (Sreberny, 2000:72).

Presently the field of Arabic language media in the Middle East is characterised by transnational, national and local media. Transnational media enjoy the greatest reach in the region through the medium of television, the means predominantly relied upon for entertainment and information. Of particular influence and importance within the Arabic mediascape is the phenomenon of transnational newspapers. These newspapers occupy a solid position within the media in the region however, they are comparatively much more expensive and therefore are targeted at an affluent educated class across the Arab speaking world. The Egyptian model is especially interesting in this regard. Despite global trends indicating a decline in the printing press as a result of the subsequent move toward online forms, the Egyptian case study reveals a strong tradition of newspapers and a growing market for print media (Cherribi, 2009: 759-760).

Of the various satellite news channels to take root in the Middle East, the most famous is undoubtedly Al-Jazeera. As discussed earlier the scramble into television broadcasting following the introduction of satellite technology in the Middle East led to the establishment of Al-Jazeera by the Emir of Qatar following the disbandment of BBC Arabic. With an initial grant of $140 million Shaykh Hamad established Al-Jazeera Arabic in 1996 (Blanchard, 2011:16). “In the Arab-language media scene, Al-Jazeera continues to hold the preeminent position of influence on the Arabic-language news agenda” (Cherribi, 2008: 760). As a transnational Arabic news channel Al-Jazeera can be differentiated from local government owned news networks in the Middle East on various levels. Displaying high degree’s of sensationalism and a technically alluring format, Al-Jazeera provides an extremely discursive and interactive model that has proven popular within the Arab context. The success of the Al-Jazeera prompted a sister English language channel ten years later (Magnan et al, 2008: 301). Much like its predecessor AJE also capitalized on the expertise of western educated media professionals. Consisting of a team of staff most of whom are ex-BBC and CNN employees the network’s operational functioning closely resembles that of its counterparts. While it was created as a successor to the widely popular and controversial Arabic version, marketing and promotion of the English channel concentrated on establishing AJE on its own right citing minimal association to its Arabic predecessor (Burman 2009:130). With start-up costs estimated at around $1 billion, the AJE

network is said to be the single most costly media start-up in history. Consisting of an initial four broadcasting centers in Doha, Kuala Lumpur, London and Washington DC the network established an extensive network of bureaus dedicated to providing comprehensive news coverage from across the world (Downing, 2011: 8). With its headquarters based in Doha Qatar, AJE entered the international media scene amidst a paradoxical environment of anticipation and resentment. After Al-Jazeera Arabic established a reputation of notoriety given the contentious stand-points and images it chose to broadcast, the station inadvertently paved the way for this highly paradoxical atmosphere. Since promoters of the English channel made specific attempts at detaching the station from Al-Jazeera Arabic, media watchers were left in muddy waters unaware of what to expect from the new network. Western governments and media institutions remained highly skeptical exercising caution to any forms of new media emanating from the Middle-East which they often charged with terrorist support (Duffy, 2005 :120).

"Al-Jazeera" meaning "the peninsula" as a result of its host country's position received its greatest degree of international doubt largely as a result of the stations heavy funding from the oil rich Qatari government. While continued reports suggested the station would eventually assume financial independence, materialization of this has still failed to occur. The establishment and sponsorship of AJE ten years later by the Qatari government in 2006 has increased skepticism of the networks overall independence. Advertising occupies only a small portion of the stations programming and unlike most mainstream media outlets does not constitute an objective of its functioning. The result of this has been an overwhelming condemnation of the station often catapulted by charges of Qatari influence. While the Qatari government denies any editorial involvement, critics often accuse the country of framing Al-Jazeera's coverage according to its regional politics. Boasting neither a democracy nor a history of free press Qatar is frequently accused of utilizing the Al-Jazeera network as a mouthpiece and instrument of government. In essence criticism of Qatar's sponsorship of the network is almost always encapsulated by claims of promoting its own agenda (Maalouf, 2008:34).

> Al-Jazeera has become the symbol of the emirate as well as the source of its fame. In a sense, Al-Jazeera is for Qatar what the casinos are for Monaco. Having in the past been ignored and even despised as a state by other Arab countries, Qatar has at last found its own pace (DeLage 2000 cited in Maalouf, 2008: 34).

In line with this critique much of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring has been hampered by what appears to be very slanted media attention. In contrast to the unyielding media exposure afforded to the uprising in Egypt and Libya, Al-Jazeera offered scant coverage of the protests occurring within the same time period in neighbouring Bahrain. Like the host nation of Qatar, Bahrain is run by a Sunni led kingdom. Within the context of the Arab Spring Bahrain experienced an uprising by the Shiite majority demanding greater rights and acknowledgement in the country. Al-Jazeera's minimal coverage of these protests has been cited as direct political influence by the Qatari government who similar to the Bahraini regime favours Sunni rule (Kessler, 2012: 52). Al-Jazeera's dedicated coverage of the Egyptian uprisings have similarly initiated much attention given the station's close link to the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's strongest political party toughest opponent to the Mubarak regime.

This dissertation is particularly interested in the role of AJE within the context of the Arab Spring but more specifically the Egyptian revolt. As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the Al-Jazeera phenomenon has been a considerable addition to the media-scape of the Middle East. Despite this, various intricacies regarding the role and actual prominence of AJE within this landscape need to be elaborated. Despite being an important and notable player within the news media context in the region, it has to be reiterated that Al-Jazeera is a satellite channel and access to its programming is subject to issues regarding affordability. As a satellite delivered news network, audiences need to be have access to an installed satellite dish and will most likely need to subscribe to a particular bouquet of television programming. The class implication of this is therefore immediately evident. It is essential to note Al-Jazeera's attraction to a specific middle to high income target audience. Furthermore, this dissertations focus on the AJE medium specifically needs to be contextualized. Within the Arab context Al-Jazeera maintains a strong presence and is the most often cited Arabic-language news source (Cherribi, 2008: 760). It is also by far the most important of all transnational Arabic-language news channels reaching an approximately 45 percent of Arab viewers and facing very slim competition from the second most important transnational Arab channel, Al Arabiya which is said to command only 9 percent of the audience (Cherribi, 2008: 759). AJE on the other hand enjoys far less prominence within the Arab context and largely attracts an elitest, foreign educated English speaking audience many of whom are based in the Diasporas. Investigating the role of Al-Jazeera Arabic with the

Egyptian revolution would have proven to be much more insightful unfortunately, the language barrier proved to be beyond the scope of the researcher and was therefore not possible.

3.2 Brand Al-Jazeera: The Alternative

In an attempt to gauge the brand AJE chose to pursue prior to the Arab Spring this section of the chapter will interrogate various statements specifically made by Wadah Kanfar the stations previous Director General. It is especially important to note here that Wadah Kanfar resigned in September 2012 following the release of WikiLeaks cables proving he had met with US officials in Washington and agreed to tone down war coverage in Iraq that America deemed inflammatory. Kanfar has since been replaced by an oil executive who belongs to Qatar's ruling al-Thani dynasty (Kessler, 2012: 53). These statements will be complemented by other Al-Jazeera personnel along with specific extracts taken from the station's Code of Ethics and other publicized mission statements. The statements will be interrogated specifically in light of academic work on alternative media with the intention of exploring the lucrative brand of alterity AJE has pursued since inception. Promoting an alternative character that deviates from the conventions of local media censorship and international capitalist tendencies exits for the station as a convenient reality that contributes to an appealing brand image.

It will do so by demonstrating five categories through which AJE exploits an alternative nature. These are, "The Other", The Catalyst for Change, The Independent and Objective Alternative, The Underground Medium and The People's Station.

As one of the key constituents to the survival of any business, organization or association, self-branding plays a critical role in firstly introducing a new entity and secondly sustaining it (Hatch and Schultz, 2008:22). The use of branding initiatives with respect to media organizations follows in the same vein. The current media environment which features numerous news broadcasters demands that media organizations entering the market assume a unique and interesting brand identity in order to arouse attention and mark difference from the rest. AJE's particular case study is interesting for various reasons. Following in-tow of its Arabic predecessor, the network had many pre-conceived ideals attached to it even before it actually hit the air-waves. Thus, AJE entered the global media environment as a sister channel and unlike most new comers did not necessarily have to lay the groundwork for what was to come.

However, in choosing to create a decisive shift from its Arabic counterpart, AJE did nevertheless embark on a process of brand formation. In doing so it capitalized on the success of its predecessor while promoting an air of increased global awareness that made no mistake of establishing rivals in the CNN and BBC.

3.2.1 'The Other'

The AJE launch in November 2006 received international attention and was largely catapulted by the stations initial motto of "Opinion and Counter Opinion". The motto fed into the context of global media market at the time dominated by western media powerhouses CNN and BBC. It gelled well with the Prevailing criticism of cultural imperialism as the motto subtly sought to promote the 'Counter Opinion' which the media-scape of the time was charged with ignoring. Thus, from very early on in its existence AJE assumed the position of the Other and while not explicit the station made various attempts at appearing as alternative to US-led media mainstream.

Mainstream media are currently more concentrated than ever before. As a consequence of this unfair distribution of ownership public opinion often displays rather critical reviews toward media conglomerates since their alliances toward corporate power are thought to compromise journalistic independence. (Waltz, 2005: 1). AJE has been particularly crafty in its acknowledgement of funding. Rather than elaborate on the state benefactor, that station has instead capitalized on a notion of 'financial independence'. Mohammed Nanabhay an AJE executive who established the company's new media group in 2006 was quoted as saying; "Part of our mission, our mandate, is to get our news out. We don't have the direct commercial pressures that others have. If we can make some money that is great."[2]

His statement speaks to the predominant structures of the mainstream media which rely heavily on advertising and other commercial driven incentives in order sustain themselves. In situating the idea of profit generation as secondary to ultimate goal of delivering news, Nanabhay succinctly positions the AJE network outside from the mainstream network and therefore within the realm of alternative media. Despite the dense ownership of media industries, the last few

[2] Nanabhay, M. 'Al Jazeera provides an inside look at Gaza conflict'. Interview with *The New York Times*. 1 January 2009. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/technology/11iht-jazeera.4.19256575.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

decades have witnessed an overwhelming increase in alternative media outlets giving rise to previously silenced voices and perspectives (Waltz, 2005: 1). Telesur, the satellite television station created by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Iran's Press TV are some of the more popular initiatives (Levin, 2007:112; Raphael, 2008:204). However, in acknowledging the deviant influences, it remains paramount to discern whether or not the current day proclamation of alternative media remains accurate or perhaps an attempt at a convenient and attractive branding strategy.

Giving a 'voice to the voiceless' a widely proclaimed mission statement of the station has contributed toward the station's brand image of alterity. In striving to provide a platform for the previously silenced, Al-Jazeera inadvertently pokes holes into the inaccuracies of the mass media and therefore positions itself outside of it. In an interview with *Time Magazine* during his reign as Director General Kanfar, asserted that Al-Jazeera's approach to journalism emphasizes "re-thinking authority, [and] giving a voice to the voiceless" (MacLeod, 2006). The ideal is reinforced in the station's code of ethics which states; "the channel aims to give a voice to untold stories, promote debate, and challenge established perceptions." (el-Nawawy, 2010: 7). Together these statements collude to create distance from the global mass media as Al-Jazeera exerts a concerted attempt at positioning itself as the Other.

Proliferating the station's alternative brand imaging is Al-Jazeera English assumed position of representing the Global South. In adopting the role to counter the hegemonic thrust of US-led western media, Al-Jazeera English promotes itself as the equalizing factor to the cultural imperialism debate. Promoting an agenda that neither pays allegiance to political or economic forces the stations advocacy of the Global South appears most sincere and has in-turn garnered a great deal of credibility and trustworthiness. Al-Jazeera English proclamations of representing the Global South and giving a "voice to the voiceless" combine to form a key constituent and capacity of alternative media which through some means enact political and societal change. It is perhaps within this realm that Al-Jazeera English various claims to alterity receive their greatest prominence. Alternative media has a long and powerful history. Ranging from the ability to link people in geographical locations to the capacity to transform repressive regimes, alternative media has tremendous potential.

3.2.2 The Catalyst for Change

In enhancing its position as an alternative medium and a catalyst for change, AJE has on numerous occasions positioned itself at the forefront of social progression. Alternative media has and always will receive its greatest critical acclaim from its ability to mobilize people and enact change. Through promoting ideals of representing the underrepresented (the Global South) and giving voice to the voiceless, the Al-Jazeera's mandate seems to conform to the prowess of alternative media. Given the largely dictatorial Arab gulf in which it is housed, Al-Jazeera aims to a lightning rod for democratic change. In an interview with Director General Kanfar by PBS he asserted;

> Ten years ago, Arabia was controlled by governments, and therefore the media -- mainly TV stations -- were pushing only one line, which was the government's vision about reality and politics. When Al Jazeera came, it changed all of that, and suddenly you find people from different political parties and opposition leaders appearing on the screen, speaking to the audiences with their opinions ...[3]

In a similar vein Kanfar reiterated the Al-Jazeera position in early 2011 when he was interviewed regarding his decision to step down for the top post;

> From the beginning we set up in our mission statement that we will stand for the people and for their right for democracy, and right for freedom of expression. If we don't stand for the people, who is going to stand for them? If the Arab World has a chance to liberate itself from authoritarian regimes and to go to the future with confidence for democracy, there is no way we could have stood indifferent (Edwards, 2011)

Through advocating political change in the Middle-East and Arabia in particular, Al-Jazeera has managed to successfully create a brand image of the alternative even though it has paved the way for various new media houses that support similar objectives. The tightly controlled political sphere of the Arab world has catapulted the mission and purpose of the network as the station seizes every opportunity at stating its relevance and worth. Riyaad Minty a 24year South African senior analyst at AJE was quick to do this when he stated "That mental block needs to be broken down in Arab countries. A new generation of people are prepared to go out there. What it takes is big media companies to give people voices on air. Where people can feel comfortable on a

[3] Interview between Kanfar and CBS Frontline. Aired March 27, 2007 retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/newswar/warinterviews.html

specific platform." (Cohen, 2009). Minty's sentiments were closely echoed by former Director General when during his position as top chief he stated;

> How could the Arab world build a future if 65 percent who are under 30, you know, 65 percent are, are ruled by authoritarian regimes – no democracy, aging regimes, corruption and so on, and so forth. The only voice that has the strength to challenge this status quo and say there is something wrong, please let us fix it, is Al-Jazeera. Al-Jazeera is on the foremost power of creating democracy and freedom of expression in, in the Arab world. So, therefore, yes, we will continue. But definitely we will face trouble. So what? Let us face troubles. We are journalists. If we choose this profession, we should choose it for a mission, to be committed to the audience, to truth, and to allow space for transformation to be correct and right.[4]

3.2.3 The Independent and Objective Alternative

Al-Jazeera's funding by the Qatari government has been by far one of the station's greatest critiques as international media watchers have remained skeptical of possible Qatari government influences on the network. The resulting stigma has had a considerable effect on Al-Jazeera's global branding as questions surrounding their funding have continually surfaced.

When questioned about the station's independence during the eight-years of his position through the course of four wars former Director General Kanfar answered;

> We do not listen to pressure from any government ever, even when they are pressurizing our bureaus, arresting our correspondents, even destroying our bureaus in Kabul and in Baghdad, even threatening to bomb our AJ headquarters in Doha like George Bush did. My main battle this whole eight years was to keep the independence of Al Jazeera from the Americans and from the Arab governments and from any other governments involved. My job was to keep them far away. (Edwards, 2011).

High ranking Al-Jazeera personnel have had to defend their editorial independence since the inception of the network. However, consecutive funding by the Qatari government as Al-Jazeera struggled to sustain itself financially has cast a dark shadow over its five year operation. Western governments have been quick to charge Al-Jazeera with being a pawn for the very ideals it seeks to promote. The extent of this criticism has been so strong that distancing itself from Qatari

[4] Interview between Kanfar and Gladstone. Aired March 26, 2010 by *On the Media*. Transcript retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://themoderatevoice.com/118381/why-we-need-al-jazeera-english/

policy and guiding principles has become a recurrent aspect of the station's brand imaging evident in various public statements. When asked how Al-Jazeera manages to maintain autonomy from its host sponsor and whether the station exercised complete freedom in covering issues regarding Qatar Kanfar replied;

> Before Al Jazeera, the governments that sponsored TV stations pushed all the news of their countries on the screen. Qatar didn't do that. So we are definitely distant from the Qatari local and international political agenda.[5]

He further reemphasized;

> We do cover Qatar. But I must tell you something very important. Maybe the presence of Qatar on the screen is less than the presence of Egypt or the presence of Saudi Arabia simply because Qatar is much smaller as a state. So it is not as present as other countries in the region. We cover Iraq; we cover Palestine. We cover others. We are a news-driven network; therefore, if there is news in Qatar, we put it on the screen.[6]

However, in order to sustain the alternative media brand imaging of being completely independent, Al-Jazeera has had to squash reports of Qatari influences on more than one occasion. In a statement addressing reports by WikiLeaks alleging Qatar's use of Al-Jazeera as a tool for foreign policy Kanfar asserted;

> While nothing could be further from the truth, US diplomats had the freedom to express their opinions. But interpretation and conjecture cannot take the place of analysis and fact. They focused on the source of our funding rather than our reporting, in an attempt to tarnish our work. Judgments made in the cables are plainly erroneous, such as the assertion that we softened our coverage of Saudi Arabia and the Iranian elections due to political pressure - one needs only to look at our reporting of these events to see that this is not the case. We are journalists not politicians - we are not driven by political agendas, for or against anyone. (Kanfar, 2010).

Al-Jazeera's role within the Middle-East as the whistle-blowing media network dedicated to a liberal media system has been undermined by foreign critics largely as a result of the network's somewhat peculiar relationship with Qatar. While the Qatari government has denied any editorial

[5] Interview between Kanfar and CBS Frontline. Aired March 27, 2007 retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/newswar/warinterviews.html

[6] Interview between Kanfar and CBS Frontline. Aired March 27, 2007 retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/newswar/warinterviews.html

involvement in the station, critics have often raised concerns regarding whether Qatar's regional politics frame Al-Jazeera's coverage. As one of the greatest contradictions challenging the station, Qatar is not a democratic country and does not boast a tradition of free media (Maalouf, 2008: 34). While Al-Jazeera has been extremely vocal in voicing distrust and criticism toward the autocratic regimes of neighbouring countries, the station has often been accused of ignoring Qatari politics. In advocating change the station assumes a somewhat ironic position championing democracy in other countries while remaining oblivious to the host countries personal indifference. Critique of the station's lack of interest in Qatari politics at the expense of exposure and ridicule of the rest of the world has prompted Al-Jazeera to take a more pro-active approach that has come to pay more attention to the affairs of its host country. This striving to maintain an image of objectivity has become a fundamental aspect of the network's branding. The sentiment has been echoed throughout the stations existence and most recently in Kanfar's resignation letter where he stated;

> Al Jazeera gained the trust of its audience through consistently speaking truth to power, and channeling peoples' aspirations for dignity and freedom. Our audience quickly saw that Al Jazeera was of them and their world - it was not a foreign imposition nor did it seek to impose a partisan agenda. We were trusted to be objective and to be the voice of the voiceless. It is through dedication and conviction of our staff that we have assumed a position of leadership in our industry. Even though we are a young organisation, in just 15 years our name is deeply associated with the very notion of news the world over. We are respected by our audience and hold the admiration of our peers. (Kanfer cited in Hounshell, 2011).

The reiteration of objectivity and independence evident in the various statements indicate concerted attempt by the station to cement, in the minds of the public, Al-Jazeera's autonomy within their greater mandate of delivering news. The efforts feed into the greater branding strategy of the network of alternative media which situate independence as paramount to its functionality.

3.2.4 The 'Underground' Medium

By assuming the role of the whistle blowing media organization in the East, Al-Jazeera has endured numerous obstacles in their coverage of international affairs (Foerstel, 2006:99). Ranging from confiscation of equipment and journalist kidnappings to bombings of their offices,

Al-Jazeera have had to face fierce opposition from both local and foreign governments (Foerstel, 2006:99). The hurdles have however, served a paradoxical function for the station. Being the target of political violence has contributed to the network's image of an 'underground medium' that strives to tell the truth despite the dangerous circumstances. In his resignation letter to the network in 2011 Wadah Kanfar the station's ex-Director General echoed these sentiments by stating:

> Al Jazeera will maintain its stellar record and live up to its code of conduct. It is the mission for which Tariq Ayoub, and RasheedWali Ali Jaber gave their lives for, the mission which TayseerAlouni and Sami Al Hajj spent years illegally detained and for which many of you were harassed. Between our audiences expectation and your vigilance, I am confident that Al Jazeera will continue to report with integrity and courage (Kanfar cited in Hounshell, 2011)

Kanfar's highlighting of the loss of journalistic life in the line of work taps into deeper emotional reservoirs that highlight the extent to which the station endevours to disseminate news. It similarly ignites the level of danger the station faces in its ultimate aim of delivering the 'truth'.

3.2.5 The People's Station

In their concerted efforts at projecting an alternative image Al-Jazeera has drawn on the historical connection between alternative media and "the people". While alternative media require independence as a pre-requisite for any degree of success it simultaneously positions the role of its audience as vital in its role to enact change (Atkinson, 2010:33). Alternative media have historically been recognized for its easy access to its audience and the uncomplicated involvement ordinary people have to the media. While Al-Jazeera cannot claim to offer avenues of direct access to the station, the network has salvaged every opportunity to highlight its close connection to the people it strives to serve. In addressing why the Arab world requires Al-Jazeera Kanfar responded;

> The amount of commitment that our audience has towards Al-Jazeera, they embrace us, not because we are politically correct from the point of view of governments, which most of them are authoritarian, no. We are full of pride and determination because the public out there think of Al-Jazeera as their own. They own it. (Kanfar, N.D).

Kanfar re-emphasized this point in his resignation letter earlier this year when he said;

> Contrary to the "common sense" imparted by the regimes political elite, the Arab public are not naïve demagogues or irrational believers. They are intelligent, politically astute and have a level of empathy that the political elite lack. Our channel lives and dies by this audience and they will not forgive us if we deviate from the mission that we have lived for the past 15 years. (Kanfar, 2011).

The situation of the people as integral to the workings and success of the station exists as one of the starkest branding exercises for the Al-Jazeera network. The notion of belonging and allegiance holds chief importance for the station particularly as a result of its alternative branding strategies. The corporate nature of all mainstream media in the current media-scape is one of the strongest drawbacks of the industry as the primary goal of serving people with news and information has been shifted to a capitalistic purpose of profit generation. While funding by the Qatari government has been a source of great critique for Al-Jazeera it has simultaneously assisted the branding exercise of alterity. With a reliable source of funding the network has been quick to position its audience as its main priority unlike its competitors who are obliged to firstly appease revenue in order to serve a public interest. Thus, Al-Jazeera has since inception prioritized its audience and the allegiance its holds toward them. The prominence the station has afforded the audience through various public statements has indicated a firm branding strategy that seeks to place 'the people' at its forefront.

3.3 Critical Analysis on Al-Jazeera's Role as an Alternative Medium

The element of alterity is undoubtedly one that holds much appeal. Romanticized notions of emancipation, social justice and resistance to oppression are just some of its 'mythic' qualities (Atkinson, 2010:136).While Al-Jazeera does not qualify as an alternate means on various accounts it simultaneously constitutes other requirements which render its status much more complex than first meets the eye. More importantly however, is the proclamation of alterity by the stations management which ultimately ties into larger considerations like branding. Promoting an alternative character that exists in stark opposition to its international mainstream competitors and neighbouring media constituencies is an attractive brand image.

The rapid pace at which media entities are mushrooming grants media consumers the complex task of choosing which of the multiple organizations to follow and invest a certain degree of confidence in. The branding of these organizations are crucial in this process as the slants and spins they choose to align themselves with are likely to be the determining factors for media consumers. The mainstream with reference to the American media in particular have over their years of dominance managed to lose their monopoly on audiences as the variety of new media technologies have fractured audiences according to various facets largely dependent on interests (Heron, 2008:3). Moreover, the development of these technologies has opened up opportunities to explore previously unchartered territories by the mainstream. Thus, while alternative media hold much promise for discerning audiences interested in experiencing the "Other" it similarly holds great brand value for media entities as it generates a quick link to credibility and value.

While the term alternative media can easily be accepted for anything in opposition to the mass media, this definition runs at the risk of being extremely general and in doing so could incorporate many elements that are in reality mainstream. Examples of this include countries like North Korea wherein mass media institutions such as CNN may appear alternative as a result of the country's seclusion form the rest of the world (Waltz, 2005: 2). Defining alternative media has proved to be an enormous challenge as the term has the potential to be linked to various phenomenon. As such author/s have derived various definitions varying according to their own interests. For the purpose of this chapter I therefore propose that no single definition of the term be institutionalized but rather a combination of various factors that have proven to be the common features in academic literature on alternative media. In line with this, alternative media is primarily concerned with participatory democratic ideals of mobilized citizenry. Instead of merely providing avenues for news dissemination, alternative media have a vested interest in facilitating social change through non-hierarchical structures (Iskandar, 2006: 250). Alternative media are undoubtedly responses to social institutions in which they are produced. This kind of media provides a counter narrative to the mainstream wherein the power to communicate, create awareness and act as an alternative to the dominant cultures holds much potential for change (Engstrom, 2008: 21). Thus, "alternative media are 'alternate' only in the context of their response to, and participation in, the cultures within which they are produced and consumed" (Waltz, 2005: 5).

The status of Al-Jazeera has long been the subject of inquiry with regard to its controversial standing in the media industry. With a huge following in the Arab world, Al-Jazeera has a debatable position on whether or not it constitutes mainstream or alternative media. “From glorification to vilification, the station has been described as “radical” by its detractors and as an “alternative” medium by its admirers” (Iskandar, 2006: 249). At present it occupies an ambivalent position as a go-to source for alternative news in the West and a mainstream position in the Arab world (Iskandar, 2006: 1). Alternative media responsibility toward social change has been instrumental in history and remains pervasive in its multiple definitions. In opposition to the mainstream, alternative media are often charged with critical reviews of government and public institutions which mainstream media are likely to glamorize. In the light of this Al-Jazeera tends to depict highly cynical mistrustful views of authoritarian political establishments in the Arab regions (Iskandar, 2006: 2). The station produces stories critical of monarchical regimes and corruption, and serves as a platform for various opposing viewpoints.

Al-Jazeera has been known to be a podium for radical voices often inciting hatred and violence against the United States and Israel. However, despite the station’s stark alternative motto it functions in much the same way most mainstream organization do. News values, formats and style enshrined in the broadcaster’s ethics closely resemble transnational broadcasters such as the CNN and BBC both of whom Al-Jazeera has cited as competitors. Furthermore Al-Jazeera comprises of highly educated staff including editors and reporters who have years of experience gained in the West.

While the station provides opposing content from perspective of the West, it remains a dominant feature in the Arab world as a leading source of information. The station’s claim to alterity remains implausible on various levels. Firstly, it receives all funding from the Amir of Qatar giving massive suspicion to questions of complete editorial independence. Secondly, the stations hierarchy displays no initiatives toward amateur development but instead closely resembles major global networks. Both structurally and discursively Al-Jazeera cannot be considered as a form of alternative media as a result of its dominance in the East and mainstream imitation in the West (Iskandar, 2006: 17) However, as the realm of alternative media begins to occupy an increasingly elusive nature what is of paramount importance is to recognize that categorizing the alternative is entirely dependent on context.

The ‘insider’ status Al-Jazeera enjoys within the middle-east has been one of the leading contributors to the stations claim to alterity. Utilizing its key positioning within the East as a means to promote credibility of news and information, Al-Jazeera has managed to assume a degree of reliability when producing stories from the East as Western media outlets continue to be looked at as ‘Outsiders’. The Israeli-Palestinian clashes which have proven to be an enduring battlefield is one of the stations strongest points of coverage as a result of its distinct advantage of been positioned in the area. While Western media organizations are prevented from venturing into Gaza by Israeli restrictions, Al-Jazeera through its ‘insider’ status merely covers the story from ‘home’ (New York Times, 2009).

In his comprehensive work on alternative media and Al-Jazeera, Iskandar (2006: 252) refers to this phenomenon as the ‘native reporter’. The idea specifically refers to the authenticity of reporting from your own backyard which inadvertently connotates the elimination of Western bias. Furthermore it feeds into the larger dialogue on cultural imperialism which situates the native as an active ‘producer’ of news in comparison to its previous position as passive ‘receivers’ of news. The concept ties in well with Atton’s work on alternative media where he suggests “the ‘Other’ is able to represent itself [and] ‘native informants’ can speak with their own ‘irreducibly heterogeneous’ voices (Atton, 2002: 9). The association to home soil tends to suggest a closer relation to events unlike the mainstream media which are forced to cover from the outside. The idea also harkens back to notions of credibility and trustworthiness. The 2009 bombings by the Israeli military of Gaza exist as one of the more recent examples where the network capitalized on its positioning. With six reporters based on the ground in Gaza, two working for Al-Jazeera English and the rest for Al-Jazeera Arabic, the network provided by far the most influential news media coverage as it was leaps and bounds ahead of competitors CNN and BBC who were forced to cover from the margins (New York Times, 2009).

As the principal media channel reporting from Gaza, Al-Jazeera provided running commentary, videos and images during the Israeli airstrikes that was unparalleled. Furthermore the Amir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, who funds the network, publically stated that Al-Jazeera is “the only international broadcaster with a presence there.” (New York Times, 2009). Within the context of the Gaza bombings and in regard to its reporting from the larger middle-east region, Al-Jazeera does most definitely constitute the notion of the ‘native reporter’.

However, what remains rather problematic is the connection the station assumes with 'native reporting' and alternative media to its broader news coverage which does not necessarily run true. Given its global orientation, Al-Jazeera endeavors to report on news emanating from across the world. In doing so the station much like all other international broadcasters is forced to at times report from the outside. The fact that the network chooses to exploit an alternative character although it remains limited in scope exists as a branding strategy more than a practical reality. The appeal of the 'native' and 'indigenous' to a Western audience stands to instinctively create an association with the alternative (Iskandar, 2006: 252). In doing so, the façade of alterity holds immense brand value for encompassing the network even though it only runs true for a small percentage.

Championing the rights of the people is always a lucrative brand image to pursue. In the case of AJE the stakes are higher given the tight grip on political freedom and limited avenues for the dissemination of free speech. However, the romanticized notion of alternative media that glamorizes resistance as evident in the speech of Al-Jazeera former Director General is highly problematic and dangerous on various levels. The effort to associate the Al-Jazeera brand with the legendary legacy of alternative media exists as a ploy to draw in audiences at the expense of thoroughly exploring the intricacies that the façade of alternative media remain oblivious toward. The adventurous representation of resistance is both appealing and misleading. The appeal for audiences to be part of exciting and courageous resistance to power through lived experience subsists no further than a sly branding strategy which in fact itself harbours power restrictions.

> The vague descriptions and ambiguous concepts distort, or even hide from sight, both the oppression associated with power structures experienced by people depicted in alternative media content, as well as their lived resistance against those power structures. (Atkinson, 2010:136)

Nevertheless, the alternative brand remains a lucrative one and Al-Jazeera has pursued its agenda in various forms. While organizationally Al-Jazeera's claim to alterity remains questionable the station's exploitation of various elements has contributed to a successful branding exercise. The 'underground' element of the station elaborated by various statements which highlight the dangerous and hostile environment within which it operates harkens back to prowess and steadfastness of alternative media whose goal to transform remains unwavering in the face of

danger. The positioning of 'the people' as central to aims and objectives of the station assists this branding strategy perfectly as the alternative remain people centered compare to the mainstream which are profit oriented. Various brand strategies employed by the Al-Jazeera English network contribute to the overall brand imaging as alternative. Together they form a web of intermingled aspects that undeniable proliferate this brand which has managed to occupy a firm position in the international media-scape. While the brand façade of alterity performs its function of capturing and sustaining audiences well, it simultaneously reveals the deep and structured nature of the Al-Jazeera network whose decision to exploit the brand identity acts as a sly means to conceal its own highly structured and power affiliated operation.

> The alternative media world, thus, is a place that is special because of the extraordinary and exciting visions of resistance presented to audiences. The performances of international insurgent groups and the nebulous visions of oppression and resistance hide from the sight of audiences many of the real problems associated with dominant power structures in society which [promote] overly romanticized images of resistance to such power. (Atkinson, 2010: 137)

The analysis of various public statements made by Al-Jazeera staff and its previous Director General indicate a branding strategy that strives to promote itself as 'the alternative'. Proliferating the contra-flow perspective through its motto of opinion and counter opinion, elevating the 'voice of the voiceless' and privileging the audience above all are explicit indications of a branding exercise that closely resembles the framework of alternative media. Furthermore the activist nature that the station has assumed within the Arab world concisely summed up in Kanfar's words "we speak truth to power" has channeled the historic powers of alternative media that sought to above all enact societal change. Brand Al-Jazeera has within the current media landscape managed to secure itself as a leading media organization with a global interest framed from the perspective of the Global South. The prerequisite for branding which is uniqueness and exclusivity has been relatively easy for the network given its pioneering efforts at challenging the censored environment of Arab media and providing the first global attempt at countering the one way flow of information from the West.

3.4 Brand Al-Jazeera: The Counter Hegemonic Alternative

AJE has since inception made clear its intention to redress the unequal flows of information between the Global North and South. As such the network has enshrined this objective within its corporate profile stating, "Our Mission is to provide independent, impartial news for an international audience and to offer a voice to a diversity of perspectives from under reported regions. In addition, the channel aims to balance the information flow between the South and the North." Positioning itself within the paradigm of the contra-flow debate has undeniably contributed to a unique branding strategy that thrives on difference within an international media sphere that is dominated by US-led media products.

In dedicating its coverage to counter the hegemonic threshold of American media, Al-Jazeera has often raised issues of power as central to their mandate. In addressing the networks aim to counter the hegemonic Kanfar Al-Jazeera's former Director General clearly illustrates:

> Our philosophy of reporting is a human sentiment paradigm rather than the power center. We shift away from power. Our relationship with power is always to question power, rather than to give power more domain to control. We have to empower the voiceless, rather than to empower the pulpit..or the powerful only. (Kanfar as cited in el-Nawawy and Powers, 2010:12)

His statement speaks directly to the prevailing systems of power which Al-Jazeera claims to hold in check and in doing so provide a counter narrative toward. One of the earliest indicators of Al-Jazeera's positioning within the counter narrative domain exists in the networks very first mission and vision statement where it "aspired to be a bridge between peoples and cultures" (Thussu, 106: 2007). The use of the 'bridge' metaphor exists as one of the station's first branding strategies that clearly positioned itself within the paradigm of the cultural imperialist debate. In assuming a vital position within the global media scene with a dedicated interest to news and information emanating from the East, the Al-Jazeera English brand identity became inextricably linked to countering the hegemonic threshold of Western media. In specifically choosing to word its early mission statement with the word 'bridge' Al-Jazeera senior management made very clear yet indirect its intention to redress the unidirectional flow of information from the US-led global media to a multi-directional process that accommodates greater diversity. In doing so Al-

Jazeera English contributed to the dialogue on the imbalanced flow of information and sought to equalize the situation through a pro-active stance favoring the East (Thussu, 107: 2007).

The debate on contra-flows of information spurred on in the 1960's and 1970's concentrated almost primarily on the unequal international communication flows. The debate centered exclusively on issues of dependency and media imperialism given the discrepancy between the flows of information from the North to the South (Stavans, 2010; Thussu, 2007; Boyd-Barrett and Thussu, 1992). Contra-flow can be defined as the situation where "countries [that were] once considered clients of media imperialism have successfully exported their output into the metropolis (Sinclair et al cited in el-Nawawy, 2010:7). Al-Jazeera's location in the middle-east within the current media landscape ultimately positions the station directly within this debate as a pioneering venture in the East that strives to produce news locally and thereafter import it to the rest of the world.

In assuming a position within the global news media landscape and identifying rivals in media giants CNN and BBC, AJE was forced to adopt a brand identity that thrived on credibility especially since it had found competitors in agencies that had long dominated the scene. It therefore exploited a native position at a stage when international news media was dominated by a distinctive Western stance. The 'native' association assisted the brand identity of countering the hegemony as it played on the idea of the South writing back. The local identity exploited by the network sought to redress the Western grip on news media by emancipating the Global South to 'tell their own news'. Furthermore the station entered the global news media arena promoting a liberal and objective stand-point amidst a local media environment of rigid censorship. The resulting association of the station with 'taking on the West' has become so pervasive that the name Al-Jazeera has consequently become synonymous with ideals of 'talking back' and promoting the voice of the South (Thussu, 106: 2007). The strength of the station was undoubtedly catapulted by its global reach and English medium which made no secret of the fact that the station aimed at servicing an international audience and as such intended competing with the relevant players. More aptly put, the network's manager was quoted saying:

> We are expanding globally… for us the competition is BBC World Service and CNN International because we see ourselves as a global broadcaster on the merits of our coverage and the fullness of our vision (Cited in Zayani189: 2010)

However, while Al-Jazeera's successful brand identity, premised on ideals of countering the thrust of Western media, may be attributed to various proponents like its global reach and accessible medium, one key constituent of this success lies within the rhetoric of the academic sphere. The widely propagated brand that advocates a voice for the Global South in the face of Western dominated media seems to have been most widely accepted and proliferated in academic circles. Thus, effectiveness of Al-Jazeera's counter hegemonic brand strategy needs only to be tested against the enormous amount of academic literature on the station to reveal its success.

Described as a "genuine 'counter hegemonic contra-flow'…that threatens the traditional Western news hegemony" by Samuel-Azran (2010:13) and understood to be a "counter hegemonic force challenging the existing political order and its prevalent social discourse" by Uysal (2011: 3), academic literature on the Al-Jazeera network exhibits a strong tendency to associate the network with ideals of the counter hegemonic. Often credited with proliferating the Arab public sphere, AJE has since inception been hailed for its emancipative qualities by promoting the ideas of political activists, opposition leaders and dissenting voices. More significantly the network has been championed for its outward criticism of political elites and in doing so accustoming its viewers to political condemnation in ways previously unthought-of (Seib, 145: 2008). AJE's savvy branding exercise which capitalizes on the romanticized notions of resistance perhaps receives its warmest acceptance from the academic sphere where the brand identity is consumed and widely disseminated.

In a paper titled "Al-Jazeera English: A Conciliatory Medium in a Conflict-Driven Environment?" Powers and el-Nawawy (2010: 2) argue in favour of Al-Jazeera's importance stating that

> Al-Jazeera English's model of journalism offers an alternative to today's mode of news journalism that continues to encourage stereotypical and counter productive attitudes toward cultural 'Others'. AJE's programming represents a fresh break from the traditional news agenda of other global news giants, such as CNN International and the BBC World Service.

The authors echoe a widely shared sentiment of acclaim for the network, which is also evident in academic literature and is premised on the station's ability to offer an alternative that most importantly counters the decades old thrust of Western media. According to Thussu;

> Al-Jazeeera constitutes a textbook example of contra flow in global media products, as it weakens 'Anglo-American domination of news and current affairs in one of the world's most geo-politically sensitive areas by serving as an alternative source of information (2007: 24)

His thoughts are corroborated by Samuel-Azran (2010) who credits the network for providing the first counter-hegemonic news flows to the West. He further praises the station for posing the greatest challenge to Western news hegemony in the history of global media. Put perhaps most aptly with:

> Today, the Arab public and the world public, the latter linked with Al-Jazeera through numerous cooperation agreements, is no longer dependent on CNN, Western media and news agencies. The flow of information from North to South has in some respects been reversed… (Hafez, 2007:146)

The association of Al-Jazeera with the rupture of West-centric media control proves to be a salient feature of academic literature attributed to the network (Zayani, 2010:188). The significance of this is the manner in which Al-Jazeera's branding exercise of alterity specifically countering the hegemony has managed to seduce the academic sphere. In illustrating the various authors who have propelled this attribute of the station I aim to highlight two crucial aspects. Firstly, the manner in which academic discourse has proliferated brand Al-Jazeera as being a counter hegemonic force within the international media-scape thereby contributing to dialogue on contra- flows, the cultural imperialist debate and most importantly the wide scale recognition of Al-Jazeera as a dominant and stimulating feature of the global media. Secondly, I aim to draw attention to the success of the networks strategic branding initiatives. While academics are traditionally assumed to take the role of advocacy, Al-Jazeera's savvy branding exercise of promoting a contra-flow character has proved to be a challenging and seductive force even for the watchdogs. The praise and acclaim of Al-Jazeera's pioneering attempts at providing a counter narrative evident in academic literature indicates the extent to which academics have bought into the branding exercise of the network, illustrating the wide scale appeal of alterity and resistance in general.

3.5 Conclusion

AJE's claim to alterity is obviously one that holds much appeal given the success of the network within its relatively early years. The contested terrain of alternative media that seizes to acknowledge a clear definition of the term has undoubtedly contributed to AJE's hold over it, as the network exhibits savvy branding exercises that exploit certain characteristics at the expense of others. Promoting a public agenda that favours 'the people', appropriates native reporting at all available opportunities and providing a counter narrative to dominant discourse are all concerted branding attempts by the station to appeal to the alternative realm. It is one that holds much mystic appeal in the forms of resistance and conflict. However, as evident in the various statements discussed, the station's pre-occupation with alterity remains dangerous for two reasons. Firstly, in striving to constitute the alternative, AJE runs at the risk of becoming "Otherness machines" a term coined by Loomba (cited in Iskandar, 2006: 252) used to describe media institutions whose primary role is to manufacture alterity. Secondly, this preoccupation exoticizes the notion of the 'Other' for opportunistic reasons. AJE's claim to the alternative remains implausible on many levels the most stark being the stations extremely structured and hierarchical functioning. In appeasing the subaltern into its everyday workings the network simultaneously hides the hegemonic structures within it. According to Iskandar the image of an alternative can be produced and reproduced in two ways; audience attribution and self-attribution (Iskandar, 2006: 254). Audience attribution refers to the characterization of alternative by audience members given their respective media environments. However, contrary to Iskandar, I argue that Al-Jazeera's production and reproduction occurs in self-attribution and academic attribution as evident in this chapter's analysis on Al-Jazeera's academic rhetoric. Using the façade of alterity Al-Jazeera has skillfully managed to conceal its organizational establishment as a corporate brand strategy that is marked by uniqueness. The co-operation of academic discourse has tremendously assisted the marketing strategy that has catapulted the brand imaging that undoubtedly serves only to appease audiences and perhaps possible revenue (Iskandar, 2006: 254).

The following chapter explores the phenomenon of the audience in relation to Al-Jazeera. Given that the channel positions the audience as integral to its mandate and agenda the chapter

interrogates forms of audience participation offered by Al-Jazeera across flagship programmes and the stations' Facebook page that has catapulted in popularity in recent years.

Chapter Four

Audience Participation: Investigating Al-Jazeera's incorporation of audiences during the Egyptian uprising

4.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses audience participation across four specific episodes of AJE flagship programmes; *The Listening Post* Reporting the Egyptian Revolution, *Empire* Social Networks, Social Revolution, *People and Power* Egypt Seeds of Change and *The Stream* Post-uprising Tunisia & Egyptian Revolution 2.0. As hallmarks of the network these programmes provide the most accessible data sample to investigate the incorporation of audiences across the networks broadcasting bearing in mind the limitations of the study in analyzing the 24 hour running news coverage of the station as earlier stipulated. The chapter also analyses Al-Jazeera English's invitations for audience participation across its Facebook page from January to April 2011.

Exploring the phenomenon of audience participation in relation to AJE is significant for two reasons. Firstly, the pioneering proximity of the station to the uprisings of Egypt rendered the coverage an almost obligatory function; but more importantly is the second reason being a blatant brand identity established in relation to the people and the idea of disseminating voices of the 'ordinary'. Graeme Turner's (2009) work on the "demotic turn" refers to an increasing trend across international media that incorporates the voices and faces of 'ordinary' people. Within the digital age of new media Turner's work holds significant value given the opportunities these mediums facilitate for audiences to engage with the media. Progressing from previously static modes of participation like landline phone-ins and letters to the editor, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have revolutionized the realm of audience participation making communication fast and efficient. Similarly, these media technologies have changed the face of audience participation across traditional media platforms like television introducing elements like sms's, emails and social media all of which make audience engagement with broadcasting that much more enhanced.

The specific programme episodes were chosen in relation to their titles and its resonance to the Egyptian uprisings of 2011. Invitations to participate across the programmes and Facebook page will be gauged according to the following three criterion:

1.	The coverage of ordinary people (activists etc.) across programming
2.	The inclusion of footage sent by non-professional journalists/ ordinary people via Facebook comments, sms's, tweets etc into the station's content
3.	Solicited Participation on the station's Facebook page during the above mentioned flagship programmes. This will be analysed by looking at the language utilized in Al-Jazeera English's Facebook posts and the manner in which they did or did not invite audiences to participate on the page.

The chapter will begin by analyzing audience participation in the above mentioned four flagship programmes before proceeding with an investigation of Al-Jazeera's invitations for audience involvement on the Facebook page. A series of findings and conclusion will then follow.

4.1 Audience Participation in Al-Jazeera English video programming

The emphasis on a sentiment of a 'people's' revolution spearheaded by the Egyptian youth has been one widely propelled within the media hype surrounding the uprising. The agency of the ordinary citizen has been amplified through new media technologies that, with the aid of the mainstream, have managed to garner international recognition and support. The converging of new media technologies like social media with the traditional media has opened up many doors for audience participation. The accessibility of these technologies for ordinary citizens are said to have shifted the dynamics of power previously characterised by the mainstream which remained in large part limited in access and aloof to involvement of the ordinary. The priority placed on audience participation by AJE is of particular interest to this section paying close attention to Livingstone and Lunt (1994) who propose a stringent view of talk shows on television taking into account the value and significance of televised public discussion. With early initiatives of audience engagement such as the live studio audience present during shooting of programming being easily dismissed for their frivolous nature, attention has shifted to more concerted efforts of audience participation. These surpass the mere visibility and representation of ordinary people

to explore the participation of these audiences with media organizations and their influence on actual media production.

Audience participation in each of the four analysed AJE episodes appeared to take on different roles within the context of the shows all of which reveal the interesting and complex nature of participation and the real potential it harbours for true change. Theoretically the section interrogates the participation and visibility of audiences through the incorporation of 'ordinary' voices across programming. Audiences are conceptualized and understood in the study according to the means through which these voices receive prominence. For *The Listening Post*, *Empire* and *The Stream*, the audience is understood through the agency exercised by ordinary people in 'speaking to and participating in' the content of the programme. The documentary genre of *People and Power* which features a behind the scenes look at the orchestrating force behind the Egyptian uprisings has led this research into understanding audience participation in the show as the ordinary people who *People and Power* follow and interview throughout its duration. In an effort to thoroughly explore the intricacies of this participation, each programme will be analysed separately taking into account the kinds of audience participation offered and its implications for the broader Egyptian revolution.

4.1.1 *The Listening Post* Reporting the Egyptian Revolution

As a media watch programme dedicated to surveying current media trends and developments, *The Listening Post* reveals a strong inclination toward disseminating the voices of its viewers. Audience participation is enshrined within the content of the programme through a scheduled segment called 'Global Village Voices'. The segment is characterised by a series of opinions from various personalities around the world concentrating on the relevant episode's topic of discussion. The personalities present a short opinion (around two minutes each) or analysis on the discussion via a video clip featuring a small bio detailing the person's name, occupation, location, and the technology utilised in the production of the video. The segment is normally characterized by three or four people an example being the three individuals appearing on the episode 'Reporting the Egyptian Revolution' (February 12, 2011) who in order of appearance were, Anthony Lowenstein a freelance journalist from Sydney, Australia, Souheila Al-Jadda a journalist based in California, USA and Justin Mabardi a stage manager from New York, USA. The particular episode, concentrated on the international media spectacle that followed the

Egyptian uprising despite the dire circumstances and the impact this attention had on the actual revolt.

As part of a scheduled component of the programme, the participation can be viewed as solicited by *The Listening Post* and therefore a concerted attempt at involving diverse and ordinary voices into the show's production. Commentary by audience members on the 'Global Village Voices' segment is typified by viewers' assessment of the programmes particular theme as illustrated in the analysed episode where each participants contribution remained limited to an overall assessment of the media attention on Egypt and the signaling of a falling Mubarak administration. The value of audience participation is often charted against its contribution to a vibrant public sphere which at its most significant is able to enact change. AJE's incorporation of audience participation is thus also an attempt at pushing the boundaries of this public sphere and it is with this regard that the participation should be gauged in order to determine its true value and potential. With a dedicated slot to 'Global Village Voices' *The Listening Post* exhibits a strong inclination toward the opinions of its audience and while AJE might propagate this feature as a positive feat deeper, analysis into the true potentials of these possibilities must be probed.

As discussed in previous chapters, AJE promotes itself as a pioneering media venture within the Arab context. In introducing interactive forms of media like talk shows and discussion formats, AJE claims to have reformed broadcasting in the Arab world since this type of programming essentially "engage the audience, sidelines Arab state regime power and empowers the audience by providing both a voice for them publically and by airing views - politically or socially." (Rinnawi, 2006: 137).

The Listening Post's commitment to audience participation through 'Global Village Voices' is undeniably a gracious feat. It displays an association between the network and its audiences whereby AJE pays homage to its viewers and takes an interest in their views. The incorporation of these individual sentiments into the broader production of the programme once more harkens back to an audience-centered brand identity. Anthony Lowenstein the first participant on the 'Global Village Voices' segment on the analysed episode highlighted this dynamic when he stated. "For me as an outsider looking in and reading and spending time in the Middle-East the truth is the Egyptian regimes response is the sign of a weak regime rather than a strong one." Lowenstein's unconcealed personal viewpoint appears as a progressive feature of audience

participation whereby his individual take on events in Egypt finds a platform for international dissemination. His 'outsider' status becomes ironic within the context of this discussion as it elaborates on the value of participation outside the conventional realm usually saturated with political actors and professional media personnel.

However, while acknowledging the progressive element of *The Listening Post* and its allegiance to viewers, I aim to probe deeper into the potency of this audience participation holding it accountable to the widely acclaimed notions of democratization and empowerment with which it is vigorously upheld. Participation remains a contested terrain. Much of this is due an undemanding consumption of the term that fails to adjudicate it according to its transformative value. "The often (implicit) assumption is that participation is necessarily beneficial: If it is enabled all those involved will also appreciate it, and can only gain from it." (Carpentier, 2011: 22). The assumption is problematic on various levels. The de-contextualising of participation is a convenient way to absolve it of its responsibility and the very objectives for which it claimed praise.

Within the context of the programme, participation remains limited to three voices who present views on the media storm surrounding the Egyptian revolution. Their sentiments tie into the broader narrative of the programme and thus their value for initiating a degree of change and broadening the scope of the debate is narrow. Rather than posing questions or channeling the programme in alternative routes of dialogue the three voices seem to instead collaborate with the show and to some extent appear as individual justificatory systems that validate *The Listening Posts* content. Thus I argue that while the visibility of ordinary faces and voices on the show appear to promote audience involvement, the potency of this participation within the relevant political context is weak.

Taking into account the fact that only six minutes of *The Listening Posts* total programming duration of 25minutes were dedicated to the 'Global Village Voices' segment, audience participation while enshrined within the context of the show, it remains largely insignificant when leveled against broader content ratios. Although the three personalities featured lend their voices to broader global dialogue the limited time allocated to them reduces their influence and to some extent renders their visibility and representation as complementary to the programme instead of integral to its mandate.

4.1.2 *People and Power* Egypt's Seeds of Change

The documentary nature of *People and Power's* programming somewhat complicates the idea of participation since unlike other programming formats participation receives its greatest influence within the production of the show rather than through the show. The contested terrain of media participation has led various scholars into a debate differentiating the two models.

> Participation 'in' the media deals with the participation of non-professionals in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media decision-making. These forms of media participation allow citizens to be active in one of the many (micro-) spheres relevant to daily life and to put their right to communicate into practice. ... Participation 'through' the media deals with the opportunities for extensive participation in public debate and for self-representation in the public spheres, thus, entering the realm of enabling and facilitating macro-participation. (Carpentier, 2007 :88-89).

The distinction in each form of media participation is important since each highlights the dimensions of access presubscribed by media houses and their resulting perspective. For *People and Power* participation 'in' the media indicates a strong alliance with the voice of the ordinary. Through its documentary nature *People and Power* is filmed through 'a behind the scenes' lens that focuses its attention on the actions/aspirations of ordinary folk. An apt example being the episode 'Seeds of Change' that follows the April 6th Youth Movement and its leader Ahmad Maher who is widely credited for spearheading the Egyptian revolt within which *People and Power* forms a strong alliance with the Egyptian youth. As integral to its mandate *People and Power* is characterized by an informal method of filming that very much does away with more professional techniques to adopt more casual methods that, instead of promoting a skilled persona, emit a grassroots agenda that is primarily focused on the spontaneous events of designated groups of people. The agenda of the programme is prominently evident in the episode 'Seeds of Change' that is dedicated to the April 6th movement's tactics and co-ordinating force, providing airtime that translated into much needed visibility for the Movement by affording an organizing face to the uprising that much dubbed a 'leaderless revolution'. According to Kochberg (2002) documentaries are appealing largely because audiences experience pleasure through viewing certain active forms of participation. The documentary genre is widely accepted as "primarily a technical, optical replication of social and physical reality" (Chu, 2007).Through its dedication to providing a visual record of events occurring on the 'ground' the genre has

managed to establish a strong relationship with ideals of truth and purity. It has been successful in this regard primarily because of a visually convincing structure that strives to conceal forms of subjectivity despite them being hard at work (Bernard, 2011: 5). Documentaries provide a break from conventional television broadcasting by assuming more 'authentic' antics that make production processes visible. The result is a genre that appears to facilitate the dissemination of ordinary faces and voices without the technicalities of 'formal' television. For Nichols (2010: 6) documentaries are the "creative treatment of actuality" where "Creative treatment suggests the license of fiction, [and] "actuality" reminds us of the responsibilities of the journalist". Participation is an integral component of the documentary genre. It makes possible two strong assumptions of the genre that are possibly wholly responsible for its appeal and popularity. Firstly is the assumption that documentaries are about reality and events that have actually happened and, secondly, the assumption that documentaries are about real people (Nichols, 2010: 7-8).

While both assumptions are true, the extent to which they are exploited and emphasised is problematic, together with the angles and lenses through which they are portrayed. The overt emphasis placed on the 'ideal' of truth and purity within the documentary genre is the most concerning aspect of its existence. Human subjects are always the key ingredients in documentary style narratives and it is their apparent 'non-performance' nature that feeds into the wider assumptions of truth and authenticity. The phenomenon provides a shift from conventional television and movie genres where human subjects are trained and rehearsed in their roles as actors and performers. *People and Power's* Egypt's Seeds of Change episode which documents the April 6th Movements activities in the days counting up to the eventual revolt, exists as a concerted attempt at covering the revolt through a behind-the-scenes narrative structure where the key protagonists are actually the youth at the forefront of the struggle for change. The active participation of these personalities in the documentary are crucial to the authenticity of the narrative which once more recalls the distinctive nature of the documentary genre which is often assumed to be ground in truth rather than fiction.

Thus, while participation within the programme may not be linked to audiences, in this instance it does have important implications for the agenda it seeks to promote. While documentaries strive to exhibit a natural and organic nature they are however, intrinsically subjective and

framed through a lens of developed filmmaking. The inclusion and exclusion of actors/participants within the genre are therefore by no means natural but instead a result of calculated decision-making procedures by film makers depending on the angles and agenda's sought to pursue. Thus, participation within the film is crucial to its outcome and it is within this regard I posit the idea that the deliberate use of Ahmed Maher as the 'protagonist' and his fellow April 6th Movement members in *People and Power* Egypt's Seeds of Change, exists as a concerted attempt at pursuing a people centred agenda. The participants in the documentary provide a first-hand encounter of the revolution from behind closed doors, the effect being a deeper understanding of the uprising through the ordinary faces that spearhead it. The challenges experienced by these 'actors' from the authorities and pro-Mubarak forces presents a thrilling and dangerous backdrop to the narrative that enhances its quality and authenticity.

Analysing the use of participation within *People and Power* reveals a complex dynamic where participation undergoes an important makeover. While maintaining the crucial element of the 'ordinary', participation in the documentary genre evolves to constitute a narrative told through the voices and visuals of the 'ordinary'. The result is very compelling since strategic filmmaking techniques allow little room for doubt. Furthermore the active nature of participants who stand up to adversity provides a humane element to the film which is undoubtedly targeted at appeasing audiences. The choices of participants in the film are very telling considering the wider objectives of this dissertation. By providing valuable airtime to the April 6th Movement, *People and Power* and AJE, on the macro scale, illustrate a strong inclination to the protestors and their plight. Thus, the station's deliberate association to the people and the grassroots struggle can be viewed through a larger branding lens where the process of brand identity is carefully constructed through strategic alliances.

4.1.3 *Empire* Social Networks, Social Revolution

Empire is a discussion based programme hosted by Mirwan Bishara a senior political analyst for AJE. The show is characterised by a panel of guests all of whom engage and debate on relevant topics. The show is filmed at different locations and is not studio specific and is at times filmed in front of a live studio audience. Despite this, *Empire* is characterized by dialogue that is strictly limited to panel guests. The specific episode Social Networks, Social Revolution (February 17, 2011) concentrated on the use of new media technologies in the Egyptian revolution and

questioned whether or not these technologies were influential in this process. Guests were from both ends of the spectrum and discussion was largely channeled by Bishara. Of all four programmes analysed, *Empire*, was least concerned with audience participation as indicative of the programmes broader nature, discussion was primarily limited to the five guests, Carl Bernstein, Amy Goodman, Amy Bell, Les Shirky and Evgeny Morozov. While it may be argued that the panel of guests did constitute a form of participation, the personalities on the panel did not represent the ordinary which is a central tenet of audience participation in this study. Views expressed during the show were indicative of the 'expert' guest line-up and were by no means a platform for disseminating voices of regular people. Although the programme is broadcast in front of a live audience, audiences were never invited to speak.

As characteristic of the programme a lively debate is enacted out on stage although audiences present during the filming of the show are never incorporated. Instead the live studio audience seems to exist as against a broader framework of dialogue while their participation within the discussion is not prompted. Discussion based talk shows have from very early on in their existence been propagated as democratic forums of discussion where ordinary citizens had the opportunity to question authorities in power. These formats are generally comprised of an array of guest personalities from diverse backgrounds in an effort to stimulate conversation and provide broad perspectives. However, the discussion format evident in *Empire* does not echo these sentiments. Guests on the show appear to have been chosen according to a criterion of journalistic knowledge and involvement and while their differing opinions and views did provide for a stimulating discussion their educated backdrops rendered them above the realm of what would normally constitute 'the ordinary'.

Of all the analysed programmes *Empire* exists as the most elitist. With a fairly concentrated topic the show emitted a degree of superiority and restrictiveness that is largely hostile to participation of ordinary people. Content on the shows appears to be highbrow and intellectual and while all four analysed programmes concentrated on aspects of the Egyptian uprising, *Empire's* individual take on events was screened through a highly professional arena that did not deem audience involvement necessary. The live studio audience present at the recording exists more as wallpaper than any critical attempt at engaging with audience participation.

4.1.4 *The Stream* Post-uprising Tunisia & Egyptian Revolution 2.0

AJE's *The Stream* is the birth child of the Arab Spring having been created by the network following the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. The show was generated as a means to explore the phenomenon of social media given the role it played within the revolutions that shook the Arab world. A daily show dedicated to social network platforms, *The Stream* is characterised by a young technologically savvy cast and invites likeminded personalities to feature on the show. Not surprisingly *The Stream* is by far the most interactive and audience centered of all programmes analysed. Dedicated to reviewing the social media scene, the show remains unparalleled in its dedication to audience participation through the medium of new media. The current nature of the show, which incorporates tweets, emails and Facebook comments received during airing, is one of its greatest assets, elevating the role of audience participation as a crucial element in the show's agenda.

Post-uprising Tunisia & Egyptian Revolution 2.0 (July 15, 2011) was dominated by three main personalities who directed the flow of dialogue these were; host Derrick Ashong, digital producer Ahmed Shihab-Eldin and in studio guest Ramesh Srinivasan an assistant Professor of design media and information studies at the University of California. In tow with the young and vibrant nature of the programme, the studio set-up is similarly characterised by an informal space of discussion featuring a lounge area that is a far cry from the rigid spaces that conventionally encompass the face of news media broadcasting. From the onset the host Derrick Ashong, establishes the role of social media stating "As always we bring you stories that are on-going global and we source them from social media". The connection between the show and the audience it strives to serve therefore becomes immediately visible. In sourcing content from social media the programme makes a decisive shift from traditional mainstream media content which remains in large part traced from 'official' sources that are beyond the realm of ordinary citizens.

As typical of the programme the particular episode disseminates an array of voices from various outlets of social media. It kicks off with a short video snippet of a young man stating "Hi my name is Hashim and I am from Iraq and I am in *The Stream*". Although the video snippet holds little value in terms of critical engagement with audience participation it does pave the way for a series of other voices that become more prominent as the show progresses. Audience

participation is set up as a central element of the show as host Derrick Ashong early on poses an invitation for audiences to participate stating "We also want to know what stories you're following so definitely pitch your ideas to us, use a brief video and tweet it to us with the hash tag AJStream".

Throughout the twenty-five minute duration of the show, audience participation is solicited a total amount of three times. These invitations to participate on the show occur apart from the various other voices that are aired from a range of social media platforms, the most prominent of which are blogs. Indicative of the programmes broader make-up structures, the specific episode analysed paid a considerable amount of attention to the Global Voices online blog admittedly because the blog has translated various comments regarding the crises in Tunisia and Egypt from Arabic to English. With a specific interest in the delayed Tunisian elections, host Ashong presents a series of comments in favour of and against the elections from bloggers. This is undoubtedly an attempt to create a degree of impartiality in the show's content matter. However, despite this obvious aim, the dissemination of these 'ordinary' who have not necessarily sought such mainstream coverage is interesting.

The Stream's dedicated interest in social media correlates to increased audience participation both solicited and unsolicited. Employing an evidently young and vibrant charisma, the shows charm is unsurprisingly targeted toward the younger segment of society more conventionally thought of as being technologically disposed. Thus, while the show endeavours to cover 'global' stories it does so through the lens of a youthful generation. The element is very much in tow with the uprisings of Arab North Africa that were to a large extent coordinated and carried out by the youth with the aid of social networking. During the particular episode analysed two personalities are interviewed via Skype to shed light on events happening post the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. The first was Malek Khadrawi a co-administrator of a blog called Nawat.org and the second was Jiji Ebrahim an Egyptian activist and blogger.

The interactive element of the show is emphasised during the interviews as viewers watching the live broadcast are able to tweet questions and comments to the speakers which presenters then pose. It is within this regard that this research finds the incorporation of audience participation most valuable. The reconceptualising of space through the convergence of various media platforms is fascinating. *The Stream* acts as an intermediary between global audiences and the

invited guests speaking via Skype. The dynamic is remarkable and most alluring given the enhanced forms of participation platforms like social media facilitate. Apart from providing audiences with the ability to participate in the show, the linking of voices from across the world's landscape through the common space of a studio speaks volumes to the concepts of convergence and participation and the potential they harbour.

The idea is very much in line with van Dijk's (2006: 38) work on the network society and the forging of relationships new media technologies make possible. In her analysis of this phenomenon, van Dijk (2006) explores the dimensions of new media interactivity and cites 'Direct relations' as one in which "individuals, groups and organizations are linked in increasingly direct relations, even across large distances. The rise of connectivity in the network society has both social and technological reasons" (van Dijk, 2006: 38). In relation to audience participation the concept is tremendously important given the various faces audience participation has encapsulated in recent years. In an age where audience participation has been promoted in increasingly blurred terms as explored in previous programmes AJE's *The Stream* marks a significant shift when gauged from a quality perspective.

Audience participation on *The Stream* is most valuable when gauged against all three previously analysed Al-Jazeera flagship programmes. While the influence in guiding content of the host and in-studio guest cannot be ignored; *The Stream* undoubtedly provides unparalleled opportunities for audience engagement that extends further than the facade of participation witnessed in other programmes. Converging media platforms on the programme created various spaces and opportunities for audience engagement. In providing audiences with the ability to pose questions and comments to speakers on the live show, the interactive element of *The Stream* is pioneering in its efforts. The increased visibility of the 'ordinary' on the show is perhaps one of its most valuable accomplishments in terms of both solicited and unsolicited participation. However, any acclaim of the programme needs to be grounded within the context of its relevance. As such it would be naïve to elevate *The Stream* above previously analysed programmes without reflecting upon them in relation to their very strategically fashioned agendas. *The Stream* is by nature and advent a social media programme. The inclination it has to social media and audience participation is therefore part of the shows mandate.

Audience participation across AJE's programming proved to be an interesting study given the structures of each of the analysed programmes and their directives. Unsurprisingly *The Stream* displayed the most accommodating platform for audience participation utilizing various forms of new media technologies including social media to invite participation and disseminate a diversity of voices. *People and Power* through its documentary nature can be viewed as a direct form of inviting participation on the station making the face and voices of ordinary people the most central aspect of its programming. In contrast *The Listening Post* and *Empire* appear less inviting. While *The Listening Post* does afford audiences direct airtime, as explored earlier, these efforts appear to be limited in potency. *Empire* remains the most hostile to voices of the ordinary facilitating only expert views that are in large part aloof to commoners. The following section looks at AJE's Facebook page and explores how the station invites audiences to participate through it.

4.2 Al-Jazeera English's Facebook Page

The fact that more Americans use the internet than read the newspaper each day is a great indicator of the degree of impact new media has had on the lives of ordinary people since its advent. The success and phenomenal popularity of social media in particular is most telling. With close to 1 billion users worldwide Facebook has been the most successful social network yet. Thus, it comes as no surprise that global corporations and media houses alike have jumped on the bandwagon and similarly assumed social network profiles (Treadaway and Smith, 2012). The increasing convergence of traditional media with new media technologies like Facebook has been an important hallmark of the digital age. As institutions like Al-Jazeera take up new media and incorporate technologies like Facebook, audiences become that much closer to these corporations. As smart phones and tablets become increasingly popular people are now exposed to constant updates via Facebook pages in the comfort of the hands. The extent to which Facebook pages, AJE's in particular, facilitates audiences to effectively communicate and participate is of primary concern to this section.

The research remains primarily focused on the textual projections of audiences on the AJE Facebook page based on how audiences are featured and invited to participate within the text of the station's Facebook posts. Prioritizing the textual invitations for audience participation is important in understanding the kinds of participation (interaction) offered and more importantly

the ideology providing the impetus for these efforts. Put more eloquently is Hartley's (1987) take on audiences:

> [Audiences] are the invisible fictions that are produced institutionally in order for various institutions to take charge of the mechanisms of their own survival. Audiences may be imagined empirically, theoretically or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the needs of the imagining institution. In no case is the audience 'real', or external to its discursive construction. There is no 'actual' audience that lies beyond its production as a category, which is merely to say that audiences are only ever encountered *per se* as *representations*. Hartley cited in Hartley (1999: 491).

While Hartley's (1987) work on the field of audiences existed at the time in direct relation to television, the underlying premise of his statement retains much validity within the modern context of audience participation and new media technologies. The adoption of social media platforms like Facebook by institutions like AJE as a platform to communicate with audiences presents an interesting means to interrogate the textual projections of audiences and the appeal for them to participate. It is invariably within the realm through which audiences are represented and invited that AJE serves the basis of its ideology and mandate. Thus, the manner in which audiences are textually inferred and invited to participate through the page are understood as crucial to this study since they represent theoretically what constitutes the AJE audience, a facet integral to the successful functioning of the network as a whole.

Assuming a profile on Facebook offers users various options of communication with other individuals, groups and pages. In line with these, users are offered varying degrees of participation ranging from the ability to directly post comments on profiles to the ability to merely click the 'like' option. The commentary capacity of Facebook exists as one of the networks most distinguished attributes as it inadvertently enables an inter-connected realm of communication where Facebook users who are not necessarily 'friends' are provided the platform to discuss issues via the common grounding of a group, page or individual. The success of this attribute can be directly viewed through the AJE Facebook page boasting a phenomenal 936, 058 'likes' (Date assessed, 12 March 2012). With a common interest in the page all 936, 058 of these Facebook users have the opportunity to discuss AJE's Facebook posts with each

other via the page. The commentary in turn becomes available on the AJE Facebook page making public its availability to page visitors.

AJE's role within the Arab Spring and Egyptian revolution in particular has been applauded from various circles primarily because of the station's commitment to reporting the unrest through the involvement of ordinary Egyptians. The sentiment is aptly echoed in the following statement by the network following the revoke of its license to broadcast in the country: "In this time of deep turmoil and unrest in Egypt society it is imperative that voices from all sides be heard; the closing of our bureau by the Egyptian government is aimed at censoring the voices of the Egyptian people." (Schattle, 2012: 53). Propagating an identity that posits the voices of the ordinary above all else is indeed one worthy of further interrogation. Given the Arab Spring close ties to social media, AJE's Facebook page which was continually updated through the revolt played an important role in the stations overall branding that sought to privilege the voices of the ordinary. Thus, the following section interrogates the stations Facebook posts for the duration of the Egyptian uprising paying close consideration to the networks invitation for audiences to participate via e-mails, sms's and the forwarding of videos and photo's.

Before beginning any analysis of AJE's Facebook posts and its participatory value or lack thereof one fundamental point regarding the station's Facebook profile must be made clear. AJE's Facebook page does not allow visitors and fans to directly comment on it. Instead the station has customized the page so that visitors may only comment on posts made by AJE admin personnel. While this structure is not completely alien to Facebook pages of other global corporations and celebrities it does however, have implications for the degree of participation it allows fans. In only permitting comments and not direct posts the participatory feature of the page is undeniably circumscribed.

4.2.1 Solicited Participation

A total of 5 Facebook posts during the period of January to April 2011 feature direct solicitation of audience participation by the AJE network. A survey of these efforts at inviting participation reveals the intricacies of modes of participation and the manner in which the network managed to simultaneously solicit and manage audience participation. A post dated January 26th read, "Al-Jazeera staff follow the latest developments in the deadly January 25 anti-government protests.

Why not share your comments over on the site…Its getting heated!" Following a similar thread was a post published on January 28th stating, "Forward us your video comments about events in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East." "Do you want to share your views on a news story, tell us what stories matter to you or respond to Al-Jazeera's coverage?". While at face value the explicit attempts at garnering audience involvement through means of Facebook posts illustrates the prioritising of audiences views, closer inspection of this proves otherwise.

The request for audiences to forward commentary via video footage to the network resonates well within the realm of new media and interactivity. It emphasises the heightened experience of media users that have transcended previously passive roles to now adopt active personalities. While this collaborative feature of new media is often celebrated with notions of democracy and egalitarianism, it has similarly been addressed within academia for furthering capitalist incentives. Inviting audience participation through any means acts as positive reinforcement of a people-centered identity. However, deeper inspections are less celebratory when considering issues of journalistic capacity and expenditure. According to van Dijk (2006) the corporate logic underlying media entities like AJE remain the fundamental impetus behind their soliciting of audience produced content. In essence the network acts as an employer to its entire journalistic staff all of which receive remuneration for their journalistic output. In soliciting programming from sources that do not require financial compensation, AJE receives a two-fold benefit. First, appealing to audience participation serves a savvy branding strategy that situates the station as the 'purveyor of ordinary voices' and second it serves the networks financial sector through free programming sourced from audiences. The latter of which positioned Al-Jazeera at the forefront of the Arab uprisings as footage 'from the ground' often featured during the period contributed toward the station's overall image. Thus, while AJE's call for content feeds well into the new media terminology of the 'consumer' audience it similarly runs the risk of being oblivious to its implications which according to van Dijk reduce audiences to 'data providers' that ultimately spare media corporate extra cash (van Dijk, 2006).

According to Carpentier (2011: 68) "media organizations have strong links to the concept of participation, at the levels of both self-representation and self management, which positions them close to the logics of direct, delegative and participatory democracy." Given the largely aloof nature of mainstream media that limits media production to professionals, the facade of

appealing to a more non-professional people-centred means of news production is an extremely lucrative and attractive brand to pursue. AJE's particular context holds much resonance to this debate. In reporting a people's uprising against tyranny and dictatorship, AJE's discourse undeniably promoted a strong allegiance to the masses as evident in previous sections. Through inviting participation on its Facebook page, the station once more highlights this allegiance, but in doing so opens up the realm of critical debate to gather the real incentives behind its activities. The link between brand Al-Jazeera and audience participation becomes immediately apparent. Choosing to pursue an agenda that appears to call on the opinions and viewpoints of its audiences is most engaging. However, just as all other branding initiatives demand more critical consideration, so too does this one. Assuming participation to include any kind of social practice is tantamount to over stretching the term to include fleeting actions and inadvertently falling prey to concerted attempts by news organisations like AJE to seduce audiences. Participation holds little value if in its entirety it merely facilitates "access to or interaction with media organizations" (Carpentier, 2011: 69).

In inviting viewers to comment and provide views on particular news stories, the weight allocated to audience participation remains weak. In many respects it assumes the role of 'interaction with media organizations' as illustrated by Carpentier (2011: 69) which does not necessarily provide any substantial grounding for the influence of participation. To exert any kind of authority, participation must have within its capacity the ability to influence or perhaps equal power relations within the decision making process of news production (Carpentier, 2011:69). In simply limiting comments to existing programming, AJE inadvertently highlights the remaining unidirectional flow of information from media organisation to audiences where participation merely necessitates commentary on completed products and not actual involvement within their production.

The solicitation of video's and images which proved to be a salient appeal by AJE's Facebook team as evident on February 2nd stating; "#Egypt Al-Jazeera urges people who have any images or video from the protests to submit it to us" is rather problematic. The idea feeds into wider academic thoughts on free labour and the exploitation of participatory means to further personal objectives. Using the appeal of audience interaction, AJE's various requests for imagery and

videos emanating from the conflict zone allude to a superficial appeal of participation that some would argue are in reality means of engaging free labour (van Dijk, 2006).

When considering participation on AJE's Facebook page various other considerations come into play. AJE admin staff are privy to an array of fan demographics as a result of the page. While Facebook users worldwide merely click 'like' to receive continuous news feed of AJE's posts, they knowingly or perhaps unknowingly simultaneously consent to their personal information being forwarded to the station. AJE admin staff enjoy various demographics ranging from gender, age and locales of their page fans all of which are targeted at producing more refined marketing campaigns. The reality is rather disturbing and puts into question the real 'value' of participation offered on the page. While new media technologies like social media have been applauded for their democratic value Dean (2010: 4) argues that their democratic value is severely undermined by their underlying corporate structures. The very properties for which new media platforms are hailed; inclusion, participation and the ideals of access are the very same elements that problematically produce huge concentrations of wealth through their commodification and capitalisation. Dean's (2010) work on new media and participation provides an enabling platform to dissect the hype surrounding the use of social media, the internet and mobile phones during Egypt's uprising. Instead of glorifying each of the above entities for the ideals of access that are often propagated, Dean (2010) employs a wholesome approach that takes in consideration their larger implications which all essentially feed into a capitalist logic.

4.3 A case of Divergence

Of the post analysed, 80% contained links to AJE's website. The links directed users to in-depth articles on the relevant stories. The reality of this been remarkably significant with regard to the study's interest in investigating the relationship between old and new media. Contrary to previous assumptions, AJE's adoption of social networking has evidently been less a means of converging the network's on and offline mediums than it has been a concerted effort at in fact sustaining two very separate platforms. While more popular debates on convergence would assume a direct connection between AJE's Facebook page and television broadcasting, the case study has surprisingly indicated a trend of divergence instead. With links attached to 80% of the Facebook posts directly leading to the website, AJE appear to consolidate their ideology via the

website through in-depth articles that further elaborate on information provided in posts. The apparent disconnection between the Facebook platform and television broadcasting is very interesting given the fact that the research highlighted a fair amount convergence in programming through *The Stream* primarily; however there is little to no evidence of this in the Facebook page. Thus, in assessing the relationship between the traditional and new media, the AJE case study illustrates a greater degree of convergence within old media (television) than across new media (Facebook).

4.4 Participation Despite the odds

A thorough analysis of AJE's Facebook posts illustrates the surprisingly few attempts made by the station to invite audiences to participate. A careful study of the discourse employed by AJE indicates that despite various circulating ideas about the station, it did not go out of its way to engage fans and explicitly prompt them to respond to posts. However, in spite of this, one of the most interesting findings of this study is that the participatory feature of the Facebook medium transcended AJE's feeble efforts at engaging people. By virtue of its structure and medium as a social network, Facebook facilitated the dissemination of voices of ordinary people directly through the medium's 'comment' feature. While AJE was successful in disabling people from directly posting comments on the Facebook page, the station could not manage the comment feature that becomes directly available to users once the station made public a post. Thus, despite a rhetoric that proved to be less inviting, AJE's Facebook posts elicited hundreds of comments from fans across the globe all of whom utilized the platform to air their views even though initial posts by the station might not have solicited them. Taking into account the hundreds of comments posted by audiences around the world, the research cannot however, make any claims regarding the extent to which AJE incorporates these comments into programming. Furthermore a study of the comments elicited by the posts would provide an interesting snapshot on the kinds of comments received by people nevertheless, this dissertation remains directly concerned with the manner in which they were invited to participate and not by the way in which they did participate.

4.5 Conclusion

The analysis of audience participation in four AJE flagship programmes provided an interesting study that illustrated the complex nature of participation and the forms it assumes according to various television formats and circumstances. Adopting a different nature in each of the programmes the complexities of participation highlighted once again the all-encompassing and powerful nature of media houses that utilise and stimulate participation in an attempt to further various objectives. *The Listening Post's* dedicated segment to 'Global Voices' appears at face value as a resolute effort at inviting audience commentary. However, when levied against a more critical appraisal of participation, the venture loses much credit since it does little to contribute toward emerging and innovative debates. *People and Power's* documentary style product similarly exudes subjectivity once the façade of the documentary genre is deconstructed and interrogated. *Empire* exists as an elitist forum of discussion primarily targeted at societies highbrow. Stimulating discussion of an extremely academic nature the show is unapologetic in its selectivity and reveals no inclination to involve the 'ordinary'. *The Stream* remains the most dedicated to audience participation providing cross-platforms for engagement with audiences that is unparalleled. In positioning audiences as central to its agenda, *The Stream* incorporates the voices and faces of many ordinary personalities through savvy convergence of new and traditional media technologies.

Invitations to participate on the AJE Facebook page remain largely limited taking into respect the potential they harbour. Displaying a rhetoric that is hardly inviting to audiences, AJE's Facebook commentary highlighted a platform less interested in engaging Facebook users than it did with directing them to the station's website. Thus, the study of posts highlighted an AJE ideology constituted by a dedicated stream directly linking users to a website that furthers the philosophy of the network much less the aspirations of the people it claims to represent. More fascinating however, is the outcome of divergence evident in AJE's Facebook page. Showing minimal reference to its television broadcasting component, the social media platform has been revealed to sustain an independent identity that is primarily sustained within a digital media framework and not in conjunction with television broadcasting. Ideally a production ethnography study would reveal the most accurate results regarding the relationship between AJE's broadcasting entity and Facebook page however, given the distance and logistics involved this study was

simply not possible. Similarly, while the programmes analysed represent hallmarks of the AJE network they cannot by any means claim to represent the station's 24-hour running news coverage. A study of which would ultimately provide more compelling results. Unfortunately the sheer magnitude of researching 24-hour running news coverage for the duration of the unrest was not possible firstly since the resources required for archiving the lengthy duration of the coverage were not available and secondly due to the scope of an MA that proved far too small for such wide research data. Despite this the study posits an innovative research methodology that contends with the component of participation through a much more critical lens taking into account the conditions which both promote and circumscribe it. The outcome is a far more significant appraisal of the phenomenon in comparison to the more generic evaluations that have accompanied the rise of social media and new media in particular.

Proceeding from an informed position on the participatory value of AJE's programming and Facebook page, the following chapter interrogates the networks branding across the same two platforms.

Chapter Five

Brand Al-Jazeera: An interrogation of the station's branding in Programming and Facebook Commentary

5.0 Introduction

The exponential growth of online social networks in the past decade as a result of the mediums real time efficiency has opened up numerous avenues of enhanced online communication. With Facebook occupying one of the top ten most visited websites on the internet, the social network now boasts a phenomenal global popularity characterized by its fundamental eminence in connecting people from various locales through photographs and discussion formats (Nazir et al, 2008:1). The success of Facebook as a medium for social communication is particularly relevant in reference to AJE as the popularity of the network's Facebook page could be linked to the station's growing international prominence. With a dedicated stream of Facebook posts each day, the potential for using the social medium as a means of branding are high. The advent and rapid growth of new media technologies has given rise to a networked community wherein organistations rely increasingly on integrated networks to stay in touch with members. While the concept has often been applied to corporates it may well run true for global broadcasting entities like AJE who exploit forms of networked branding to establish and maintain brand recognition through avenues like social media. In approaching the station's daily Facebook commentary through a more critical lens as being the voice of the network, AJE's Facebook posts are undeniably a strong feature of its overall brand imaging. Using Hall's work on representation and identity as a framework, this dissertation seeks to draw links between AJE's Facebook commentary and its branding strategy since it is within the realm of discourse that identities are conjured and reaffirmed.

This chapter interrogates four specific episodes of AJE's flagship programmes; *The Listening Post* Reporting the Egyptian Revolution, *Empire* Social Networks, Social Revolution, *People and Power* Egypt Seeds of Change and *The Stream* Post Uprising Tunisia & Egyptian Revolution 2.0 along with the networks Facebook posts from January until April of 2011. It does so with the intention of investigating the kind of issues raised by the network on its Facebook page and during programming with the specific interest in unearthing what has come to

constitute brand AJE during the Arab Spring. Thematic content analysis is used to derive the popular themes within the content where after critical discourse analysis is employed to further engage the themes, paying keen attention to the discourse exploited by the station. Thompson's (1997) five modes of operation of ideology; reification, fragmentation, unification, dissimilation and legitimation will be employed in the analysis.

Assuming the position as the first global English news provider from the Arab world AJE's prominence in the global media-scape has been attained through apart from its 24hour news coverage but also from an array of flagship programming. *The Listening Post*, *Empire* and *People and Power* are all prominent features of the channel and as such specific episodes of each were chosen through a process of thematic content analysis that ultimately deciphered the episode titles that most related to the Egyptian uprisings. An episode of *The Stream* AJE's latest social media programme, was also analysed primarily because the show originated as a response to the phenomenon of social media and its influence in the events that have culminated in the Arab spring.

5.1 Al-Jazeera: Branding and Programming

Using the four AJE's flagship programmes as a means to unearth possible branding attempts within them provided for an interesting analysis. While the content featured across AJE's Facebook page and its programmes encompassed a range of issues, focus on the Egyptian revolt proved to be a salient spotlight of the station's coverage. In investigating the extensive visual content across *The Listening Post*, *Empire, People and Power* and *The Stream* along with the continuous stream of posts dedicated to the uprising on the Facebook page, this dissertation has categorised the analysed content into three main themes as a result of their commonalities. The three main themes unearthed are: A strong anti-US sentiment; emphasis on the unique and authoritative voice of AJE; and a constant attempt at reiterating the AJE mandate to report, despite the danger, a theme the dissertation has termed "The Al-Jazeera Covenant". The three themes will first be discussed in light of the flagship programming followed by a section detailing their relevance to the Facebook posts.

Four specific episodes of the flagship programmes were chosen from the eight mentioned in the methodology through a detailed process of thematic content analysis. After watching and

transcribing all programmes the four most relevant to the dissertation were decided on namely; *The Listening Post* Reporting the Egyptian Revolution, *People and Power* Egypt Seeds of Change, *Empire* Social Networks Social Revolution and *The Stream* Post Uprising Tunisia & Egyptian Revolution 2.0

5.1.1 Al-Jazeera Anti-US

AJE's position as the first global news agency located within the Middle East has long been one of the networks most distinguishable traits. Gaining increased popularity amongst Arab audiences, Al-Jazeera Arabic has managed to maintain local appeal by emitting a distinctly Anti-US stance that strongly resonates with regional opinions but remains strongly condemned by Western counterparts. Keeping in tow with its Arabic predecessor AJE video programming similarly emitted a strong anti-US flavour. Of all four programmes *The Listening Post* expressed the most condemning view of the US administration. In an episode dedicated to reviewing the global news reportage of the Egyptian unrest, host Richard Gizbert made no attempt at concealing the American media's lop-sided coverage of the revolt that was largely indicative of its political alliance with the deeply problematic Mubarak regime. Stating, "…much of the coverage on the American airwaves had echoed the Obama administration's line "That Egypt was a US ally and Mubarak was a stabalising influence in a volatile region and despite his flaws at least he kept Egyptian Islamists the Muslim Brotherhood at bay politically. The biggest fear for the US is that Egypt will turn to Islamic fundamentalism". Gizbert's scathing review of the American media which he indirectly alludes to as being politically motivated feeds into an important branding strategy for the AJE network.

In drawling links between the US government's stance on the revolt and its local media coverage, Gizbert points to the façade of an independent American media. In doing so he implicitly exalts the position of AJE by highlighting its own independence and freedom to report the Egyptian crises without political interference. According to Thompson (1997) this process amounts to an expurgation of the Other in which AJE creates a disparity between itself and its Western counterpart highlighting the latter's inefficiency in delivering on journalistic principles. In so doing AJE plays on the idealistic values of the journalistic profession and employs a branding strategy that associates itself with ethics of transparency, autonomy and people-centeredness. Furthermore, in explicitly mentioning the US's preoccupation with warding off

Islamic fundamentalism and its media's compliance in propagating 'suitable' content, Gizbert brings forth the idea of an intrinsically selfish media system that is more concerned with the fears of its administration than its responsibility to its audience. The American address of Mubarak's "flaws" as secondary to his position at keeping Islamic fundamentalism at bay provides perhaps the greatest attack by Gizbert on the American stance and the media which propagates it. His statement propels the notion that the US government willingly chooses to remain oblivious to the injustices Mubarak inflicts on his people as long as his power in state amounts to easing the fears of an American psyche fixated on the threat of Islamic terrorism. Gizbert's assertion of American media compliance with the administrations stand-point posits a massive challenge against the US media which he alludes to as being 'politician-centered' in direct contrast to AJE that is people-centered.

The onslaught against the American media and its administration continued in another of AJE's flagship programmes titled *Empire* Social Networks, Social Revolution. The show is hosted by Mirwan Bishara and is characterized by a discussion format involving various guest speakers that all engage and debate around the relevant episodes topic.

During this specific episode host, Marwan Bishara, assesses the value of social media in Egypt's revolution and recounts the American reaction to the uprising stating, "…the US government which had been waffling in its response turned to twitter to make its voice heard…". The deliberate use of the word "waffling" once more points to the lack of resolve on the part of the Americans to a largely humanitarian crisis polarized across two primary fronts: promoters of democracy against advocates of dictatorship. Using the word "waffling" to best describe the US response, the host immediately positions their standpoint in murky waters in a conflict that is clear-cut between essentially good and bad. The connotation of which forges a union between the American government and an undemocratic regime. Once again the discourse exploited in this instance points to Thompson's (1997) work on the expurgation of the Other wherein the US has been differentiated to constitute a different and threatening Other.

Proceeding further into the show, guest Amy Goodman described as a "best selling author" further ridicules the US government stating;

> "…it was quite something to see President Obama making a powerful statement about people's freedom, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and freedom of access to the internet. That we should be granted this. And I think we should take this lesson to heart at home because he is not following that path at home. When we talk about issues of net neutrality, when we talk about something he promised before he became president that he would keep the internet open and free. It's not the path he's going down, letting the internet, the video and telecom companies write the legislation that will privatize the internet. That is the greatest threat now in the United States."

The Obama administration's hypocrisy described in the above statement provides yet another condemning view of the US which in this instance is said to publically pursue one agenda but in practicality follow another. Goodman's narration of various media policies and promises which Obama has neglected to materialize on acts as a means of legitimizing the hypocrisy she charges him with and holds him accountable for (Thompson, 1997). Goodman's constant use of word's like "we" and "home" illustrate a discourse of unity which she assumes for the greater American public who have not benefited from Obama's empty promises. In essentially unifying a segment of the American populace against the president, Goodman exercises what Thompson (1997) describes as the fragmentation element of discourse. In doing so she emphasizes the differences that separate what, according to her, the American public deserve and are promised from what they are given. This emphasis unites the greater American populace and mounts a challenge against the administration (Thompson, 1997).

The anti-US sentiment echoed in both AJE programmes points to a larger rhetoric that supersedes the networks overall content output clearly evident in its Facebook posts. This rhetoric which has come to signify the AJE stance is undeniably linked to a branding strategy that accentuates a particular perspective as a means of a signifying character and uniqueness.

5.1.2 Al-Jazeera "The Authoritative Voice"

AJE's emphasis on its own authority and clout was extremely pronounced within the analysed episodes. In endorsing the might of its coverage, *The Listening Post* featured an interesting video snippet from a previous episode detailing what host, Gizbert, termed to be a "prophetic point made on this programme... on the evolution and impact of Arab satellite channels on politics on the region in the fifteen years since the launch of Al-Jazeera". The snippet was by Rami Khouri, Director of ISSAM Fares Institute in which he said, "…Al-Jazeera… have a dimension which is

beyond letting off steam and actually mobilizing for political change. This is a historic moment in the modern era of media." The statements by both Gizbert and Khouri have important implications for brand Al-Jazeera. Firstly, Gizbert's revisiting of an old clip described as being prophetic in the light of the Egyptian unrest is most telling with regard for the brand imaging of AJE and the kind of content it claims to produce. In being "prophetic" in character the discourse once more appeals to viewership asserting a degree of foresight in its programming content that goes beyond reporting current events but actually reading their implications for the future. Thus, the authority with which the network delivers its news and programming is immediately pronounced and the forward thinking nature of this is directly associated with elements of the celestial. The result being an almost supernatural kind of news reportage.

Secondly, the correlation Khouri draws between the advent of Al-Jazeera and the opportunities for mobilizing political change in the Arab world is a massive boost for brand Al-Jazeera. As a force of mobilizing popular dissent, AJE is inadvertently being credited for the emancipation of Arab populations. The notion once more proliferates the AJE brand image with the ideals of whistle blowing and liberation. The discourse is successful at promoting this image as it uses the Egyptian revolt as a rationale to legitimize AJE's potency (Thompson, 1997). AJE's timing for revisiting the words of Khouri speaks volumes to the brand identity the station sought to adopt during the Arab uprisings, in particular the Egyptian revolution. In revisiting the clip during the Egyptian crisis the station indirectly used the events following January 19th in Egypt as an attempt at claiming responsibility for the unrest and spurring on political change. Thus, to recall Gizbert's word, 'prophetic', brand AJE is, in the light of the above rhetoric, a force of popular mobilization created as forum for the dissemination of public dissent.

5.1.3 The Al-Jazeera "Covenant"

The third most salient theme uncovered in AJE's programmes was a continued sentiment detailing the network's dedication to covering the Arab unrest despite threats to its staff, equipment and infrastructure. The reinforcement of these claims led this research into terming the theme, The Al-Jazeera "Covenant". The 'promise' to report no matter the circumstances proved salient in *The Listening Post* and *People and Power*.

During its Egypt Seeds of Change episode, *People and Power*, a documentary style programme, featured a behind-the-scenes look at the revolution and the young individuals responsible for driving the movement through strategizing protests for maximum effectiveness. The crux of the show is epitomized in a voice clip by Elizabeth Jones stating, "They say it's a leaderless revolution but somewhere in the side streets of Cairo there are leaders and they are planning". The episode details the trials and tribulations of Ahmed Maher the leader of the April 6th youth movement and the man largely credited with driving the entire revolution. AJE's role in capturing the events leading up to the eventual overthrow of Mubarak is clearly stated in a voice over by host, Summer Al-Shahad, stating, "Over the first 10 remarkable days of the protest *People and Power* filmed exclusively and behind the scenes with a core group of young activists from the April 6th opposition movement". The claim to exclusivity by the network is a branding strategy targeted at maintaining an international audience that enjoys the luxury of variety in satellite television. The appeal propels the Al-Jazeera 'covenant' of first hand reportage amidst volatile environments involving danger and an overall threat to human life.

Invoking similar notions, AJE's Richard Gizbert, host of *The Listening Post*, exploited a discourse emphasizing the extent to which journalistic life and freedom were tested during its coverage of the unrest stating, "…acts against foreign journalists grew more and more frequent…Things were looking so dangerous for journalists that Al-Jazeera took the extraordinary step of often withholding the name of correspondents reporting live from the field in order to preserve their anonymity". The element of danger induced in his discourse harkens back to the Facebook commentary analysis in which the ideals of heroic mythic journalism are introduced as branding strategies catapulting the Al-Jazeera Brand as being synonymous with the credentials of whistle blowing, bravery and tirelessness in the pursuit of news coverage.

5.2 Al-Jazeera: Branding and Facebook

With a total of 361 posts from January 15th until April 27th, AJE's Facebook posts proved to be plentiful across the peak of the Arab Spring that begun in Tunisia and spread quickly to neighbouring Egypt. Correlations in the agendas between the networks flagship programmes and Facebook commentary became immediately apparent. This section of the chapter will provide an analysis of the Facebook rhetoric making explicit its connection to the themes created in the

previous section. In so doing it aims to provide a comprehensive review of AJE's branding initiatives throughout the Egyptian revolt.

5.2.1 Al-Jazeera Anti-US

The antagonistic dynamic between America and the Arab world has over the last few decades intensified as the notion of an 'attack on American freedom' became intensely popularised by US-led media following the events of 9/11 (Altheide, 2007: 287). The wide-scale propagation of this notion exists as a result of the sheer might and magnitude of American media which remains a dominant force within the international media-scape. The ensuing dynamic of difference between the West (America) and the East (Arabia) highlighted by Bush's famous statement "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" has resulted in a strongly anti-American attitude in the East. According to Gentzkow and Shapiro (2004: 1) America suffers a major problem in the East as a measly one percent of people surveyed in Jordan and Palestine in 2003 expressed a favourable opinion of the United States. More problematic is the idea that 40-60% of polled foreigners believe that the United States "is waging its war on terrorism not solely out of security concerns but also to control Mid-East Oil, Protect Israel, target Muslim governments or dominate the world" (Walt, 2005:107).

With a stream of posts dedicated to the Egyptian revolt, AJE's Facebook page emitted a distinctly anti-US fervour that strongly resonates with prevailing attitudes displayed above. In one of the earliest posts dated January 25th the station shared a link with an attached comment stating "Egypt anti-govt protests escalate Thousands call for Tunisia-style ouster of president Hosni Mubarak as US, an ally, says government there is "stable" ". A post later that day read "It's time for Obama to say Kefaya!". In clearly linking the American government with the estranged and now former president Hosni Mubrak the first statement clearly commits a form of fragmentation according to Thompson (1997) that exercises the expurgation of the Other. The use of inverted comma's in the word "stable" suggest an emphasis on the American official statement which in the context of the revolt remains laughable and somewhat demeaning to the Egyptian populace given the uncertainty and danger they posed at the time. The follow-up post calling for Obama to join the revolution by saying "Kefaya" presents a subsequent attack by AJE on the US administration by using the term *Kefaya* that has become synonymous with Egypt's movement for change.

AJE's distinctly anti-American stance was once more echoed on the 30th of January in a post stating "President Obama, say the 'D-Word' US appears to shy away from talk about democracy in the Middle East, despite historic anti-government rallies in Egypt." In distancing president Obama from the ideals of democracy and freedom a well-documented and popularised pillar of American life, AJE's discourse indicates an action of differentiation that reveal fragmenting gaps within the American persona (Thompson, 1997). The notion resonates strongly with Carother's (2003: 85) take on America's 'split personality' with regards to its foreign policy that "actively cultivates warm relations with "friendly tyrants" in many parts of the world ... while makes ringing calls for a vigorous new democracy campaign in the Middle-East". In holding the US to account for transgressing one of its most fundamental values, AJE's discourse indicates a mounting challenge against the American administration. The challenge is directly attributed to the US double standards that seek liberation, freedom and justice for its own people while promoting injustice and tyranny to foreigner nationals. The discourse of fragmentation exercised through both differentiation and Expurgation of the Other according to Thompson (1997) feeds into the larger operations of ideology that seek to divide and rule (Thompson, 1997). The association of the American government to this ideology is undeniably intentioned to create and propagate negative nuances that together construct the American image as one that is hypocritical and different. Interestingly enough it is the East that has historically been associated with such notions.

Furthering this Anti-US double standard fervour is a post on March 10th reading "Obama does not get it, if independent, democratic, governments are formed in the Middle East, they won't follow Washington's orders." The clear indignation shown toward the American presidency in this statement clearly situates AJE at odds with the administration. The portrayal of the American government as a 'bully' that opposes the democratisation of the Middle East as a result of its domineering character appears as a form of reification according to Thompson (1997) that sees a process of social construction been presented as natural. The depiction of American dominance as expressed in the discourse exists without any substantiation. As such it stands to present the stations own judgment as both natural and unchanging. On March 14th the station published a post stating "Obama gets it right" "Obama's seeming inaction over the protests sweeping the Middle East is exactly what he needs to do that is, nothing." The statement once again casts the presidency in a bad light citing his un-involvement in uprising of the Middle East

as a good thing inadvertently alluding to the previous American actions as being bad. The castigation of the US image in the posts cumulatively operates to alienate and discredit.

The element of danger is introduced in a post dated February the 7th which read "Suleiman: The CIA's man in Cairo" "Suleiman, a friend to the US and reported torturer, has long been touted as a presidential successor". In explicitly linking the CIA to a notorious figure of Egyptian oppression and violence the discourse inexplicitly links the United States to a degree of violence against a proposed harmless population. The discourse which associates the Americans with personalities of tyranny once more works to Other the American character and situate AJE and its imagined audience against a created image of American oppression. A post published on March 19th reinforces the connection between the US and its threat to society by stating, "Cruel and Usual: US solitary confinement, As incarceration rates explode in the US, thousands are placed in solitary confinement, often without cause." Ironically in forging an association with America and oppression, AJE charges the American's with an issue that has long been their greatest critique from the West. Once criticised for being "the most powerful ally of terror in the world" and called "killer's with camera's" AJE has historically suffered negative publicity in the West driven by their alleged connection to violence (Lynch, 2005:36). In an inversion of the dynamic AJE's Facebook posts indicate a similar if not equally damaging appraisal of the US. The discourse works craftily to topple the allegation and instead form a mounting challenge.

AJE's patent anti-US discourse forms a prominent and unmistakable component of its Facebook commentary during the Arab spring and Egyptian revolution in particular. Apart from aligning the American administration with Mubarak's iron fist rule, the commentary goes further to associate the US allegiance with Mubarak as a powerful force in the ongoing Isreali-Palestinian conflict. On February the 6th the station published a post stating "Egypt and the Palestinian question, The Mubarak regime has been a tool with which Israel and the US have pressured Palestinians". The linking of relations between the US, Mubarak and Israel are according to Thompson (1997) a form of narrativisation which recount the past and treat the present as a chain of events. Together they culminate to form a legitimating factor that contributes toward a greater force. With regards to the post, the discourse exploits American historic relations with Mubarak and Israel as a form of legitimation in their criminal onslaught against Palestine.

5.2.2 Al-Jazeera "The Authoritative Voice"

The emphasis on the originality and proficiency of AJE expressed in the programming became once more visible in the dedicated stream of Facebook posts by the network. The most repetitive post by far by the station read "From our headquarters in Doha, we keep you updated on all things Egypt, with reporting from Al-Jazeera staff in Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez." The statement was repeatedly posted at short intervals throughout the January to April time span reiterating the stations dedication and perseverance. On February 3rd Al-Jazeera English posted "The world's first English language channel to have its headquarters in the Middle East; covering the world, bridging cultures and setting the news agenda." Emphasising its location to events in Egypt contributed to the stations overall legitimacy as mentioning the proximity acts as a means of rationalising its authoritative voice (Thompson, 1997).

In identifying the various cities within which reporters were based AJE inextricably indicated the comprehensiveness of their coverage. Furthermore by highlighting their headquarters in the Mid-East the station assumed a degree of influence over reportage that discursively work to garner support. In doing so the station went a step further to extend its reach through a series of posts during January and February stating "Demand Al-Jazeera" "Like our coverage from Egypt? Think we should be shown on US TV? It's time to demand Al-Jazeera http://aje.me/demandAJ- if you're on twitter please use the tag #demandaljazeera" The posts feeds into the larger anti-US sentiments expressed in the earlier section but also indicates the forceful nature of the network's coverage during the period that sought to extend its reach primarily through exploiting issues of proximity and scope. Thompson's (1997) work on critical discourse analysis and the modes of operation of ideology find close resonances in AJE's discourse within a concept termed universalisation. The concept forms an umbrella term that houses systems or institutional arrangements which serve individual interests that are represented as serving the interests of all. In expressing the desire to broaden its capacity by calling on viewers to vote the station proposes a degree of universalisation that assumes its prevalence in certain societies would be for the greater good.

In once more promoting the legitimacy and progressiveness of the station a post reading "Al-Jazeera: Has the future arrived?" "Arguing that the "Al-Jazeera effect" has transcended reporting by other major international news outlets" was posted on March 18th. The proclamation speaks

directly to the naturalisation operation of ideology pointed out by Thompson (1997). Critical analysis of the language indicates a deeply socially constructed process of self-imaging being promoted as natural. In positioning itself at the forefront of news broadcasting, AJE post illustrates a complex discourse structure that fragments the global news industry. By setting itself apart from its competitors the discourse again becomes effective in 'Othering'. However, on this occasion it does so on a much larger scale in that it creates difference in the work ethic and competence of fellow global news networks. While it does not as according to Thompson's (1997) work, construct a threatening force worthy of expurgation; it does emphasise difference at the expense of its competition.

5.1.3 The Al-Jazeera "Covenant"

Emphasising the network's degree of dedication and enthusiasm during the uprisings proved to be a strong feature of AJE's coverage. On repeated occasions the station published comments reiterating its unwavering dedication in the face of danger.

Catapulting the theme was a comment posted on the 26th of January reading "Al-Jazeera staff follow the latest developments in the deadly January 25 anti-government protests." The statement exists as a precursor to a series of posts by the network detailing the threatening Egyptian landscape. On January 29th during the peak of Egypt's uprising AJE posted; "With protestors back on the streets in #Egypt, we continue our live uncensored coverage. Watch our live stream on Facebook or on our website: http://aje.me/ajelive". Exploiting the discourse of unity through the station's use of the words "we" and "our" the ideology of unification works well to serve a created image of unison for the Al-Jazeera English network. In categorising the entire news organization into a collective agent the allegiance of its coverage is enhanced. The use of the word "uncensored" adds to this dynamic by contributing to the elements of courage and danger (Thompson, 1997). On January 30th the station published "Egypt shuts down Al-Jazeera bureau, Network's license cancelled and accreditation of staff in Cairo withdrawn by order of information minister". Once more the threatening nuance of the statement is fore grounded by an environment of hostility and fear. By making explicit the information regarding

the bureau's shut down and license cancellation the statement inadvertently alludes to its unwavering, "uncensored" reportage that was deemed too powerful and therefore shutdown.

In a follow-up post dated February 1st, AJE once more reiterated their enthusiasm for documenting the revolt stating "Despite obstacles impeding our progress, Al-Jazeera continues to bring quality coverage from around the world". The stations covenant toward quality coverage aligns strongly with Thompson's (1997) concept of legitimation where the priority of garnering support becomes most vivid. Propagating attitudes of courage and nerve amidst a re-presented atmosphere of trepidation, the discourse utilised in the station's Facebook posts work to legitimise its overall news reportage. Through reinforcing the facet of danger impeding its coverage, the language utilised manages to create an air of uncertainty that ultimately contribute toward the appeal of its journalism. The notion is most aptly displayed in a post published February 4th stating "Al-Jazeera Arabic's Cairo office has been stormed by unknown men and the office has been trashed". The element of uncertainty mentioned above is highlighted by the "unknown" men. The language functions well to establish the concept of a 'dark' force impeding the network's coverage. Similarly it works well to contribute to age old perception of journalistic values of truth and objectivity which are often challenged but always reign supreme.

Publicising various hindrances opposing journalistic duty proved to be a salient feature of AJE's Facebook commentary. The first of which was posted on February 6th reading "Al-Jazeera correspondent Ayman Mohyeldin has been arrested by #Egypt military authorities. We call for his immediate release". The sentiments were once again aired during the initial uprisings in Libya when on April 3rd the station posted: "Al-Jazeera demands the immediate release of four journalists detained again by Gaddafi's forces in Libya". Deepening the motif of uncertainty and danger a post reading "No safe haven for reporters in Libya, As civilians fire rockets and government troops shell civilian positions, there is almost no safe place for journalists" on 22nd of April. In making public information the arrest and detention of its journalists, AJE's discourse once more showed evidence of rationalisation (Thompson, 1997). By relating a chain of reasoning i.e. AJE journalists strive to report the truth therefore they are detained and under threat, the station creates a degree of legitimation over its coverage. The degree of liveliness induced into AJE's coverage by the nuances of danger are according to Clayman and Heritage (2002 :6) part of the appeal of news media that contribute toward its spectacle. For AJE, in

particular, exacerbating the spectacle of danger performs an important role for two crucial reasons. Firstly, it promotes the credibility of its broadcast which ultimately leads to the second facet of sustaining an audience.

5.3 Branding Implications

Proceeding from the previous section's in-depth analysis of AJE's Facebook and programming discourse, this section applies a micro-scopic lens to the branding implications of this discourse. According to Schiffrin (2001 :54) "The production of coherent discourse is an interactive process that requires speakers to draw upon several different types of communicative knowledge that complement more code-based grammatical knowledge of sound, form, and meaning per se." The significance of this statement for AJE in particular lies in language's ability to "display personal and social identities, to convey attitudes and perform actions, and to negotiate relations between self and Other" (Shciffrin, 2001: 54). The importance of discourse within this discussion lies in the term's capacity to foreground the concerns of social issues within the study of language. For the purpose of this section the terms of discourse and language shall be used interchangeably given the greater scope of the term discourse in comparison to language only which tends to suggest a narrower understanding. To discuss language in alienation of this societal influence and impact would be thoughtless given the social context in which it is both born and sustained (Ivanic, 1998:38).

The relationship between language and identity has been explored in various academic spheres with an overwhelming amount of research indicating that language systems are directly responsible for fostering social identities. The desire to identify according to Ivanic, (1998: 38) "manifests itself in choices in written language, including choices beyond sentence boundaries." While identity is a construct often associated with the individual and human agency, the notion of collective identities and brand identity has received increasing prominence in recent years as discussed in earlier chapters. AJE's brand identity, a central concern of this dissertation is a fundamental constituent of the station's success and as such requires maintenance and reinforcement much like all other forms of identities.

The discourse analysed in the previous sections revealed three salient themes all of which undeniably feed into the networks larger branding strategies. The Anti-American sentiments

aired throughout the Arab uprisings by AJE harken back to a contentious Arab-American relationship that has, since the 9/11 attacks, tarnished the image of both nations across regional media. The American government's widely publicised connection of the Arab world with terror through association with Bin Laden and Al-Qaida networks has further deepened the rifts between the already fragile relations between the Muslim world and the West. America's paranoia regarding the threat of terrorism has been ridiculed at length most famously by Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel who said, "The roots of terrorism nets in… the will to live in ignorance…Education is the way to eliminate terrorism." (Cited in Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2004: 2). Despite this the notion of terror fuelled against the American way of life has subsisted feeding into various facets of Western life most prominently through the mass media. The Arab world's response to the dilemma has been equally damaging as the stance of Anti-Americanism has come to categorize its prevailing media systems. With just over half a century of television media available in the Arab world, the current face of Arab media is a far cry from the initial stagnant, centralised and audience apathetic character it once possessed. Although still largely dominated by strict government domination, media in the Muslim world has in the last four decades witnessed significant shifts as an array of regional and global developments have introduced new forms of political communication (Ayish, 2002: 138).

A-Jazeera has undeniably been one of the leading forces in this regard. Following a Western broadcasting structure, the station is credited as the first Arab based agency to tackle issues of polygamy, corruption and various other socially sensitive subjects (Ayish, 2002: 143). Al-Jazeera has managed to rekindle a pan-Arab identity amongst its viewership that exists as a concerted and recognised response to the US-led media attack on the Arab world and its alleged connection to terror. Ongoing conflicts between Israel and Palestine, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have propelled this venture as opposition to the mighty American media voice have found home on the Al-Jazeera network (Seib, 2008: 143)

Identifying itself on various occasions as the "The world's first English news channel to have its headquarters in the Middle East" as illustrated in its Facebook posts, AJE has capitalised on its unique positioning in the Arab world as one of its defining characteristics. In doing so the networks brand identity has become inextricably linked to this feature. Al-Jazeera has borne the brunt of local and international criticism. Through provocative programming the network has

managed inflame Arab rulers and Western governments alike. In doing so it has maintained a strategic appeal to its viewers promoting a whistle blowing nature that closely resonates with its local audiences who depict untrusting reservations toward local state-led media systems. While Arab audiences have enjoyed the networks exposure of corrupt local leaders and inadequacies of Arab governments they have similarly revelled in exposing the harsh realities of war by revealing the threats to civilian life in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. Often accused for propagating Bin Laden's voice of terror, Al-Jazeera has managed to turn the western admonished personality into a folk hero who symbolizes the 'Muslim' cause in the Muslim world (Ajami, 2001: 1). The anti-American slant prompted by images and videos of notorious subjects like Bin Laden remain much more pronounced on Al-Jazeera Arabic whose controversial stance remains blatant. AJE on the other hand, a station that promotes a broader and more global outlook remains much a bit more subtle in its approach.

Following its Arabic predecessor, the content featured across AJE's Facebook commentary and video programming illustrate an anti-American stance that strongly resonates with the AJE overall brand identity. As the first English station hosted in the Middle East promoting the counter narrative to the US-led media initiative remains one of AJE's core roles. It has similarly built a brand identity upon this responsibility. The station's discourse illustrates various attempts at affirming an identity that exists in opposition to the American persona. The phenomenon aligns with Hall's work on Identity formation that more often is most prominent when emphasised in opposition to. Like all identities, brand identities require constant maintenance and re-affirmation to remain credible. In an attempt to remain relevant and credible toward its viewership AJE's anti-US discourse exists as concerted attempts at sustaining its Arab-centred brand identity that thrives on whistle blowing and providing the counter narrative.

Promoting the counter narrative speaks to the station's strongly entrenched brand identity of counter hegemonic media force. Citing one of its core roles as being the "Voice of the Global South", AJE's journalists are often viewed as "anti-imperialists" striving to portray the oppositional agenda (Ajami, 2001: 4). Voicing blatantly anti-American sentiments, AJE's discourse can be viewed in light of this brand imaging that endeavours to discredit the American persona in favour or a more regional and 'authentic' viewpoint. According to Seib (2008: 145) "The rise in Anti-Americanism in the region since 2002 might well be partially explained not

simply by the appearance of graphic, bloody images from Palestine and Iraq, but also by the common narrative linking America as the common denominator for each of those otherwise distinct issues". Identifying a common pan-Arab enemy in the American's has undoubtedly been a leading contributor to brand Al-Jazeera's 'counter hegemonic' brand identity. This identity thrives on promoting the contra-flow of information emanating from the South and speaks directly to the cultural imperialist debate. The anti-American dialogue can therefore be directly attributed to this branding strategy and more broadly relates toward the contextualision of news discourse and the impact of regional politics on news formation.

In addressing the second most prominent theme of AJE's discourse; "The Authoritative Voice" attempts at promoting and proliferating the networks brand are blatant. As indicated earlier, AJE's pioneering role within the Middle East is the key constituent to the station's success. Considering the prevailing media systems within the region prior to its advent, AJE's strongest feat has been gaining the trust of its audience, a populace who had lost faith in the local media systems which were fraught with propaganda. While much of its programming has raised concerns of objectivity in the West, this critique remains oblivious to the baseline strength of the station. Rather than evaluating AJE's programming against a Western benchmark of standards, AJE's audiences are captured by one fundamental constituent, credibility. Encapsulating the identity of a pan-Arab news network, Al-Jazeera's international brand recognition is inextricably linked to a form of news gathering and dissemination architectured to appease an Arab audience based in the region and the Diaporas. In essence this process entails the idea of news independently gathered by Arabs for Arabs (Seib, 2008:143).

The global reach and outlook of AJE has somewhat complicated this dynamic. With a staff base predominantly educated in the West, AJE represents a Western broadcasting model and its claim to Arab authenticity has been questioned in comparison to sister station Al-Jazeera Arabic. The station has however gone to great lengths to cement its position in representing the Arab point of view to an international English speaking audience most prominently by its earliest motto "The opinion and Counter Opinion". The element of value creation has been especially important for the station in this endeavour, an aspect that has been greatly enriched by its programming content. In exploiting a discourse that seeks to reaffirm the quality and content of its coverage, AJE's discourse during Egypt's uprisings highlight two important branding initiatives. Firstly, it

serves to highlight the quality of its coverage through the strategic placement of its headquarters in the Middle East and secondly through this positioning, the emphasis on its Arab centered vision. The attempts are directly targeted at appealing to the element of credibility mentioned earlier as it reinforces the authenticity of news gathering and dissemination of Arab news in the Arab world. According to Seib (2008: 144) "In the new era of proliferating satellite television channels, state controlled and Western broadcasters have found that they are at a significant competitive disadvantage in the Arab world because they are not as credible as Al-Jazeera". Thus, the discourse that reinforces AJE's tactical positioning and resulting authority in reportage feeds into the larger branding considerations of value creation and credibility.

Al-Jazeera's established credibility has been one of the key constituents to the stations international success. Through invoking a truly Arab centered mode of producing news, the station has simultaneously provided an 'authentic' element to its news broadcasting, something previously lacking within the region. By providing a broader Arab context to frame its stories, AJE's coverage has created a broader Arab narrative to its news making more evident the idiosyncrasies of news emanating from the Muslim world. While its competitors do cover stories from the Arab world, they cover individual countries, failing to acknowledge broader connections linking the larger Arab community (Seib, 2008: 145).

In using the Facebook platform to garner support in favour of AJE availability in the United States, AJE clearly attempts to expand its brand reach. Capitalising on the Arab uprising and its strategic location, the station's call for votes to broadcast in the States is a market driven effort at expanding the Al-Jazeera English brand into previously unchartered territories. The discourse is therefore directly relevant to its branding initiatives. In creating correlations between itself and issues of authenticity, credibility, the Global South and pan-Arabism, AJE's Facebook call to broadcast in the United States exists as a crafty attempt at selling a brand to a consumer through shows of various credentials.

"The Al-Jazeera Covenant", a series of Facebook posts and verbal sentiments echoed across flagship programmes that are dedicated to accentuating the network's unwavering dedication to reporting the uprising despite the dangers involved exists as a practical illustration of the networks news values and its links to branding strategies. AJE's use of talk shows and interviews has been extremely useful in building a brand identity premised on ideals of whistle blowing and

anti-corruption. The forums have been particularly successful as they introduced Arab audiences to forms of communication that held leaders to account for their actions while promoting public debate on issues that had previously been denied public involvement. As such the network has prided itself on investigative journalism which, according to Darwish, (2009: 150) is essentially "the unearthing or discovering of something bad". Investigative journalists are said to look beyond the conventionally acceptable, behind the narration of events by authority and appeal to audience's sense of justice (de Burgh, 2000: 1). The fruits of investigative journalism are often 'shamed' leaders and 'liberated' audiences cultivate bonds of loyalty between audiences and journalists, a key constituent to broadcasting success. The loyalty discussed here is a direct reference to Al-Jazeera's 'Covenant' during the Arab Spring which is, in essence, a promise to continually deliver quality news despite prevailing conditions.

The 'Al-Jazeera Covenant' speaks to the station's brand of loyalty in the Arab world that has established a reputation for defacing political elites and denouncing Western imperialism. The element of danger enforced in the discourse harkens back to wider journalistic concerns of the pre-occupation of media entities with bad news and its subsequent appeal to audiences. The association of the journalistic profession with danger has been a long subsisting connotation that has over the years given weight to journalistic credibility and substance. AJE's deliberate and concerted attempts at highlighting the plight of their journalists harkens back to issues of brand identity and its prerequisite of value creation. The fragile conditions of journalists described, highlighting their vulnerable state with regards to capture and detention, works to create value for brand Al-Jazeera by virtue of its commitment.

5.4 Conclusion

Manoeuvring an innovative operation of mimicking Western journalistic values while appealing to a pan-Arab consciousness, AJE's overall rhetoric indicates discursively loaded statements all inadvertently alluding toward brand Al-Jazeera (Ajami, 2001: 3). The fundamental concepts of value creation and credibility proved to be a salient connotation of its content, as the discourse utilised drew on various points of reference to reaffirm these qualities. Investing value and credibility within brand Al-Jazeera has in this case illustrated the critical realm of brand identity, which while portrayed as 'real', is in actual fact a continued process of reaffirmation. To situate AJE as the leading 'brand' of news coverage by virtue of its reportage of the Arab spring would

be to fall prey to its branding strategies evident throughout its Facebook commentary. Capitalising on its strategic positioning the station exploited its Facebook forum to tempt audiences through attracting notions of authenticity and people centeredness. The discursive links between brand identity and discourse therefore indicate the manipulative sphere of language and its deeply connotative nature. Exploring AJE's Facebook and video media discourse illustrated strong tendencies toward the element of identity production and global branding.

Chapter Six
Conclusion

Combining the concepts of branding and participation in relation to AJE has provided an intriguing study into the complexities of mainstream media branding, an element that has thus far received very little academic attention. Although both fields of study remain topical points of on-going research, the interwoven link between theoretical conceptual understandings of branding and practical enactments of audience participation have thus far been overlooked. The rise of new media technologies like social media has created an immediate link between the two fields, the case of AJE being interestingly pronounced.

AJE has, since inception, provided a fascinating model of international broadcasting taking into account the peculiarities of the network that were thoroughly explored in earlier chapters of this paper. The station's claim to alterity exists as perhaps the most interesting feature of its global success. Concerted attempts to draw on features of the alternative as unearthed in the themes of anti-US sentiments, unique authoritative voice and the Al-Jazeera covenant in Chapter Five have managed to establish the global news network in direct competition to news powerhouses CNN and BBC. Delving into the branding strategy of AJE has shed light on the various constituencies of this exercise, the relation to audience participation being an important hallmark in uncovering key underpinnings of the station's public relations strategies.

Social media platforms like Facebook have undeniably challenged the landscape of participation with the media, opening up opportunities of real time engagement that was previously impossible. The swift change of political power in Egypt following the civilian uprisings of early 2011 is testament to this. However, when gauged against its link with a media powerhouse like AJE the participatory value of social media reveals bigger more narcissistic components. The study of participation across AJE's Facebook page illustrated a far less optimistic version of invited participation than commonly propagated. Instead it highlighted the very organized nature of this participation. The highly stringent structure of AJE's Facebook page which does not facilitate direct posts indicates the structured nature of participation which in many respects positions ordinary voices as subordinate to the powers of the network.

Apart from *The Stream*, participation across AJE's remaining flagship programmes similarly revealed the constraints of audience participation proving time and again to be dependent on greater forces. The relegation of ordinary voices in AJE's programmes illustrated very distinct sets of power structures emanating from the station. These structures appear to maintain the status quo of hierarchy which constitute the network. The limited vocal and visual representation of the ordinary across the programming were in all instances, apart from *The Stream* restricted in their potency, failing to achieve significant clout over matters which ideally is the true purpose of audience participation. Against a deceptive backdrop of audience involvement I argue that participation across AJE's Facebook page and video programming exists as a concerted means at upholding a brand image fashioned around notions of audience engagement the station has strived to achieve since inception.

As detailed in early chapters of the dissertation, AJE's peculiar positioning within the global media-scape has been established through a very deliberate brand identity premised on vocalising the sentiments of 'ordinary people'. The brand identity has worked well in launching the pioneering network primarily because it successfully exploited the concept of the alternative, claiming to serve an audience previously disregarded by local and international broadcasters.

The Arab uprisings of 2011 provided the perfect opportunity for AJE to cement its brand as one dedicated to giving a "voice to the voiceless". The citizen journalism aspect of the Egyptian revolution which grabbed international media attention afforded AJE a perfect platform to promote this brand image. Through savvy use of station's Facebook page, AJE quickly jumped aboard the social media bandwagon that had in many respects come to represent the face of the civilian uprisings. Through a dedicated stream of daily Facebook posts, the research has highlighted the manner in which AJE maximised on the concept of participation without necessarily fulfilling its essential components. By this I advance the idea that AJE merely harnessed the hype engulfing the period by utilising Facebook for advancing the morale of participation and liberation the medium had managed to embody at the time. It did so however, without necessarily inviting audiences to participate as clearly illustrated by the research which has challenged meek classifications of participation in an attempt to gauge their true potential at engaging discussion. Focusing directly on the textual projections inviting audiences to participate on the Facebook page has shed light on the theoretical construction of audiences by AJE which

in most instances projected these imagined masses less as active agents than as passive consumers.

The participation of audiences on the Facebook page through the comment feature despite weak invitations by AJE indicates the agency of new media users. It posits the positive attributes of mediums like social media that facilitate audience engagement despite the often hostile solicitations for this by big entities like AJE. Furthermore it provides strong opposition to the power yielded by these entities evident within the arrangement of AJE's Facebook page that disabled the option for audiences to post comments directly onto the page.

Convergence between old and new media proved to be vaguely evident in the case study of AJE in fact at times pointing to tendencies of divergence instead. The lack of cross platform engagement proved to be an interesting outcome of the study given the increasingly dynamic academic dialogues on the subject which often point to the interrelated nature of the two. Instead of providing complementary options of participation to one another, AJE's employment of new and traditional media has been shown to further a different objective. The face value endeavours at audience involvement appear as a means to promote enhanced forms of participation and more a means to promote Brand Al-Jazeera. Proceeding from a brand at grassroots level that entrenched itself as the Other, AJE has during the course of the Egyptian revolution (within the broader framework of the Arab Spring) displayed resolute efforts at engraining its image as one promoting the voice of the ordinary.

Despite the various outcomes emanating from research into four of AJE's flagship programmes and Facebook page, two important limitations of this study must be recognized. Firstly, within the landscape of Arab media and the Middle East, Al-Jazeera Arabic remains the most accessed and prominent satellite delivered news network. While AJE has undeniably established a firm foot within the global media-scape it cannot claim to enjoy the success and outreach of its Arabic sister network and largely attracts an educated English speaking elite many of whom are settled in the Diasporas. Due to the language barrier the Al-Jazeera Arabic network could not be analysed along with the rich archive of literature available in the Arabic language. Secondly, the study's inability to research the station's 24 hour running news coverage remains a limitation. While the programmes exist as hallmarks of the network they cannot alone claim to represent the entire content of AJE. An ethnographic study into the content production of AJE would be the

most accurate means to draw conclusions regarding the use of audience comments within AJE's content production. Geographical constraints have made this aspect particularly difficult and therefore while assertions regarding the invitations for audiences to participate during programming and on the Facebook page are accurate they do not make claim to the overall influence of this participation in the stations overall content production.

While AJE has always strived to maintain a public persona linked to the voices of the ordinary, I argue that the Arab uprisings of 2011 provided the most comprehensive opportunity for the network to capitalise on this. Various subsidiary factors have assisted this process including, the Arab roots of the channel, its pioneering stance in the region and most importantly the unique positioning of its headquarters which all contribute degrees of sincerity to the cause. Cumulatively these factors work toward the greater brand strategy of value creation. It is within this regard that the role of audience participation has provided the most enlightening perspective. The relatively minimal effort at inviting audience engagement with the station and toward the content production of the network exists as a defining characteristic in poking loopholes into a brand identity premised on notions of the 'people'. The clear link between participation and branding is perhaps one of the most important implications of the study which advocates a collective view of two previously separated fields specifically within the digital age of new media. While the critical tradition has become more vocal on issues like branding, there is insufficient work been done through this lens to adequately confront the concept. The evidently strong connection audience participation has to the manner in which media entities like AJE promote themselves and in essence sell their product is important given the prominence the station has achieved since the Arab Spring.

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