Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising:

A study of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising, its impact on Syrian audience perception, and the factors motivating content selection

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of Al-Jazeera Arabic news channel's coverage at the outset of the Syrian uprising, covering March and April 2011. It reviews the channel's practices and their impact on Arabic public opinion, and examines the allegations that Al-Jazeera played a role in shaping the Arab Spring.

The study fills a gap in the literature concerning Al-Jazeera's coverage and practices during the different Arab Spring revolutions, by exclusively investigating the early weeks of the Syrian case in depth. First, it studies the content and delivery of the news, with a content study highlighting the features and characteristics of Al-Jazeera's news content during the target period. Second, it examines Al-Jazeera's reported impact on the perceptions of the Syrian audience members who participated in this research in regard to the events in Syria, and the course of events during the uprising by conducting a focus group study with Syrian nationals. Third, it analyzes the considerations that informed the channel's choice of content and delivery, by conducting semi-structured interviews with different groups of current and former Al-Jazeera staff, to identify the various journalistic factors and political commitments of the channel.

The findings suggest that Al-Jazeera only encouraged Syrians to act by covering the events and atrocities taking place in Syria. The Syrian viewers who participated did not perceive any attempts at incitement by the channel, although it chiefly sided with the Syrian revolutionaries, according to the content study. In conclusion, the findings determine that the channel had, at most, only a limited impact on the revolution's course of events, as

many other factors informed the course of the Syrian revolution. Interestingly, diverse editorial and political factors were revealed to contribute to the decisions made about coverage, such as being exclusively dependent on Syrian activists' reports, due to the prohibition preventing Al-Jazeera crew from entering Syria, as well as Al-Jazeera's apparent commitment to the Qatari political line.

The study is unique in that its findings were based on having thoroughly probed Al-Jazeera's coverage from three different angles to generate rigorous triangulated data, affording a comprehensive and integrated picture of the role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising. In addition to elaborating on the role and practices present in Arab journalism at the time of the Arab Spring, the thesis raises questions for future researchers concerning the media's impact on public opinion throughout the Arab region.

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Authors' declaration:

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

Al-Jazeera Arabic news channel, which will be referred to as Al-Jazeera in this thesis, was established in 1996 as the first Arabic news channel focused on Pan-Arabism. It successfully introduced a core Arab narrative after long years of state media control (Zayani 2005; Lynch 2005), rapidly becoming the most watched channel in the Arab world (Campagna 2001). It broadcasts events and news coverage, discussing them from an Arabic perspective, freely examines the taboos present within the Arab regimes, and elevates topical debate, while offering a locus for Arabs to express their negative feelings and the pressures exerted upon them (Ghareeb 2000; Hroub 2011; Wright 2005). Al-Jazeera's first commitment is to its agenda of promoting democracy and human rights (Ghareeb 2000; Lynch 2005). Consequently, since its emergence, it has become a vital source of information and the most visible player in the Arabic communication sphere which has been respected and taken seriously within international political and media circles (Elder 2011). Al-Jazeera achieved the status of a leading regional media outlet, dominating Arab public discourse (Seib 2008) by playing a central role in liberalizing the Arab media, developing an autonomous media narrative, and giving the nascent Arab public sphere a platform upon which to develop (El-Oifi 2005; Abdelmoula 2012). Indeed, Hillary Clinton commented that the channel is "changing peoples' minds and attitudes" (Huffpost 2011).

At the end of 2010 and the start of 2011, the Arab world was shaken by a wave of uprisings and revolutions across a number of Arab states. The first cases of unrest were in Tunisia, from where they spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and eventually Syria. In Tunisia and Egypt, demonstrators

successfully toppled the incumbent rulers in the hope of political change (Spencer 2011; Macqueen 2013). In the other countries the revolutions were either effectively suppressed or marked the start of a period of civil war. The period of unrest, which became known in the world's media as the 'Arab Spring', failed to meet the hopes of those engaged fighting for more democracy and freedom (Tirman 2012; Mojon 2020).

After the first uprising, the swathe of revolutions moved dramatically from one Arab country to another within a period of just four months, taking the world by surprise and causing the people to ask what had prompted the surge of unrest and why it had spread so rapidly. Factors such as shared challenging living conditions, unemployment, corruption and human rights violations across the region offered one set of explanations; however, people hypothesized that Al-Jazeera, as the pioneering number one news channel in the Arab world, had played a role due to its intensive pro-revolts coverage (Khondker 2011; Abdullah 2012). Evidence for this includes demonstrators in Egypt praising the channel and holding its slogans high in the air during their protests (Hasan 2011). Moreover, some scholars rapidly began referring to the events that took place as the 'Al-Jazeera revolutions' (Pintak 2011a; Tausch 2011). As time passed and Arabs themselves became politically divided as the revolutions' complex consequences became apparent, Al-Jazeera's viewership was negatively affected. Predictably, unlike before, mostly not everyone agreed with its content, as it no longer reflected all Arabs' beliefs (Watkins 2019; Souaiaia 2011; Youssef 2013).Moreover, once the revolutions started to fail and the anticipated objectives remained unrealized, many people, bloggers and media outlets started to theorize that the Arab Spring had been a political plan by the political elites and big powers to promote specific goals in the

Arab world (Borger et al. 2003; Ó Colmáin 2013). For example, it was alleged that an agenda existed with the aim of dividing the region into smaller ethnic and sectarian states following the expiration of the Sykes-Picot agreement on its 100th anniversary in 2016 and maintain the power solely for Israel in the area (Martinez 2012; Assad 2017; Hersh 2007). Consequently, some had begun to suspect that, Al-Jazeera, with its enthusiastic coverage of the uprisings, was a part of this plan (Skynewsarabia 2020; Maannews 2011).

Political and economic uprisings and demonstrations are not a new phenomenon in the Arab region. Prior to Al-Jazeera and the emergence of the internet and social media, which (by providing a crucial news source for Al-Jazeera) enabled the channel to successfully cover the Arab Spring (Abdelmoula 2012; Kamel 2014; Duffy 2011), many uprisings took place. However, because states' media outlets often controlled reporting and dissemination of information, many of the earlier uprisings did not turn violent, and some remained unknown among the concerned populations (Pintak 2011b; Rodrigues 2011; Chomsky, Pilger 2003). The situation differed in the case of the Arab Spring, as Al-Jazeera, interacting via the internet and utilizing social media sources was able to offer instant and bold news coverage directly from the ground (Kamel 2014). This level of information afforded Arab viewers with up-to-the-minute insights, and moreover, the reports employed an enthusiastic rhetoric, stridently defending people on account of the regimes under which they were living (Hroub 2011; Souaiaia 2011; Al-Shareif 2016). Importantly, many scholars argued that Al-Jazeera's intensive and pro-revolts coverage was not motivated by a desire to support the public or promote democracy, but rather to serve the political agenda of Qatari interests (the channel's financer) (Kühn et al. 2013; Ulrichsen 2011; Souaiaia 2011).

During the Arab Spring, Al-Jazeera enthusiastically expanded its online network with key bloggers and activists in the revolting countries to enhance both its resources and audience engagement (Abdelmoula 2012; Mir 2011; Duffy 2011; Kamel 2014). It offered comprehensive round the clock live coverage of events, cancelling its programming schedule, leading the New York Times to describe Al-Jazeera as the 'common thread' between the Arab uprisings (Worth, Kirkpatrick 2011). Thus, Al-Jazeera played a key role in keeping the revolutions in the spotlight, which potentially extended their duration, raised their intensity and might have led to their transition from one country to another. The role of Al-Jazeera in what happened is one of the main issues this research seeks to explore through studying the case in Syria. Commentators and media scholars investigating the network's role in the uprisings, suggest that since its launch Al-Jazeera had developed a cumulative effect on Arab public opinion. Between 1996 and 2010 it had created greater awareness among the younger Arab generation about politics, human rights, etc., generating a mindset and a narrative of popular rage against oppressive regimes. It is essential to consider this history of influence over public opinion when evaluating the role the channel played during the revolutions (Abdelmoula 2012; Worth, Kirkpatrick 2011).

Against this backdrop, it seems reasonable to wonder whether Al-Jazeera's calls for democracy, freedoms, and human rights mobilized Arabs and influenced their perceptions during the Arab Spring, as the movement ostensibly shared its democratic motives. Furthermore, if we consider the possibility that the Arab Spring was planned or orchestrated by those in authority, as many have since claimed (Borger et al. 2003; Ó Colmáin 2013), then we might ask if Al-Jazeera was a part of this plan. In addition,

we need to ask whether the coverage was one factor that has led to move the revolutions from one Arab country to another and escalate the crises within those countries in turmoil to attain certain goals. It is then critical to query whether a news channel could really mobilize, incite or revolutionize people, and control and direct them towards certain actions to serve a specific agenda in light of the media limitations discussed by many scholars (Armoudian 2016; Gilboa 2005; Livingston, Eachus 1995). This then leads us to question whether the media, including Al-Jazeera, is powerful enough to be compared with political parties and military powers as an influence on people and their perceptions. Additional questions probing the channel's objectives motivated the researcher to start the process of enquiry that ultimately led to this research.

1.2 Study Aim

This research aims to investigate the role of Al-Jazeera's Arabic news channel in the Syrian uprising during its first 45 days in March and April 2011. This was achieved by firstly studying the channel's news content during that period of time to investigate its coverage while reporting the events in Syria. Secondly, by evaluating the apparent impact of this content on the Syrian participants' perceptions, attitudes and actions. And thirdly, by exploring the factors that contributed to the coverage according to Al-Jazeera staff members to identify the reasons behind this coverage.

1.3 Research Questions

This thesis will address the objectives and the aims of this research through answering the following three specific questions. These are:

RQ1: How did the Al-Jazeera news channel report the events of the Syrian uprising at its beginning in March and April 2011?

- What were the textual features in terms of coverage?

- What sources were used in news reports?

- What visuals were used in news reports?

- What are the features of the anchors' debates with the different guests.

- To what extent was coverage balanced?

RQ2: What were Syrian audience's perceptions of Al-Jazeera's coverage?

- How did the Syrian audience perceive and evaluate Al-Jazeera's coverage and its role in the course of events in Syria?

RQ3: What were the internal and external factors contributing to Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising?

- What decisions and practices were taken in Al-Jazeera's newsroom that shaped the coverage presented to audiences?

- What factors external to journalism may have contributed to Al-Jazeera's coverage; i.e. external forces and political pressures.

1.4 Study Design

The decision to focus on Syria was made due to the spatial and temporal limitations of a PhD study. Each country that experienced an Arab Spring revolution has unique characteristics and circumstances, thus evaluating the impact of Al-Jazeera's coverage on every revolution and the populations involved was not practical. The selection of the Syrian revolution as the

research's main focus was guided by multiple factors; first, investigating how the revolution started in Syria allows us to make a contribution to exploring Al-Jazeera's role in the spread of revolutionary intent from one Arab country to another. Second, Syria takes Arab nationalism especially seriously, and the Syrian regime has a history of hostility with Israel and USA (Rubin 2007) the political elites who are alleged to have had a role in planning the Arab Spring as mentioned earlier (Carmichael 2011, Bramhall 2015; Borger et al. 2003; Ó Colmáin 2013). If the allegations are true, then overthrowing the Syrian regime would be a priority (Al-Jazeera 2003; BBC 2002; Ignatius 2006), making studying the Syrian case especially pertinent. Third, the Syrian revolution is among the most complex cases in the Arab Springand the one with the most enduring consequences. The unrest in Syria was wholly unpredicted by President Bashar Assad, due to the apparent sway the regime held at that time (Wikas 2007; Al-Abdullah 2010; Rubin 2007), suggesting a significant shift in opinion must have occurred for the public to attempt to revolt. Moreover, the tipping over of the conflict into a proxy war attracted the attention of global players, especially as the nation's collapse into civil war enabled terrorism to take hold (BBC 2016a; Shipman 2012; Anderson 2016). Fourth, it took almost nine years for the revolution to be quashed, involving brutal oppression, and conflict which put the country's development back tens of years. Moreover, President Assad remains in office, making his the first regime to survive the Arab Spring.

The study focuses on investigating Al-Jazeera's coverage during the first two months of the Syrian uprising, as this was the initial phase of the uprising and significantly important to investigate the channel's role in the emergence of the uprising, following its coverage of previous Arab Spring

revolutions, thereby exemplifying the channel's potential role in disseminating the revolutionary drive between countries. This period also marks a turning point in the status quo in Syria, as the potential ramifications of the events cement themselves in Syrians' minds. At that time, people watched Al-Jazeera continuously, as it was the most trusted channel (Whitaker 2011; Seib 2008). Therefore, the researcher hypothesized that the early days would be easier for individuals to recollect, and as events were simpler at that time reviewing perceptions of Al-Jazeera's content would be less complex. Moreover, by investigating Al-Jazeera's coverage in Syria at the very beginning of the revolution there, insights can be gained into the possible intentions of the channel when evaluating its initial discourse and locus.

This thesis seeks to fill a gap in the literature evaluating Al-Jazeera's coverage and practices throughout the Arab Spring revolutions, by qualitatively investigating the early weeks of the Syrian uprising. What distinguishes this study from former work is that it thoroughly probes Al-Jazeera's coverage at the outset of the Syrian events, investigating the case through three data sets to deliver a comprehensive and integrated picture of the alleged role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising, as no other researcher has exclusively studied this role in such a comprehensive manner using a triangulation approach that tackles it from different and crucial perspectives as will be explained in a later chapter.Also, many relevant previous studies identified by the researcher focus on the journalistic practices of Al-Jazeera with regard to other events happening at other times using different approaches. Content studies were also found, they investigated Al-Jazeera's different programmes on the Syrian uprising, including Harahsheh (2013) who studied the content of a programme titled 'Opposite Direction' and the way it addressed the Syrian public. But no previous researcher has

conducted an audience study to establish the Syrian public's opinion and perception of Al-Jazeera's news coverage of the Arab events in March and April 2011 and how far this coverage influenced Syrians and their uprising. Hence, what distinguishes this research is its different approaches to the study of Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising during its first 45 days based on its main news programme, its audience study and, above all, the data triangulation to yield integrated findings, and assure validity and reliability and to reduce bias (Patton 1999).

In the thesis, the researcher details three methods used to investigate Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising. The first, which addresses the first research question, involved analyzing the content of one Al-Jazeera's main newscasts 'Hasad Al-Yawm', which means 'the Harvest of Today' in English. The researcher studied Al-Jazeera's news content and the features engaged in by the channel when covering events in Syria during March and April 2011 that inform the channel's stance and balance and might have shaped the Syrian audience perception, such as the language, tone, discourse, anchors' debates, use of sources, use of visuals. The researcher chose to analyze the news, because this service is the channel's principal and most direct means of connecting with the audience and provides a microcosm of Al-Jazeera's overall positioning. In 2015, Machin and Polzer observed that television news remains the most influential service in terms of moulding public political opinion. The news was selected by focus group's participants as their primary choice when asked what they preferred and watched most on Al-Jazeera during the Syrian uprising; therefore, it is likely that the news is what Syrians consulted the most when formulating their opinions. The 'Hasad Al-Yawm' program was a good choice for analysis because it is a comprehensive newscast that, as its name suggests, discusses the whole day's news. Moreover, examining Al-

Jazeera's news content is an ideal way to critically evaluate the channel's journalistic practices and stance. Analyzing the rhetoric employed when addressing the audience, and the factors that shaped this rhetoric, provides a solid evidence-based foundation for the study.

The second method, the focus groups which address the second research question, sought the views of a number of Syrian nationals. This enabled the researcher to discover the perceptions of the participants regarding Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. The participants shared whether they believed the coverage of the Arab Spring shaped their perceptions and attitudes regarding events, if it may have encouraged them to react, and by extension if it played a role in the birth of the Syrian revolution and subsequent events.

The third method, the interviews which address the third research question, sought the views of a number of Al-Jazeera newsmakers involved in creating the news broadcast by 'Hasad Al-Yawm'. The researcher was able to understand the coverage of the Syrian uprising from the network's employees' perspective, understanding the journalistic practices that shaped the coverage which in turn can be influenced on many levels as will be illustrated, as well as the reasons and factors that contributed to, directed, and determined the coverage. The researcher discussed Al-Jazeera's news coverage and shared the outcomes of the focus groups with the channel's staff to garner their perceptions of the reasons for these findings. She also explored how Al-Jazeera staff themselves perceive and evaluate their coverage and the factors that contributed to it, the journalistic factors informing the practices and roles that explain the features of coverage identified earlier during the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising, and any

external pressures and political commitments on Al-Jazeera regarding its performance. The researcher designed this study to triangulate the data from the previous two, as knowledge of editorial policies and journalistic practices and culture are essential to establish the aims of news content (Esser et al. 2017). Together, these methods provide an integrated depiction of the differing and crucial dimensions that describe the role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising.

1.5 Chapter Summary:

This thesis comprises eight chapters: Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Focus groups, Content study, Interviews, Discussion and Conclusion, in that order. Chapter (1) the Introduction, has provided an overview of the research, the motivations for conducting it, the research aims and objectives, and the rationale for the study design. Chapter (2) the literature review, presents previous literature discussing the impact of media on public opinion, the Arab Spring, Syria as a country and the Syrian uprising, Al-Jazeera's establishment and its role in democratizing and revolutionizing the Arab public sphere, and finally scholarly literature to date evaluating Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. The chapter concludes by highlighting possible gaps in earlier research areas and the research questions posed in the thesis. Chapter (3), the methodology, explains the research aims, philosophy, approach and strategy. It also discusses the three methods conducted to answer the research questions and the value of each method, in addition to discussing the participants and the sampling procedures and designs. Moreover, the chapter explains the analytical approach conducted to analyze the data that emerged from the research methods. Chapter (4), the content study, investigates the content of one of Al-Jazeera's main newscasts to evaluate

the features the channel allegedly employed to address and influence its viewers. The chapter addresses Al-Jazeera's rhetoric and the way it portrayed and reported on the regime. Chapter (5), the focus groups, reveals the focus groups' outcomes, and explores the participants' perceptions of Al-Jazeera's influence on the Syrian viewers' insights, attitudes and reactions; hence the channel's role in the emergence of the Syrian uprising and the subsequent events. This chapter surveys three main areas: how the participants perceived Al-Jazeera's coverage, Al-Jazeera's role in influencing Syrian perceptions, and the role of social media. Chapter (6), the interviews, present the data from the Al-Jazeera's staff interviews to clarify the factors that shaped and determined Al-Jazeera's coverage of the events in Syria. The chapter is divided into three parts: the journalistic factors, the external factors and political commitments, and journalists' reflections on their roles and practices. Chapter (7), the Discussion, presents the research findings and discusses the results from each study separately including how it corresponds to the research questions. Additionally, it explains the links between the different strands and elaborates on the relationships between them and the findings reported in previous literature. The final Chapter (8), the Conclusion answers the research questions, demonstrates the thesis gaps and contributions and presents the limitations and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the last three decades, since the Al-Jazeera Arabic news channel was established, numerous studies have been conducted examining its role as a pioneer in the Arab world. It broadcasts free media in defence of Arabs' previously long been used to exert control. Since its introduction the channel has had a recognizable impact on Arab public opinion, revolutionizing Arab perceptions and articulating democratic concepts that influence people's everyday lives (Seib 2008). Consequently, the role of Al-Jazeera has been an important and controversial subject, and always demanded further study and investigation by media scholars. The debates surrounding Al-Jazeera increased over time, peaking at the start of the Arab Spring, when the movements' emergence triggered challenges over the channel's coverage, placing its professionalism and credibility under investigation (Abdelmoula 2012), prompting media scholars to closely examine its performance. This research involves three strands of integrated research, covering discrete aspects of the channel's alleged role in the Arab Spring through studying the start of the conflict in Syria that began in 2011. This chapter presents previous academic studies in this area, reviewing related ones and identifying gaps demanding further consideration.

Offering a clear and comprehensive overview of the literature, the first section of this chapter introduces and discusses scholarly literature detailing the advent and significance of Al-Jazeera. It moves on to examine previous research in relation to Al-Jazeera, which is linked to the three research questions posed in this thesis. The second section offers a comprehensive overview of literature to date addressing Al-Jazeera's apparent role in the Arab Spring. Finally, the third section details the evidence presented thus far in the literature concerning Al-Jazeera's role in

the Syrian uprising. Again, both in terms of the three main research questions.

Importantly, this chapter also seeks to identify the possible gaps in the literature in each area. The researcher believes that introducing the literature separately in this way will enable the reader to construct a comprehensive understanding of each topic, as a foundation from which to explore the subjects discussed in this thesis in depth.

2.1 Al-Jazeera

This section consists of four parts: First, it discusses the advent of Al-Jazeera, its significance (i.e. its distinctive role in influencing and democratizing the Arabic public sphere), and the way the channel dealt with previous events and themes. Second, it discusses the academic literature pertaining to Al-Jazeera in relation to the research questions, introducing literature relating to Al-Jazeera's practices in terms of its characteristics and features of coverage that might have shaped its audience perceptions throughout earlier events; such as the language, tone, discourse, anchors' debates, use of sources, use of visuals which inform the channel's stance and balance. Third, it introduces studies covering the channel's impact on public opinion. Fourth, it addresses the factors that apparently inform the channel's coverage.

2.1.1 Al-Jazeera: Advent and Significance

Al-Jazeera was established in 1996 with a five-year loan of $150 Million from Qatar's Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, as part of his reform plan (Miladi 2006; Seib 2008). The channel was initially staffed by professionals who had formerly worked for the interrupted BBC Arabic

(Seib 2008; Askary 2012). In 1999it had developed into a 24-hour news channel (Al-Jazeera 2006).

Prior to the introduction of Al-Jazeera, Arabic TV channels were predominantly state controlled, with Arabs reliant on Western media outlets, such as BBC world radio and CNN, for balanced news (Ayish 2011; Seib 2008; Cherribi 2006). Al-Jazeera was the first Arabic channel to broadcast events and discuss them from an Arabic stance, ostensibly away from western filters (Seib 2008). It covered taboo subjects associated with the Arab regimes freely with no restrictions, elevating the level of debate and discussion in the Arab world (Ghareeb 2000; Hroub 2011; Wright 2005). It was rapidly adopted as an alternative to Western media channels, challenging their monopoly (EI-Nawawy, Gher 2003; Miladi 2006; Seib 2008; Miles 2005). Al-Jazeera's western rivals lacked in depth understanding of the region, and Al-Jazeera was able to convey greater warmth, reverence, and cultural relevance (Barkho 2006). Indeed, in some cases, even western channels relied on Al-Jazeera's exclusive footage for their reports (Whitaker 2011; Alterman 2004; Cherribi 2006). In war time, Al-Jazeera, unlike its western counterparts, elected to broadcast images of civilian casualties, stressing that the public has the right to know (Fahmy, Johnson 2007). As Roumani (2003, p.64) commented "I watch CNN nobody gets killed; I watch Al-Jazeera, it's like a tragedy". Additionally, Al-Jazeera fostered a pluralistic political culture creating an environment in which viewers could perceive and interact with media content.

Since its establishment, Al-Jazeera has covered every significant news event; for example, in 1998, when the US bombed Iraq Al-Jazeera was there. In 2000, during the Palestinian intifada, Al-Jazeera attracted a large

audience throughout the Arab world. Moreover, in 2001, when the US attacked Afghanistan, Taliban allowed only Al-Jazeera to remain in the country after western journalists were asked to leave. Later, in 2003, the channel provided intensive coverage of the war on Iraq (Miles 2010). This led, Jon Alterman (1998) to describe the channel as the biggest phenomenon to emerge in the domain of the region's visual media, and David Hearst (cited by Ahmed 2017) suggested that without Al-Jazeera the Middle East would be a much poorer place. Miladi (2006) also described Al-Jazeera as a "phenomenal success", while Matar (2006) claimed that Al-Jazeera is the Arabs' way to vent feelings and emotions, noting that it is the most objective and balanced of all the available channels. Al-Jazeera apparently takes its motto, "The opinion, and the other opinion" seriously (Alterman 2004; Boyd-Barrett, Xie 2008). It was the first media outlet in the region to present a full range of opinions; despite being pro-Palestinian it also was the first Arabic channel to give a space to the voices of Israelis (Miles 2005). While being generally anti-American it also covered American views (Wright 2005), displaying one of the chief characteristics of democratic media; i.e., dealing with news stories from multiple angles and showing diverse viewpoints as Newton (1989) argued that democratization requires airing of all opinions.

Al-Jazeera has become a must-see TV for millions of Arabs living in the Middle East and abroad. It rapidly achieved the status of most watched, and most controversial news channel, due to its bold and uncensored news coverage (Auter et al. 2005; Campagna 2001). By 2007 Al-Jazeera had almost 50 million Arab viewers, more than a third of whom watched Al-Jazeera for at least 5 hours a day (Auter et al. 2004, 2005; Abt 2004). Studies found that 140 million Arabs, nearly 50% of the total population, consider Al-Jazeera to be their go-to channel, and that 98.4% of 1225

media and political science university teachers, comprising almost 50% of all those in 22 Arab countries, consider Al-Jazeera to be their preferred channel, watching it for a daily average of 3.2 hours (Abdelmoula 2012). According to Johnson and Fahmy (2007) viewers at the time of their research rated Al-Jazeera as highly credible based on all measures.

Al-Jazeera's prominence and popularity made it the world's fifth most recognized brand by 2005 according to Zayani (2005). This has been possible for many reasons; first, the channel emerged in a relative media vacuum in the Arab world, and was a pioneer in establishing freewheeling journalism for a mass audience (Seib 2008; Miladi 2006). Second, the channel's bold professional coverage, and discussions of controversial subjects focusing on the Arabic side of the story, delivered in a pro-Arabs tone gained trust among audiences, encouraging it to engage in even more open, confident and more charged and unfiltered reporting (Whitaker 2011; Seib 2008; Al-Shammari 2015; Cherribi 2006; Lynch 2005; Alvarez 2006). Third, many of Al-Jazeera's original anchors were recognizable ex-BBC employees. As the BBC radio was one of the most trusted news sources among Arabs in the 1980s and 1990s (Cherribi 2006) these individuals had high credibility ratings (a significant component of the Parasocial Interaction Scale (PSI), which will be discussed later, which is critical to the success of the media organization (Perse 1990). Fourth, the generous Qatari financial support provided the budget required for extensive reporting across the region (Al-Shammari 2015). Finally, the aggressive reaction of the Arab regimes towards Al-Jazeera's coverage, as they acted to shut down its bureaus and expel its journalists which contributed to its public appeal (Seib 2008; EI-Nawawy, Gher 2003; Quinn, Walters 2003; Souaiaia 2011; Ahmed 2017). It's worth noting that regional hostility over the emergence of Al-Jazeera placed pressure on the Qatari state, who in

turn recognized the channel could serve as a tool for use by Qatar to press other Arab governments according to Telhami (2013). During the 2017-2019 Gulf crisis, shutting down Al-Jazeera was among the Gulf Coalition's demands before restoring diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar (Riley 2017; Miles 2017).

Al-Jazeera enthusiastically focused on Pan-Arabism and establishing a common core Arab narrative (Zayani 2005; Lynch 2005), placing democracy and human rights first on its agenda (Ghareeb 2000; Lynch 2005). Thus, it became a crucial source of information and the most visible player in the communication sphere, one taken seriously by the entire world's political and media (Elder 2011). The problem of democratization in the Middle East arose due to the unprofessional local Arab perspective of democratization, evident in their constitutions, elections and parliaments, which reflected the needs of the regimes rather than people's (Sadiki 2009). Meanwhile, Al-Jazeera contributed to changing Arabs' mindsets along with social media, playing a significant role in supporting the struggle against authoritarianism in the region and serving as a democratization and reform tool (Nisbet 2007, Abdelmoula 2012). It criticized regimes and gave air time to elections, protests and wars in the Arab world (Shapiro 2005; Cherribi 2006,Wright 2005; Eldar 2011). This led Abunimah and Ibish (2001) to state that Al-Jazeera "represents the best trends of openness and democratization in the Arab world".

2.1.2 Al-Jazeera: Features that Can Shape the Audience Perceptions:

This section discusses and evaluates media presentations and practices that might cause influence on audience. They encompass the role of language and tone, the discourse and anchors' debates, the use of sources and visuals,

and their utilization by media content producers to create a certain approach on audience and support specific journalistic practices and roles. It also evaluates studies detailing Al-Jazeera's coverage characteristics that might have shaped its audience perceptions when portraying the various events that took place prior to the Syrian uprising. These overviews help introduce the information that provide context to answer the first research question, which aims to investigate Al-Jazeera's coverage with all the previously mentioned elements, when covering the Syrian uprising and subsequent events, and when addressing the Arab and the Syrian audience.

Stuart Hall in 'Reception Theory' (2006) focused on what he termed 'determinate moments' to explain the nature of the encoding and decoding processes during the transmission of news. He noted that events broadcast by the media are never presented in their entirety in a raw format, but rather that they undergo multiple production and distribution processes and 'storying' that transform them; it is then this information that audiences receive and decode (Hall 2006). Walter Lippman's introductory chapter to his book 'Public Opinion' is called 'the world outside and the pictures in our heads', and emphasizes that the media serves as a bridge between real events and the images we generate inside our minds; thus, it is important to note when considering this, that these bridges do not necessarily impartially communicate what is really happening (McCombs 2014; Alvarez 2006). Certainly, media content producers play a major role in selecting the images they share with people, encouraging them to focus on one thing and ignore others. That is, they offer a selective version of newsworthy events, heavily weighted towards those that are unusual, or full of drama and conflict. In principle, news outlets aim to cover the news objectively, but

frequently end up colouring it to suit the contexts and perspectives of the target audience, in a process referred to as 'contextual objectivity'.

Contextualization means creating collectivism among participants within the same cultural, religious, political, and economic context. This contextualization "complicates the pursuit of even-handed coverage and is capable of speaking to the 'enemy' at times of war" (ElNawawy & Iskandar 2002b). Iskandar and El-Nawawy (2004) proposed the concept of "contextual objectivity" to describe Al-Jazeera's war coverage by balancing audience appeal and "objective" coverage; the channel offers a good example of how to practise contextual objectivity. However, critics argue that the term of contextual objectivity is a dubious notion, "at best a muddle, at worst an evasion and it is used to defend Al-Jazeera from its detractors" (El-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002b). Contextual objectivity is "one of the great dilemmas for news networks, especially during times of war". It causes showing different televised versions of the same war, depending on the media's approach and the audience perceptions (El-Nawawy 2003).

Consequently, journalism does not merely mirror reality, but also constructs it, by observing societies and then selecting and framing topics for debate, directing decision-making (Shoemaker, Reese 2013). Hence, mass media is best understood, not as a tool that facilitates and generates enlightened public opinion, but rather one that shapes it. The result of this is that audiences are frequently manipulated, they consume a stylized media discourse consciously designed to manage public opinion (Habermas 1989), which explains the interest policy makers take in managing it (McCombs et al. 2011; Bennett 2007). Contemporary media scholars argue that trust in the media should be bestowed only with circumspection, as not

everything in media is true. Moreover, audiences need to be aware that the processes engaged in when decoding the information provided by the media include the audiences' responsibility as much as that of the media outlets (Seib 2008; Friedman 2003; Alalawi 2015). All these assertions are important to consider when posing the questions that this research seeks to address concerning how far media can shape public opinion, and the implications of this in relation to the responsibility of Al-Jazeera for its performance and editorial choices throughout the Syrian uprising.

As well as choosing what news stories to cover, media outlets employ a variety of different techniques to present content and try to direct people to perceive events a particular way, so as to promote or arrest change; for example, framing, priming, agenda setting, etc. Framing is the process whereby a problem is defined, causes diagnosed, moral judgements are made and remedies are suggested, giving an overall interpretation to a certain part of a fact. Doing so takes a journalist away from pure objectivity, suggesting an unintended bias, as the information arrives with a built-in frame that best suits the purpose of the source. This, in turn, enables journalists to guide the audience and regulate its perception and acceptance of a particular meaning. Agenda setting is about selecting the topics that the media is discussing to reflect what the public is receiving and perceiving as main issues; it was first coined by McCombs and Shaw (1972). Trenaman and Mcquail pointed out: The evidence strongly suggests that people think about what they are told but at no level do they think what they are told. (1961, p. 178). Priming, which is a specific aspect of agendasetting, explores the linkages between news media and public attitudes, and is the result of shifts in the salience of issues presented to audience following the channel's planned agenda (McQuail 2005; McCombs et al. 2011). These techniques are all about salience, forcing

attention to certain issues rather than just covering it to be simply received by the audience. Typically, a media source chooses an event to cover following its agenda, selects a particular narrative that corresponds to this agenda, and employs media tools to add novelty and interest achieving a given aim, in a process McQuail terms 'media effectiveness' (McQuail 2005; McCombs et al. 2011; Miller, Bokemper 2016). Van Loon (2008) likens the media to a hammer; suggesting it is a tool that can be used to either build or destroy. When exposed frequently to a media source with a particular agenda, audiences become increasingly influenced to think a certain way, and in some cases to respond accordingly (McCombs, Shaw 1972).

Moreover, the media can influence the course of public debate by utilizing emotive or persuasive language, using words such as 'claimed' rather than 'said' to imply possible dissembling, by deciding on coverage frequency, and the placement of certain news items on the front page (Hanson 2013). According to McCombs (2014),

> Elements that are prominent in the media frequently become prominent in the public mind. (n.p.)

Tone and the visual contents are also substantial tools when covering news items, as they can introduce emotion or increase persuasiveness. For example, McCombs et al. (2011) assert:

> News stories are both denotative messages conveying substantive information, and connotative messages conveying tone and emotion (p.110).

Unquestionably, journalism can inform how we see the world and guide us towards evaluations of events that resonate deeply within us; actively

stimulating emotive responses and determining opinion. The effect of mass media on the public mindset, especially emotional perspectives is evident, and the public mindset has its role in influencing the national psyche (Richards 2007). Frequently media channels rely on visual images, especially dramatic events, as well as raw terror to heighten audiences' responsiveness (Richards 2007). Thus, media coverage plays a highly significant role in triggering emotions, identifying friends and enemies, and provoking a sense of nationalism, rebellion, or both (Zingarelli 2010).

Television, with its visual and audio features remains one of the most powerful media tools for communicating the news; it is excellent at conveying and eliciting emotion while also entertaining viewers (Hanson 2013). It is preferred by many people, who prefer traditional sources of media over new media, and thus it continues to dominate public opinion (Maluf 2005). As proficient and tested means of engaging audience and shaping their perceptions and attitudes, television news channels utilize multiple tools to get the viewers more engaged and influenced. For example, everything from the use of studio space, colours, liveliness, visual symbols, graphics software, symbolism, the anchors' attitudes, body language gestures and tone of voice is carefully choreographed (Machin & Polzer 2015).

In the study context, which aims to identify the features of Al-Jazeera coverage employed to shape audience perception during the Syrian uprising, it is vital to also establish what features it had a history of utilizing to engage viewers when reporting on previous events. Scholars interested in Al-Jazeera have identified that, from its inception, the channel targeted viewers' emotions and concerns over civilian welfare by displaying heart wrenching and bloody images of Arabs and using an

emotive tone when narrating events (El-Nawawy 2006; Abdullah 2014). In addition, the talk shows on Al-Jazeera are characteristically emotional in tone and content and lacking in reasoned and rational presentation according to Hahn (2009). In this regard, Al-Jazeera is not unlike CNN, which also employs powerful emotional content, aimed at awakening moral responses and cultural memories (Zingarelli 2010).

Traditional societies like Arabs, according to Scheff (2013), are more heavily influenced by emotions than modern societies. This might somewhat explain Al-Jazeera's focus on delivering content that appeals to the emotions, as a means to increase its viewership and influence in the region. Al-Jazeera's employees themselves have reported that using emotive rhetoric was a deliberate tactic (Aburub 2010) to appeal to audiences; one apparently driven by a passionate desire to defend people's rights (Hahn 2009). The public sphere is a highly complex domain when viewed in emotional terms and focusing on expressing and eliciting specific emotions at any given time can shape the contours of public opinion, determining the range of political alternatives, parameters and opportunities for participation in change (Richards 2007).

Considering the resonance of visual material with audiences, scholars who have investigated Al-Jazeera have highlighted the channel's reliance on visual imagery to promote concerns, influence opinion, and generate interest in news items (Miladi 2006). For example, the channel effectively stirred up Arab sentiments by broadcasting bloody images from Iraq and Palestine linking them to America and Israel, to stimulate anti-American and anti-Israeli feeling (Wessler, Adolphsen 2008; Matar 2006; Lynch 2006). This focus utilizing graphic visuals depicting human suffering aroused national sentiment in support of the Palestinian cause and the

people of Iraq (Ayish 2001). According to Auter et al. (2005), the network addresses viewers in a

> personal way and holds their attention with short, concise reporting, fast-paced editing and visually appealing graphics (p.2).

The channel also prioritizes humanitarian frames when covering events such as the Afghan war, further increasing the level of negative sentiment against the US. Its coverage has consequently been accused of lacking in journalistic objectivity (Japerson, El-Kikhia 2003). Indeed, Daoud Kuttab (cited by Hasan 2011) suggested that Al-Jazeera's reporters force issues to the forefront of public consciousness rather than neutrally reporting on them, making them more like activists.

Al-Jazeera Arabic's use of language, especially word choice, was also found to be influential by media scholars interested in the channel's performance, who identified a noticeable difference in the tone of the coverage by Al-Jazeera Arabic and its English counterpart, according to the perceived audience (Aburub 2010). For example, Al-Jazeera Arabic uses the word 'martyrs' to refer to Palestinians who have been killed, whereas the English version of the channel does not. Furthermore, while the Arabic channel reported on events in Gaza through an emotive lens, its English equivalent described Gaza as 'backward' (El-Nawawy, Iskandar 2002). The Arabic channel also used the emotive phrase 'the war on Gaza' when reporting the suffering of Gazans, reinforcing anger against Israel, contrasting with how CNN portrays the situation as a 'crisis in the Middle East'. This again emphasizes the channel's enthusiasm for selecting emotive discourse exclusively to its Arab viewers. Wordplay was also evident when comparing the content of the two channels' reporting of the Qatari-Israeli

relationship; the Arabic channel misinformed its audience to pursue the Qatari agenda (Aburub 2010).

Understanding one's perceived audience is an integral part of news production that reveals the processes by which news products are shaped in context of wider influences (Clausen 2001; Cottle 1993; Harrison 2000; Matthews 2010). Scholars have extensively discussed the importance of the role of media consumers themselves in news-making and determining agendas and outputs (Cottle 2000; Dewerth-Pallmeyer 1997; Matthews 2008). The significance of the consumer is often grouped with other professional news production micro and macro influences, such as news values, political pressure, economic constraints … etc. (Schudson 2005). In the case of Al-Jazeera, coverage focuses on addressing the unfulfilled needs of what it conceives of as its disempowered and repressed Arab audience (El-Nawawy, Iskander 2002; Hamada 2008). Al-Jazeera's coverage reflects the diverse characteristics of Arabs, addressing them with sensitivity to their differences. Al-Jazeera's journalists take great care over learning about the Arab mindset, in order to shape a preferred perspective from which events should be discussed. Thus, the news channel employs journalists from different Arab backgrounds to better communicate with its audiences, a strategy that is integral to the channel's ability to convey its message (Matthews & Habsi 2018). Additionally, the channel seeks to reflects the collective Arab alongside national perspectives to ensure its dominance in the region (Nawawy, Iskander 2002).

In regard to Al-Jazeera's features of coverage that might have shaped the audience perceptions during the Arab Spring a number of studies which significantly add to our data will be referenced; for example, Owais (2011) questioned the Arab media's role in the revolutions of Egypt and Tunisia,

noting that the Al-Jazeera kept repeating the words 'Change' and 'Purification' when reporting on both revolutions, suggesting these two words indicated that the revolution 'has not ended, they have just begun'. Abdullah (2012), studying Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Egyptian revolution found the channel relied on using positive terms to describe the revolution, such as 'the revolution of people, dignity, freedom, social justice and free Egypt', which in turn offered a positive stereotype regarding the revolution and bolstered Arabic-Egyptian sympathy. He also suggested that Al-Jazeera's use of colours and music were identified with the revolution, and in turn provoked patriotic sentiments among Egyptians encouraging them to support the revolution. Additionally, Abdullah discussed how the anchors' performance clearly and emotively supported the revolution, adding that images of the revolution were continuously broadcast for days which undoubtedly had an impact on viewers, as evidenced by the referencing of the channel's name and motto on placards carried by the Egyptian rebels.

In the same context, Rinnawi (2012) observed a tendency to present Egyptian events as an unfolding drama, glorifying demonstrators, highlighting the confusion among Egyptian security forces, vulgarizing Mubarak supporters, marginalizing the regime authorities, and demonizing Mubarak and the regime. He also found the channel dealt with Mubarak's regime using the past tense, constantly reporting images emphasizing the importance of toppling Mubarak. The anchor asked not whether the regime would be removed or not, but when it would be and why this step was necessary. All this against the backdrop of reports that were critical to Mubarak. Rinnawi identified seven trends used in the channel's reporting of events in Egypt: framing, agenda-setting, disproportionate allocation of time to news items, fragmentation of the news, blurring of the line between

fact and opinion, personification and finally sensationalism. He also emphasized Al-Jazeera's use of encouraging statements, such as 'Egypt of the Change', 'Egypt, the people's will', 'the escape of Mubarak' and 'the victory of the resistance'. Elsewhere, Al-Shareif (2016) compared Al-Jazeera's coverage with the BBC's in regard to six main events during the Arab Spring. He found that Al-Jazeera placed additional focus on the opinions of the protestors, reporting events as witnessed by them. Moreover, the channel always showed protestors as powerful and government forces as powerless. He further suggested that Al-Jazeera sometimes added confusing irrelevant information when reporting events, maximizing examples of the government's wrongful acts and ignored good ones.

Additionally, Al-Sadi (2012) tackled Al-Jazeera's most watched programme 'The Opposite Directions', and discussed the tools its anchor, Faisal Al-Qasim, employs to sway his viewers. Al-Sadi argues that Al-Qasim's power lies in his use of rhetorical questions, which enable him to tap into the radical beliefs and attitudes of viewers. By using rhetorical questions, he not only demonstrates a willingness to identify with the audience, but also provides viewers with alternative perspectives skilfully creating a niche for them. These alternative perspectives, Al-Sadi (2012) explains, are used by Al-Qasim to moderate viewers' radicalism and implicitly bolster the Qatari establishment's policies and strategic interests. Speaking about the 'Opposite Directions' Aburub (2010) acknowledges Al-Qasim's role in controlling debate to his benefit, offering conceptual packages to the viewers bolstering visual based content and altering mindsets.

Discussing Al-Jazeera's tools and rhetorical devices more widely, Al-Sadi (2012) observes that the channel selects only those historical events that serve its ideological objectives, offering its viewers the data as fact. Additionally, he suggests that it imposes topics on both supporting and opposing guests, which explicitly demonstrates professionalism and objectivity; although in reality, this forces guests to direct their words to serve the channel's discourse. Aburub (2010) also argues that the channel carefully selects words, their order in sentences and how they are articulated and repeated by anchors, stressing Al-Jazeera's reliance on repetition to emphasize its beliefs in viewers' minds. All the above data provides important findings regarding Al-Jazeera's practices prior to and during the Arab revolutions, which is beneficial for evaluating the channel's coverage of the Syrian uprising in this study.

Aburub (2010) discusses the extent to which effective media channels focus on two areas: 'content' which refers to selected topics and coverage techniques, the time given to each subject; and 'form', which describes selected images and their order in the newscast, and the anchors' body gestures, which can themselves be persuasive. He elaborates on how the visual discourse lies in TV can control and direct the viewers' mental activities through smart use of signs, symbols, icons and indicators generating ready formulated mental images, or what Schiller called 'packaged consciousness'. Aburub (2010) also suggests that how topics are selected, and the types of guests chosen and how they are treated in terms of time devoted and the frequency with which they are interrupted, all comprise manipulative rhetorical devices that are anything but random. He stresses that Al-Jazeera chooses guests with unbalanced experiences, and presents populist figures, who use simple language and a loud tone to overpower the message of more academic knowledgeable and rational

figures. Consequently, viewers psychologically absorb and respond to the more populist higher tone, as it sticks in their minds for longer. Moreover, anchors ask open ended questions to guests who speak harmoniously through their replies and body language, while the other guests are always treated in an accusatory manner and asked embarrassing closed questions about actions previously explained on screen in a way that makes the guest's role difficult to justify.

Furthermore, Aburub (2010) argues that these images, which are carefully chosen, become more powerful when accompanied with commentary and presented in a media frame. This is because news commentary offers explanations blended with opinions that influence the decoding process, especially when viewers trust the media outlet. He argues that human brain can be profoundly influenced by exposure to repeated visual experiences, and that its analytical capacity is numbed by visuals (TV) that offer packaged events based on the cameraman's perspective and impose this content on viewers' brains, impeding their criticality. Elucidating this further, Aburub (2010) emphasizes that TV provides a window onto the world through which viewers can only see a particular scene. He adds that Al-Jazeera ignores some events and amplifies others, unpacking events and re-formulating them in a format that serves Qatar interests. Although it is a bit aggressive against Al-Jazeera and majorly focus on the channel's negative practices, Aburub's research is useful for this research, since it highlights the role of TV, and investigates the content and presentation of the Al-Jazeera news channel and how influential it can be mentally and psychologically on viewers, as well as how it has maintained its position and competitiveness despite the appeal of new media.

Having examined the literature in relation to the media's impact in terms of the features of coverage, and scholars' discussions of these in relation to Al-Jazeera's performance in consideration of the first research question, the next section considers the literature concerning the impact of media and Al-Jazeera role in shaping public opinion introducing this role during the Arab Spring, to help introduce the information that provide context to answer the second research question.

2.1.3 Al-Jazeera: The Impact on Public Opinion:

This part presents the academic literature detailing the impact of the media on public and political opinion, and Al-Jazeera's role in democratizing and liberalizing the Arabic public and political sphere. This informs the allegations that theorized the channel's role in the emergence of the Arab Spring, and is essential as a means to investigate the perceptions of Syrian viewers regarding the impact of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising on their insights, attitudes and reactions.

The concept of public sphere could be first found in Emmanuel Kant's work; it was later developed by Jurgen Habermas in "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere", first published in 1962, where he focused on democratization and the political participation as the core of a democratic society, and articulated freedom of speech, free press, and the right to political participation as its principles (Abdelmoula 2012). According to Habermas, the public sphere is where a public opinion can be formed in social life; it must be open to all citizens and is the place where they can play the role of individuals who do not act on behalf of businesses or private entities and are not cowed by intimidating forces. It has to mediate between state and society and permit democratic control of state activities. The political public sphere is that where public discussions about

the state and the political practices can be found (Habermas, 1991, 398). Habermas' theories about public sphere were heavily criticized; he responded to his critics and made significant changes to his original thesis in his article "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" (Abdelmoula 2012).

Media scholars hold different opinions regarding how influential the media can be on public opinion and policymaking. Indeed, many scholars have been reluctant to confirm its influence on public opinion, denying that the media can serve as a primary social actor, or communicate vibrant political opposition. They argue that the media is relatively powerless when compared to other social influencers such as the education system, claiming that the media works best as a tool to reinforce public opinion rather than change it, as Joseph Klapper argued in 'Phenomenistic Theory' (cited in McCombs et al. 2011; Armoudian 2016; Gilboa 2005; Livingston, Eachus 1995; Hafez 2008). Other scholars, by contrast, strongly believed in the effect of the media (Entman 2008; Leonard et al. 2002; Azran 2013; McQuail 2005; Van Loon 2008). They argue that the media play a vital role in influencing people's attitudes toward social, political and economic factors and that the quality of the message delivered to society greatly impacts attitudes and ultimately behavior (Ali & Alkhazendar 2013). Furthermore, that exposure to the media increases individuals' willingness to form an opinion, and reinforces existing opinions, as people evaluate events through the lenses provided to them by the media (Van Loon 2008).

According to Seib (2008), the media can be a tool for stirring up conflict as well a means of instilling peace, it can also scatter people of one nation overlooking the borders and can unify the scattered ones across the globe. Media scholars also discussed that media construct a particular meaning

out of a certain event and broadcast it to the audience in a systematic way, and it is what determines the newsworthiness of the events not the opposite emphasizing that uncovered events, regardless of how important they are, cannot acquire the same weight or significance as those which get covered (Hartley 1982; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Abdelmoula 2012). (Hartley 1982; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Abdelmoula 2012). On this issue, Abdelmoula (2012) replaced George Berkley's "to be is to be perceived" with "to be is to be seen on television"; and according to Miller and Bokemper (2016) the media has become genuinely dangerous, stating:

> What was reported and how it was reported might be as important as whether it was reported (p175).

As Behr and Iyengar (1985) also observe:

> Changes in the public agenda are caused by changes in the media agenda … the amount of media attention devoted to particular issues determines the degree of public concern for these issues. (p.38)

The quotes demonstrate that the researchers believe the media's impact on public opinion should not be underestimated, and that it can make a difference, but this is only to a limited extent, whereas education, religion, etc. have a more expansive role. The media can also position itself in such a way that it reinforces existing opinions or seeks to change the minds of those who might be reluctant to or unwilling to form an opinion otherwise. However, media can be instrumental in transforming opinions, demanding observation of detailed professional and drawn out processes. The impact of the media, proceeds from its use as an instrument to steer the public away from one stance by overwhelming them with others.

Politics, as well, has been widely affected by the rise of mass media in the 20th and 21st centuries. Today politics remains a largely mediated experience, with most citizens relying on the news to tell them what is happening and what they need to know (Cushion 2015). Notably, during wartime, the media serve as a military voice, packaging information in a way that is palatable and likely to shape the public domain; with notable ramifications for democracy (Russ-Mohl 2013). Hence, Al-shareif (2016) advises that no one should neglect or discount the role the media plays in people's lives, directing them towards certain actions.

However, successive technological revolutions have boosted media's potential to become a major player in developed societies, as governments have lost their control over the flow of information (Alterman 2004). Almost 40 years ago the advent of international satellite channels began to have a significant influence globally. However, live coverage of the Gulf War in the early 1990s by CNN can be seen as a key first indicator of the importance of this shift in reporting in the Middle East (Maluf 2005; Alterman 2004). Public pressure, driven by televised images, increasingly played a role in decision making about humanitarian crises (Anthony Lake cited by Hoge 1994). According to Colin Powell (cited by McNulty 1993),

> live television coverage doesn't change the policy, but it does create the environment in which the policy is made. (p. 80)

That is, organized media held the power to propel governments forward, to create and to alter foreign policies (Seib 2008; McCombs, Shaw 1972), however as Miller and Bokemper (2016, p.14) argued: "Once disputes are carried by major news outlets, the risk of escalation rises", while the former Secretary of State James Baker (1995) wrote:

> The real-time coverage of conflict by the electronic media has served to create a powerful new imperative for prompt action. (p.103)

The impact of the media can be measured in different ways; i.e. cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural, and psychological (Hanson 2013). Each of these aspects typically triggers a different type of change; moreover, an audience can have the same level of exposure to information but come to different conclusions about how to exploit it (McQuail 2005). However, shaping societies is not an easy task, because some people identify the message immediately, whereas others do not. Moreover, multiple economic, technological and psychological factors exert a unique impact upon society (Richards 2007).

With the rise of the internet and social media, things became even less controllable by governments as they lost grip on media. Also, online information spreads rapidly and widely, regardless of its veracity (Seib 2008; Alterman 2004). As Friedman (2003) commented:

> [The] Internet can educate more people faster than any media tool we've ever had. At its worst, it can make people dumber than any media tool we've ever had. (p.261)

Undoubtedly, the digital revolution has provoked more dramatic changes in how public opinion is shaped, which have challenged the media's ecology. Information that could previously only be accessed by buying a newspaper or viewing a TV channel, is now readily available with just a few clicks (Van Noort 2007). According to Seib (2008), the:

> [media] are no longer just the media. They are players in themselves as well as mechanisms, and on many levels, they are altering world affairs. (p191)

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The supposed aim of these new technologies is to unite the world under a globalized mindset, claimed in reference to the emergency of satellite channels by Ted Turner:

> My main concern is to be a benefit to the world, to build up a global communication's system that helps humanity come together. (Seib 2008. P2)

However, it is important to observe in relation to this, that a world united under the banner of globalization does not genuinely create the utopian society implied. Rather it seems to have created a less understanding world, filled with conflicts. According to George Packer (cited by Seib 2008), extensive exposure to news and ease of access to a huge data base of contradictory information is adding to rather than subduing intolerance.

Since Al-Jazeera was established, its coverage has revolutionized Arab public opinion, altering the framing of what is termed the new 'Arab public sphere' (Lynch 2006, Amin 2004; Quinn, Walters 2003; Wojcieszak 2007; Hafez 2008). Its programmes are avidly watched by millions of Arabs and have contributed to the formation of pan-Arab public opinion (Al-Kasim 2005). Al-Jazeera played a central role in liberalizing Arab media discourse, as mentioned above, creating an autonomous media narrative that gave a nascent Arab public sphere a platform upon which to develop (El-Oifi 2005). According to Souaiaia (2011), "Al-Jazeera has consistently been able to influence public opinion". Al-Jazeera not only filled a media void but also a political void in the Arab context, which is characteristically lacking in political pluralism (Zayani 2005). It even had an unprecedented effect on international politics, exceeding even the 'CNN effect' (Seib 2008). Abdelmoula (2012) found that Al-Jazeera has undoubtedly been

instrumental in resetting the agenda of Arab media, reshaping its relationship to the political sphere, and also unpacking the political world for the consumption of ordinary citizens, thereby affecting people's perception of politics and political change. He acknowledged the new public sphere is not only attributed to Al-Jazeera, but that its role remains unparalleled. Lynch (2005) commented: "One Al-Jazeera cameraman may be worth many thousands of protestors when it comes to generating political power". He (Ibid) also noted:

> News coverage of political protests and struggles has opened up the realm of possibility across the Arab world, inspiring political activists and shifting the real balance of power on the ground. (n.p.)

The relationship between the media and the political sphere is widely discussed by media scholars (Siebert et al. 1956; Hallin, Mancini 2004; Gunther, Mughan 2000; Luhmann 2000). However, according to Abdelmoula (2012), media-politics relationship studies to date have failed to discuss the ramifications of this influence in the Arab region, adding that Arab media landscape has been through a significant transformation in the last decade, especially since the emergence of Al-Jazeera, which has successfully engaged Arab elites and ordinary citizens in public debates. The way Al-Jazeera appears to revolutionize and influence the Arab public sphere relates to the media's ability to gather together people who share the same political, religious and cultural doctrines under a virtual umbrella, creating virtual societies, provoking settled nations, invoking regime change, justifying some acts and demonizing others and exacerbating conflicts (Seib 2008; Armoudian 2016). The evidence for this is the channel's alleged role in the Arab Spring, which is the topic of this research.

One of the chief reasons Al-Jazeera became one of the most popular news channels among Arabic audience is because it succeeded in creating a mentality of group membership by developing a mock-interpersonal relationship with them. Audience parasocial interaction, which entails interest in and admiration for favourite anchors, including evaluating their characteristics, behaviours, personalities, etc., (Horton and Wohl, 1956) had a strong effect on the channel's credibility. A study of 3,500 Al-Jazeera users found that parasocial interaction relates to the time spent watching, and belief in its credibility (Auter et al. 2005). Individuals who deliver news can appear very close to viewers, by developing a very intimate and special relationship, heightening their influence and impact on them (Hartley 1996). Viewers' trust increases in conjunction with their perspective regarding a certain channel's credibility (Johnson & Fahmy 2007), and possibly this occurred with Al-Jazeera and its viewers and had an effect at the beginning of the Syrian uprising.

However, many other scholars have been cautious when linking Al-Jazeera with moves towards democracy, stating that the emerging public sphere lacks the capacity to transform public opinions into concrete policies (Lynch 2005). Thus, the belief that Al-Jazeera is able to democratize Arab societies presumes the main barrier to democracy is information deficiency, which is untrue (Miles 2005). Therefore, although the mass media can be effective in articulating alternative viewpoints or mobilizing people to adopt transitional policies, they cannot in isolation transform the political landscape because they are not primary political actors and are easily dominated by political and market forces. The mass media only serves as a mediating force between the government, the opposition and the people (Hafez 2008; Shapiro 2005; Maluf 2005; Miles 2005; Zayani 2005; Hamada 2008). Therefore, unless the fundamental processes of democracy

become well established, the impact of Al-Jazeera will remain limited (Seib 2008). According to Lynch (2005), Al-Jazeera, regardless of its influence and domination of the media in the region, is not sufficient to overcome deep-rooted authoritarian regimes alone:

> What one enthusiast called 'the Democratic Republic of Aljazeera' does not, in fact, exist. Aljazeera cannot create democracy on its own, nor compel Arab leaders to change their ways. Television talk shows cannot substitute for the hard work of political organizing and institution building. (n.p.)

Nonetheless, Al-Jazeera's political influence may translate into actions under certain circumstances, even prompting people to demonstrate according to Abdelmoula (2012); as Alterman (2004) comments, when public opinion slips from a government's grasp it can be easily mobilized. However, even if Al-Jazeera succeeded in mobilizing Arabs, even getting them onto the streets to demonstrate, as in the 'Cedar Revolution' 2005 and in Lebanon and Egypt's 'Kifaya', it still does not control the ultimate outcome (Lynch 2005; Pintak 2008).

Despite the points made above, on a practical level, we cannot deny Al-Jazeera's role in building Arabs' awareness had a gradual impact on democratizing and liberalizing their perceptions, possibly also revolutionizing public and political opinion before the Arab Spring started. Thus, Al-Jazeera has been presented as a key factor in the changing attitudes and consciousness of Arabs prior to and during the Arab uprising. Certainly, many of the scholars who have researched Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring have addressed the gradual long-term impact of its coverage on the desire in the Arab public sphere for democratic change in

the region (Abdelmoula 2012). This debate will be discussed in detail in a later section.

Despite the various arguments concerning Al-Jazeera's role in revolutionizing Arab public and political opinion, the literature suggests this influence was not only multifaceted and complex but limited when compared to other more prominent and powerful factors. Certainly, the arguments discussed above are rational, but make it difficult to determine whether Al-Jazeera's role was definitive in revolutionizing the Arab public and political opinion, or whether it was rather limited compared to other more prominent and powerful factors. For example, the political and democratic void that subsumed the Arab world before Al-Jazeera emerged was not necessarily resolved by content produced by the channel. Indeed, the messages of democratization broadcast by Al-Jazeera may have been limited in terms of their educational value and created the illusion among Arabs that they were now well-informed about democracy and well-prepared for change, although in reality they had insufficient understanding to actualize long term change. This was revealed after the Arab Spring started, once Arab citizens wanted to practice what they had learnt; they realized relatively rapidly that they knew how to start the process of change but had no strategies to navigate the aftermath.

Al-Jazeera and Citizen Journalism
An important aspect of the growth of the internet has been that it has meant traditional media outlets have had to adapt their practices to keep pace with the flow of information and disinformation (Kamel 2014). This has seen traditional media outlets embrace the notion of audience interactivity, whereby journalists not only disseminate news but also gather information from their audiences. The emergence of active citizen reporting, integrating

new and old media has provided a more powerful and impactful media on public in the Arab world, despite attempts at censorship from the political sphere aimed at restricting the free flow of information. These changes to embrace interactive reporting are an unprecedented form of "democratization from below" as Abdelmoula (2012) discussed.

For its part, Al-Jazeera has been enthusiastic about generating an interactive environment, communicating effectively with its audience since it early days via the 'Sharek' initiative, which encourages audiences to share photos and videos they believe are important for enriching news content. This approach has helped the channel gain relevance with the younger Arab population, whose primary source of communication is social media networks, which in turn played a significant role in the emergence of Arab uprisings (Abdelmoula 2012; Abdullah 2012), when traditional and new media became close partners, yielding mutual benefits. During the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising citizen journalism was often the main and sometimes the only source of news for Al-Jazeera, and many other channels (Kamel 2014). This enriched the channel's content and amplified the voices of the upcoming generations and encouraged them to participate actively in news creation (Niyomukiza 2013). This integration was apparent from the quantity of material uploaded onto the Al-Jazeera servers via 'Sharek' (Abdelmoula 2012), which assisted Al-Jazeera in covering events when it was prohibited from being present in the revolting countries (Harahsheh 2013).

Citizen journalism is a set of practices that require the internet to provide news content, it relies entirely upon unedited and unfiltered news stories submitted by ordinary, non-professional members of the public (Wall 2015; Allan, Thorsen 2009). Recently, it has become an essential part of news

gathering worldwide, adopted as a vital resource of news by prominent news agencies, with many local and global events only covered by citizens due to many reasons, such as repressive governments where press freedom cannot be taken for granted and restrictions on media company's access. In these cases, citizen journalism is often associated with political activists who seek to challenge society's established institutions (Wall 2015; Allan, Thorsen 2009). Citizen journalism is also replacing the role of foreign correspondents, helping them to produce and consume more international news, and encourage a greater diversity of voices with more efficient and more cost-cutting options (Williams 2013). Wall (2015) suggests that during certain periods of political change, citizen journalism might effectively create an alternative public sphere in non-authoritarian countries, while in the authoritarian ones it might serve as a form of propaganda spurring on those prone to violence.

Certainly, to date, citizen journalism has been presented as a double-edged sword by media scholars. On the negative side it has been described as a 'potentially problematic development', not readily acceptable in the context of journalism, where it was viewed as unethical, untrustworthy, overly subjective, emotional, of poor quality and having no real news value, as citizen journalists do not observe journalistic professional standards but are led by their own subjective views regarding what is newsworthy (Richards 2007). Even if citizen journalism provides immediacy and a variety of images and narratives which can enrich and expand news material, it can still reduce the value of news by provoking anxiety among the public (Richards 2007). In addition, citizens typically do not care about ensuring the privacy of news subjects or strive for sensitivity and balance when presenting the news. To exemplify these criticisms in the context of this thesis, we can refer to the events in Syria, during which citizens posted

news about children and people's dead bodies. This led professional journalists to note that sometimes citizens published deliberately manipulative videos which served the aims of activist groups in Syria. The pieces prepared by citizen journalists lack emphasis on key features such as accuracy, balance, impartiality and newsworthiness (Niyomukiza 2013).

More positively, citizen journalists allow widespread coverage of issues in areas that otherwise might not be highlighted. This enables them to increase public awareness of corruption, and violations of human rights, possibly encouraging hesitant or undecided citizens to seek change via action, including protests. Citizen journalism has also forced some government-owned media outlets to cross some of their former red lines, breaking conventional taboos in an effort to catch up (Khamis et al. 2012). Some researchers have noted a growing tendency towards working with citizen journalists, as reporters considered citizen journalists a professional second tier of reporters. However, studies demonstrate that when processed by media outlets citizen content is reshaped to align with professional values (Wall 2015).

During the Arab Spring, the mainstream media dominated coverage, despite the flood of citizen content in the realm of social media. At this time, professional journalists were able to effectively gate-keep, verify and filter content, resulting in activists being forced to manage their stories to fit the requirements of traditional media to allow their messages the best reach and to tailor their stories to match what they think might make them publishable. Hence, it is argued that citizens had potential access to global audiences, but that this was generally controlled by main stream news outlets (Ali & Fahmy 2013).

2.1.4 Al-Jazeera: Journalistic Practices, Editorial Decisions and External Pressures

The third research question considers the factors that informed Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising; firstly, exploring journalistic factors encompassing editorial decisions, journalists' roles and practices and media pressure from the company's owners, and secondly, external factors such as social and possible political pressures. This part offers evidence from the literature concerning the establishment of Al-Jazeera, introducing the pressures the channel typically experiences.

The reasons for Al-Jazeera's establishment has been examined by media scholars. It emerged as part of its founder, Shaikh Hamad's new reform policy, which sought to introduce Qatar as a key global player desirous of promoting democracy and freedom of speech. It was also founded to eliminate threats and to serve as a tool to confront those who refuted his rule following the coup he had conducted against his father in 1995 (Miles 2005; Hroub 2011; Zayani 2005; Sakr 2007; Khatib 2013; Riley 2017; Whitaker 2011; Souaiaia 2011). Others subscribe to the theory that Al-Jazeera was founded as a result of collusion with external parties. The various suggestions include the allegation that Al-Jazeera is an American project designed to exert US influence in the Middle East (Harahsheh 2013; Maannews 2011); that it is an American and Israeli agent aiming to dismantle the Arab world by undermining Arabic values (Aburub 2008, 2010); and even that the channel was conceived by two French-Israeli brothers, David and Jean Frydman, as a medium to allow Israelis and Arabs to exchange arguments and opinions to facilitate peace (Meyssan 2011). These allegations are supported by scholars when they refer to the relationship between Qatar and the US (it is home to the largest American

military base in the Middle East) and the state's excellent relationship with Israel. However, in contrast, despite the relationship between Qatar and Al-Jazeera, the reporting by Al-Jazeera is anti-Israeli and Anti-American (Aburub 2010; Abdulnabi 2018; Harahsheh 2013).

Those who claim that the channel has a hidden agenda, argue that Al-Jazeera seeks to distract its viewers with images and stories that re-direct attention away from Qatari practices. They note that the channel has not brought an end to the western media monopoly in the Middle East, but rather has pushed the American hegemony undercover (Aburub 2010; Abdulnabi 2018). For example, Rushing (2007) observed that the war on terror can be promoted via Arab media including Al-Jazeera to support the American endeavour to spread democracy. However, it is important to note here that the supposition that Al-Jazeera is an American or Israeli project has no solid basis in fact, and so requires careful in-depth investigation. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to theorize there is a Qatari agenda at work beyond simply defending Arabs' rights and freedoms, as the state pays millions for Al-Jazeera further. These various claims can be investigated in reference to the content and coverage of events on the channel, as will be attempted later in this thesis.

Previous scholars have also evaluated Al-Jazeera's coverage; however, no firm conclusions have been reached. Some allege the channel presents information that is either biased or untrue, and that it does not adhere to the principles of journalistic independence, and instead promotes a clear political agenda (Shapiro 2005; Al-Jazeera 2005; Kühn et al. 2013). The channel does exude professionalism while delivering subjective information, and this has enabled it to achieve the status of an effective actor able to influence people's attitudes and behaviours (Ali &

AlKhazendar 2013). Those who believe the channel is not biased argue that it addresses Arabs by presenting only what is important to them, as the western media does. Moreover, they observe that while it gives voice to opposing arguments, subtle biases undoubtedly remain because no reporting can be truly unbiased (Alvarez 2006; Alterman 2004; Rushing 2007).

Adding to the agenda's attributed to Al-Jazeera above, some scholars have accused it of being anti-American (Abunimah 2013; Gentzkow, Shapiro 2004), specifically of provoking anti-Americanism in the region by attributing the bloody images from Palestine and Iraq to America (Lynch 2006). Indeed, Pintak (2006) links America's falling popularity in the region to the rise of Al-Jazeera. The US government has at times demonized Al-Jazeera as the "Mouth of terrorism" and the "Osama bin Laden channel" after it aired tapes of Al-Qaeda leaders; indeed, President Bush referred to the channel as "hateful propaganda" (Alvarez 2006; Ajami 2001). Moreover, the channel has been accused of broadcasting anti-Israeli propaganda due to its transmission of certain content and visuals that stir up Arabic sentiments (Wessler, Adolphsen 2008; Matar 2006). It has also been accused of promoting Islamism in an attempt to create a shared global Muslim identity (Cherribi 2006; Shapiro 2005). While in middle eastern contexts, Arab governments have accused the channel of being provocative and promoting violence, by airing the opinions of opposition politicians and clerics (Shadid 2006). Ajami (2001) stated:

> Al Jazeera may be more independent, but it is also more inflammatory … Al Jazeera deliberately fans the flames of Muslim outrage … [It] is an aggressive mix of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. (n.p.)

Other actors have also accused Al-Jazeera of being a tool of Qatar's foreign policy, with the channel apparently being less independent than it suggests (Zayani 2005; El-Oifi 2005; Abdulnabi 2018; Azran 2013). Henderson (cited by Riley 2017) noted,

> Al Jazeera is sensationalist, Islamic, and pan-Arabic, but it mirrors Doha's policy concerns in more ways than it might care to acknowledge. (n.p.)

The channel does not make profit from advertising and it is totally bankrolled by the Qatari government, which highlights the importance of the channel's political economy and the fact that it may easily be at the mercy of the financer. Political economy focuses on the produce, distribution and consumption of media rather than analysing the media texts, which, according to political economy, are produced in specific systems that are not ideologically neutral, and are conditioned by a range of complex interactions (Pearson & Madill 2013). Political economy mainly focuses on the way economics and politics are inseparable, and understanding this is pivotal to understanding the way any society and culture works (Pearson & Madill 2013). Political economy scholars note that private control of news media does not serve the public's informational needs any better (Youmans 2012, Abt 2004; Telhami 2013). Barkho (2006) emphasizes the fact that journalists have to respond to the needs of those to whom they owe their existence, regardless of any ideational assumptions. However, Waddah Khanfar, Al-Jazeera's former general director (cited by Abdelmoula 2012) acknowledged that the channel can't be a 100% independent organization as It's funded by Qatar, emphasizing they try to find the balance regardless of this fact. Certainly, a number of scholars have explained that Al-Jazeera's journalists are not completely free to decide what is broadcast. They note that the material produced is

determined daily by higher management; i.e. individuals nominated by the Emir himself and responsible to the Qatari government for the channel's performance (Al-Shammari 2015; AI-Meezan 1996).

Investigating this issue further, Kühn et al. (2013) observed that according to its ex-journalists Al-Jazeera follows political guidelines laid down by the palace, rather than serving the interests of viewers and journalistic priorities. It was also mentioned that Al-Jazeera has the freedom required to tackle any taboo under any of the Arab regimes with the exception of Qatar, thereby questioning the channel's independent editorial policy (Al-Shammari 2015, Cherribi 2006; Wright 2005; Miles 2005; Kraidy, Khalil 2007, Aburub 2008). Hroub (2011) points out:

> Al Jazeera is not a tool of the CIA, Israel, or Al-Qaeda. Rather, it is the sophisticated mouthpiece of the state of Qatar and its ambitious Emir … Al Jazeera's success story would not have been possible without Qatar's backing. (n.p.)

Yablokov (2015) notes that Japan, China and Qatar have all launched media outlets to promote their perspectives on global events competing with established actors. This is an integral element of public diplomacy, as international broadcasting plays a critical role in promoting a country's national interests among international audiences, which in turn increases trust and confidence. Al-Jazeera's anti-establishment discourse does not aim to communicate a liberal political rhetoric that undercuts the political perspective of the Qatari state; rather it allows the bolstering of Qatari policies by identifying Arab viewers with a new democratizing, self-reforming paradigm that meets their expectations, and is optimized by the state of Qatar. Al-Jazeera serves as a means of reinventing, not challenging Arab autocracy (Al-Sadi 2012).

However, many other scholars deny Qatar's influence on Al-Jazeera's performance, confirming the channel enjoys unprecedented media freedoms and editorial independence in the Arab world, and that its staff prioritize stories by newsworthiness. They also emphasized the Qatari government's inability to interfere in Al-Jazeera's policies (Boyd-Barrett, Xie 2008; Sakr 1999). Nonetheless, there is a third category of scholars who question the nature of the relationship between Al-Jazeera and Qatar (Zingarelli 2010), acknowledging both the channel's independence and its nature as a subservient instrument of Qatar's foreign policy (Abdelmoula 2012). El-Oifi (2005) stresses that what matters here is the channel's considerable impact over the Arab media landscape and public.

Al-Jazeera has been the recipient of many contradictory allegations, each depending on the perspective and the background of the describer; therefore, Al-Jazeera can appear biased to some and neutral to others. It can appear as anti-American and anti-Israeli to someone, and completely truthful to someone else. In addition, arguing that the channel is a Qatari tool might seem unreasonable to some people and accurate to others. Indeed, as Qatar is the channel's official financer there is certain reason to suppose it could if it chose exert pressure of a financial nature on Al-Jazeera, triggering the need for further study.

Media systems research examines connections between media and politics (Esser & Hanitzsch 2012). A media system is an independent part of a larger system, but at the same time it evolved within and has been influenced by political and cultural contexts, which are also complicatedly embedded within their specific socioeconomic context ranging from very authoritarian to very liberal from (Dimitrova 2003; Seethaler 2017;

Sonczyk 2010). Many scholars find the need to observe media from a multidimensional perspective, beyond national media systems, due to globalization and digitalization, and the structural changes they caused, as in the contemporary world the weight of the nation-states is weakening, and media are more characterized by global flows (Carelli 2014). Media systems were best explored through comparative studies; at the forefront, the "Four Theories of the Press" (Siebert et al.1956), which are: the Authoritarian, under which the state has direct control of the country's media. Media can be privately owned, but criticism of the government or its supreme leader is not allowed; the Libertarian, where freedom of the press is a key characteristic, criticism of the state is encouraged, and journalists are expected to keep the government accountable; the Soviet Communist, where the communist government owns the media to promote its ideology; the Social responsibility, which emphasizes the media's responsibility to provide objective and balanced news coverage through self-regulation.

Another comparative study is "Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics" (Hallin & Mancini 2004), which discusses three models found in 18 Western countries, which are the Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model, the North Central European or democratic corporatist model, and the North Atlantic or liberal model. Both studies, and many others, have their limitations. The most important, for the purpose of this study, is that they do not tackle the Arab region.

Only few attempts were made to classify Arab media. This is due to the heterogeneity of so many key categories of comparison, the highly dynamic developments in the region and the lack of available empirical data to permit solid comparison of multiple categories (Richer, Kozman

2021). However, Rugh (1979, 2004, 2007), in his attempt to classify Arab media systems, came out with four models: the mobilization press, the loyalist media group, and the transitional system. These categories can change whenever the political system changes, as they are primarily related (Richer, Kozman 2021). Other classifications were made after the emergence of satellite channels, by the likes of Ayish (2002), Mellor (2005), Galender (2016) and Richer, Kozman (2021).

The most important variable that influences Arab media is the political system. The emergence of satellite channels, making national borders less important, had a major impact on Arab media even though national political systems continued to dominate their structure and behavior. Al-Jazeera, although known for its breaking of taboos and criticizing Arab governments, is mindful of the political environment of Qatar, which claims that Al-Jazeera is an independent entity. In Qatar, as per Rugh (2007) classification, the "loyalist" media system was prevalent, and many of its media channels still fall into this category as no political parties or competitive elections exist, there is no opposition to the government, although, it can be said that the regime adopts a more passive attitude towards the media and does not exploit the media to mobilize the public for specific political purposes, as the mobilization system does. Qatar allows private media, but under censorship, hence the media are consistently loyal to the regime in power. Al-Jazeera, however, showed a different attitude that seemed revolutionary and inconsistent with Qatar's policy. Yet, the national political system that is essential in media also applies to Al-Jazeera for three reasons. Firstly, the channel emerged as a part of the liberal/political reform plan carried out by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani after the coup he led against his father. Secondly, Al-Jazeera's political attitude was a part of the new system's policy decisions in Qatar, back in 1996, to put the country on the international map using

Al-Jazeera to provoke controversy in a controlled way. Thirdly, Al-Jazeera does not raise controversial issues that directly affect the political status quo in Qatar, and there are limits to what Al-Jazeera can do (Rugh 2007).

Influence can occur in a variety of ways, firstly according to how the newsworthiness of an issue is decided, as journalists follow certain guidelines and criteria when selecting what they consider newsworthy and transmissible to the public, i.e. 'News values' (Galtung, Ruge 1965; Golding, Elliott 1979; Bell 1991). The more an event satisfies a network's 'news values', the more likely it is to be selected as news (Galtung, Ruge 1965). The decision made in this regard can reveal a variety of information, including the channel's agenda, the journalists' emotional responses, competitiveness, cultural backgrounds, and the interest news organizations' owners take in affecting outcomes (Richards 2007; McCombs et al. 2011). Thus, journalists might adopt four roles: normative and cognitive which inform 'role orientations', and practiced and narrated which describe 'role performance' capturing journalists behavioural and practical dimensions. The cognitive role conveys institutional values, as well as the attitudes and beliefs individual journalists embrace as a result of their occupational socialization (Schultz 2007). This is classified as a neutral role and participant role when journalists tend to embrace the participant role more than the neutral (Cohen 1963, Johnstone et al. 1972), and the normative, which includes what journalists expect and believe to be deemed desirable in society (Christians et al. 2009; McQuail 2000). Simply put, what society believes to be desirable in a 'normative' context can easily be influenced by what informs institutional values cognitively which can in turn be easily influenced by the institution's agenda. However, the practiced role is the journalists' role as they seek consistency between role orientations and role performance when working within the external constraints that impose

limitations on their editorial autonomy (Reich, Hanitzsch 2013; Shoemaker, Reese 2013). The narrated role denominates subjective perceptions and reflects on the roles that journalists perform in practice. Furthermore, what journalists do, and what they think they do is not necessarily the same thing.

Moreover, journalistic perceptions and practices also play a significant role in selecting topics and shaping narratives and news content, alongside ethical orientations and work conditions and pressures (Lohner et al. 2016), and this is an essential aspect of this research. Journalistic practices are influenced by factors that surround individual news workers, as discussed by Esser et al. (2017). These influences differ in detail, however they

> …regularly include common characteristics of political systems and media systems as whole, the respective media sectors and organizational types that journalists work for, and the journalists' routines and practices when interacting with news events. (Esser et al. 2017, p.24)

Nevertheless, Esser et al. (2017) emphasized that despite the external influences that might alter journalistic practices under the modernization paradigm which emphasizes changes over-time, they are still expected …

> to proceed in a path-dependent manner determined by the specific conditions of the institutional and cultural environment in which journalists work (Esser et al. 2017, p.23).

These influences can be described from macro to micro as follows: the systemic level refers to links between the media system and the prevailing social order within the nation-state; the institutional level includes influential factors from the network that affect the newsroom; the

organizational level encompasses factors associated with the internal structure such as ownership type, economic and professional goals, editorial policy, and the journalistic culture at news organizations; the routine level refers to news-making practices and journalistic initiative versus spoon-feeding by sources, news-gathering practices, the criteria used to determine newsworthiness, and the logic of news story construction; and finally, the individual sphere incorporates psychological factors that impinge on the individual's work, such as their professional values, personal views, political attitudes, and the environmental conditions that determine content (McCombs, Reynolds 2002; Shoemaker, Reese 2013; Reese 2007).

Leading media organizations earn their prominence and reputation through the consistent implementation of professional and ethical journalistic standards. Truth, accuracy, objectivity, freedom from bias, fairness, thoroughness, accountability, etc., are cornerstones of professional journalism, and not applying them can be damaging to any media organization. The way these standards are used differs from one country to another, depending on the political and media systems; yet, they constitute a key dimension for comparing media systems. They can be found in most countries with freedom of press (Esser et al. 2017; Hallin & Mancini 2004; Siebert et al.1956; Benson and Hallin 2007; Esser 2008; Esser, Umbricht 2014; Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Weaver,Willnat 2012).

Reporters are expected to be accurate in their news and the use of their sources, despite the little time allowed for story preparation and the pressure they go through in light of the fierce competition to get the "scoop", as fresh material is very valuable, which sometime limits their ability to verify information. They must also be truthful and do not report

false or misleading information. Additionally, they should be impartial, presenting the different viewpoints and sides of a story, and regard different ideas and opinions with detachment. As philosopher, jurist and scholar Ronald Dworkin says, "everyone need not receive equal treatment, but everyone should be treated as an equal" (Cox cited by Sambrook 2012; Brewer 2018; Sambrook 2012; Wahl-Jorgensen et al. 2017; Neem 2007; Walker 2005). They should also be thorough, to provide a good understanding of the subject, and held accountable for their work, prepared to accept criticism and consequences. Most importantly, journalists should be objective, independent of mind through testing beliefs by the methods and criteria of good inquiry, stay away from topics of personal interest, to avoid bias; if they are unable to do so, the interest should be disclosed. Many studies found that objectivity is not easy to achieve; it can be an impossible standard to satisfy, whether intentionally or not, as it requires mental discipline and a willingness to critique one's views (Ward 2017; Calcutt, Hammond 2011).

Every journalist comes from a different background which has an impact on the outcome he/she produces. Humans are biased by nature, so instead of avoiding bias, journalists should learn how to deal with it by examining their biases and measuring them against the gathered evidences. They should also acknowledge that their beliefs and perspectives are the result of their own experiences and that others can have different perspectives out of different experiences, and that these perspectives may be valuable (Baleria 2021).

Journalists should absolutely report the facts as they exist, but this alone will not help the audience understand why the story is important and how it affects them. A "context" should be provided to help the audience to

understand the issue at hand. Journalists' goals is to inform and explain why a certain story matters, to boost public understanding and help them decide how to deal with it (Baleria 2021). <u>Perceiving bias</u> is also based on <u>the audience</u> experiences and beliefs, which sometime causes them to engage in confirmation bias, whereby they tend to embrace the story which affirms their beliefs and unfairly dismiss the one that contradicts them. Thus, because everyone has innate biases, determining what constitutes bias in news coverage is extremely challenging. It is not uncommon to see a news report attract conflicting accusations of bias (News Literacy Project).

It is often argued that objectivity is confused with neutrality. Objectivity is not neutrality; neutrality means a reporter takes no position in a reported story, which often prevents him from determining the truth and in turn creates an ill-informed public unable to draw a conclusion from the story. While objectivity means seeking for evidence to reach a verifiable and reasonable conclusion by questioning and analyzing the available data. Balance is often the way through which objectivity is maintained by the news media, but balance can also undermine true objectivity if the two opposing points of view look equally plausible. Reporters must start neutral and then find the truth through evidence, considering all aspects of the argument and avoiding extremes and sensationalizing. The journalist's mission is to determine the truth, not to be neutral (Neem 2007; Walker 2005).

Ward (2017) believes that objectivity can be deceitful, incoherent and irrational. Thus, he introduced what is termed 'pragmatic objectivity', which urges journalists to practice democratically engaged journalism that views them as social advocates of a special kind, objective. Pragmatic objectivity

is holistic and inclusive; it evaluates beliefs based on a variety of standards, with journalists being neither partisans nor neutral reporters of fact. In pragmatic objectivity, the sphere of objective belief is larger than the sphere of fact; it does not depend on observation only, but also on perspectives, beliefs and values. Knowledge is an interpretation in which fact and theory are entangled. Even what we consider a fact is determined by our webs of belief. To be pragmatically objective is to meet three standards: empirical; coherence; rational debate. The virtue of pragmatic objectivity is that it explicitly recognizes the inherent qualities of judgment that reporters must employ, and entails an understanding of the inherent fallibility of such judgments, while holding them to community or collective standards that usefully promote the central goals of reporting itself.

In wartime, there are always complex relations between journalism and patriotism, which may make objectivity and conventional journalistic standards often skewed to serve partisan ends (Kellner 2008). According to Tumber and Prentoulis (2003), objectivity is still valid in journalism, but is no more related to neutrality and detachment as it is re-defined to add moral and ethical responsibility. Pragmatic objectivity is among those norms that replaced objectivity; Ward (2004) proposed the concept to go beyond the fact/value dualism. It realizes the imperfection of objectivity but it does not deny it, and it focuses on interpretation, conceptual scheme, and holistic evaluation. He (2016) discusses that journalists are not neutral, they are investigators of the facts that do not repeat other people's alleged facts. Those who adopt pragmatic objectivity are engaged journalists who provide accurate, verified and well-evidenced interpretations of events. Their stories are not without perspective or conclusions, yet such

judgments are evaluated by criteria that go beyond citing specific facts, from logical rigor to coherence with pre-existing knowledge.

However, for social and political purposes, some journalists adopt a non-objective viewpoint, what is called advocacy journalism. Journalists practicing it do not believe objectivity is possible in practice for many reasons, media ownership and sponsorship at the forefront. They declare bias and are upfront about their editorial position even on their masthead. They believe mainstream media is also unbalanced and politically biased, but in an implicit way, hence, according to them, advocacy journalism with its focus, and access, can be a more effective public-interest advocate than the mainstream media (Careless 2000). It shows up when important issues are ignored by mainstream media, and a community needs its own media. Advocacy journalists are not activists, and there are strict lines that should never be crossed as professional journalists. For example, they should acknowledge their perspective, be truthful, accurate, and credible. They should never spread propaganda, fabricate or falsify, judge or suppress vital facts, or present half-truths (Careless 2000; Fisher 2016).

McLaughlin (2016), however, argued that scholars and journalists tend to fall between two types of reporting, i.e., objective or true. Many reporters experiencing atrocities were no longer able to remain impartial in their reporting and consequently took sides, applying the 'journalism of attachment', whereby journalists are aware of the moral content without being emotionally involved, still report facts while maintaining commitment. Williams (2011) defines it as "a journalism that cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; that will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor" (p. 14). This renders objectivity (i.e., the acceptance of a social reality without

any critical examination) meaningless, and impossible in some circumstances, and less important than the truth, which is not necessarily objective. Some journalists believed in the benefits of objectivity and considered the 'journalism of attachment' and the new honest media as a form of twisted therapy for the reporters, and a "menace to good journalism", considering that journalists set themselves as judge and jury, overlooking any political and historical context. Adding that viewers wish to understand events taking place on the ground, rather than the feelings and opinions of the journalist (McLaughlin 2016; Hume 1997).

Ward talks about a centrist position between objectivity and journalism of attachment saying that "a narrow standard of objectivity that allows 'only facts' in reports is useless for much of journalism. But a journalism of attachment that stresses feelings, value judgment, and interpretations is reckless without objectivity. What is needed is a flexible standard of objectivity" (p. 124, cited in Spencer, 2005, pp. 98-99).

Discussing the seven pillars of traditional journalistic wisdom, objectivity, truth, balance, impartiality, bias, accuracy, Independence, Gaber (2014) will help us to better understand journalistic practices and roles, which he states do not necessarily offer the exact value they originally call for, even if they intend to do so. This means that even if we considered Al-Jazeera's aims at objective, impartial and independent, many factors can interfere with this goal and change the outcome. For example, Gaber (2014) describes 'objectivity', the first pillar, as a meaningless concept, explaining that all journalists have gender, ethnicity, families, social backgrounds and personal histories that inform their outputs. 'Truth' is the second pillar, and he argues that deliberate falsification is rare in the media, but the truths are many in every situation and the important question for many in the

professional media is which particular truth should be considered. Richard Peppiatt (cited by Huffpost 2011) stated,

> One thing I learnt early on in my career was that telling the truth and not lying are distinct concepts.

Journalism is truth-gathering with a short time limit, collecting as much relevant evidence as possible, which is what can be done within the deadline. This triggers the question is getting the facts right or objectivity are the same as truth? And is there a common truth? However, truth is provisional which means it may change, they change whenever there is a new or better evidence. Nevertheless, it is so difficult for journalists to establish a truth about an issue as they always see it from their own perspective. As Walter Lippman made the difference clear that news "is to signalize an event, the function of truth is to bring to light the hidden facts" and they can meet in only few areas. Adding, in political life which outcome is always in doubt news reports do not reflect the truth. A big part of this is due to the restrictions of news business, such as the limited time space or sources (Epstein 1974).

It is quite possible that in the future journalism will further lose its grip, although journalists believe their job is collecting and verifying information as best they can. Internet may increasingly accommodate a public demand for unverified information. However, as objectivity fades from the journalist's lexicon, fairness and balance have become the new slogans. Although nowadays balancing opposing statements do not necessarily yield truth, which rarely has two sides (Goldstein 2007).

In respect to 'balance and impartiality', Gaber (2014) states that when investigated in depth by the media situations are usually more nuanced and complex than could be easily explained impartially. 'Bias', he states, typically arises when it is time for journalists to put a story together, even if they originally determined to be unbiased. 'Accuracy, thoroughness and fairness' he adds require journalists to seek for 'accuracy', yet each chooses facts that suit their own particular purposes, even though thoroughness should exist in the reported material despite the restrictions of time and space, and fairness is not easily applied by journalists, but it must exist. Meanwhile 'independence' cannot be easily obtained, as journalists always have owners who decide what can and cannot be presented to an audience (Golding, Elliott 1979). As Pouzilhac (cited by Seib 2008) stated, the eyes that see the news before it is reported make a difference. Gaber's study offers a strong argument, which provides a valuable analytical basis from which to explain how journalists affect media outcomes, which are not necessarily objective. This background will also help us further evaluate the practices of Al-Jazeera's journalists covering the Syrian uprising later in the thesis.

According to Hanitzsch (2017), journalists can be classified into four global professional milieus: populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, opportunist facilitators and critical change agents who drive social reform and political participation by exhibiting a critical attitude toward the government. The latter best explains Al-Jazeera journalists' performance as discussed in the earlier part and relates to Al-Jazeera's role as investigated in this study. Hanitzsch added that western journalists are supportive of actively promoting particular values, ideas and social change, whereas non-westerners tend to be more interventionist in their professional views. According to Pintak (2014) Arab journalists, conceive of their mission as

that of driving political and social reform, thereby acting as, "change agents" in the political arena.

2.2   Al-Jazeera's Role in the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring started in Tunisia, and was triggered by long term corruption, food inflation and unemployment (Spencer 2011). It was sparked by the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohammad Bouazizi who acted in objection to his poor and humiliating life. The protestors in Tunisia effectively ousted former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who then tried but failed to suppress the revolutionaries (BBC 2011b). The revolutionary wave then expanded to Egypt (Macqueen 2013), where people peacefully demonstrated echoing similar sentiments to the Tunisians. They again were successful, toppling former President Hosni Mubarak who had also tried to suppress their demonstrations (Al-Jazeera 2011b).

At the time, Tunisia and Egypt were portrayed as successful revolutions; especially once they were compared to countries where events did not follow the same pattern, such as Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and Syria. In Bahrain, protests were decisively eradicated by the Bahraini Government in cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation council (Cockburn 2011; Law 2011). In Libya, armed conflict occurred between the supporters and the opposition to the former President Muammar Gaddafi (Arsenault 2011). In this case, NATO intervened, taking action in favour of the rebels against Gaddafi's forces, enforcing a No-Fly-zone in Libya, and resulting in Gaddafi being killed by the rebels (Gamal, Gaynor 2011). In Yemen the uprising was to protest the corruption and poverty, and defections from army and government took place ultimately resulting in the former Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh resigning. A civil war then occurred in Yemen and Saleh was killed. The Syrian case, which is the main topic of

this research is discussed in detail in the next section. In the longer term post-analysis of the Arab Spring it has become apparent that people's desire for democracy were ultimately not fulfilled, and the revolutions negatively affected the Arab world overall (Tirman 2012; Mojon 2020).

The term "Arab Spring" was first used in the Arab world in 2005 when the 'Cedar' movement took place in Beirut and 'Kifaya' movement took place in Egypt, respectively, capturing the attention of the world through Al-Jazeera at the forefront (Lynch 2011; Murphey 2005). The use of this term was coined by Western commentators marking a rise of democratic expression around the region after Bush's war in Iraq in 2003, what was called the 'democracy project' and was thought to be a turning point for the Arab world (Krauthammer 2005; Murphy 2005). The word 'spring' was inspired by the "Prague Spring" in 1968 and the revolutions of 1848, referred to as the "Springtime of nations" (Krauthammer 2005; Massad 2012).

The term was re-coined by Lynch in his 'Foreign Policy' article (Lynch 2011), discussing the Arab uprisings of 2011, marking the beginning of re-using this term during that time (Lynch 2012; Lynch 2011). According to Massad (2012) choosing this term "was not simply an arbitrary or even seasonal choice of nomenclature, but rather a US strategy of controlling their aims and goals", just as it used it for its own interests in Prague in 1968, as he discussed. Lynch (2011) did not believe that the uprisings of 2011 were part of the US democratic strategy in the region, rather that the protests were the result of other factors related to corruption and lack of reforms. He noted that only if protests are intensified and continue to spread, which turned out to be the case, the possibility of being a US "Arab Spring" can be considered.

The media was believed to have played a critical role in triggering and spreading the revolutions, especially in light of the absence of a democratic civil society (Khondker 2011). During the 'Arab Spring' the mantra 'the people want to bring down the regime', which became known as 'the mantra of revolution' was repeated in all the revolting countries (Abdelmoula 2012), a fact now widely credited to media. During the Arab Spring media outlets revolutionized the political landscape in the Arab world, acting as mobilizers and advocates of change, as they responded to the drastic changes in the political landscape (Khamis et al. 2012; Hroub 2011; Miles 2011; Eldar 2011). Some commentators have argued that satellite channels played an important role in directing the uprisings during the Arab Spring in service of certain agendas that did not include democracy and human rights. For instance, the media played a central role in the revolution and the democratic transition process in Egypt 2011, revealing the regime's wrongdoings and the depressing realities in the country, and also creating momentum by highlighting opposition movements, and youths in particular (Abdullah 2012). Al-Jazeera was among those channels and was the most controversial at that time (Harahsheh 2013).

Undeniably, the media paved the way for subtle but fundamental changes within Arab political culture. Even before the Arab Spring, the great enthusiasm that Al-Jazeera and new Arab journalism created in the Arab world demonstrated that Arabs are open to discourse and fundamental freedoms, which in turn led to a participatory political culture (Hafez 2008). However, Freeland (2011) looked at the influence of media on the Arab Spring revolutions from a different context termed the 'Groupon effect'. He claimed that satellite television and the internet were powerful

tools that helped protestors overcome the problem of collective actions and giving the unhappy people the confidence that their views are widely shared and that a sufficient number of their fellow citizens are willing to join.

Many studies have investigated the role of Social media in the Arab Spring (Ghannam 2011; Storck 2011), the way it awakened largely dormant, unengaged, and marginalized civil societies in the Arab world (Khamis et al. 2012), shaping political debate and mobilizing people. Via these platforms reforms were discussed, breaking down barriers such as fear government censorship, spreading democratic ideas across international borders (Howard & Hussain 2011; Bhuiyan 2011). Social media was a less easily controlled news source, and so became an effective instrument for disseminating information and promoting insurgent agendas (Tufekci, Wilson's 2012; Lindsey 2013).

Scholars have also argued that the role of traditional media cannot be separated from the role of social media which in the context of the Arab Spring were harmonically interacting and complementing each other. Traditional media with their limited resources, crew and equipment, were unable to cover the expanding mass movements on their own. It is not easy to cover events in different cities in large countries such as Egypt with only professional reporters and camera crews. Despite this, exposure of the general public to events still required they be televised as the outreach and credibility of new or social media remains limited and confined. For example, the images of Mohammed Bouazizi burning himself would only have triggered Tunisians if it had not been televised repeatedly by Al-Jazeera to a large audience in multiple countries (Abdelmoula 2012). Here lies the importance of TV against social media and explains the researcher's

interest in focusing on TV's role along with social media which was widely studied by other researchers. Ahmad Sheikh one of Al-Jazeera's main figures when interviewed by Abdelmoula (2012) stated:

> Traditional media need social media to get information, and social media need traditional media to widen their scope of coverage. (p.235)

Meanwhile Freeland (2011) observes that television, particularly Al-Jazeera, and the internet, i.e. Facebook and Twitter, solved the problem of collective action, helping to spread information and organize demonstrations, adding that technology made it much easier for frustrated societies to express their collective anger.

In the specific case of Al-Jazeera, it is apparent from reviewing the facts that the channel was eager to project the story of the Arab Spring into the living rooms of ordinary Arabs across the region and beyond, as governments were toppled in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, showing a potential significant twist in the channel's political economy (Cherkaoui 2014). Al-Jazeera's presence was so salient that demonstrators in Cairo were heard to shout "Long live Al-Jazeera" (Hasan 2011). Media scholars interested in Al-Jazeera have suggested that the channel played a key role amid the Arab Spring, by choosing to dedicate much of its screen time to covering events and highlighting the regimes' violent actions (Gore 2013; Youssef 2013; Atwan 2011). Miles (2011) asserted:

> Al-Jazeera has played a leading role in the Arab Spring, teaching demonstrators tactics and strategy, giving rebel leaders a platform and airing powerful user-generated content off the internet that galvanized millions to take to the streets. (n.p.)

This role, regardless of how positive or negative it was, reportedly contributed to the success of some revolutions and the defusing of others. Al-Jazeera introduced the Arab revolutions and the people's demands for freedom and dignity to the Middle East and the rest of the world, serving as the most influential means of spreading the frustrations of protestors (Abdullah 2012; Eldar 2011; Mahroum 2011; Souaiaia 2011). The New York Times (Worth, Kirkpatrick 2011) described Al-Jazeera as the 'common thread' between the Arab uprisings, and stated that the channel helped to propel the emotions of insurgents from one capital to the next, while Pintak (2011a) and Tausch (2011) did not hesitate to eponymize the Arab Spring 'the Al-Jazeera revolutions'. Additionally, Hroub (2011) noted:

> The Arab Spring has been a genuine popular uprising against decades of corrupted and oppressive authoritarian regimes, its rapid spread, which caught almost everyone by surprise, was due in part to the influence of Al-Jazeera. (n.p.)

Of course, as mentioned earlier, this distinctive role of Al-Jazeera could not be possible in the absence of the help of Social media and the local activists as they significantly helped the channel ultimately do its job during the Arab Spring and make the influence it was reported to have on its audience (Abdelmoula 2012).

Other scholars went further than looking at Al-Jazeera's timely role, suggesting the channel's role can be dated to its inception, since which time it had constructed and communicated a narrative of popular rage against oppressive Arab governments through heavy emphasis on Arab suffering and depictions of political crises (Pintak 2011a; Tausch 2011). Olfa Lamloum (cited by Abdelmoula) remarked that Al-Jazeera is the 'rebellious' mirror of the Arab world since its inception, offering access to

spaces where freedom of speech is promoted even among the younger generation. Moreover, Abedmoula (2012) described Al-Jazeera as more than a media outlet, an agent, facilitator and accelerator for change, suggesting that it had two types of effects in terms of changing the political landscape; a long term effect, which had contributed to informing, educating and creating a vibrant Arab public sphere since the channel was founded, and an immediate effect, whereby the channel's coverage reported on and shaped the narrative of the Arab Spring facilitating the course of the revolutions. One of Abdelmoula's interviewees, who works for Al-Jazeera observed that the Arab Spring might not be Al-Jazeera's revolution, but that the generation which led the revolution is certainly Al-Jazeera's generation. This argument highlights the range of Al-Jazeera's possible influence and is important to consider in this research.

Numerous scholars have acknowledged the role and the influence of Al-Jazeera in the emergence and the progress of the Arab Spring, yet not everybody agreed on the precise goals of Al-Jazeera's coverage. Some have argued that the coverage was biased and comprised of carefully formulated political agendas, while others believed it was neutral and professional. The first group explained that before the Arab Spring Al-Jazeera was the voice of change, but that later it stopped following the principles of journalistic independence becoming biased (Al-Shareif 2016; Hroub 2011). Mahroum's (2011) study found that Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring favoured the revolutionaries, although 67% of the sample studied believed this did not negatively affect the channel's objectivity, with just 33% stating Al-Jazeera was not objective. Nayef (cited by Harahsheh 2013) described how Al-Jazeera provoked the concept of 'chaos' in the Middle East at three levels: helping to overthrow the head of the regime, calling for removal of the whole regime after overthrowing the figurehead, then encouraging

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people to pursue elections, thereby increasing the divisions between people and so maintaining internal conflicts and civil wars. Nevertheless, many scholars mentioned that the bias Al-Jazeera showed in regard to the Arab Spring revolutions served to promote a political agenda that reflected Qatar's interests, as it led to the overthrow regimes the Qatari government believed were hostile to its policies (Kühn et al. 2013; Ulrichsen 2011). This is also evident in its ineffective and inexplicably subdued role once the revolutions reached Bahrain (Souaiaia 2011). Abdulnabi (2018) which explained the Arab Spring was a timely opportunity for Qatar to distinguish itself from the authoritarian regimes in the region, presenting itself as a champion of human rights and democracy.

The second group, mainly comprised of Al-Jazeera Arabic and English employees, refused to accept the claim that Al-Jazeera played a material and supportive role in the Arab uprisings. They argued instead that the blame lay with the endemic corruption, oppression and strained relationships between Arab governments and their people, which were ignited by the gradually emerging political awareness to that Al-Jazeera had significantly contributed, paving the way for historic change (Abdelmoula 2012). Al Anstey, the managing director of Al-Jazeera English stressed that the channel does not follow an agenda nor seek to democratize countries, it only reports on events and does not create them (Hasan 2011). He also observed that the propaganda was a response to the Arab regimes' hostility to the network, adding that Al-Jazeera's success when covering the Arab uprisings stemmed from a lack of independent coverage elsewhere. Further, Anstey rejected the claim that the Emir used Al-Jazeera to topple secular or rival regimes, adding that the channel's skimpy coverage of events in Bahrain was solely due to the fact that its crew had been expelled from the country (Eldar 2011; Hasan 2011). Kelly

Jarrett, the executive producer of Al-Jazeera English, also mentioned that Al-Jazeera's coverage was more balanced than that of other media outlets (Abdulnabi 2018). Meanwhile Waddah Khanfar, the Arabic channel's former general director also refused to acknowledge that Al-Jazeera was responsible for the events of the Arab Spring, stressing that it would have happened anyway. In fact, he stated that the only difference was the number of victims would have been more (Hasan 2011).

The section below gives examples from previous studies detailing Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring revolutions, firstly, to assist in framing the parameters for this research, and secondly, to help situate this study and its findings. During the Egyptian revolution the channel reportedly exceeded journalistic limits to become a part of the revolution; allegedly encouraging people in other countries to revolt, especially as the channel had a considerable influence on people's attitudes and practices at that time (Abdullah 2012; Kamel 2014). In the context of Libya, Baroud (2012) suggested that Al-Jazeera exaggerated and altered facts relating to its coverage, thereby deviating from its journalistic responsibilities; this then triggered fear among viewers, having a negative psychological impact on them, and provoking people to oppose the governing regimes both inside and outside Libya (Al-Shareif 2016). This study has a notable limitation, in that it was only conducted on university teachers and students in Libya, which means the findings are only limited to one group in society. Other evidence gathered in Libya has suggested that Al-Jazeera's coverage served to cheerlead the rebels, offering minimal criticism of NATO (Atwan 2011). At that time, Qatar was heavily engaged in overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi which perhaps indicated there was a relationship between the channel's coverage and Qatari interests (Al-Shammari 2015).

Meanwhile, in the case of Bahrain, Al-Jazeera appeared reluctant to support the revolutionaries; Abdelmoula (2012) suggests that this was perhaps because it did not want to be seen to be fuelling a sectarian conflict since the uprising in Bahrain was sectarian in nature, as also geopolitical factors may have guided decision making. Meanwhile, Hroub (2011) argued this was because this is where the Saudis, and more significantly the Americans, drew a very strong red line, or perhaps even because Sheikh Hamad was concerned the revolutionary spirit might infiltrate his own country. Consequently, the channel's credibility is most threatened by the disparity between its coverage of the different revolutions, most notably its lack of coverage of Bahrain. When covering other countries, the channel made considerable effort to present the people's opinions and experiences counter to the regimes, attracting accusations of bias. This will be further evaluated in reference to the findings of this research in relation to the coverage of the Syrian uprising.

Notably, Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring had consequences for the channel. Many scholars started differentiating between the pre-2011 and the post-2011 Al-Jazeera. Abdulnabi (2018) said that before 2011, media and politics scholars considered Al-Jazeera as a major element of "pan-Arab public diplomacy"; they even described the channel as the "virtual state" because of its credibility, critical coverage, and relative independence from Qatar's politics. This changed after the uprisings of 2011, and the channel started being described as a Qatari propagandistic agent, changing its editorial policy following the country's shift from a neutral mediator to a military interventionist during the Arab uprisings.

Al-Jazeera lost credibility, popularity and its former glamour in the eyes of its millions of Arab viewers. In 2010, its audience was estimated to be over

50 million across the Middle East; however, its audience figures declined when the Arab revolutions robbed it of the appearance of objectivity (Abdelmoula 2012). Youssef (2013) suggested that the channel first suffered a loss in credibility when it took the side of armed rebels in Syria and Libya, and when it defended Egypt's Islamists linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, calling the protests against them 'a coup'. Its popularity has since slipped further following the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar in mid-2017, as reportedly the Qatari political intervention affected Al-Jazeera's adoption of a partisan position. Accordingly, Al-Jazeera has failed to realise its vision to be recognized as a model of professionalism in the Arab media world and has also failed to live up to its slogan "The Opinion and the Other Opinion". However, Al-Jazeera remains the most popular Arab news channel, despite having fewer than 50% of the viewers it had in 2000 (Watkins 2019; Souaiaia 2011; Fanack 2017).

The channel's credibility was also damaged by the resignation of a significant number of its employees, who attributed their resignations to the channel's biased coverage and control by Qatari political agendas (Taylor 2013; Sharaf 2013). For example, Al-Jazeera's anchor Ghassan Ben Jeddo resigned, stating that the station only allowed guests who criticize the Syrian regime, while overlooking violence against protestors in Bahrain (Eldar 2011). Luna Shibel, Al-Jazeera's ex-anchor also stated that the channel is aligned with certain agendas and covered the Arab Spring according to a plan, confirming that its sponsors determine the editorial content (Maannews 2011). Furthermore, Beirut correspondent Ali Hashem also quit after the channel ignored his report about witnessing armed men clashing with the Syrian Army, instructing him to 'forget about the armed men thing' (Narwani 2012). In addition, Hajjaj Salama resigned from the channel on air, refusing to present inaccurate and fake news about Egypt

which ignored the many anti-Morsi protests taking place at that time. Discussing the resignations, Sagheer (2016) emphasized the restrictions imposed by the channel on its reporters, and the extensive modifications their reports undergo so as to identify with Qatar's policies. However, it is important to take information provided by individuals who resigned from the channel with caution, as their reasons for leaving may not be wholly transparent and might also reflect their own ideologies and personal and political tendencies.

Many scholars have cited more objective reasons for Al-Jazeera's loss of viewers; Abdelmoula (2012) suggested that like everyone else the sudden eruption of the Arab Spring took Al-Jazeera by surprise, negatively affecting its coverage, which sometimes showed a degree of inconsistency, and in turn threatened the channel's credibility, balance and professionalism. He also confirmed that Al-Jazeera remained in line with its original commitment to always represent the people as it did during its relatively neutral coverage prior to the Arab Spring. What is termed 'traditional professionalism' and 'formal objectivity' did not necessarily fit with the obligations Al-Jazeera's had promoted since it came on air. Hence, the channel twisted "the neck of traditional professionalism … to grasp the complexities of the reality". Abdelmoula's study is valuable and addressed many of the aspects that contribute to this research, discussing the channel's democratizing role and the Arab Spring. However, his study tends to repeatedly justify Al-Jazeera's actions suggesting its neutrality. It is nevertheless important to consider, as he flipped a coin and examined the story from the other side; i.e. the impact of the Arab Spring on Al-Jazeera. Meanwhile Machin and Polzer (2015) offered other explanations, such as the audience fragmentation (due to varying political tendencies and ideologies in reference to internal issues), the growing number of

alternative channels, online and social media news, changes in information consumption and leisure patterns, and the tendency for channels to become politicized and adopt certain agendas, thereby appealing to different audiences. These are possible factors that can be introduced in defense of the channel, eliminating the exclusivity of explanations about how the channel became politicized and why it followed certain agendas.

However, scholars believe that although the different media channels had their significant role in the Arab Spring, yet they are not sufficient for achieving a socio-political transformation, emphasizing that believing so steals people's determination and will to implement change, which are the main driving force behind any revolution (Khamis et al. 2012). Arab uprisings were made by the Arab people, but media significantly accelerated them, helping people work altogether and overthrow the existing regimes (Frangonikolopoulos, Chapsos 2012). As mentioned earlier, plenty of successful revolutions took place throughout history and before the emergence of media. Additionally, when reflecting on the different debates about Al-Jazeera's influence on Arab audiences, and the role it played in contributing to political change and democratic advancement, scholars have discussed that the channel was unable to prepare people for what was required of them in the aftermath of revolution. The 'Groupon' effect, as discussed by Freeland (2011) can gather people to protest, but it cannot ultimately guarantee the installation of a better regime, as this requires longer-term collective action and a more significant commitment than can be facilitated via new technologies. The new Arab public sphere was and will always be linked to the media, as it fills the vacuum of absent social and political structures; however, arguably this relationship remains superficial. Thus, the researcher suggests the media has effectively created a virtual Arab public sphere detached from

the real society, but the weaknesses revealed by the Arab Spring identified vulnerabilities that can arise in the public sphere. For instance, the geopolitical considerations which affected Al-Jazeera's coverage in Bahrain, influenced its subsequent role in the virtual public sphere. The literature referred to above has afforded the reader a comprehensive insight into the different aspects of Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring as a mechanism to introduce the channel's role in the Syrian uprising. The main concern of this research, as will be explained below in the next section.

2.3   Al-Jazeera's Role in the Syrian Uprising

Historical Background to Syria

Before discussing the role of Al-Jazeera and its coverage of the Syrian uprising, it is important to present a brief history of Syria and the Syrian uprising to give readers essential background to understand the regarding the possible influence of Al-Jazeera on the Syrian uprising.

Syria became independent in 1946, after which it struggled to attain long term stability due to the lack of a coherent identity due to minorities and the numerous coups it underwent between 1949-1970. This led an American diplomat in 1968 to refer to Syria as a country marked by 'the stability of instability' (Rubin 2007). Syria is a country with many minorities, the uniting of which has been a challenging task to the country leaders (BBC 2012). The Assad family and the Ba'athist party from the Alawites took power after a coup in 1963 but were an unfavourable minority from the perspective of the Sunni Muslim majority (Wikas 2007). The Assads hailed the concept of the 'resistance against Israel', to such an extent that they prioritized it over the reforms taking place inside Syria.

This was considered a demagoguery, drawing on national appeals from Rubin (2007), who also remarked that Syria was a good friend to Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and Russia.

The Assad's regime was secular in nature and the Muslim Brotherhood party were never on good terms with it, leading to conflicts in 1964, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1977 and the conflict of 1982, which ended with the massacre in Hama (Gowans 2013). However, in political terms, the Syrian regime actively confronted any type of domestic opposition, sometimes backed by the US as Wikas (2007) discussed. Nevertheless, the regime enforced restrictions in other sectors, especially, the economy, military, media and freedom of speech (although the Syrian constitution provided for this (Al-Abdullah 2010)), all facilitated by an 'emergency law' declared in Syria in 1963 (Rubin 2007). Syria was placed third on the list of the world's 10 worst regimes for the arrest and harassment of bloggers by (CPJ 2012), it did not have a free press, and also blocked internet websites such as Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia Arabic and Skype. Moreover, by law, internet cafes were expected to record all conversations in chat rooms (Ahonen 2012). The authorities also blocked Muslim Brotherhood, Israeli and sectarian websites (Al-Abdullah 2010). Additionally, according to the BBC (2018), long before the conflict began, many Syrians complained about the high level of unemployment, widespread corruption, and lack of political freedoms and state repression under President Bashar Assad, who succeeded his father, Hafez Assad, in 2000.

On the other hand, Syria also had many positive aspects. According to Rubin (2007) Syria took Arab nationalism more seriously than any other state. Indeed, Syrians were not necessarily rich, but lived comfortable lives compared to the citizens of surrounding countries (Davidson 2012). It was

also the only Arab country that enjoyed self-sufficiency with no loans from the international bank (Hariri 2014). Additionally, between 2001 and 2010, Syria was classified as one of the very few countries to have achieved high rates of economic growth over the decade and was one of the five safest countries in the world (Sputniknews 2017). Before 2011, agriculture in Syria contributed around 20% of Syrian GDP, and oil around 25%. The country attracted high numbers of tourists and had a modest industrial sector, in addition to major phosphate deposits. Before 2011 the country had achieved self-sufficiency in terms of wheat, agricultural products and livestock, prices were at the lowest levels, and the inflation rate was about 8%. The Syrian pharmaceutical sector covered 90% of local needs and exported to 54 countries around the world, a health centre was allocated for every 10,000 inhabitants in the countryside, and for every 20,000 inhabitants in the cities. Moreover, in 2010, GDP in Syria exceeded 64 billion dollars (The World Bank), with a 22% government contribution. The Syrian oil sector supplied domestic needs and exported the surplus to Lebanon. The number of schools exceeded 21 thousand, while the illiteracy rate reached 5% having been 70% in 1970. Syria had been planning to end illiteracy completely by 2015, before more than 7000 schools were destroyed due to the conflict. Electricity production in Syria had reached 46 billion kwh, which in 2010 supplied domestic needs and allowed for export to Lebanon. Unemployment levels in Syria had dwindled during the pre-crisis years to 8.4%. Aleppo was ranked the highest in terms of manpower, but the crisis destroyed 113,000 industrial establishments, 35,000 in Aleppo (Hbeishan 2015).

Meanwhile, according to Martinez (2013) Syria had experienced multiple political and economic challenges prior to 2011. These included, the permanent state of war with Israel, the economic sanctions imposed on the

country after 1979 (Rees 2012), the huge number of Iraqi refugees arriving in Syria after the war on Iraq, and a drought that badly impacted the country shortly before the uprising (Shank, Wirzba 2013).

The uprising in Syria

The Syrian uprising reportedly started on March 15, 2011. The commonly reported narrative is that the Syrian revolution was sparked when 15 boys in the Southern city of Dara'a were arrested and tortured for writing graffiti in support of the Arab Spring (Al-Jazeera 2018; Schapiro 2016). However, many possible triggers were identified as being behind the start of the Syrian uprising. Some argued that the Syrians were disenchanted about the regime's practices, and that the 15 kids incident was the 'straw that broke the camel's back'. Others suggested that the Syrians were influenced by the Arab Spring, which motivated them to start a revolution (Al-Jazeera 2018). Meanwhile a third group attributes the events to a conspiracy, formulated with the aim of changing the regime in Syria (Anderson 2013; Rees 2012).

Media coverage of the events in Syria by Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, and the majority of western media outlets, described the Syrian uprising as a peaceful protest that had encountered violence from the Syrian regime. It only became an armed movement months later (HRW 2011; BBC 2012; Al-Jazeera 2018; BBC 2018). However, local Syrian media and several other international and western media outlets, mainly with governments supporting the regime, reported that the protests were not peaceful, and stated that a third party was killing both protestors and security forces officers to exacerbate the situation, as part of a larger conspiracy aims at a regime change in Syria (HRW 2011; Rettman 2011; Barlett 2015; Gorani 2011; Jha 2014; Weber 2017; Karouny, Bayoumy 2011). Another story proposed that the protests were peaceful but included armed militants who

infiltrated them having been backed, trained and financially supported by foreign parties to realise certain agendas (Gorani 2011; Karouny, Bayoumy 2011; Steele 2012; Van Der Lugt 2012; Anderson 2016; BBC 2016a; Gilsinan 2015; BBC 2011a; Spillius 2012; Barlett 2015; Martinez 2012). A further narrative suggests that Assad himself radicalized the opposition to gain the world's sympathy, and to convince the public that he would be the best option to end this war (Tierney 2015; Ghazawi 2011; Di Giovanni 2016).

From the commencement of the unrest, President Assad was reported to have responded immediately to the protestors by implementing reforms meeting their demands; such as cancelling the Emergency Law, amending the constitution, holding multi-party parliamentary and presidential elections, releasing political prisoners, and allowing free media, to no avail (Gowans 2013b; BBC 2012; Anderson 2016; Karouny, Bayoumy 2011). Ultimately, a foreign intervention took place in Syria and turned the country to a proxy battleground (BBC 2016a; Shipman 2012). The US, UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar took the rebels' side against Russia, Iran and Hezbollah on the regime's side, each intervening in the service of their own political agendas (BBC 2016b; Gilsinan 2015; CNN 2012). This underlines how controversial and complicated the Syrian uprising is, and how the views related to its emergence were polarized, making the Syrian case an important topic to further investigate and elaborate on. Specifically that Qatar is categorized as supporting those opposing the regime, as evidenced by Al-Jazeera's coverage.

It is important to mention here that Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising, which is the main focus of this research, went through two phases. The first related to the first two weeks of the events in Syria, during which

Al-Jazeera ignored the events taking place there and focused on less important events in other parts of the region. This lack of reporting triggered criticism of the channel for not giving Syria the momentum it had bestowed in the contexts of the other revolutions. The second phase began after the first two weeks once the revolution and killings became more serious. At this point the Syrian news service was primed, widely discussed and analysed on Al-Jazeera, taking a pro-revolutionary stand (Abdullah 2012; Khasib, Ersoy 2016; Kanan, Shalaby 2011; Abdulnabi 2018). After this, the coverage of Al-Jazeera, which was the Arab population's main source of news, and the most trustworthy, was reported to explicitly show support for the Syrian people against the regime, which some commentators characterized as unbalanced and biased. However, at this time, the channel depended on local activists as correspondents providing them with the necessary equipment and training to get news for them (Byrne 2012; Eldar 2011). These activists were Al-Jazeera's only source of information, as professional reporters were either banned from entering Syria, or felt unable to risk entering Syria illegally for fear of execution (Marrouch 2014; Khasib, Ersoy 2016; Hersh 2012; Russia Today 2012a). The two-phase coverage suggests a conflict over approach within Al-Jazeera at the beginning of the uprising, although the subsequent explicit unbalanced coverage by the channel meant it lacked impartiality as a news outlet, requiring further investigation throughout this study.

The regime-oriented media stressed Al-Jazeera was a major player in the war on Syria, and the channel's pro-revolts stance pushed the limits by fabricating news and manipulating the truth (Maannews 2011; Anderson 2016). They remarked that the Syrian uprising represented a turning point for Al-Jazeera's professionalism, with many critics claiming the channel's performance was unprofessional. It was also discussed that they

consciously shaped events, fabricated facts, incited people, and gave a sectarian character to the uprising, picturing it as a Sunni vs. Shia conflict. All this appeared to be aimed at overthrowing the Syrian regime at any cost, in service of political and international agendas (Assad 2017; Martinez 2012; Byrne 2012). Moreover, they stressed the coverage disregarded Amnesty International's reports about the atrocities carried out by members of the opposition against pro-regime civilians. Many argued that Al-Jazeera used the well-known Egyptian cleric Al-Qaradawi, who had lost much of his legitimacy during the Arab Spring, to legitimize the channel, expressing views such as: "It is ok to kill one third of the Syrian population if it leads to the toppling of the heretical regime" (Barlett 2015; Abdulhamid 2017). Consequently, many Al-Jazeera journalists resigned in objection to the channel's editorial policy, reporting that even the British 'Independent' characterized Al-Jazeera's coverage as misleading and dangerously inaccurate (Tasnimnews 2016). Anderson (2016) argued:

> Although every war makes ample use of lies and deception, the dirty war on Syria has relied on a level of mass disinformation not seen in living memory (n.p.)

For its part, the regime-oriented media also provided evidence of its narrative, presenting stories associated with Al-Jazeera's employees. The correspondent who resigned in Syria, Laila Mawed, for example, denied that the international media had been banned from Syria, confirming that media representatives were present at a number of Syrian events. She also described Al-Jazeera's coverage as a "a long horror movie full of cinematic tricks" (Almjhar 2011). In addition, Al-Jazeera's former journalist Ali Hashem stated that Qatar determined the channel's agenda and created its own version of the Syrian crisis confirming that the media of both sides of the conflict played dirty (Russia Today 2012). Kanan (2012) also reported

that one Al-Jazeera Syrian journalist resigned because he believed the channel's coverage of the Syrian crisis was contrary to professional media standards, and that the repeatedly unbalanced coverage was undoubtedly required by Qatari officials, and that the channel faked and fabricated news using footages from other countries to stir the emotions of Syrians. He also noted that the individual responsible for the Syrian profile in Al-Jazeera, a member of Muslim Brotherhood and the brother of a Syrian opposition leader, always filtered reports and eyewitness testimonies in a way that served his chosen narrative, adding that the channel disregarded its motto to share the 'other opinion', showing one-sided coverage lacking in credibility, neutrality and professionalism, devoid of conscience and humanity (Axis of Logic 2013). Moreover, a former Al-Jazeera reporter in Sydney, Salih Alsaqqaf, when interviewed by Abdelnabi (2017) stated that the channel asked him to cover every anti-Assad march in Australia, even small groups, but did not approve any reporting of pro-Assad rallies in Sydney despite there being significant numbers of demonstrators. Alsaqqaf also stressed that Al-Jazeera did not allow him to cover pro-Bahraini uprising rallies in Sydney. These alleged double standards are typical in propaganda-oriented coverage, whereby an ally of media owners is constantly focused on, legitimized, and framed as worthy, while enemies are delegitimized, framed as unworthy and marginalized (Herman, Chomsky 2010).

In this regard, and from a more academic perspective which also tackles how the channel highlighted the opposition more than the regime, Abdelmoula (2012) underlines that Al-Jazeera's in-house reports clearly blended news with opinions. The opinionated reports he described, clearly contextualized atrocities as overreactions and protests as normal reactions. Moreover, they were keen to underline the widespread uprisings across

Syria, depicting events as a serious revolution to justify the channel's open coverage (Abdelmoula 2012). These controversial reports questioned Al-Jazeera's professionalism and objectivity during the Arab Spring. Moreover, the channel highlighted any minor progress by armed opposition groups, greatly contributing to psychological warfare by anticipating events and announcing the fall of areas before they happened (Abdelmoula 2012). Conversely, the channel barely mentioned the progress of the Syrian Army, thereby undermining its victories. Many observers described the channel as a war operations room rather than a media channel, emphasizing that its discourse often mocked the Syrian resistance against Israel (Tasnimnews 2016). Additionally, it was mentioned that Al-Jazeera English staff were instructed by their executive producer Kelly Jarett not to refer to Jabhat Al-Nusra, an officially announced section of Al-Qaeda, as Al-Qaeda. The reason for this, according to Jarett, was that Al-Qaeda had changed and Jabhat Al-Nusra was from among Syria's rebels (Middle East Eye 2015).

Khasib and Ersoy's (2016) quantitative study about Al-Jazeera's use of sources reveals that the channel depended on activist sources at 46.3%, while it depended on its own, government and Syrian opposition sources to 30.5% respectively, while it used mix footage from Syrian news agencies, the Syrian opposition and their own sources, together representing 17.1 %, 1.2% of the total footage come from government sources. 43.9% of the footage showed the Syrian opposition in different victim situations, peaceful protests, death tolls and suffering, 25.6% showed the Syrian Free Army, and 15.9% showed both of Assad regime, Syrian opposition in the Syrian news reports. In terms of the news frames, the study also found that Al-Jazeera's news reports contained 50% of conflict frames. The majority of Al-Jazeera's coverage shows Assad's regime as responsible for atrocities and killing scenes, frequently repeating this footage on its Arabic and

English channels. It also quoted the Syrian opposition more frequently than the regime (Ayaad 2014; Abdulnabi 2015), demonstrating a lack of balance, as emphasized by Khasib and Ersoy's (2016) who also argued that the principal role of the media is to de-escalate conflict between conflicting parties, and address conflict as a problem that can be solved, which in turn preventing violence between parties, facilitating understanding between sides and modifying the public's perception about various hostilities.

Journalists need to consider balance, fairness and accuracy when selecting writing and publishing conflict news which needs to be transparently reported, but this was not the case here (Ersoy 2016; Khasib and Ersoy 2016).In terms of the language used by the channel in regard to the Syrian uprising, various observations were discussed, such as the use of different terms to define the revolution according to country; i.e. in Yemen it was called a 'crisis', in Iraq a 'conflict', and in Syria despite all the complications, terrorist groups and foreign intervention, Al-Jazeera insisted on referring to it as a 'freedom and dignity revolution' (Tasnimnews 2016). Additionally, the channel called the official Syrian army 'Assad brigades' and its victims 'deads', while referring to the opposition's victims as 'martyrs' (Kanan 2012; Abdulnabi 2018). Al-Jazeera Arabic channel referred to the Syrian events as a 'revolution' and its English sister labelled them 'Syria: the war within'.

According to Atwan (2011) Al-Jazeera's coverage in Syria failed to meet the channel's independence, professionalism and objectivity standards; as Baroud (2012) also stated,

> Al-Jazeera has deviated from its journalistic responsibilities in Libya, and is now completely losing the plot with Syria.

In addition, Abi Sa'ab (2012) stated,

> On the rock of the Syrian tragedy, the kingdom of delusion was shattered.

Largely referring to the channel's relationship with Qatar (Khasib, Ersoy 2016; Harahsheh 2013; Telhami 2013; Ayaad 2014; Abdulnabi 2015; Kühn et al. 2013; Abdulnabi 2018; Abi Sa'ab 2012), and Qatar's support of the different Arab rebels and its donation of millions to the Syrian opposition (Eldar 2011; Hroub 2011). There were suggestions that Qatar, while providing weapons to the rebels in Syria it also ran fake news stories on Al-Jazeera (Anderson 2016; Byrne 2012). This support arguably sought to further isolate Iran, strengthen allies in Lebanon, weaken Damascus-based Palestinian factions, and help US allies rearrange the power-paradigm in the region (Baroud 2012; Harahsheh 2013; Phillips 2016). Moreover, some commentators observed that Al-Jazeera, which claimed to applaud democracy in the Arab world, was financed by a country lacking in democracy (Arlidge 2011).

Additionally, Harahsheh (2013) discussed Al-Jazeera's rhetoric in regard to the Syrian uprising in reference to its well-known talk show, 'The opposite direction', underlining that it clearly served Qatari policy even when seeking to show the opposite. The programme's famous anchor, Faisal Qasem used the 'rhetorical question' as a tool in the programme's introduction to clarify his views, which reflected the Qatari perspective. This inserted opinion into viewers' perceptions encouraging the audience to think in a particular way. Harahsheh (2013) also found that the programme primed the Syrian story in the episodes she reviewed, despite there being many other significant events it could also have been covering. Its coverage also emphasized a number of frames; i.e., the impossibility of a peaceful

solution to the Syrian crisis, the importance of an armed opposition to replace the regime, and even promoting the idea of foreign intervention in Syria. The channel also proposed that overthrowing the regime and dismantling the army would be an essential precursor to effective progress. Additionally, it downgraded Pan-Arabism by focusing on the conflicts within each Arab country per se. It reconceptualized the targeted enemy away from Israel and towards local Arab regimes, while also underlining the differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims and widening the gap between them. Harahsheh (2013) also emphasized that phrase 'the opposite direction' goes only in one direction in service of Qatari political goals.

Contrasting with the coverage presented by Al-Jazeera was the Syrian regime's media, which was also reported by the CNN to deliberately fabricate and deceive viewers. Indeed, one Syrian propagandist who had defected stated:

> Our job was to fabricate, make deceptions and cover up for Bashar al-Assad's crimes. (n.p.)

He confirmed they used loyalists and presented them as locals claiming atrocities were being committed by armed gangs when it was actually the Syrian regime's security forces and the Shabiha. He added that they sent loyalists to appear on Al-Jazeera and other channels to deny the people's narratives, and stressed that President Assad hated representatives of the international media because they were trying to reveal the truth (Watson et al. 2012). Moreover Khamis et al. (2012) explained that Addounia TV, owned by Assad's brother-in-law, strongly promoted the Syrian regime's narratives accusing Al-Jazeera of faking news, while doing so itself. A consideration here is that the international media's over-reliance on

opposition activists reports was a direct consequence of the regime's media blackout (Hersh 2012).

2.4 Chapter Summary

The large volume of literature pertaining to Al-Jazeera shows an exceptional level of interest for a channel that is less than 25-year-old. This was of course explained by the channel's unparalleled performance in a region that was not familiar to the liberal media. The Arab Spring itself was an unprecedented event which changed many of the prevailing beliefs in the Arab world, becoming a significant focal point for scholars. Likewise, the Syrian uprising which took place in a country with high restrictions in terms of freedoms, the freedom of speech being at the forefront, makes it interesting to investigate what exactly it was that broke down the fear barrier. Thus, it was essential here to present as much of the literature covering this period as possible to prepare the reader for the subsequent chapters and to establish a clear and solid theoretical base for this study to be built on. Despite the significant amount of literature there remain gaps and limitations. Therefore, this study will be important in illustrating Al-Jazeera's role at the beginning of the Syrian uprising before it became complicated. None of the literature offered an integrated and comprehensive qualitative study of Al-Jazeera's role from the perspective of three interrelated aspects; how the events in Syria at the beginning of the uprising were covered, how this coverage impacted the audience and their perception, in addition to exploring the editorial decisions that shaped this coverage. Therefore, it is anticipated that through triangulation of data and a careful focus, it will be possible to deliver an integrated overview of Al-Jazeera's alleged role in the Syrian uprising. Additionally, this chapter discussing media features and characteristics and how this may shape the audience perceptions, discussing audience, media impact on public opinion,

journalistic practices and roles, Al-Jazeera's political commitments with Qatar, and Al-Jazeera's practices and coverage of previous events, all provide a background for the research questions and prepare for the coming chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological approach used to address the research questions and the gaps in the literature concerning the extent and nature of the role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising. It describes the three methods used to collect the data to answer the three emergent research questions, including the rationale, the practical considerations and the justifications for the choice of each method. This chapter will also clarify how the three methods used complement one another in a triangulation to clarify the role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising.

This research examines Al-Jazeera's role during the first 45 days of the Syrian uprising in March and April 2011, as this period provides clear data for analysis, where it highlights Al-Jazeera's initial reactions to the events in Syria and how the channel dealt with the news. This early period also reveals people's reflections on their raw reactions to events before they became more complicated and politicized and divisions emerged. Thus, it will better help establish a study about Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising through exploring how Al-Jazeera covered the Arab Spring revolutions and the Syrian uprising and how this was perceived by Syrians and impacted them at the outset of the revolution. In addition to exploring the different factors that informed this coverage.

There is a substantial body of literature that addresses the relationship between Al-Jazeera and the Arab Spring, with some studies examining the Syrian uprising. However, no single study offers a comprehensive in-depth review of Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising from multiple perspectives. This motivated the researcher to conduct an integrated study

about this role; investigating three aspects: Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising; the influence of that coverage on the Syrian audience and whether the audience believed the channel was responsible for influencing the course of the Syrian uprising itself. The study also explores the decisions taken in Al-Jazeera's newsroom and the different factors that determined the scope and nature of coverage.

The researcher employed three qualitative data collection methods, namely, a content study, focus groups, and interviews, were implemented to obtain information to address each of the three research questions. The aim of the first research question was to study Al-Jazeera's coverage with which the Syrian viewers were addressed at the outset of the Syrian uprising. The aim was to carry out an in-depth study of the features of the coverage, including the language, tone, discourse, anchors' debates, use of sources, use of visuals and juxtaposition, and how they reinforced the channel's rhetoric, which in turn inform its stance, balance and influence on viewers' perspectives. This was done by conducting a qualitative content study of one of the channel's main newscasts issued during the first 45 days of the Syrian uprising. The second question aimed to explore how the Syrian viewers decoded the content of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the early events happening in Syria and whether the coverage used by the channel to address viewers affected them and the course of events in Syria. The second research question was answered by conducting focus groups with a number of Syrian citizens to establish the channel's impact on viewers. The third question aimed to investigate the factors and reasons for the points of view expressed during the coverage of the Syrian uprising, as well as the journalistic practices and editorial decisions that impacted Al-Jazeera's rhetoric at that time. The participants selected to answer this were Al-Jazeera employees and ex-employees with knowledge of the external

influencers, internal pressures, journalistic practices and editorial decision-making processes.

The methodology allows triangulation of the data to ascertain whether findings associated with one method mutually corroborate others (Saunders et al. 2012). According to Patton (1999) triangulation is

> the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena.(Carter et.al. 2014, p. 545)

It is also viewed as a "strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources" (Carter et.al. 2014, p. 545; Patton 1999). Many types of triangulation are identified to enable the researchers make substantial strides in overcoming scepticism. Triangulation in this research used multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon to offer a greater understanding, in addition to assure validity and reliability and to reduce bias. Meanwhile each data source reveals its own specific angle expressing unique characteristics and significance associated with the topic. The research is exploratory, flexible and the researcher's assumptions were fluid. As the data was collected understanding of the topic became more focused and specific as demonstrated in the data analysis (Saunders et al. 2012).

3.1 Epistemology

Before presenting the methodologies used to address the research questions, this section identifies the study's epistemology and the theories of knowledge that inform the research.

This multi-methods research methodology is exclusively dependent on qualitative data collection methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010). Qualitative methodology can be exceptionally broad in scope, due to its philosophical and epistemological roots, and its inductive and flexible style of theory building, that enable the researcher to perceive the multiple facets of reality through the subjects' eyes, using in-depth interviews, focus groups and other qualitative methods. Shifting from one participant to another, the researcher gains insight into the interpretative approach the research subjects adopt to produce their own understanding of their social, political and cultural environment. This enables the researcher to elicit and identify the dominant contexts that frame their views. Qualitative methodology also allows greater interaction between a researcher and their participants, unlike quantitative methodology where researchers take on the role of outside observers. It also assigns a central role of the researcher and allows their subjective interpretation.

Studying Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising necessitated a sense-making process, addressing subjective and socially constructed meanings by exploring the research subjects' personal views and experiences through focus groups and interviews. It also required investigating meanings and connotations through a study of the language, tone and visual texts and other features used by the channel. The data collection methods used in this study was non-standardized with many questions and procedures being altered and others emerging during the process. These are all characteristics of the qualitative research method (Saldana 2011). This research studies 'how' and 'why' Al-Jazeera covered the Syrian uprising in a comprehensive manner rather than 'how often' and so would not be suited to quantitative data. This research needed flexible and open-ended data collection methods to enable the capture of the complexity of data and the participants' inner

thoughts and interpretations about Al-Jazeera's role and impact, and the perceptions about the factors that influenced constructing this role.

Qualitative researchers believe that best way to explore a phenomenon is to study it in its context (Saldana 2011). This study's current researcher herself collected the data for the study; two sets of data were collected in the field where she met with the participants, investigated their experiences, spoke directly with them and watched them behave and act within their context. After the data was gathered, the information was reviewed, interpreted and organized into themes from the bottom up, moving from broader themes to more abstract units of information. Additionally, the researcher was open to learning from the participants and interpreting all that she saw, heard and understood. This provided an informational base that could not be tightly prescribed until after the participants had been consulted. These characteristics correlate with Creswell's (2009) description of the features of qualitative research.

Investigating the role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising was best achieved using an interpretive philosophy, which intends to understand 'the world of human experience' as explained by Cohen et al. (2017). Interpretivism studies examine participants' views, experience and interests to interrogate the intricacies of the research problem (Creswell 2009). The characteristics of individual interactions are essential in delivering a further subjective interpretation of the context. It is important for the researcher to review the participants' contributions in depth by analysing their language, tone and expressions, aspects that would not be measured in quantitative research. Additionally, the researcher's social interactions with the

participants were essential to generate a more accurate understanding of the data.

Qualitative data collection methods employing open-ended questions are widely used in the interpretive philosophy to enable participants to share their views fully. Consequently, sample sizes are often small, as in-depth qualitative investigations are required to reach the real principles that motivate individual actions (Saunders et al. 2009). The interpretive approach is based on epistemological considerations with regard to human knowledge and the construction of social reality. Objective truth is constructed by gathering the meanings of objects when we interact with them using different communicative tools, with language being at the forefront. In social realities no single interpretation can express the whole truth or identify the complete meaning, because truth is complex due to the multiplicity of actors and the fact that different actors produce and construct different meanings in relation to the same phenomenon. They experience and understand the same 'objective reality' very differently, especially when other social factors interfere. Understanding is choosing between different interpretations that enrich our knowledge with a plurality of meanings and opinions of the world around us (Krauss 2005; Saunders et al. 2009). This thesis adopts the interpretivist philosophy because it understands and constructs the narrative based on the participants' different views and experiences collected to generate and enrich data through focus groups and interviews.

As each of the data collection methods used has different characteristics and has been chosen for a specific purpose, the study applies a generic qualitative approach (GQA), which selects applicable elements from a

number of strategies. According to Caelli et al. (2003), the GQA is not guided by an established set of philosophical assumptions which fall under one of the known qualitative methodologies. Thus, it either blends these methodological approaches in order to create something new, or claims no formal methodological framework at all. Kahlke (2014) also suggests that studies which use elements of more than one established methodology can work well as generic studies when compatible elements are blended into a single new methodology. Merriam (2009) argues that GQA offers an opportunity for researchers to play with boundaries and the tools of established methodologies, consequently developing research designs that fit their epistemological stance, discipline, and particular research questions and states that the GQA can stand alone as a researcher's articulated approach.

The first research question required an in-depth study that investigated the features of Al-Jazeera's news coverage of the Syrian uprising. The second and third research questions also called for in-depth empirical investigations of real-life situations, including the focus groups participants' perceptions about Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising and the views of the interviewees who are a number of Al-Jazeera's journalists and editors about the reasons and factors that informed this coverage. For both questions, the researcher was required to develop a careful understanding of participants' lives by listening, observing their behaviour, and eliciting their views. The research findings were developed by deriving codes from which to categorize the material emerging from the three methods. Taken together the findings fulfilled the research aims to deliver an integrated conclusion.

3.2 Target Data

This research studies the role of the Al-Jazeera Arabic news channel in the Syrian uprising at its outset in March and April 2011, looking at how Al-Jazeera addressed its viewers; how the viewers decoded the channel's coverage and the impact they think it had on their perceptions and on the course of events. It also looks at the channel's strategies, factors and the decisions that led to its coverage. The findings of this research fill the gap in the literature review on this topic.

The study focused on the Al-Jazeera Arabic channel because it is the most watched by Arabs, including Syrians, and because the audience targeted by this research is made up of people who experienced and participated in the Arab and Syrian uprisings, who mostly speak little English and so are unlikely to have turned to the channel's English version to learn about the wars taking place in their countries. The data for this research was collected in Arabic and was subsequently translated to English, which was a challenge for the researcher who had to ensure that she maintained the accuracy of the data during the translation process. The translation process took place after the Arabic spoken material was transcribed. The initial coding process was carried out on the Arabic data and the emerging ideas were translated by the researcher into English in another document. The researcher ensured the translation did not affect the meaning or the context of the codes. The evidence and the quotes used were carefully translated, as the researcher was keen to maintain accuracy and not to lose the meaning of the data. Arabic-English translation was the researcher's profession for five years prior to conducing her PhD, and when she doubted some words she looked for them in professional dictionaries exploring the synonyms and their use in sentences to make sure she used the right terms, sometimes

she sought help from other translation professionals and news editors. Each method is discussed below giving clarification for the choices made and presenting the practical considerations and justifications inherent in each.

3.3 Ethical Concerns

To ensure that this research adhered to all the required ethical considerations, the researcher abided by the ethics policy, rules and regulations recommended by Bournemouth University throughout each phase of the study. The researcher completed the ethics exams, forms and checklist, in addition to the risk assessments required for each method, and received approval from the ethics panel to commence her data collection. The participants in this research were fully informed of the research goals, procedures and their roles. They were also advised of the data protection and anonymity procedures applied. The participants' consent was obtained by requesting they sign consent forms that explained their rights with regard to the study. As per BU regulations, all the data was protected and stored on a memory stick kept in the researcher's safe, to which only she had the key throughout the period of the study. The audio files will be destroyed after the research is completed.

Only the focus groups were conducted with vulnerable people in refugees camp, raising ethical concerns as per BU checklist. No concerns were raised with regard to the interviews and the content study. Therefore, after fulfilling BU's requirements with regard to the focus groups risk assessment, the researcher received a permit from the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior to access Al-Za'atari camp. To maintain the safety and security of the researcher, one Jordanian policeman and one policewoman escorted

the researcher to all the focus groups sessions inside the camp. The participants were very kind and generous despite their difficult conditions. Additionally, keeping in mind the vulnerability of the participants, and the possibility that they might become anxious when recalling emotionally distressing events, the researcher offered participants access to the services of a counsellor experienced in handling such cases, working for a refugees' NGO. No one needed the services of the counsellor.

3.4 The Content Study

The content study was conducted to answer the first research question, which aimed to investigate the features of Al-Jazeera's coverage at the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March and April 2011. The study was conducted on the Syrian segments of 15 episodes from the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' newscast, which translates as 'the Harvest of Today' in English. The researcher chose to analyse news because the news is the channel's closest vehicle to direct communication with the audience. News programmes show the channels' most direct speech to its audience, unlike other programmes which can be analytical or include discussions on particular topics from different perspectives. Additionally, television news remains the most trusted and at the same time accessible form of information for understanding politics, disasters and wars around the world and is the most influential when it comes to political opinion (Machin & Polzer 2015). Moreover, this news programme was chosen because the researcher was looking for a sample offering a microcosm of Al-Jazeera's overall performance and this can basically be presented by the channel's main news because it is the closest to the channel's direct speech to the audience supposedly before adding any opinions or analysis. Moreover, the focus group participants identified the news as their most watched Al-Jazeera

broadcasts. The participants also identified the popular 'The Opposite Direction' programme, but this does not fit the criteria set for this method as it is a talk show and its outcome is based on the guests opinions, moreover its anchor has a huge influence on the views offered in his programme (Harahsheh 2013). Furthermore, that programme has been the focus of many other studies.

The 'Hasad Al-Yawm' newscast is an extensive news bulletin, which compiles all the headline news of the day alongside in-depth analysis and interviews (Boyd-Barrett & Xie 2008). This gave the researcher access to a comprehensive body of material covering what and how the channel presented the Syrian events at that time. Before November 1, 2016, 'Hasad Al-Yawm' was Al-Jazeera's main newscast and presented the news of the day in a comprehensive manner, as its name suggests. Each programme would take 1-2 hours, depending on the number of news items and their significance and it was broadcast at the peak hour 11:00 pm Mecca time. After that date, the programme's name and characteristics changed. Each 'Hasad Al-Yawm' episode opens with top stories accompanied by related videos to introduce the upcoming segments. A small introduction by the presenters, usually a male and a female, would precede each segment. Each broadcast usually comprised 2-5 different segments, each having a lead, a report, and interviews with 2-3 guests either in the studio or by phone. Further material was sometimes added depending on how deep the channel wanted to delve into the topic being discussed. The sample of this strand is made up of the Syrian segments included in 15 episodes, totalling up to 2 hours 28 minutes of material to be analysed.

The researcher obtained the 15 episodes by contacting the person responsible for the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' newscast at the Al-Jazeera headquarters. Recordings of the episodes were sent to the researcher on an external hard disk from Qatar. The chosen episodes were broadcast during the first 45 days of the Syrian uprising and covered the events that took place between March 15 and April 30, 2011, which is the period chosen for this method. The dates of the episodes were chosen to reflect the most important events identified by the researcher on Al-Jazeera's website at that time.

For the content study, the researcher studied Al-Jazeera's coverage that may have shaped the perceptions of its Syrian audience; such as the language used by the channel to cover the Syrian events, including the wording, the descriptions and the connotations that they hold. She also studied the tone, what was highlighted in the segment, who the segment tended towards and whom it defended. In addition, the researcher looked how the channel presented the events, how it prioritized the news, how it used its sources and how it dealt with the imagery and texts, in addition to how the anchors dealt with the program's guests. Recognizing these aspects helped the researcher define the channel's stance, rhetoric and balance, and categorise the coverage in terms of influence, how it addressed the Syrian audience and in what mode it tried and intended to place and direct them, in addition to how this influenced the Syrian uprising's course of events.

The researcher chose to conduct a qualitative content study on these episodes because studying the content with its different facets would help address and answer the first research question. Unlike a quantitative content study, a qualitative content study allows researchers to gain a better understanding of what is happening and allows for greater freedom as the

coding process lets themes freely emerge from the data rather than restricts them. Hence, this methodology allowed the researcher to deal with the whole content offered by Al-Jazeera with an amount of freedom that enabled her to investigate the specifics and the latent meanings occurring in the channel's discourse with which the Syrian viewers were addressed, under a 'summative content analysis' as described by Holsti (1969 cited by Hseih & Shannon 2005). Quantitative content studies overlook several aspects of texts and their overemphasis on quantifying results can lessen their accuracy. Additionally, their findings can only be applied to a specific direction and cannot be generalized to a wider one. While the qualitative content study offers a subjective interpretation of the text content through a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns, as defined by Hseih & Shannon (2005), it also moves beyond the concrete content to examine the latent meaning present within the source. This means that the findings may vary from one researcher to another (Kracauer 1952; Mayring 2000). The researcher sought to thoroughly explore the features of the coverage used by the channel to address the Syrian viewers. It also tries to investigate any latent meanings in the material being analysed.

The researcher chose to analyse the whole content presented in the Syrian segments of the 15 episodes of "Hasad Al-Yawm" obtained, including all the reported events. These 15 episodes were originally chosen after reading all the reports related to the Syrian uprising on Al-Jazeera's website during the first two months. The initial selection was based on the material that reported significant demonstrations, mass killings, major reform announcements, and Assad's first speech. The researcher then transcribed all the Syrian segments, each under the date of broadcast, dividing the content into top stories, leads, reports and anchors discourse, which are the usual sections of the segment. By reading and re-reading the transcriptions,

the main features were clearly identified, which helped the researcher decide the initial codes such as the provocative language and tone, using unnecessary phrases that highlight certain views, the use of sources, reporting the pro-regime stories, the emotive approach, etc. For example, in almost every segment a rhetoric that addresses emotions was clear. This not because certain events that were potentially emotive were reported, but because of how incidents were reported through the wording, expressions, metaphors, the use of sound bites, etc. Under each code the evidence from the different episodes was added. A new document of codes and evidences was ready, where many codes fit to make different themes that define the coverage. Explanations and analysis were made of the occurring themes, which had names that best described them.

3.5 The Focus Groups

The focus group method was conducted to answer the second research question, which aimed to investigate the impact of Al-Jazeera's coverage on the Syrian uprising during March and April 2011 and on the Syrian viewers' perspectives and how they decoded this coverage. It also explored whether the coverage used influenced the Syrian viewers' attitudes and reactions to the Syrian uprising and if it, consequently, influenced the uprising's course of events, referring to what the focus groups participants think. The best method to address this research question was to conduct an audience study that investigated the personal experiences and opinions of a sample of the viewers themselves in-depth, exploring their perspectives about Al-Jazeera's coverage and how influential they thought it was, and allowing immediate interaction with the participants to obtain further details on points of interest that may arise.

To fulfil these requirements, the researcher had two options: conduct interviews or focus groups. Focus groups were preferred as they allow the researcher to interview several people together (Leung, Savithiri 2009), thereby accessing a variety of opinions. Second, by being part of a focus group, the participants were able to explore and clarify their views, by developing dimensions of understanding that would be unlikely to emerge in a one-to-one interview setting. Third, focus group discussions provoke communication between participants about their attitudes towards a topic (Leung, Savithiri 2009), encouraging them to talk with one another, ask questions, exchange anecdotes and comment on one another's experiences and views (Kitzinger 1995). It also encourages participants to explore the issues of importance and express their opinion in their own words; this sometimes takes the research in new and unexpected directions further enriching the findings. Additionally, it encourages engagement from participants who might otherwise be reluctant to be interviewed on their own, or who feel that they have nothing to say (Kitzinger 1995). Through this method, it was useful to watch people's reactions and interactions during the sessions, the way they reminded each other about certain events, what they agreed and disagreed about and in what way, and how honest and eager they were to tell their stories and debate with one another. Notably, the focus groups method helps the researcher explore people's knowledge and experiences and examine "not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way" (Kitzinger 1995, p. 299).

In terms of timeline, the focus group method was the first to be conducted for this research. This was then followed by the content analysis and then the interviews. This is because the researcher wanted to know from Syrians themselves what Al-Jazeera programme they preferred to watch before deciding on which to analyse. In addition, it was important for the

researcher to start out with the focus groups, as during the course of the study she realized that it was necessary for her to learn more about the actual events that took place inside Syria at that time, information that could not be easily gained via the media and previous literature, which presented two contradictory versions. Reality on the ground could only be obtained by speaking with Syrians who had lived through the events, before studying Al-Jazeera's coverage. Having a clear picture of the events according to the 73 focus group participants guided the researcher when performing the content analysis.

Participants: Recruitment and Details

The researcher conducted 10 focus group sessions with 73 Syrian nationals mainly from Dara'a, Damascus and Homs. 8 sessions took place in Jordan and 2 in Bournemouth, UK. The focus groups were conducted according to BU ethical procedures and upon the approval of Bournemouth University Social Science and Humanities Ethics Panel, this will be further explained in a separate section later in this chapter. 4 focus groups were held in the Al-Za'atari Refugee camp in the Jordanian Northern city of Al-Mafraq; 3 focus groups involved 24 participants from the Syrian Southern city of Dara'a, where the Syrian uprising first took place, and 1 focus group involving 7 participants from Damascus and Homs. These first 4 focus groups took place on a Saturday between October 13, 2018 and November 03, 2018. The other 4 focus groups took place in the Jordanian capital Amman; 2 focus groups involved 14 participants from Homs; 1 focus involved 5 participants from Dara'a and 1 focus group involved 8 participants from Damascus, Homs and Aleppo. The participants of the latter focus group involved 6 Syrian media professionals and 2 Syrian political analysts. The profession of the members of these groups was

particularly mentioned because they work for media and politics which is this research's concern; and it is worth mentioning the data they provided was based on more professional background. These 4 focus groups were held in December 2018. The last 2 focus groups, involving 15 participants in total, were conducted with Syrian nationals residing in Bournemouth, UK. The participants in these last 2 focus groups came mainly from Central Damascus and they lived in better living conditions in both Syria and England, unlike the other participants. They have a different lifestyle, background and education, and arrived in the UK as refugees seeking security until stability is re-established in Syria and they remained relatively unaffected by the war. These two focus groups took place in January 2019.

The focus group participants were recruited on the basis of their answers to a three-page pre-selection survey containing multiple choice questions. This was designed to ensure that the participants met the requirements for inclusion in the research, that is, among other criterions set: that they were in Syria in March and April 2011; that they depended on Al-Jazeera as a news source during that period; that they spent a number of hours watching news every day at that time; and, that they were older than 30, so could be said to be aware of the significance of the events and how Al-Jazeera was covering them. The pre-selection survey was distributed in Al-Za'atari camp almost one month prior to conducting the focus groups. The survey was distributed and collected by Syrian volunteers living in the camp and working for an NGO. After receiving the collected surveys from the volunteers, the researcher chose the ones that fit the required criteria, called the people who had filled them in on the mobile numbers provided, and asked them to join the scheduled focus group. The researcher also utilized the snowball sampling method to choose the participants in the 4 focus

groups conducted in Amman and the 2 focus groups conducted in Bournemouth, UK. The researcher's Syrian contacts helped her recruit participants and made sure the selected candidates met the research criteria mentioned in the pre-selection survey.

Having participants from different major cities in Syria and from different social, financial and educational strata, which was planned by the researcher before conducting the focus groups, ensured diverse data would be available concerning Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising. The participants' different backgrounds enabled the researcher to get hold of different perspectives and points of view which could enrich the data and consequently the study's outcome. These diversities also boost the study's dimensions and bolster the research's credibility and integrity. Their consensus on what happened pointed to the real events that took place in the different parts of Syria. This helped the researcher to better understand what happened and consequently build better conclusions. The participants also varied in terms of how they experienced the events. There were those who were in the middle of it all, bearing witness to the atrocities and who were able to compare Al-Jazeera's coverage with what was happening in reality; those who participated in the protests and were detained and tortured; and, those who learned about the atrocities from TV but did not really experience them (Central-Damascus groups). In the mix of participants recruited for the research the researcher tried to imitate an actual Syrian community with its diversities. The researcher was limited to talking only with Syrian refugees as she was unable to access Syria for safety and security reasons.

The researcher decided to conduct the focus groups in Jordan, the researcher's own country, first, because Jordan is the third largest host country of Syrian refugees (it hosts more than 650,000 refugees, according to the European Commission (2020)), and, second, because official governmental approvals and access to Syrians would be facilitated as the researcher is a Jordanian citizen. Meeting refugees from one country was sufficient for the purposes of this study given that it was part of a wider, integrated research study. The researcher chose Al-Za'atari because it is the biggest refugee camp in Jordan and the second largest in the world as per the WFP report (2019) with almost 80,000 Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2018). One of Al-Za'atari's limitations was that the refugees there come mostly from the Syrian Southern city of Dara'a, which is closest to the Jordanian border. Dara'a, is also the city where the first uprising took place and the people there witnessed most of the important events that happened in March and April 2011. This contributed significantly to enriching the research. However, the researcher struggled to find participants from other cities in the camp as she had planned, and the ones she did find were mostly unwilling to participate. The researcher, therefore, decided to conduct only 4 focus groups in the camp instead of 10 and to seek out participants from other Syrian cities in the Jordanian capital, Amman, and in the UK.

The focus group data was collected from the participants' answers to 14 pre-prepared questions asked during each session, such as asking about how the uprising in Dara'a started and why according to the participants, how they evaluate the beginning of the uprisings in terms of being peaceful or armed, how did they know about the uprisings taking place in the other countries and in Dara'a, would they relate the events to the content watched on TV, Al-Jazeera in particular, and how do they evaluate Al-Jazeera's

coverage of the events, if they believed Al-Jazeera had a role in providing new information and enhancing people's consciousness, and if they believed this would have a role in spreading the uprisings throughout Syria. The researcher also added or removed questions depending on the conversation, where the participants had come from and the outcomes that had emerged during previous focus groups.

Undoubtedly, audiences do not readily perceive the extent to which they are being influenced and manipulated (Gentile, Arturo 2003). These realities contributed to the researcher's decision to carefully evaluate the participants' responses when describing Al-Jazeera's coverage of Syrian events by observing their attitudes, reactions, facial expressions and body language and pose indirect questions to investigate how the participants perceived Al-Jazeera's coverage and its influence upon them, to afford insight into the actual impact Al-Jazeera had on its Syrian audience at the outset of the Syrian uprising.

The presence of the Jordanian policeman who escorted the researcher at all the focus groups sessions might be thought to have had an influence on the outcome data due to the tension he might unintentionally cause to the participants, which could have had an influence on their answers. However, the escort policeman is based in the camp, is familiar with all the camp residents, and they enjoy a good relationship. Hence, there is a small possibility that his presence would have provoked tension among the participants and influenced the outcome of the interviews. Moreover, the presence of a Jordanian policeman was not worrisome when speaking about Al-Jazeera's performance during the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising; even if political arguments arouse, they were related to the Syrian issues, not to Jordan.

3.6 The Interviews

The interview method was used to answer the third research question, which focused on understanding the factors that contributed to Al-Jazeera's coverage, such as the editorial line, editorial decisions and journalistic practices. It also sought to examine possible reasons, objectives, pressures and political commitments relating to the coverage provided, if any. The researcher opted to conduct semi-structured interviews, which is a focused conversation between an interviewer and a respondent (Frey, Oishi 1995), so as to gather in-depth information on the views, actions, and attitudes of the participant (Kendall 2008). Many reasons led to the choice of this method. First, the researcher wanted to come to an in-depth understanding of the thoughts and experiences of the interviewees by giving each sufficient time to answer and explain their views. Second, the interview method was convenient for this study because it allowed each interviewee to speak freely, in private, without worrying about other colleagues or participants listening to them with the added security of knowing that they would be kept anonymous. This helped the researcher obtain deep and diverse data. Some questions required sensitive answers which would not have been forthcoming if the participants did not feel free to express themselves and this would have led to a negative impact on the data. Third, the researcher chose to conduct semi-structured interviews(Fontana & Frey 2005) to ensure she would be free to follow new leads as they arose (Bernard 1988). The semi-structured interview format affords flexibility while being less strict than the structured (Zhang et al 2009) and less open ended than the unstructured interview (Punch 1998)and It was necessary for the researcher to have flexible interviews in terms of sequencing and wording a result of interviewee responses (Robson 2002). Fourth, it was essential to be able to probe deeper into the participants' initial answers to

gain more detailed information (Wimmer & Dominick 1997). Fifth, the researcher travelled to another country (Qatar) to conduct most interviews, and so had only one opportunity to meet the interviewees. According to Bernard (1988), the semi-structured interview is the best method to use in these circumstances. Sixth, the researcher wanted to create a secure environment for herself and her interviewees, so that they would feel free to reveal their views in a way still enabled her to retain control over the interview process (Drever 1995).

Participants: Recruitment and Details

The researcher conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with 13 Al-Jazeera staff: 8 current employees and 5 ex-employees. The interviewees held different positions in the Al-Jazeera Arabic newsroom in March and April 2011, and all were involved with the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' newscast, the news programme analysed in the content study, at the time. Focusing on the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' broadcast also in the interviews enhances the integration of the research methods, make the research more focused and boost the findings by explaining and analysing the same object. Moreover, 'Hasad Al-Yawm' was Al-Jazeera's peak-time main newscast, gathering together all the day's significant news items and providing a comprehensive example of the channel's overall views.

The interviews were either conducted online or face-to-face, as follows: 2 ex members of staff were interviewed online because the interviewees were of different Arab nationalities and, after leaving the channel, each had settled in a different country, making online interviews the researcher's best choice. Another ex-employee was interviewed in Jordan, and 2 in Doha.

The current employees were interviewed at Al-Jazeera's headquarters in Doha. For this portion of the study the researcher relied on the snowball sampling method. By asking the participants about their reasons to leave Al-Jazeera once they were contacted and asked to be interviewed, the researcher made sure that all the interviewed former employees were on good terms with Al-Jazeera to ensure the data collected was as neutral as possible, to avoid any potential bias or inaccuracies. Should an ex-employee not be on good terms with Al-Jazeera for personal reasons, their views might, intentionally or unintentionally, be biased and this would, in turn, negatively influence the accuracy of the data they provided. Anonymity would not guarantee that they would not try to harm the reputation of the organization. On the other hand, being on good terms would not affect the accuracy of the results due to the anonymization of the data.

During the course of the study, the researcher had to carefully review the data acquired to explore the connotations and latent meanings hinted at by the interviewees when answering certain questions. The interviewees differed in their stance; some adopted defensive positions, feeling they needed to explain or justify certain actions. This was more evident in the case of current employees who were more defensive considering their jobs, loyalty or both, and it was sometimes apparent even among the ex-employees who had left the channel. The researcher expected them to be on the defensive to some extent and she was well-prepared with questions and items for debate, to be able to attain balanced answers. The researcher prepared some alternative questions and sub-questions to support incomplete answers. During the interviews the researcher had to be very attentive to every spoken word, as the interviewees were sometimes wont to reply in a way that did not answer the main question and added nothing

to the findings, in order to avoid giving a real answer. On the other hand, the researcher received many answers that were unexpected, and that opened up the discussions in ways that significantly added to the findings. Interestingly, the data that was gathered from former and current employees had many things in common, improving the credibility of the data, especially as the answers provided by the former employees were expected to be more accusatory as they had already left the channel and so had nothing to lose.

Interview data was collected from the interviewees' answers on 9 basic questions and their sub-questions that were asked in each interview, such as how the covered material is decided and if there are any consideration for the financer in this process, how they evaluate Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising at its beginning and if they think the coverage had a role in transmitting the uprisings from one place to another, the issue of the big numbers of the resigned employees during the Arab Spring. The employees' political tendencies were also discussed, in addition to discussing some accusations to the channel informed by the literature review. The researcher added and removed questions in response to the demands of the emerging discussion.

3.7 Data Analysis:

Following a study of the research's analytic approaches, the researcher chose to employ thematic analysis in all the three strands, which is one of the most common methods used to analyse transcribed verbatim data obtained through qualitative research methods (Guest et al. 2012). Thematic analysis is described as: "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79),

because it analyses and combines the frequency of codes with their meaning in context, thus adding the advantage of subtlety and complexity of a truly qualitative analysis (Joffe & Yardley 2004). Additionally, thematic analysis, with its theoretical freedom, provides a highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs of many studies to provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data. Moreover, it offers simplicity and clarity in application and combines them with complexity and richness of results (Braun & Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis is also useful for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences and generating unanticipated insights. It is also valuable in summarizing key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to managing the data (Braun, Clarke 2006).

This research is the outcome of three different but integrated strands, each comprising a huge data set with multiple diverse directions, which needed to be organized systematically to showcase every detail fully. Thematic analysis made this possible as it permitted the researcher to start with the smallest implicit detail moving towards the most explicit and clear details. Through thematic analysis the researcher exposed every single element of the data to produce meaningful codes and themes, thereby constructing a complete picture of each method's concerns without omitting any point of interest, no matter how small. This, consequently, contributed to the presentation of the data gathered through three rich and integrated strands to explain the role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising. The researcher chose to conduct the thematic analysis for the research's three methods because this helped unify the pattern and present all the emerged data in an equivalent level to be explored and investigated. Hence, this helped comparing, integrating and identifying similarities between the methods

which in turn helped introduce the research's final results and findings in a consistent and homogeneous way.

The researcher applied thematic analysis across the three strands of this research using the six-phase guide provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process the researcher followed is illustrated in the table below:

Six-phase guide	The Focus Groups	The Content Study	The Interviews
1. To be familiar with the data by transcribing, reading, re-reading, and noting down initial ideas.	After transcribing the focus group conversations, the researcher read each focus group transcript and wrote down the main points of each answer, in addition to the significant quotes that could be useful later in the report phase. Then she re-read the transcriptions to make sure that no important points were missed.	The researcher transcribed all the Syrian segments, which enabled her to be more aware of the details and words used. This helped the researcher draw a mind map to organize the codes and themes for use at a later stage. By reading and re-reading the transcribed segments the researcher obtained a general idea about how the program dealt with the Syrian uprising and highlighted the most salient tools used.	The researcher transcribed the interviews, then separated the ex-employees' transcriptions from those of the current ones, and worked on each group separately at the beginning. This helped the researcher to better distinguish the differences and similarities between the views of the two types of employees and be able to compare data.
2. Generating initial codes by coding interesting features and collating data relevant to each code.	The researcher then read the new document where the important points and quotes were gathered in order to have an initial idea about the different codes that started to emerge. By reading this document over and over again, codes started to be clearer and were moved to a separate	The researcher had to initially analyse each Syrian segment on its own, to be able to go through the details of how events were transmitted in more depth. Then, she started underlining the initial codes and the useful quotes to be used later. After reading the analysed segments several times codes started to clearly appear. The further the episodes went in time the	The researcher read each group transcriptions (current/former employees) and wrote down the emerging initial codes and ideas in a separate document, then she re-read the transcriptions and moved the related material and useful

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		more solid the codes became as they were repeated in the same pattern. The emerged codes and quotes were all moved to a separate document divided according to the parts of each segment (lead, report and questions). This way the researcher was able to familiarize herself with the occasion each code was mentioned. This document was refined three times until the researcher obtained a well-organized and comprehensive material.	quotes to the new document, each under fitting initial code. Then the researcher read the transcriptions again to ensure that she had not missed any potential information.
3. Searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes and gathering the data relevant to each theme.	The researcher then went back to read the transcriptions to see if there were any missing points. Afterwards she read and re-read the codes and started to collate the ones that had similarities into potential themes and the quotes started to initially fit in the new themes.	Themes then started to occur after reading and re-reading that codes document. The initial themes were written down in a separate document and the related codes were moved to their themes. The researcher then returned to the transcription to make sure no further important events or significant quotes fit or suggested themes that had been missed. Through this step many pieces of evidence and quotes that were not clear previously fitted into the material after the deep coding and theme-ing process took place.	After identifying the differences between the 2 groups, the researcher put them in one document. She read the new document and gathered similar codes. She re-read the emerged document and collated all the codes that could offer a potential theme in another separate file.
4. Reviewing themes by checking if they work in relation to the coded extracts and to the entire data set, in addition to generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.	The researcher prepared a thematic map that helped organize her data, make sure no theme was similar to another and that all codes fit in the right theme.	The researcher prepared a thematic map that helped organize her data, make sure no theme is similar to another and that all codes fit in the right theme.	The new themes document was refined 3 times to enable the researcher to make sure all codes fit in the right theme, and that all themes were consistent and comprehensive.
5. Defining and	The researcher thought	The themes already had	According to the

naming themes by refining the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells.	about the best name each theme could have.	initial names used during the coding process to enable recognition. After the coding process was completed the researcher went back to give the most suitable names to the themes.	content of each theme the researcher thought about the name that best describes it.
6. Producing the report, a scholarly report of the analysis, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature.	The researcher started preparing the document of the final analysis. She read the codes of each theme and started the writing up process using any significant notes written previously by the researcher during the focus groups sessions, then she added the quotes that could be used as evidence. After all, the researcher had a final look at the transcriptions to make sure no important information or quote were missed.	The researcher started preparing the document of the final analysis using previous analysis of each Syrian segment, the themes and their codes, in addition to the evidence and the quotes.	The researcher then started to write the final report, where the themes were well presented, described and quotes were added as evidence. The researcher then checked to see that the findings addressed the specific research question.

Table 1 Thematic Analysis Six-Phase Guide

3.8 Chapter Summary

In summary, three empirical studies were carried out to develop a three-stage methodological design to explore the extent and nature of Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising. The first stage data was collected from Al-Jazeera's news coverage of the Syrian uprising and studied the language, tone and the other tools of impact used such as the use of sources and images, and juxtaposition. The second stage was collected from the analysis of focus groups data, to explore the influence of Al-Jazeera coverage on the Syrian audience, and the third was collected from the analysis of interview data which investigated the reasons and the factors behind the channel's coverage. The findings will be discussed in detail in the following three chapters.

Chapter 4: Content Study

This chapter reports the findings of the content study to investigate Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising based on its coverage during March and April 2011; this is through examining the features of the channel's coverage. The identified themes emerged from an analysis of the Syrian segments of 15 broadcasts from the news program 'Hasad Al-Yawm'. Each is presented with a description and discussion, followed by critical analysis and assessment. The content study was designed to answer the first research question:

RQ1: How did the Al-Jazeera news channel report the events of the Syrian uprising at its beginning in March and April 2011?

- What were the textual features in terms of coverage?

- What sources were used in news reports?

- What visuals were used in news reports?

- What are the features of the anchors' debates with the different guests.

- To what extent was coverage balanced?

The evidence suggests that Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' program represented a stance that supports people and demonstrators against the Syrian regime. This position was sometimes directly portrayed, through the actual discourse and the anchors' attitudes, and at other times indirectly via the choice of sources, images and soundbites. Two themes emerged when analyzing the content of the channel's coverage: Provocative

Anti-Regime Reporting, and negative portrayal of the Syrian regime. However, when studying Al-Jazeera's coverage, the data revealed that during the first two weeks of the Syrian uprising, the channel offered limited coverage, particularly as assessed by quantity, as evidenced by the following table (Table 2). However, this can be considered unusual based on the channel's typical coverage, especially because significant events were taking place in Syria early on, including the deaths of protestors (according to the channel's website and the focus group participants). Initially, it appears Al-Jazeera preferred to keep its coverage minimal in terms of Syria, focusing instead on the other revolutions. As time went on, Al-Jazeera started to lend momentum to the Syrian story, making a notable stand against the regime (a stance that was perceptible even when the coverage was limited), as will be explored and detailed in this chapter. Al-Jazeera's unusually limited coverage of events in Syria initially has since triggered scholars to probe and question the channel's decisions at this time (Abdullah 2012; Khasib, Ersoy 2016; Kanan, Shalaby 2011; Abdulnabi 2018). The following table (Table 2) illustrates the time dedicated to the Syrian story in the analyzed episodes, illustrating how the duration increased.

Episode date	Duration	News tickers
15/03/2011	No Syrian segment	3 news tickers
16/03/2011	8 minutes	3 news tickers
21/03/2011	No Syrian segment	No news tickers
24/03/2011	No Syrian segment/one headline	16 news tickers
25/03/2011	22:25 minutes	18 news tickers
30/03/2011	One minute	9 news tickers
02/04/2011	09:28 minutes	9 news tickers

05/04/2011	Less than one-minute	4 news tickers
06/04/2011	No Syrian segment	3 news tickers
08/04/2011	29 minutes	5 news tickers
12/04/2011	11:23 minutes	6 news tickers
19/04/2011	30:19 minutes	4 news tickers
23/04/2011	25:10 minutes	11 news tickers
27/04/2011	14:04 minutes	10 news tickers
30/04/2011	11:03 minutes	13 news tickers

Table 2 Time dedicated to the Syrian story in the analyzed episodes

4.1 Provocative Anti-Regime Reporting:

As mentioned previously, Al-Jazeera started to offer a more intense coverage of the events in Syria as time passed. This was evident in terms of quantity, where the number of news pieces addressing the Syrian uprising increased notably, as did the length of the time dedicated to each of these news items. The coverage clearly defended the demonstrators and the Syrian people and demonised the Syrian regime. The data included multiple different examples of the textual features that proved this pro-people and anti-regime coverage. First, the discourse the program reflected in reference to the Syrian events could be considered inflammatory as it extended beyond merely persuasive. Second, Al-Jazeera's coverage highlighted potential worries and concerns to Syrian viewers. Third, the analysis showed that the coverage integrated emotive elements into the Syrian stories. Fourth, the coverage addressed the Syrian viewers in a manner found to encourage revolution. All these features arguably have the potential to have shaped the Syrian audience's perceptions in a specific direction.

Rhetoric Inflaming and Motivating Protestors:

The data analysis revealed that Al-Jazeera's discourse, covering the Syrian uprising, was inflammatory, it aimed to provoke viewers' negative sentiments. This included the use of emotive words, expressions and tone, in addition to detailing atrocities against civilians, who were described as peaceful and yearning for their freedom, in an image that shows people and demonstrators as victims and security forces, who were clearly and directly blamed for these atrocities, as killers. For example, the channel frequently used sad and emotive language to describe the atrocities caused by the regime, using grievous and moving terms, such as by using the description, "a bloody day" and the examples below:

> The security forces added a number of civilians to their list of victims when they shot their bullets at protestors in the bereaved city of Dara'a who dwell in mourning for its sons were killed by the security forces. (March 25, 2011)

> The killing scenes are present in the streets and neighborhoods of Dara'a, which mourns its sons who were killed by the security forces. (March 25, 2011)

This is contrary to the channel's rhetoric when reporting the regime's stories about the atrocities police and army suffered from which was short, direct and lacked emotion. Additionally, using the words 'darkness' and 'horror' in the following example, and highlighting random shootings and detainments:

> From the darkness, Syrians called to the world to help protect them from the horror caused by the security forces and the Shabiha; saying that soldiers randomly shot people and attacked tens of houses dragging their sons to unknown places. (April 12, 2011)

Moreover, using the words 'snatch' and 'stolen' in the following example suggests a clear anti-regime stance in the coverage, which implicitly emphasizes that protesting is the only solution for the people of Syria.

> The regime's promises of reform could not stop the escalating tension, people only believed in protesting to snatch their freedom and dignity, stolen four decades previously, as they say. (April 12, 2011)

Additionally, choosing to broadcast emotive soundbites from Syrian officials who had resigned, such as:

> I resigned because I was unable to protect my sons' [Syrians] chests from the evil bullets. (April 23, 2011)

In addition, the coverage mentioned that women were also being detained and tortured, which is an especially sensitive issue as women are considered vulnerable and fragile and should not be exposed to this intolerable situation. For Arabs, this attack on women is even more sensitive due to cultural and religious considerations. This way of expressing and describing events could provoke sadness and rage among viewers, also showing the supportive stand by Al-Jazeera relative to the Syrian uprising, which again had an influence on viewers, since the channel

was widely watched and trusted by all Arabs (Whitaker 2011; Seib 2008; Lynch 2005; Alvarez 2006). Additional examples were evident in many other episodes, such as:

> This silence is not the one forced by the security forces' weapons, it is a civil disobedience in Homs, which has 700,000 inhabitants. This is a new weapon for those who long for a Syrian Spring. (April 19, 2011)

In this example, the language includes a call to action, as it suggests the vibrant Syrian cities have become silent and quiet, due to fear of the security forces and their weapons, hinting this, albeit indirectly, may plant rage and sadness in viewers' minds. Also, using the idea of 'longing' shows the channel's sympathies are with the Syrian revolutionaries. They acknowledge freedom as the Syrian goal; stating that Homs, which has 700,000 inhabitants has become quiet yearning for its freedom. Stating that disobedience is a new 'weapon' of the people emphasizes that the barriers created by fear are surmountable, thereby perhaps motivating viewers to act due to the collective effect explained by Freeland (2011). Another example from a Syrian segment reports is:

> People said we want freedom. The regime replied death will be waiting for you. People said then we want to overthrow the regime. (April 23, 2011)

In an imaginary stirring short conversation between the regime who was directly and frankly demonized and the people who were pictured as oppressed, narrated by the voiceover describing what he earlier considered a 'Syrian rage day' due to funerals, the murder of mourners and

resignations, implying support of the demonstrators and the Syrian people. More examples are seen a week later in the statement: "Tanks turn Dara'a from a role model to a lesson for others" (April 30, 2011). In an inflammatory indication that more violence is taking place against civilians in Dara'a explaining that this turned the city from a role model to a lesson for other cities to learn, which also indirectly praises the city's revolutionary spirit. In addition, the following examples explicitly blame the regime for their oppression, atrocities and mass killings encouraging revolt. These are narrated in an emotive and inflammatory way, with the discourse also emphasizing that the atrocities will not stop Syrians, as they only make them stronger, addressing Syrian viewers' patriotism as a way to encourage them:

> Here, the path to freedom is surrounded by the bullets of snipers and Sahbiha and those who believe that when people revolt, only death can stop them. In Barzeh near Damascus people are running away from live ammunition that wants to steal their innate right to 'freedom'. (April 23, 2011)

> The Syrian uprising has entered a bloodier phase where no voice is louder than a gun, Syrians have bled so much, but this has not stopped them, on the contrary it has exacerbated the situation. (April 30, 2011)

Rhetoric Building Concern:

The analyzed data also revealed the coverage by 'Hasad Al-Yawm' newscast highlighted issues that build concerns and possibly promoted worries among Syrian viewers. The reported events were pictured as unstoppable and irreversible, and it was suggested that fighting for their freedom and rights was the only way Syrians could save their country, with death, civil war and foreign intervention being the only alternatives. For

example, the broadcast once warned that protests were dividing Syrians into either supporters or opposition, raising anxiety about the possibility of civil war, as illustrated in the following example:

> … Calls which echo reached the coastal city of Latakia as well, and it seems that it is dividing Syrians into two parties, anti-regime calling for reforms and enactment of civil society, and pro-regime whose rally did not stay silent and organized pro-regime marches. (March 25, 2011)

The reporting also explicitly emphasizes the prospect of foreign intervention, which might also cause anxiety among Syrians, after witnessing what happened in Iraq following the 2003 American intervention.

> Syria is now entering a phase that might necessitate intervention by the international community, due to the scale of the bloodshed. (March 25, 2011)

> Syria is entering a level of conflict over which the international community can't stay silent due to the bloodshed. (March 25, 2011)

Additionally, the coverage focused on the rapid spread of protests across Syria. Highlighting the flow of the protests at the beginning of the Syrian uprising may have encouraged those Syrian viewers who wished for freedom and change to participate and speak up, while also scaring those who are hesitant into believing the situation is irreversible and out of

control. Such rhetoric might have fueled a willingness to overcome fears and participate in accelerating the process before negativity takes over.

> In Homs … reports speak of violent conflicts, live ammunition and casualties in the tens … The Kurdish majority city Qamishli, also went out in solidarity with other Syrian cities … Likewise, an uprising took place in the coastal city of Tartus for the first time in solidarity with Dara'a. Regardless of their sizes, protests also took place in Latakia, Baniyas, Hama, Idlib, suburbs of Damascus like Tal, Arbein, Douma, Harasta, Daria, Ma'damia in addition to border towns like Tal Khalakh near Lebanon and Boukamal near Iraq. (April 8, 2011)

> Photos on the internet showed thousands of protestors in Nimer town in Dara'a, again demanding freedom and overthrow of the regime. The same scene is repeated in Madaya, in the suburbs of Damascus at the funeral of a protestor who was killed yesterday, a Friday, when thousands of Syrians protested all over the country and around 70 were killed according to human rights organizations … (April 30, 2011)

Rhetoric provoking an emotional response:

Additionally, the data analyzed revealed that Al-Jazeera's rhetoric reporting and describing Syrian events, was emotive especially when emphasizing religion and patriotism. In contrast, the killings by revolutionaries reported by the Syrian regime's media was barely mentioned by Al-Jazeera. In Syria, the majority Sunni Muslims are thought to have been mostly responsible for the uprising, apparently due to the continuous oppression they had suffered under the Alawites' rule (Wikas 2007; Rubin 2007). Religion, whether Islam or Christianity, is sacred to most Arabs, thus making references with the potential to trigger religious sentiment may have created a powerful reaction in terms of viewers' perceptions and reactions.

In many cases, Al-Jazeera's focus on religious sentiments in the analysed program is apparent. For example, it continuously highlights the importance of Fridays,[1] emphasizing the link between its religious and rebellious significance to the audience. In addition, it included sound bites from well-known Muslim clerics condemning the regime's practices against civilians, thereby enhancing the credibility and sincerity of the narrative. Also using sentences inspired by the Quran throughout the coverage might have had subliminal effects on viewers, as could highlighting the regime's disrespect of Mosques. All this was expressed with an emotive tone and dramatic language, such as:

> The house of God [the mosque] could be safe, but not always! As in Al-Omari Mosque in Dara'a people were being killed. (April 23, 2011)

The language in this example is emotive and provocative. By reporting that Muslims were being killed inside a mosque and underlining this is the house of God could be considered inflammatory, because this is a blasphemous act that cannot be ignored. The regime is clearly shown here to be disregarding Islamic teachings, as killing people inside mosques is strictly taboo in Islam, and even in historic wars people were always safe once inside a mosque, even enemies. Moreover, below are two further examples referring to Fridays, thereby creating a connection in the viewer's

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[1]Fridays: The major protests during the Arab Spring took place on Fridays, as on Fridays people gather for the weekly Friday prayer (which takes place in the mosque and is mostly attended by men). So huge numbers of people pray in mosques on Friday, bringing people together making it easier to start a protest.

minds between the revolutions and the Friday prayers.[2] The coverage indirectly emphasized that the protestors being killed and rebuked were those who had practiced Friday prayer, potentially also triggering an emotive reaction by provoking religious sentiment.

> After the Friday prayer, protests spread in the different Syrian cities calling for 'freedom' and reform … the southern city of Dara'a was the bloodiest where many victims fell, witnesses said so many were killed by the snipers and security forces. (April 8, 2011)

> Protests continued and reached Homs where thousands protested after the Friday prayer calling for 'freedom', while others called to dismiss the governor. The same scene was repeated in Hama, where again the protestors took the streets after the Friday prayer calling for 'freedom'. (March 25, 2011)

A further aspect of Al-Jazeera's emotive discourse noted in the data related to a tendency to provoke patriotic sentiment, which might also have a significant impact on Syrian viewers' perceptions. The channel stressed the concept of national solidarity, always emphasizing the fact that the protests took place across Syria in consolidation with Dara'a. Also, it pictured protests as a factor uniting Syrians, and picturing the regime as responsible for dispersing them. For instance: "The peaceful protests which united all segments of Syrian society", and "The sudden live ammunition which dispersed their unity" (March 25, 2011).

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[2]Friday prayer: In Islam Friday is a holy day, and a special prayer is conducted each Friday (preferably in mosques). Thus, Muslims usually gather in large numbers in mosques for this prayer.

A review of the data collected also revealed that most videos broadcast in the program's Syrian segment included patriotic emotive content. For example, on April 2, 2011, the channel broadcast a video of people protesting against the backdrop of an old revolutionary song[3] that is special to Arabs and Syrians, as it relates to the war with Israel in 1973[4] conducted in the hope of regaining the lost lands in Palestine. Arabs were emotional about this subject, and their emotions were reflected in literature and the arts, which include provocative patriotic songs, movies and books. This had a significant impact on people in that era, which is still apparent now. The song could be why the news team chose this particular video from among the many others they received; as otherwise the footage itself shows a very typical protest. The programmers were most likely aware of the emotiveness of this song combined with a revolutionary scene, as evident in the voiceover comment made immediately after the video, stressing the song and its relationship to freedom "On the melodies of 'Fairouz' and in hope for a free future, Syrians spent their night in Baniyas". Another example of provoking patriotic sentiments is:

> This is Damascus, the city of Jasmine, people continue protesting
> … they did not receive an answer for their call for freedom, so
> they kept calling. (April 8, 2011)

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[3] The revolutionary song is called 'Khabtet Adamkon' and was penned by the famous Lebanese singer Fairouz.
[4] October 1973: a war fought from October 6 to 25, 1973, by a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria against Israel.

In another emotive image Damascus is described as 'the city of Jasmine' through a sad frame. Damascus was always known as the city of Jasmine, and this is a source of pride for Syrians, as evident in their songs, series … etc. Mention of this by the channel reminds the Syrian viewers of the expected purity and peacefulness of their own country, which is now being desecrated by the regime's atrocities and spoiled with blood. This in turn provokes feelings of sadness and rage. Moreover, the coverage throws down a gauntlet to challenge Syrians' patriotism, teasing them by deliberately underestimating their capacity to counter the regime, and negatively comparing them with Egyptians stating 'Syria is not Egypt' underlining insistence and courage. This contrast was made in an episode on April 12, while in a later episode, on April 23, the coverage praised Syrians, stating that theirs is now numbered among the victorious Arab revolutions; stressing "Those who said that Syria is not Libya or Yemen, have now received the response". This reflects the increase in the number of protestors as Syrian uprising became more serious. Mocking Syrians by questioning their patriotism and courage reduces their self-perceived dignity as a population, whereas praising them is encouraging, and arguably an indirect call to be more committed to their revolution.

Moreover, Al-Jazeera's rhetoric also emphasized Pan-Arabism, by recalling the Arab Spring revolutions and the entire revolutionary spirit that took over the Arab world, in an emotive and patriotic frame. Again, stressing the importance of Fridays, and lamenting that the price of freedom is always blood under the current regimes, creates emotive metaphors that could potentially motivate and encourage viewers. For example:

> "It's Friday! Friday in Syria is the 'persistence', in Yemen it is the 'tolerance', in Egypt is 'sterilization', and in the other Arab

countries from East to West it means looking for freedom despite the different paths which range between bloody and flowing with dark red!". (April 8, 2011)

Rhetoric Suggesting Support for Change:

In another context, Al-Jazeera's coverage on the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' program was also encouraging; as the analyzed data revealed, in many cases the coverage encouraged and urged Syrians to support or participate in the ongoing uprising. This was achieved by praising the uprising and those taking part in it. For example, on March 25, the rhetoric describing a day where protests spread across Syria, stated "It was a Syrian day of excellence". It was implied that this is how Syrians should be, brave enough to demonstrate and defend their dignity and freedoms. Another example was that "on Friday people protest looking for freedom", indirectly uncovering the channel's pro-revolution stance by juxtaposing the notion of freedom with protests. The coverage also suggested that the channel sought to raise the morale of Syrian viewers by picturing the Syrian people as on the stronger side of the conflict, urging them to overcome the fear they were accustomed to living in. The program expressed the opinion that this level of courage is indicative of real revolutions with the potential to be 'victorious'. This is illustrated in the following two examples, which clearly hint the regime is weakening:

> The regime and its followers in the Ba'ath party increasingly flounder. In their failures, demonstrators find fuel for unprecedented protest movements that amount to the victorious and ongoing Arab revolutions. (April 23, 2011)

The situation is increasingly exacerbated in Dara'a, which is the thing that forced the Syrian army to call for support. (April 30, 2011)

Al-Jazeera's encouraging rhetoric extends to directly announcing that the Syrians continued protesting, ignoring official warnings and the security forces' practices, after speaking against the regime was considered taboo, even among close family members. This emphasizes people's strength against the regime's weakness, and stresses there is major change afoot in Syrian society in terms of intimidation, which in turn encourages Syrian viewers, as illustrated by the following two examples:

The time of fear is over! Students in Damascus University protested despite the minister's warning [to stop protesting]. (April 19, 2011)

In Syria, which has one of the most vicious security forces in the Arab world, the protestors say that the barrier created by fear has totally broken down. (April 30, 2011)

The analyzed coverage also focuses on the resignations of officials from the Syrian regime and the Ba'ath party, highlighting that these resignations took place with the support of the Syrian people, in a refusal of the regime's atrocities as described in detail. The coverage actively portrayed resignations as a continuous and significant occurrence, anticipating and amplifying the potential for discontent among highly ranked officials, even before they took place, referring to "a series of resignations" when there had only been three, also by saying:

> This is the first official figure to give up his position and not the last … the chain of resignations has broken. (April 23, 2011)

Focusing on officials' resignations, encouraged the ordinary people to protest evident in what was reported in the same episode about the increasing number of protestors due to resignations, which revives the argument of the 'Groupon effect" identified by Freeland (2011).

> The continuous protests for freedom noticeably increased after the resignations occurred. (April 23, 2011)

This was how the channel covered the Syrian events on the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' program addressing Syrian viewers. The coverage adopts an explicit discourse opposing the regime in different modes and shapes.

4.2. Negative Portrayal of the Syrian Regime:

This section focuses on the journalistic practices evidenced in the media texts of the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' newscast, which used many direct and indirect methods to depict the Syrian regime as responsible for the atrocities and the Syrian people as victims. This took place through the program's use of sources and top stories, contributing unnecessary and provocative sentences, and emphasizing revolutionary terms and concepts, undermining the regime's positive actions by blending them with negative ones, and juxtaposing the challenges and downgrading the regime's narratives and actions. Moreover, it discusses how anchors deal with anti-

regime vs. pro-regime guests. All these aspects question Al-Jazeera's employment of balance in its reporting.

Selection of Top Stories:

The anti-regime rhetoric was first evidenced in the top stories of the analysed Syrian segments. Brown and Yule (1983 cited by Aburub 2010) stated that headlines shape viewers' first impression, and strongly influence their perceptions and interpretations. The top stories as arranged by the news team are captured at the beginning of each analyzed segment and introduce the news that will be discussed, show a tendency to disseminate anti-regime sentiment among viewers, as 18 out of 21 of the analyzed segments' top stories reported anti-regime news, narrating them either as facts or referencing strong sources and well-known agencies. Only 3 were neutral, and mentioned the regimes attempts at reform. One example is the top story "Casualties mourn casualties" (April 23, 2011) spotlighting the regime's continuous atrocities, which affect everyone, even those who mourn their victims, disregarding humanity and mercy. Other examples are:

> Killed and wounded by the bullets of the Syrian security forces during the dispersal of demonstrations in a number of cities and villages calling for reform. (March 25, 2011)

> Killed and wounded during the funerals of the victims fallen yesterday in the different Syrian cities, and the resignation of two Parliament members and the Mufti of Dara'a in protest. (April 23, 2011)

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Raid on Al-Omari Mosque and more victims fall in Dara'a, and the Syrian government says it has a comprehensive reform plan. (April 30, 2011)

Assad's speech speaks about a conspiracy targeting his country, and Washington believes his speech does not meet Syrian's aspirations for reform. Protests in Latakia. (March 30, 2011)

In the first 3 top stories, the increasing numbers of casualties among Syrian citizens during the demonstrations and their funerals is consistently highlighted. The regime is explicitly blamed for their disrespect of sacred places. Additionally, when the regime's reforms are mentioned they are linked to its atrocities, which undermines their value. The final top story tackled the speech by the Syrian president, only highlighting the topic that denotes the credibility of the Syrian uprising, as a conspiracy theory, immediately followed by the US's negative evaluation of the speech. The speech was framed negatively from two sides even before it was further explained. These top stories might instill negative sentiments in the audience before they are fleshed out in the full stories.

Choice of Sources:

Following Al-Jazeera's motto 'The opinion and the other opinion', the Syrian segments of 'Hasad Al-Yawm' newscast comprises two main parts, one discussing the protests, atrocities by the regime, victims and the wide-spread protests, and the other discusses the Syrian regime and its point of view. However, the way the program narrated people's and demonstrators' stories differed noticeably from how it narrated the regime's ones. People and demonstrators' stories were presented as true and credible, while the

regime's were presented as unreal and bizarre, suggesting the latter to be less credible.

> Here, the path to freedom is surrounded by the bullets of snipers and Sahbiha and those who believe that when people revolt, only death can stop them. In Barzeh near Damascus people are running away from live ammunition that wants to steal their innate right to 'freedom'. (April 23, 2011)

The people's side of the story was adopted and presented as fact in many cases, and sources were also typically absent, being attributed anonymously; i.e., "according to sources, witnesses, reports, people, protestors … etc.", and sometimes attributed to reliable sources such as well-known news agencies and Human Rights Watch. The sources were always added at the very end of the statement after the viewers would have already processed them as facts, thus their anonymity would have been secondary. The atrocities were detailed, offering credibility, as illustrated in the following examples:

> The protests took place after the Friday prayer in many cities in Syria where in Dara'a was the bloodiest. Protestors were being killed and injured by security men and snipers, protestors said victims were in the tens. (April 8, 2011)

> From the darkness, people in Baniyas were able to call for help from what they saw as atrocities carried out by security forces and Shabiha. They said that soldiers randomly shot people and attacked tens of houses dragging the sons to unknown places (April 12, 2011).

In the two examples above, the references, 'protestors' and 'people', are mentioned after the story had been narrated as a fact, and even when references are clarified, the details of the atrocities dominate the narrative attracting the viewer's attention. On the other hand, when the regime's point of view is being reported, the news team clarify the source, as either the regime or its media, and makes this clear at the beginning of the report. They also refer repeatedly to the source throughout the statement ensuring rhetoric is attributed to the regime whenever expressions opposing the people are used. The regime's view is reported straight forward with no details, explanations or excuses, it comes as is with no emotive expressions and descriptions, and sometimes with a sarcastic or teasing tone that undermines its seriousness. In many spots the regime's view is scheduled in between two anti-regime narratives, which further decreases its significance and credibility, as in the following examples:

Official sources say that armed groups killed both protestors and policemen, and according to the Syrian official TV, 19 policemen were killed. (April 8, 2011)

The regime tanks are spread throughout the streets; as they say, they are there to fight what the regime calls an Islamic State project … and to end any doubt Syrian official TV showed pictures of who it was describing as terrorists. (April 27, 2011)

In his speech to parliament, Assad said that his country is exposed to what he described as a conspiracy that seeks to provoke sectarianism. (March 30, 2011)

> The regime accused external parties, infiltrators and unknown armed men, to be involved in what they considered a conspiracy against it. (April 19, 2011)

In the previous examples, the voiceover is careful to attribute the story to the regime, and also uses qualifying words and phrases 'accused', 'what they considered', and 'whom it described' hinting that the voiceover does not believe and is not responsible of the regime's narrative despite its efforts to prove it. The voiceover also presents the regime's narrative using short brief sentences, with few descriptive details, unlike its approach to reporting the people's stories. All these practices would be expected to have an impact on the regime's narrative's credibility, as it is reportedly the most trustworthy channel for Arabs.

Use of Unnecessarily Provocative Phrases

In another context, the researcher observed that unnecessary sentences were sometimes added to the reports, leads and debates, which had an impact on the direction and interpretation of the news. For example, the episode on March 16, which reported the very first day of the uprising, showed a video of a governmental figure denying that protests had taken place in Syria. The presenter introduced the video saying:

> Al-Ali [the figure's name] denies any assault by the police on those who he described as infiltrators. (March 16, 2011)

In fact, Al-Ali completely failed to mention any police assault in his reported speech. Also, the statement "who he described as infiltrators" is

again not in precisely Al-Ali's words; in fact, he said the individuals were a gathering of the families of some regular detainees wanting to meet their sons and as such were welcomed. He also confirmed there were no protests, as only a few infiltrators penetrated the family groups. Adding and mentioning inaccurate and amplified statements, especially at the beginning only gives a wrong first impression maintaining a negative framework for the story. Additionally, stating "who he describes" attributes a description to the speaker, which instills doubt about its accuracy. However, for more neutral coverage on those "who he describes as infiltrators" is not really necessary and omitting this detail does not alter the meaning. In another example, in the episode of March 25, after dedicating 3:20 minutes describing the diffusion of anti-regime protests, the voiceover devotes only 20 seconds to a pro-regime report of the protests saying:

> Calls [of protests] … that seem to divide Syrians into two groups, anti-regime calling for reforms and enacting of civil society, and pro-regime whose rally did not stay silent and 'organized' pro-regime marches, with the organizers wandering around the streets of the capital, Hama, Suwayda and Aleppo. (March 25, 2011)

In the short sentence dedicated to the pro-regime story, the voiceover mentions that pro-regime protests were organized describing the protestors as organizers, hinting that the protests were not spontaneous. Adding the word 'organized' affects the neutrality of the narrative, which would have become more neutral if the word had been removed. The way the pro-regime protests were described and reported was totally different from the anti-regime ones, as the term 'organized' was never used to describe the anti-regime protests. More examples of unnecessarily provocative wording are included below:

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says that the security forces implemented a detention campaign this morning in Homs and Dara'a in light of the protests that took place the day before yesterday 'where 3 persons were killed'. (April 2, 2011)

Protests continued even after the government announced revising the emergency law 'which has been implemented in Syria for forty years'. The protests continued even after Assad ordered an investigation of the events in Dara'a and Latakia 'where tens of people were killed last week'. 'The intensity of the protests questions how the authorities described them with few infiltrators'! (April 2, 2011)

The phrases added which are found between the quotations in the previous examples, including 'where 3 persons were killed', 'which has been implemented in Syria for forty years', and 'where tens of people were killed last week', would not affect the meaning if omitted. However, adding them ensures the regime's actions and reform attempts are negatively framed, reminding the viewers of the atrocities when presenting apparent intent to reform. Meanwhile, the final sentence in the second example, which is 'The intensity of the protests questions how the authorities described them with few infiltrators' explicitly challenged and probed the official Syrian narrative. All the sentences added negatively affected the regime's actions. Two more examples of this can be found in the episode from April 8, which reported that the "Reforms included reemploying the teachers with Niqab 'who were fired previously'", again reminding the viewers of the mistreatment of the Syrian Muslim majority for years, preventing both students and teachers wearing the veil in schools. Also, while reporting and discussing the reforms the Syrian government would be willing to

implement, the voiceover added the sentence "These reforms were unable to convince people to stop protesting despite tens of casualties", a sentence that explicitly undermines the value of the reforms and reminds viewers of the atrocities and the casualties, which in turn negatively affected reform attempts. Another example of this is in the voiceover, which stated:

> Media was absent … 'or forced to be absent', so people had to report their own news like their predecessors in Egypt, Tunis and Yemen. (April 12, 2011)

The phrase 'or forced to be absent' implies coercion does not affect the meaning if omitted; however, when added, it emphasizes the oppression, the intimidation and the regime's attempts to silence the truth by restricting media access. Also, comparing Syria with the other countries where revolutions took place adding the phrase "their predecessors" places the viewers' in a revolutionary mindset. Additionally, in another example from the same episode "In the Kurds areas whom the regime 'finally' decided to give the Syrian nationality …", the word 'finally', which could have been easily avoided without affecting the meaning, reminds the viewers of how much the Kurds suffered for this goal, which again ruined the positivity of this step taken by the regime. It also hints that it's too late for this step, especially when the voiceover continues, as despite the nationality, the Kurds kept protesting and calling for freedom. While in another example from April 19, the voiceover reports that the Syrian government lifted the emergency law, dissolved the state security court and approved a new law allowing the right to peaceful protests (which are significant steps forward in the reform process) in a negative way. This was achieved by attaching negative statements when mentioning each reform step; such as, "the

emergency law which was effective even before the Syrian President was born", "the disreputable state security court" and "on that particular day [of allowing the right of peaceful protests] the interior ministry prevented any protests". This highlights the contradictions between what the government says and does, thus reducing its credibility and devaluing its reforms.

Additional provocative phrases were also used by anchors when debating their guests. For example, in the episode of April 2, the anchor debated with an anti-regime guest regarding the possibility of initiating a dialogue to reconcile the opposition and the regime. After the anchor asked his question he added a sentence "or has a dialogue with the regime become impossible?", thereby negatively framing the regime and its attitude to create a cynical mindset in the viewer. Moreover, on April 23, when a pro-regime guest spoke about the government's future reforms, the anchor responded by negatively framing the guest's statements, adding a sentence the guest had not said that would inspire negativity towards the regime, revealing an explicit anti-regime standpoint:

> So, talking about the future means that we forget the past; 100 Syrians were killed and will just be a part of the past, without investigation! (April 23, 2011)

In her response, the anchor frames the guest's speech, which focused on identifying new solutions to allow peaceful demonstration and stop the bloodshed, by adding that planning for a better future means forgetting about those who were killed, without any investigation, which was not even hinted at by the guest. In reality, the guest's

speech tried to add a positive slant to the coming phase, yet this was negatively shaped and reinterpreted by the anchor.

Emphasizing Revolutionary Concepts to Influence Viewers

In different contexts, certain words such as 'Freedom' and 'Peaceful' were repeated continuously, even if they were not really needed in the text. It is important that journalists report the grievances and demands of protestors but repeating them constantly can establish and emphasize certain thoughts and attitudes in viewers' mindsets, which in turn might encourage and mobilize them. Media scholars have discussed how journalism can inform how we see the world and guide us towards an evaluation of events that will resonate deeply within us; actively stimulating emotive responses and directing opinion. The effect of the mass media on the public mindset from an emotional perspective is evident, and popular media sources undoubtedly affect the national psyche. Media coverage undoubtedly plays a highly significant role in fostering emotions, identifying friends and enemies, and provoking a sense of nationalism, rebellion, or both (Richards 2007; Zingarelli 2010).

First, the program adopted and frequently repeated the word 'freedom' when describing the protests, using the word on occasions when it was not necessary to mention it. The use of the term freedom helped it retain control of the character on the narrative. This is evident in many of the episodes analyzed. Here are some examples from March 25 "Protests claiming to ask for freedom... nothing but freedom!", and "After Friday prayers, protests spread in different Syrian cities calling for 'freedom' and

reform". Additionally, the anchor briefed anti-regime guest speakers by addressing various topics introducing the word 'freedom', and putting the term under a spotlight, stating "All the demands you mentioned lead to one goal, freedom!", even when the guest was not necessarily saying this. From April 2, "On the melodies of 'Fairouz' and in hope for a 'free' future, Syrians spent their night in Baniyas". And from April 12: "This is Baniyas, which witnesses hundreds of men and women protest for 'freedom' in their country".

Moreover, in an episode from April 8, debating with a pro-regime guest, the anchor emphasized that all the Syrian people are asking for is 'freedom and dignity'. However, depicting people as seeking for freedom in their own country provokes sadness and rage, as people want to live in dignity, happy and satisfied that they have their basic rights. This focus might have provoked the Syrian viewers for whom freedom was the main demand. Furthermore, the program focused on reporting soundbites from random protestors, stressing the concept of freedom; stating "our demand is freedom" (April 2, 2011), and ...

> Our case is 'freedom' from the oppression we have lived under for 30-40 years. We are all willing to be martyrs for the sake of our dignity. (March 23, 2011)

Second, the data analysis also revealed that the word 'peaceful' appeared in a repetitive pattern. Describing the protests as peaceful, and adopting this term shows the channel's stand relative to the protests and indirectly challenges the Syrian's official side of the story. The program described the

protests as having been peaceful since the very first day of the uprising. As illustrated in the following example:

> [Dara'a which] mourns its sons who were killed by the security forces since the 'peaceful' uprising first took place. (March 25, 2011)

Additionally, when debating with the anti-regime guest, after the anchor explained that protests were merely peaceful and repeated the word 'peaceful' eight times. He stated:

> Are you saying that the terrorists, as claimed by Syrian TV, must be shown on screen to prove they have nothing to do with the protests and its 'peacefulness'? (April 8, 2011)

In his additional statement, which put words into the mouth of his guest, the anchor emphasizes the word 'peaceful' to suggest that even if terrorists genuinely exist, then this does not mean that they have something to do with the peaceful protests, emphasizing that the protests were peaceful. Immediately after this, the anchor discusses a statement made by committees from all over Syria, confirming that the Syrian uprising was merely peaceful and sent to the UN. In another example from the episode on April 27, the program captured a live video from a Security Council meeting, exclusively broadcasting soundbites which condemned the Syrian regime's practices and confirmed the peacefulness of the Syrian protests.

Challenges to the Regime's Narrative

In a fifth category, the data analyzed revealed that throughout the coverage the Syrian official narratives were always challenged by a juxtaposition of words, images, soundbites and videos. Additionally, the coverage mostly showed the viewers that the story was the people's story and the regime's differed and was contradictory. The regime's narrative is mostly presented as short and direct, restricted, usually overwhelmed by the details of a larger anti-regime one. This affects how these narratives are perceived, reducing the credibility of the official narrative. The following example is evident, as after explaining and detailing the regime's atrocities against civilians, the voiceover continues:

> But the Syrian authorities offered a contradictory story; that armed groups were on top of the building and shot hundreds of civilians and policemen. (April 2, 2011)

Moreover, in the lead for the same episode, the anchor reported the Syrian authorities' acknowledgement of the protests as a positive thing, then immediately references claims of untruthful demands that differ from what the protestors' call for. Furthermore, in the episode from April 30, the anchor questions an anti-regime guest who believed the regime might change its attitude, asking him suspiciously:

> How do you still think so, when the government looks at things from a totally different side, a conspiracy, infiltrators and fake news? … Do you 'still' believe that President Bashar Assad may really implement such steps [reforms]?" (April 30, 2011)

In the above example, the anchor explicitly queries the regime's actions, undermines and probes its reports, and directly states that he does not believe the planned reforms will happen, which could serve to instill doubts in viewers' perceptions. Another example, from April 12, stresses the regime's weakness and inability to make more stories in a sense that probes credibility, after which the voiceover lists the regimes' atrocities against people using emotive detailed rhetoric, and choosing to emphasize the narrative with a strong source, the HRW which had its influence on credibility perceptions. The coverage always probes the regime's narrative and challenges it with the use of words and expressions, or by overwhelming it with contradictory detailed narratives, soundbites and videos. The example given is:

> The regime stopped offering new stories other than what it already said about armed men seeking to provoke sectarianism, people continued talking about serious human rights discriminations by beastly torturing detainees among which many were under 18 years old and this is what Human Rights Watch confirmed. (April 12, 2011)

Additionally, debating the pro-regime guest, the anchor in the episode from April 8, spoke about bloodshed as a fact, while attributing the infiltrators' story to the regime. This indicates that the anchor believes the story of bloodshed and doubts the infiltrator narrative, challenging the regime's story and lessening its credibility.

The protests and bloodshed continue, while the official narrative insists there are infiltrators …".

With regard to the use of juxtaposition, many examples were identified. For instance, in the episode from April 2, when reporting the regime's statement that armed groups were on top of the buildings shooting hundreds of people and policemen, a video of protestors marching peacefully saying "people want to overthrow the regime" is immediately played loudly, indirectly challenging the regime's narrative. In another example from the same episode, the program reported SANA (The Syrian Arab News Agency) arguing that a girl was killed by armed groups in Homs, and immediately followed this with human rights activists condemning the regime's actions and stressing freedom and fighting corruption, which again challenges the regime's narrative. Furthermore, soundbites of protestors calling "people want to overthrow the regime" are located between two pro-regime stories about armed gangs shooting people and police. In the episode from April 19, and immediately before the debate with a pro-regime guest starts, a video is presented combining different anti-regime soundbites, such as, referring to Assad, "Who kills his people is a traitor … with our souls and blood we redeem the martyr … Allah, Syria, Freedom and that's it", priming anti-regime sentiment and possibly altering perceptions of the pro-regime's guest views. Additionally, a video of a protestor blaming the regime and its media for the atrocities, denying any armed gangs or infiltrators immediately follows the debate. There is a further example in the episode from April 30, where immediately after reporting news carried by SANA regarding preparations for a comprehensive reform plan in Syria, a video is shown in which an old woman shouts and cries, appealing for help for people in Dara'a.

Additionally, on April 19, after reporting the Syrian official narrative regarding the process of dispersing a protest to stop the Salafist insurrection, a video of a huge peaceful protest with people calling "people want to overthrow the regime" and protesters calling "we are not Salafists nor Muslim Brotherhood we only want freedom" immediately followed, again indirectly challenging the official narrative. In another example, the story of a Syrian official denying that protests had taken place on the very first episode tackling the Syrian uprising on March 16, was immediately followed by a report relating US concerns about the regime's violence against protestors. Thus, the juxtaposition challenges and negates the official view, as it would be irrational for the US or any other country to have had concerns if no protests had happened. Offering different views of the same story is essential to provide balance. However, the provision of contradictory narratives at this very early stage of the conflict demands further exploration.

In the same episode as that mentioned above, the anchor asks the anti-regime guest if he believes Syria has become part of the Arabian revolutionary wave. The question once again ignores the official's story, hence challenging his credibility. In another report in the episode from April 27, the regime's narrative about fighting an Islamic state project was reported and described as a 'claim', and the voiceover immediately continued "but a quick answer came from the streets" showing a video of protestors shouting: "it's a youth protest... no Salafists no terrorists". Afterwards, the anchors discussed the European anti-regime stand. The program's rhetoric shows that it explicitly seeks to present multiple

perspectives to viewers, while implicitly it always challenges and contradicts official accounts. In the same context, the voiceover from the episode on March 30, reports that the Kurds joined the uprising, stressing that this eliminates any sectarian agenda, as claimed by the regime. His speech was followed by a video of protestors calling "one, one, one … Syrians are one". He continued:

> This proves the maturity of Syrian people after decades of oppression and intimidation, the intensity of the protests reveals the deep gap between the government and people, the more atrocities take place the more this rift expands. (April 27, 2011)

The rhetoric clearly blames the regime and challenges the credibility of its narratives about sectarian insurrection and external conspiracy. In addition to what could be perceived of as an incendiary description of the expanding gap between the regime and the Syrian people. Furthermore, on April 8, after debating the pro-regime guest who was defending the regime and highlighting its positive actions, a 2:30 minutes raw video of snipers shooting and killing people randomly in the streets including a voiceover saying: "This is what Bashar does!", immediately followed. Choosing to broadcast this particular video right after the pro-regime view indirectly contradicts it, and ensures the regime remains negatively framed. For more balanced coverage the video should have been broadcast with the remainder of the anti-regime coverage. By locating it after the debate with the pro-regime guest, the content of the video influences the regime's willingness to explain and defend the findings.

The data also revealed that the coverage highlighted the contradictions between the regime's statements and its actions. This lowers the regime's credibility, as illustrated in the following examples:

> People did not expect the security forces to face protests with live ammunition after they heard the president's advisor Bouthaina Sha'aban saying that the president ordered not to shoot protestors … The peaceful people did not expect to be shot after they believed the regime had promised not to. (March 25, 2011)

> There is a contradiction in the regime's actions as it forbids shooting protestors and has lifted the emergency law verbally; but in reality, it does the opposite, why is this allowed to happen?" (April 23, 2011)

> Orders from those at the highest ranks in Syria prevent the firing of live ammunition at protestors, but in reality, live ammunition is still being used! what does this say to you? (April 23, 2011)

However, the soundbites and videos mostly show anti-regime content, and so are sometimes shown alongside the anchors' debate, as they seek to be neutral, hence indirectly upholding anti-regime sentiments. For example, in the episode on April 23, a soundbite that states "people want to overthrow the regime" was issued in support of the voiceover's narrative regarding the successive resignations of Syrian officials. Again, in the episode from April 27, a soundbite asserts "people want to overthrow the regime" when supporting the narrative related to people's demands. Moreover, on April 12 a soundbite includes protestors calling for martyrdom, referring to a voiceover narrative about the diffusion of the protests.

Undermining of the Regime's Reform Attempts

In a sixth set of examples collected, the coverage is seen to regularly downgrade the regime's reform attempts and actions, negatively framing them. The examples here suggest people are reacting in disbelief and are suspicious of the reforms, which in turn reduces the regime's credibility and undermines its actions. For example:

> Friday protests took place despite forming a governmental committee to draft a counter-terrorism law to replace the emergency law … (April 19, 2011)

This stance was also apparent in the anchors' debates, as illustrated in the following examples. For example, below the anchor debates with a pro-regime guest saying:

> Protests in Dara'a continue. Do you think the regime had wrong estimations about the events, so the Ba'ath Party's decisions were ineffective and could not stop the protests, which continued today and spread in other cities? (March 25, 2011)

The anchor, highlights the failure of the regime's decisions to contain the protests, offering a ready packaged negative viewpoint that undermined the regime's attempts at reform. While in the example below, the way the anchor instantly provides sarcastic anti-regime answers to his own questions, presents the pro-regime guest's views as lacking credibility. This also contradicts the guests previous and upcoming statements, which keep

him under pressure and negatively impacts the outcomes. The example here is:

> You say that so many demands were met, do you mean lifting the emergency law which people still call for today? Or the political detainees who have not yet been released? Or offering Syrian nationality to the Kurds who also protested today calling for their 'freedom'? (April 8, 2011)

In another example, the anchor responds to the guest, who suggested solutions be implemented by the regime to ensure a better Syrian future, asks incredulously:

> Do you still believe that President Bashar Assad would really implement such steps? (April 30, 2011)

The anchor's expression "do you still believe … " probes the guest's trust in Assad and his actions, which can in turn reflect on the audience. Had she been seeking a more neutral answer, she would have been more positive when responding to the guest's comments about solutions and a better Syrian future.

Moreover, challenging the value of the reforms also involved highlighting those international views that undermine reform attempts, as illustrated in the following example:

> A US State Department spokesman said that the President's speech [President Assad first speech] does not meet the level of the reforms that people demand. (March 30, 2011)

The statement given before the speech itself was reported and discussed undermined Assad's speech and reforms, imposing a negative view of the action even before it was mentioned and explained, in turn triggering anti-regime sentiments and anticipated viewers perceptions. However, the coverage only highlighted the regime's minor reforms, those which are exclusive to certain groups of people, such as the Kurds or people from certain Syrian cities like Homs, which in general do not match the Syrian majority's expectations. Thus, even when major attempts at reform were mentioned they were always attached to negative statements, which in turn could disappoint the Syrian viewers, as illustrated in the following examples:

> The reports mention violent conflicts, live ammunition and fallen victims in Homs even after the governor was fired, and in the Kurd majority area Qamishli, where people protest in solidarity with other cities saying that giving them a Syrian nationality does not end their misery. (April 8, 2011)

> … All these reforms were unable to convince the people who continued to protest, and again tens were killed. (April 8, 2011)

The first example starts by describing violence, noting that this happened despite the governor being fired, which reflects demands from the people in Homs, undermining this reform by highlighting the atrocities. Again, a reform action favoring the Kurds, i.e. giving them Syrian nationality was highlighted, and this was followed by mentioning that this was not enough, as the second example in the same episode confirms that people continued to protest, highlighting

that further killings took place. In these examples two minor reforms that did not meet the Syrians' main demands were mentioned, and these were also undermined. More examples are evidenced below:

> [Protests] reached Kurdish areas, and despite getting Syrian nationality they too went out [to protest] for 'freedom'. (April 12, 2011)

> In the Kurd areas, to whom the regime had 'finally' decided to give Syrian nationality, hundreds protested in solidarity with Baniyas. (April 12, 2011)

These were four examples in which the narrative undermined the governments' reforms and demoted their value and sufficiency even among those areas in which they took place. The narrative also highlights the lack of credibility of the reforms, by stressing that protestors are still being killed. More examples include the use of clear and direct anti-regime rhetoric with an angry and sarcastic tone. Some completely downgraded the reforms, describing their dissonance. They also accused the regime of changing reality in its official broadcasts, again in a sarcastic way. They also employ an inflammatory tone when discussing revolution and the reality of events. Additionally, the rhetoric was encouraging, especially when noting that 'Syria is changing' as regimes are not responsible for making decisions anymore. All this is evidenced in the following examples:

> The emergency law seemed to revert its full power on the evening it was supposed to be lifted, this was evidenced by the seizure of Baniyas with tanks, cutting its power and phone access. (April 12, 2011)

The promises of reform were not efficient as a means of reducing tension, maybe because the reforms took the shape of live ammunition, as observed by the general manager of Human Rights Watch. (April 12, 2011)

Firing officials and lifting the emergency law seems to be adding a note of discord to the current situation, and the preplanned well-directed events shown on official Syrian TV work only in the Syrian soap operas, but not when people are revolting in Dara'a, Douma, Ezra'a, Homs, the Damascus countryside, Baniyas and Latakia. What is happening there is not a fantasy, it is real and happening hinting 'Syria is changing' whether you like it or not. Nowadays it is not the Arabic regimes who choose! only people do so, even if sometimes the regimes are late to understand this. (April 23, 2011)

Anchor Debates:

A seventh set of examples is presented here, representing the clear differences in how the anchors debate with pro-regime guests versus anti-regime ones. Both pro-regime and anti-regime guests were accorded equal airtime. In addition, both were interrupted while speaking but in a more belligerent manner with the pro-regime ones. It is important to note that in the episodes from April 19 and April 23, two anti-regime guests were received versus one pro-regime guest. This generated a louder anti-regime voice throughout the two episodes. However, the anchors always tried to put the pro-regime guests under pressure with their questions, and these were sometimes frankly challenging to the regime's views. Two examples are evident here:

What justifies using the security forces to stop the protests and get a number of people killed as a result? (April 12, 2011)

What justifies the siege on Baniyas and cutting the electricity supply off the city for several successive days? (March 25, 2011)

Using the word 'justifies' in the question suggests there is behavior that needs to be thoroughly explained, while the phrases '…and get a number of people killed as a result' and '… for several successive days' are statements added to emphasize the atrocities, and to make it hard to offer any pro-regime justification. Additionally, in response to the pro-regime guest who said that killings had only occurred once, and had been investigated, denying that there had been more killings. The anchor, ignoring the guests' pro-regime answers added a series of rhetorical questions:

But reportedly a Syrian official said that today 10 people were killed in Sanamayn village, how? if you say there is no live ammunition? … What about all the eye witnesses and the AFP? … what about the live ammunition and injured people we saw on our screen? I believe you saw that too. (March 25, 2011)

The anchor's response and questions while also referring to evidence seen by the viewer directly challenges the pro-regime statement and puts him under pressure, as he needs to defend himself in-front of someone who already does not believe him, which in turn weakens the pro-regime spokesperson's views from the perspective of the viewers. Similar questions were asked to other pro-regime guests, such as:

Do you think an anti-terrorism law will replace the emergency law? … In regard to allowing the right to peaceful protest, which is an already existing article in the Syrian constitution, what is expected to change? … There are urgent demands to release political detainees who seem to be numerous, why the delay in meeting this particular demand? (April 19, 2011)

Immediately after this question, a separate detailed illustration concerning the political detainees and human rights organizations efforts exerted to protect them followed. This juxtaposition further challenges the pro-regime narrative, completing the anti-regime framing of the guest's responses to viewers. Another example:

An opposition figure could state that you are sticking to old mistakes and raising the excuse of an external conspiracy. Now Syrians want their 'freedom' and dignity, and want political parties to be activated away from the Ba'ath party" (April 8, 2011).

The anchor's framing of the pro-regime guest's suggestions about people's aggressive behavior in the street, using the words 'old mistakes', apparently overlooks these suggested behaviors, sticking to the term external conspiracy, which he described as an 'excuse'. This implies that the anchor does not believe the story. The anchor then sets out the people's chief demands, which are freedom, dignity and political parties away from the Ba'ath party, which is the most salient point of all, showing an anti-regime tendency with regard to excluding the Ba'ath party. In another example from the same episode, the anchor debates with the pro-regime guest, who informs that Ba'ath party will no longer have the power it used to, asking:

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But why does the Ba'ath party exclusively makes decisions in Syria, without referring to other segments of society; isn't it presumed that the regime is likely to be replaced one way or another, even if the governing faces remain the same.

In this example, the anchor critiques the monopolization of power by the Ba'ath party in Syria, which is not a new concern for viewers, even when the guest seeks to suggest that changes are occurring. This ensured the pro-regime narrative was negatively framed, by reminding the viewers of the party's practices. Moreover, by confidently stating that 'the regime is likely to be replaced', the anchor underpins the concept of regime change in the viewers' minds.

Throughout the episodes analyzed, the anchors were observed twice challenging the guests' statements and denying them an opportunity to respond, then concluding the conversation by giving a negative impression of the regime. This represents a stand against the regime and those who defend it, questioning their credibility, the two examples offered are:

Thank you! We of course have never heard about the things that you have just mentioned, anyway thank you Dr. Talib, the analyst and researcher in strategic cases from Damascus. (April 8, 2011)

It's worth reminding viewers that the Syrian authorities do not allow foreign journalists to enter Syria and report what is happening neutrally. (April 12, 2011)

However, stressing the fact that the foreign media is not allowed in Syria was highlighted multiple times in the program's different Syrian segments on April 19, April 12 and April 8. This emphasizes the channel's reasons for depending on activists and internet sources, questioning why the regime will not allow the media into the country if it has nothing to hide. Another challenge to pro-regime guests is deliberate interruption when they question the anti-regime narrative that the protests were peaceful, that armed gangs exist, or that policemen have been killed, the anchor said:

> Nice words that 'try' to draw a nice image about the scene, but on the ground the scene is not nice at all; it is red with blood, a sacred and pure blood, regardless of who is being killed. However, the number of the protestors killed is far higher than that of policemen. (April 23, 2011)

In a very direct anti-regime response, the word 'try' reduces the pro-regime story's credibility. There is also emphasis on the ugliness of the scene, combined with an emotive image ofpure and sacred blood having been spilled by the regime. The anchor also confirms that the number of the protestors killed is greater than the number of policemen, clarifying that the sacred blood belongs mostly to protestors. All this explicitly shows a pro-people support against the regime. Another example from the April 30 broadcast suggests the rhetorical structure and tone used by the anchor indicates an anti-regime stance and blocking access to positive comments to defend the regime. It also pulls the speech in an anti-regime direction, which is:

> In regard to the new events that took place today where people were killed, and the Al-Omari mosque was raided … etc. On what is the regime depending to deal with the situation this way using this security approach? (April 30)

On the other hand, the anchors made the anti-regime guests' job easy by asking interactive questions, supporting and acknowledging anti-regime views, and avoiding making challenging comments, for example:

> Mr. Haitham, why were the measures taken by the regime not able to calm the people in Dara'a and the other Syrian cities? (April 2, 2011)

This question explicitly highlights the failure of the regime's measures and downgrades the regime's actions making the anti-regime guests' task easier. Another example is:

> Do you think the regime, with the reforms it promised to apply a few weeks ago - not today nor yesterday - can achieve the 'freedom' people ask for? Or, is it going far in less praiseworthy directions? (March 25, 2011)

In his question to the anti-regime guest, the way the anchor stresses the time elapsed since the Syrian government promised reforms, reduces its credibility. 'Not today nor yesterday' is again an unnecessary additional sentence designed to emphasize the regime's time-wasting and dishonesty. Moreover, adding 'is it going far in less praiseworthy directions?'

underlines the governments' contradictory and violent reactions and dishonesty.

Elsewhere the data reveals that when debating the anti-regime guests, the anchors state pro-regime views. This use of pro-regime views when questioning the anti-regime guests pushes them to be more direct and clearer in their criticism. For example, on the very first episode Syrian events were mentioned on March 16, the anchor literally repeated how the Syrian authorities were denying any protests when speaking to the anti-regime guest, who in fact hinted that protests were taking place. In another example from April 2, where in addition to directly using the regime's narrative to taunt the anti-regime guest and seeking for a direct strong answer, the anchor hinted at implicit support. For instance, he made certain to refer twice to the regime's views, and used the expression 'so forth' when reporting the regime's story showing lack of interest and conviction in the details:

> Mr. Haitham, the authorities say they believe a part of what is happening is about armed gangs, an external conspiracy and so forth, can we separate the protests that call for reforms from those the authorities are concerned about which as they say include infiltrators and armed gangs? (April 2, 2011)

In this way, strong responses were elicited from the anti-regime guests:

> These armed gangs exist only in the regime's imagination and the security forces are those who kill people. (April 2, 2011)

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More examples can be found in the episode from April 8, when an anti-regime guest was discussing the importance of implementing reforms, showing solid support for the Syrian people, and undermining the regime's reform attempts and narratives; the anchor made pro-regime comments seeking for more solid answers:

> But Mr. Atasi, the regime agrees and says that reforms are in progress, one can say if people waited all these years, it is OK if they wait a bit longer for these demands to be fulfilled, it is irrational [to expect] that everything will happen at once!

> Talking about the bloodshed, do you think all these protests are spontaneous?

These examples provide some evidence detailing how Al-Jazeera's 'Hasad Al-Yawm' newscast covered the Syrian uprising, supporting the Syrian people by questioning the regime's narrative, and negatively portraying the regime using different tools to shape the coverage in a way that might influence and shape the audience's perceptions, in addition to how journalistic practices were employed to serve this narrative. This stance from Al-Jazeera has been noticed and discussed by many researchers, such as Abdelmoula (2012) and Khasib and Ersoy (2016).

Chapter 5: Focus Groups

This chapter examines the impact of Al-Jazeera's coverage on the Syrian audience. It focuses on the perceptions of a sample of this audience, in particular their views on the channel's influence on their insights, attitudes and reactions during the period between March and April 2011. The themes discussed in this chapter evolved from the in-depth critical analysis and assessment of the discussions with seventy-three participants from ten focus groups sessions, which were conducted to answer the second research question:

RQ2: What were Syrian audience's perceptions of Al-Jazeera's coverage?

- How did the Syrian audience perceive and evaluate Al-Jazeera's coverage and its role in the course of events in Syria?

An examination of potential influence requires various methods and means of analysis, as such studies need to investigate a number of different factors. In the current research, studying the participants' perception and evaluation of Al-Jazeera's coverage resulted in a considerableamount of data, which indicated that, in general, the participants viewed Al-Jazeera's coverage as being accurate, without offering exaggeration or promoting fake news. Their statements confirmed that they considered the channel was only encouraging Syrian viewers by broadcasting atrocities that had taken place, without promoting any specific agenda. In addition, they tended to consider that the influence of social media played a more

prominent role in the uprising. These findings support the objective of the research question and sub questions. Three themes emerged from the data, as discussed in further detail below: firstly, the participants' views of Al-Jazeera's influence on their perceptions, attitudes and reactions; secondly, the participants' evaluation of the role played by Al-Jazeera; and thirdly, the influence of social media.

It should be noted that in the discussion below, the focus groups are indicated with letters and the individual participants by numbers, i.e. (A1) or (B2).

5.1 The Participants' View of Al-Jazeera's Influence on Their Perceptions, Attitudes and Reactions (How Al-Jazeera is Perceived):

This theme illustrates how, as Syrian viewers, the members of the focus groups perceived Al-Jazeera's coverage of the events in Syria at the outset of the uprising, including their opinions of how the channel may have influenced their perceptions, attitudes and reactions. This theme also identifies the participants' perceptions of shifts in the channel's coverage, the trigger for the Syrian uprising and aggravation of the situation. It also discusses their opinions with regard to Al-Jazeera problematic coverage with their proposed justifications, in addition to their opinions regarding the resignation of the channel's anchors.

The analysis of the data illustrated that, at the outset of the Syrian uprising, Al-Jazeera offered very limited coverage in terms of its quantity, length and quality. As discussed below, the participants considered that this lasted for a period of almost fifteen days. Participant A2 emphasized that: "there was no comprehensive coverage, not at all", while B3 commented that: "Al-Jazeera was prohibited in Syria, the channel covered nothing at that time". The participants noted that the channel initially rarely reported the events taking place in Syria, only noting that normal protests were taking place, while ignoring the oppression and the atrocities. A1 stated that "at the beginning, Al-Jazeera was only telling stories without even showing evidence, photos or videos", and B3 stressed that "sometimes Al-Jazeera was only reporting the events through the news tickers, without even bothering to say them". In addition, E1 noted that "Al-Jazeera was ignoring the events", while B1 explained that, while watching Al-Jazeera from Al-Raqqa city (where he was working at that time), he assumed that all was peaceful in his home town of Dara'a, but when he went to visit his family he reported: "things were much worse than what I saw on TV".

Consequently, the participants remarked that Syrians were disappointed with Al-Jazeera's performance during that period, considering it disrespectful, which led them to turn to other channels for news, i.e. Al-Hiwar, France24, BBC Arabia and Monte Carlo, in addition to social media. G1 indicated preferring to trust these channels as "maybe they had fewer political interests than Al-Jazeera".

The participants suggested the following reasons such as that Al-Jazeera's lack of coverage may have been due to a lack of reporters in the country,

particularly as the Syrian authorities did not allow professional media outlets to cover events from inside Syria. This aspect was also highlighted by Karouny and Bayoumy (2011), who stressed that the BBC and Al-Manar were the only channels with reporters in field, because their correspondents in Syria were Alawites (i.e. from the ruling minority) and so covered the events in accordance with the views of the regime. This resulted in Al-Jazeera lacking any correspondents able to physically cover the situation. D1 noted that "Al-Jazeera's real coverage started after almost one month of the uprising, as it had no correspondents allowed inside the country". Furthermore, B3 stated that "Al-Jazeera covered nothing during the first fifteen days, until they could make deals with activists to cover for them". A2 also commented that "Al-Jazeera did not want to make mistakes, it wanted a true coverage", while E6 added:

> Al-Jazeera's coverage was limited because it wanted to be 100% sure about the credibility. The received footage went through a long authentication process before being broadcast. Anyway, Syrians were unhappy with that incomplete coverage. (E6)

The participants also suggested the existence of a political motivation behind the limited coverage, emphasizing that, following the first fifteen days, Al-Jazeera showed a new attitude, with extensive coverage of events in Syria, including reporting anti-regime news and detailing atrocities.

> I remember well, it was Thursday 6:00 pm, three bulletins were published on Al-Jazeera's website about three massacres, Sidnaya, Hama and another one. On Friday, the very next day, I noticed that Al-Jazeera started to report on all the atrocities. (E3)

> After almost twenty days, Al-Jazeera completely adopted the Syrian case with all its details. Why? I don't know! To oppose the regime? I don't think so, as the relationship between Qatar and the Syrian regime was excellent. But what I am sure of is that this coverage was not for the sake of the Syrian people, it was something political. (G1)

The participants noted that, during this time, negotiations had been taking place between Qatar and Syria, and it was following their failure that Qatar and Al-Jazeera took a clear stand against the Syrian regime. They added that this also followed the declaration of the Saudi King's condemnation of the Syrian regime's practices against its population, which in turn transformed the attitude of the Gulf countries towards the situation in Syria. E1 noted that "Al-Jazeera always takes action according to Qatar's decisions". The limited coverage and the sudden change observed by the participants has also been discussed in the literature, with commentators suggesting various reasons, primarily political (Abdullah 2012; Khasib, Ersoy 2016; Kanan, Shalaby 2011; Abdulnabi 2018; Phillips 2016).

The participants put forward the opinion that, following the increase in Al-Jazeera's coverage, they felt the channel attempted to offer an objective viewpoint on the conflict, with its coverage being neither inflammatory nor sensational and omitting any potential fake news. Consequently, most of participants did not feel that Al-Jazeera aimed to incite Syrians to revolt or aggravated the situation. Firstly, B3 noted that "Al-Jazeera broadcast the whole picture exactly the way it was, it covered protests as they were". Secondly, D1 stated that "Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya were broadcasting the exact events". Thirdly, A3 pointed out that "Al-Jazeera was neither with the people, nor with the regime, it only transmitted what happened".

Fourthly, F2 added "Al-Jazeera was broadcasting the truth, you could feel the channel's credibility". Fifthly, E5 stated "Al-Jazeera's coverage was faithful because it was either live or raw videos". This is also shown by C1's comment:

> I used to look outside my window to find the same scene being broadcast by Al-Jazeera. I used to hear live rounds being fired outside and within seconds I'd hear it on the screen. (C1)

Furthermore, the participants did not consider that the channel broadcast fake news or footage, thus contradicting the claims of some commentators (Anderson 2016; Byrne 2012; Phillips 2016; Maannews 2011), as well as a viewpoint widely circulated among Arabs. A2 noted that there were more than enough atrocities taking place in Syria without any need to fake such stories, while B7 suggested that it was the regime's media, rather than Al-Jazeera who offered faked news. Additionally, the participants stressed that they did not feel Al-Jazeera's coverage had any inflammatory or sensational tone and language when covering the events at the outset of the Syrian uprising.

> Al-Jazeera's role was not so special, it was like any other channel. What was happening in Syria was what really mobilized people and incited them. (G1)

The Syrian viewers residing in cities at a distance from Dara'a highlighted that the restrictions and practices of the Syrian regime had impacted their everyday lives, and in particular their freedom, including being subject to intimidation. They stressed that they had protested in solidarity with Dara'a

since they all suffered the same pressures and shared feelings of distress and an impulse for revenge. The participants from Homs noted that they also protested due to their difficult living conditions, as well as experiencing fear and accumulated outrage, and agreed with firing the governor of Homs on issues that extended beyond dignity than money. E6 pointed out that "the revolution was not a revolution for money or food, it was a revolution of freedom and dignity". In addition, E1 highlighted "Syrians were ready for a revolution". The participants also emphasized that protestors were not initially seeking to topple the regime and didn't personally blame President Bashar Assad for the atrocities. They considered that all they were asking for were a small number of reforms, including those related to political prisoners and the replacing of governors, along with the granting of additional freedoms.

> We only called for dignity and freedom. Only when humiliation became deliberate did we call for the overthrow of the regime. (B1)

This was supported by F1's comment that "the atrocities pushed people towards rebellion".

> The revolution took place in solidarity with Dara'a. We were not against Bashar at the beginning, but his first speech was disappointing, as he underestimated people and their revolution. (B4)

The above argument is significant, people from Homs and other distant cities mainly knew about the uprising through media, including Al-Jazeera,

and this can be considered a role regardless how effective, deliberate or inadvertent it was. However, the proposed reasons by the participants are stronger and mainly challenging the impact of Al-Jazeera on Arab public opinion and its alleged role in spreading and exacerbating the Arab Spring revolutions, particularly in Syria. It also challenges the expected results based on the content study component of the current research, i.e. that the focus group participants would also perceive that the channel's coverage of Syrian events was explicitly anti-regime, including that it employed emotive language and an inflammatory tone.

However, a number of participants (i.e., C3 and C5) reported that Al-Jazeera broadcast misleading footage about huge protests taking place in certain villages, while, as eye-witnesses, they knew that nothing had occurred.

> Once Al-Jazeera reported a big protest to be taking place in my village 'Elma'. I called my family to make sure they are okay, and they said there was nothing!" (C5)

The participants suggested various interpretations of this inaccuracy. Firstly, they proposed that it was a mistake arising from the lack of professional reporters, with E1 suggesting that they might have been provided by embedded regime sources, who deliberately sent misleading videos in order to reduce the channel's credibility. Secondly, they considered that this may have been an inadvertent technical mistake, of the kind that frequently takes place in television broadcasting, with E2, as a media professional, commenting: "it happens, we have been there many times". Furthermore, E1 also noted that "it must have been an editorial

mistake from the newsroom, nothing else". Thirdly, there was a slight suggestion that Al-Jazeera might have reported inaccurate news as an intentional exaggeration to amplify the events of the Syrian uprising. C1 questioned the reliability of the channel's sources, feeling that it tended to exaggerate events and promote public fear, in order to encourage revolt:

> They started to say 'as per our sources', then 'as per our correspondent'. But who is their correspondent? Someone who did not even complete the 6th grade? Where is the other opinion [referring to Al-Jazeera's motto, the opinion and the other opinion]. (C1)

Additionally, the participants remarked that, even when Al-Jazeera offered more intensive and comprehensive coverage, it still failed to cover some major events, suggesting that this could be politically motivated, i.e. the well-known clock-square massacre in Homs perpetrated by security forces against protestors on April 18, 2011. E2 pointed out that "Al-Jazeera covered less significant events but not this important one", while E3 commented "this is not the only important event that was not covered by Al-Jazeera".

In addition, some participants believed that, although Al-Jazeera's coverage was faithful and intense, it was not sufficiently thorough and rich in content. E1 felt that the coverage tended to be anti-regime in a randomly provocative manner, without promising or fulfilling goals, or proposing any solution. This argument is also supported by Abdelmoula (2012). E1 offered the example of Al-Jazeera's coverage of Syrian events was not as thorough as that of Saudi Arabia during the Qatari-Saudi conflict, believing

that the reporting only acted as a tool to place the Syrian regime under Qatari pressure, but not to reveal all the Syrian regime's practices. E1 also stressed that the channel had not included interviews with influential opposition figures, only with those who were superficial and unpersuasive, with non-comprehensive views that were far from the core of Syrian hopes:

> If Al-Jazeera really wanted to have an impact on Syrians and incite them, it would have shown more than that [coverage] in terms of the Syrian hidden issues, but this was not Al-Jazeera's goal. (E1)

The participants suggested a further reason for the lack of thoroughness could be the intensity of events in Syria, accompanied by Al-Jazeera's inability to follow up and examine all that unfolded, including the atrocities taking place. E2 noted that "Al-Jazeera could not give the Syrian profile an appropriate emphasis, there was too much to be covered". Furthermore, C3 stressed that "what happened was much more than Al-Jazeera was able to show, it was definitely unable to cover everything". Moreover, A2 stated "Al-Jazeera never broadcast complete news, no media channel in world could do so".

Additionally, some participants remarked that Al-Jazeera's coverage was opinionated, reflecting the views of its guests, and adding that these guests had been selected according to specific criteria. For example, guests tended to be unequal in qualifications, background and personalities to the individual supporting the channel's agenda, and who was therefore guaranteed to dominate the debate. The issue of Al-Jazeera's method of

selecting guests has been discussed by many scholars (Eldar 2011; Al-Sadi 2012), primarily by Aburub (2010), who also focused on how the channel chooses its guests in order to serve its agenda. This shows the possibility of an implicit role played by the channel in influencing perceptions, which remains unrecognized by the majority of its viewers. Thus, C1 argued that "Al-Jazeera paid its guests to give hope to Syrians, in order to encourage them".

> If Al-Jazeera wanted to incite people in Homs, it received a guest from Homs to describe events in an emotional way … Al-Jazeera invited me to speak on their screen several times, and I only did once, because they wanted me to speak in a certain direction and this is not what I want. (E5)

> Hasan Abdulasi, an opposition figure with significant views, once told me that Al-Jazeera did not allow him on its screen. This is because it only allows the opposition related to the Muslim brotherhood. Actually, media played a big role. (E1)

Data from the current method reveals that the participants, even when expressing doubts about some of Al-Jazeera's performance, tended to justify rather than criticize the channel's actions. This could be explained by their loyalty and willingness to maintain a positive stand, in particular due to the channel's identification with Syrians' hopes and desires.

However, the above findings do not support the allegations that Al-Jazeera was directly involved in transferring revolution to Syria from other Arab Spring countries, as well as exacerbating and aggravating the situation. In addition, the participants clarified the factual reasons they believed played

the main role. Firstly, they argued that the real reason behind the dissemination and the aggravation of the uprising inside Syria was not due to the media, including Al-Jazeera, it was the oppression experienced by the population and the way the security forces handled the situation in cities such as Dara'a. Moreover, as the uprising spread the security forces began to use more lethal tactics. C3 stated that "they were simply shooting people", while C2 pointed out that "the media only exploited the pressure people were living in". In addition, F1 remarked that "the situation was exacerbated by the bloodshed, with each family losing a member who was killed by the security forces". Furthermore, E5 added that "the president's failure to contain the uprising is why it turned into a crisis", while G1 noted that "maybe Al-Jazeera helped the uprising to spread, but the oppression and the atrocities were the main reasons".

> Our revolution took place for one reason: humiliation. Additionally, Syrians took courage after the Arab Spring revolutions. (A1)

Secondly, the participants believed that the successful revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia played a considerable role in encouraging Syrians and facilitating their revolution. E1 pointed out "All Syrians knew that their turn is coming soon watching other revolutions, we thought it would be easier than it was!".

> We used to live in fear, but when we saw revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia taking place, we took courage. We have never expected this would happen to us. (A1)

> We thought, if Egypt, with all its inhabitants, could agree to revolt, then we definitely can do this too. (A4)

The data shows that the participants considered the success of the Egyptian revolution a significant factor, and knowledge of this was of course in the public domain in Syria due to the media; Al-Jazeera being among the first to report it. E3 considered that the Syrian revolution would not have taken place in the absence of media, and if Hosni Mubarak had not stepped down. Or maybe it would simply have been a short-lived uprising: "people were not influenced by Al-Jazeera, but by the coverage of the Arab Spring transmitted by Al-Jazeera". E1 also pointed out that Syrians were shocked when former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak stepped down. Syrians, describing walking through Damascus city centre devoid of people.

> At that moment, I believe Syrians started to get scared and believed their turn was coming soon! I think every Syrian was watching Al-Jazeera at that moment, wherever you went, shops and in the streets, you found people watching. (E1)

The participants noted that the impact of the Egyptian revolution was evident in the different events that formed part of the Syrian uprising. Firstly, during the clock square protest (i.e. the most significant to take place in Homs) Syrians gathered in an identical manner to Egyptians in Al-Tahrir Square, i.e. they took tents intending to stay until their demands were granted. However, as reported by the participants, a massacre took place instead. Secondly, E1 stated that the first time Syrians called to overthrow the regime in Sukkarieh district in Latakia city was following Al-Jazeera's announcement of the trial of the former Egyptian president. Thirdly, the data indicates that Syrians used the slogans created by Egyptians during their revolution, with A3 noting that: "Syrians were

calling 'People and Army are one', a slogan inspired by the Egyptian revolution".

Syrians were eventually informed of the occurrence of the previous Arab Spring revolutions exclusively by the media, as well as learning about a significant part of the atrocities within Syria. Media in this context refers to traditional media, at the forefront of which (as emphasized by the participants) was Al-Jazeera, along with social media, whose role in the Arab Spring has been discussed in-depth by other studies such as Ghannam (2011) and Storck (2011). B3 stated that "people were influenced by the Arab Spring uprisings transmitted by Al-Jazeera, but not by Al-Jazeera itself". A5 commented: "Al-Jazeera only inadvertently encouraged, but it did not incite". However, in regard of traditional media, which is the focus of this current study, Hall (2006) argued that media are never presented in their entirety in a raw format, but rather undergo multiple production and distribution processes and 'storying'. It is this transformation that audiences receive and decode. Media scholars have also suggested that the factors determining the newsworthiness of an event are necessarily informed by specific agendas (Hartley 1982; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Abdelmoula 2012). Hence, media outlets employ a variety of different techniques to ensure their audience perceives events a particular way, in order to promote this agenda.

The role of media in the Arab Spring has been widely discussed by a number of previous studies (Khamis et al. 2012; Hroub 2011; Miles 2011; Eldar 2011; Abdelmoula 2012), with scholars also acknowledging the role of Al-Jazeera (Abdullah 2012; Eldar 2011; Mahroum 2011; Souaiaia 2011;

Worth, Kirkpatrick 2011; Pintak 2011a; Tausch 2011). Hence, since the participants considered the previous Arab revolutions as playing a role in triggering the Syrian uprising, it was important for this current study to examine the medium through which this news was conveyed to Syrians, i.e. the media.

When discussing the resignations of Ghassan Bin Jiddo, Luna Al-Shibel and Ali Hashem (who, as discussed in the literature review, stated this was due to Al-Jazeera's subjectivity and biased coverage during the Arab Spring)the participants rejected the anchors' claims. For example, C1 stated that the resignations of Bin Jiddo and Ali Hashem bore little reference to Al-Jazeera's coverage, but they were likely to have resigned due to their ideological beliefs, stating: "Bin Jiddo resigned because he got a good offer to found Al-Mayadeen channel" (i.e. a channel set to rival Al-Jazeera, financed by Iran, Hezbollah and Syria) (Leigh et al. 2015). E1 also rejected Bin Jeddo's statement, which pointed to Al-Jazeera's 'black rooms' as a reason for his resignation:

> I was an intern at Al-Jazeera. Even if I don't really trust the channel, I have never seen any black rooms. It is a normal channel, but full of Muslim Brotherhood employees. (E1)

Additionally, B3, when discussing the video Ali Hashem claimed Al-Jazeera refused to broadcast of clashes between the Syrian Army and armed groups (i.e., proving the Syrian uprising was not peaceful), questioned why Ali Hashem had not privately broadcast the video himself. In response, the current researcher attempted to find this video on the

internet but found nothing with the same description. F1 also argued "what Ali Hashem was saying is not true, that is why Al-Jazeera did not broadcast it". Furthermore, E1 stated that Luna Shibel resigned in response to being offered the position of the Syrian president's media advisor, rather than because of any bias by Al-Jazeera when reporting events in Syria (Al-Soufi 2011).

The findings from the focus groups indicate that the participants considered that this initial unbiased coverage changed almost three years later, with the channel's coverage becoming politicized and in accordance with the interests of its financer.

> It is not independent as it claims, it only follows Qatar's interests. This is very clear and evident, especially after the murder of Khashoggi. (E1)

The participants highlighted that, following the dramatic reduction in its coverage of the Syrian uprising few years later, they had tended to lose faith in the credibility of Al-Jazeera, and question its true intentions. B3 commented: "no media channel shows the real news!" Moreover, F1 remarked: "we started to feel a bias towards the regime, which makes me feel that there has been a reconciliation between Qatar and Syria!".

> It's clear that the channel became politicized, now they broadcast according to what suits its goals. There is a total media blackout in regards to Syria, as if an international demand asked to end the Syrian case" (B7).

I used to believe so much in Al-Jazeera, but now I never watch it. It is politicized, it overlooked all news and stuck to coverage of one person - Jamal Khashoggi! (G1)

No one believes Al-Jazeera now. It is misleading, and it was the evil warrior who explicitly showed an anti-regime stand, but implicitly aimed to destroy Syria, which now needs at least fifty years to be reconstructed. (C1)

Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising can be seen to have undergone a considerable transformation, which raises a number of questions concerning the channel's objectivity and impartiality, i.e. after commencing with a limited coverage, it then demonstrated an implicit anti-regime stand, followed by once again choosing to largely ignore the events taking place in the country. This also raises the issue of the motivation, agendas and goals lying behind the overall performance of the channel, which is examined in this research by means of the interviews with several members of its staff. As Aburub (2010) noted, there must be a significant reason for losing faith in a previously trusted media channel. It is notable that the participants of the current method hinted at the influence of Qatar on a number of occasions, suggesting that they felt this relationship was significant, but rarely attributed to Al-Jazeera's impartial coverage of the Syrian uprising aiming at achieving any agendas or goals.

By contrast, several of the participants believed that Al-Jazeera played on the emotions of its viewers during the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising, including deliberately inciting the population by constantly showing atrocities, which helped to aggravate the situation in Syria. C1 stated

that:"Al-Jazeera wanted this revolution to take place and continue". E5 also stressed that the channel's policy has, from the start, been to mobilize citizens against their leaders, i.e. "especially those who were not in good terms with Qatar". Moreover, E1 considered that the channel had always targeted the emotions of the Arab population, including placing a considerable focus on the sensitive issue of the Palestinians. There has been a wide-ranging discussion by media scholars of the issue of harnessing emotions, including the ability to stimulate emotive responses and determine opinions (Richards 2007), alongside identifying friends and enemies, and provoking a sense of nationalism and/or rebellion (Zingarelli 2010). Many scholars have argued that, since its establishment, Al-Jazeera has exploited Arab emotions by displaying heart wrenching and bloody images of Arabs and using an emotive tone when narrating events (El-Nawawy 2006; Abdullah 2014; Zingarelli 2010). Hahn (2009) also concluded that Al-Jazeera'scontent lacked a reasoned and rational presentation, while Worth and Kirkpatrick (2011) considered that Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring was intended to inflame the emotions of insurgents from one capital to the next.

The findings for this theme primarily suggest that the participants viewed Al-Jazeera as being generally accurate in terms of content, and lacking any intention of being inflammatory or inciting revolt. The participants also tended to justify any inaccuracies, although some highlighted the issue of political influence, particularly the relationship between Al-Jazeera and its financer (i.e. Qatar). On the other hand, a small number perceived Al-Jazeera's coverage as intended to incite an emotional response and play a role in transferring the revolution from other Arab Spring countries to Syria, so exacerbating the existing situation within the country.

In addition, it should be noted that broadcasting inflammatory content in an accurate way differs from the act of transmitting content in an inflammatory manner. This observation prompted this current method to examine of the features and characteristics of the coveragewhen delivering content to viewers. It found that the participants viewed Al-Jazeera as having no real influence on their perceptions, attitudes and reactions, while also stressing that the channel (along with any other form of media) would have been unable to trigger the Syrian revolution if atrocities had not taken place. They concurred that the channel may have played on Syrians' emotions, particularly due to the conditions under which they were living, but that it had no role in the commencement of either the Arab Spring or the Syrian uprising. The following theme examines the role of Al-Jazeera as conceptualized by the participants.

5.2 The Participants' Evaluation of the Role Played by Al-Jazeera (Evaluating Al-Jazeera's Role):

This theme examines the participants' evaluation of Al-Jazeera's role, including their reflections on the impact of its coverage during both the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. It also discusses how they believed this role evolved in light of more fundamental factors initiating, and escalating, the revolution in Syria.

Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring has been widely discussed throughout Arab society, including by the media and previous studies. There has also been discussion of its possible intention to transfer the revolution between

Arab countries and provide intensive anti-regime coverage in service of a specific agenda (Hasan 2011; Gore 2013; Youssef 2013; Miles 2011;Eldar 2011; Mahroum 2011; Souaiaia 2011; Abdullah 2012; Worth, Kirkpatrick 2011).

As noted above, the discussions with the participants of the focus groups highlighted a general view of Al-Jazeera's coverage as being accurate and lacking in exaggeration. They also felt that the coverage was impartial, as the broadcast of distressing events only ever partially conveyed the extent of the atrocities that were taking place. In addition, they remarked that the coverage of the Arab Spring by Al-Jazeera did not dramatically diffuse such uprisings in the Arab world, with any influence being inadvertent. Furthermore, they felt that Syrian viewers did not view the channel's coverage as being subjective or inciting them to revolt. This therefore formed the participants' views (as discussed in the previous theme) of Al-Jazeera's influence on their perceptions, attitudes and reactions.

However, the participants suggested that Al-Jazeera may have played a role through its coverage of the different revolutions during the Arab Spring, by allowing other populations to keep up with these events in real time. This then links to the suggestion that the channel united those with a revolutionary spirit throughout the Arab world, thereby potentially playing a role in increasing individuals' willingness to take action in response to the ongoing revolutionary wave. However, C1 commented that the Arab revolutions were contagious due to the pressure the population was already experiencing. This was supported by E5, who stated: "Al-Jazeera only influenced people's courage to imitate".

> Al-Jazeera kept repeating the events, and gave hope to people, that it happened in Tunisia and Egypt, we thought why are we still scared? (B4)

The participants also concluded that that Al-Jazeera's role in transferring the revolution to Syria was minor, indirect and inadvertent. As discussed in the previous section, the participants emphasized that the real reason behind the Syrian revolution included the pressure, intimidation and lack of freedom under which Syrians had lived over many years, along with rage suppressed following the massacre in Hama 1982. Thus, they considered that Al-Jazeera's broadcast of other Arab revolutions only triggered this rage and encouraged Syrians to overcome their fears, believing that, in the light of the revolutionary wave taking place in the Arab world, this was chance to secure change. However, they stressed that the channel's coverage was not the main reason behind the revolution. Therefore, they concluded that the first protest in Dara'a was prompted by the existing situation (the pressure), the courageous stand taken in response to the media coverage, and the incident of fifteen teenagers, who were detained and tortured. Interestingly, the participants confirmed that such torture of young people by the regime was not a new occurrence, but that was the first time it had prompted such a reaction. This could well be seen to highlight the role of media in this instance.

> Al-Jazeera and other media only contributed to transmitting the picture. In the 1980s people died, houses were destroyed, and no one knew, but Al-Jazeera showed all the pain. (G1)

> Some people believe that media was the reason why people were mobilized, but this is wrong. People used the media to make their voices heard. People in Syria are the ones who made the revolution, the media only served it. (E6)

The data arising from the discussion of Al-Jazeera in relation to the Syrian uprising again indicated that the participants concluded; firstly, that the channel played no role in deliberately inciting Syrians, and that it had not intended to exacerbate the situation inside Syria, so contributing to the overthrow of the Syrian regime. This contrasts with the suggestion that the channel was pursuing a political goal or being a part of a conspiracy made ina number of previous discussions and studies (Martinez 2012; Byrne 2012; Anderson 2016; Abdulnabi 2018). The participants also noted that they felt Al-Jazeera broadcast coverage of events inside Syria in an accurate manner, and it was the brutality of the Syrian regime broadcast on Al-Jazeera that led the population to revolt. They also concluded that intimidation from the regime prevented Syrians in other cities from protesting at the beginning, while at the same time watching the events in Dara'a on traditional and social media. It was the fact that, instead of containing the uprising, the Syrian regime responded with lethal violence, which led to the response from other Syrian cities. F3 stated: "we saw on the media that people were being killed in other Syrian cities, so we wanted to consolidate".

> They said that Dara'a is under siege and people there are dying from hunger, we could not bear that. We are emotional nations, taken by dignity and honour, so we took all food we could and went to Dara'a, the army shot us and again new people died. (B3)

The data therefore suggests that Al-Jazeera's sole role in these circumstances was to report on atrocities and broadcast them to other Syrians in a timely manner. G1 remarked that: "the channel kept us updated, sometimes we knew what was happening in the next neighbourhood from TV". In addition, A1 also confirmed that Al-Jazeera's role was to publicise atrocities, which then encouraged others to revolt due to rage and disappointment.

> I believe media helped spreading the revolution inside Syria by 90%. Syria is a big country, so to instantly receive similar news from another far city is almost impossible without media channels. By word of mouth it would take one or two years to spread, especially with the intimidation. Media helped to spread news instantly. It transmitted a big part of the truth. (B7)

The above argument indicates that Al-Jazeera did indeed play a role in the Syrian uprising, but this role was indirect and inadvertent, contrary to the evidence presented in the content analysis. This therefore weakens the potential for this role being intended to serve certain political agendas, as put forward by a number of previous studies as mentioned previously. Al-Jazeera was among those media channels reporting that protests in Syria were peaceful (Al-Jazeera 2018), contrary to the regime's narrative that the protestors were armed, having been infiltrated by extremists and were part of a conspiracy (Assad 2017; Martinez 2012; Byrne 2012; Barlett 2015; Gorani 2011). And the participants confirmed that the Syrian protests were peaceful until the population was faced with atrocities undertaken by the regime, with C3 remarking that: "Bashar Assad himself admitted in his speech that protests were not armed until after a period of six months". The participants, in particular F3 and B4, emphasized that Syrians only took up

arms to protect protesters, but not with the intention of confronting the army, and only once soldiers started to defect. This conclusion is significant, as it confirms the credibility of Al-Jazeera's narrative when it comes to the issue of Syrians witnessing these events from within the country.

The data reveals that Al-Jazeera was eager to transmit events from inside Syria, despite being prohibited from working in the country. To this end, it exerted significant effort to trust Syrians in situ, making deals with activists, and providing channels for the uploading of videos and to help cover events. B4 stated that: "Al-Jazeera was showing a number on its screen where people could call or send photos and videos". B1 added: "I saw these people myself, they had special phones with special Internet connections". In addition, B5 noted: "Al-Jazeera was calling people, giving them cameras and special Internet connections, and was asking them to report events secretly".

> Al-Jazeera dealt with activists in all over Syria. The channel was instantly covering events. We were seeing our neighbourhoods on the screen, live. (F4)

It can be argued that it is normal practice for a professional channel like Al-Jazeera to exert such efforts to cover significant events in an important country like Syria. As the regime prevented Al-Jazeera from officially working inside Syria, this forced the channel to exclusively use this tool, which is a legitimate action for media companies, particularly to avoid losing professionalism and viewers. This can also be seen as an eagerness

to be present, and in control, and thus maintain its pivotal position with its viewers.

The data confirms that the Syrian uprising arose primarily from the atrocities committed by the regime, along with its disrespect for Syrian lives, freedoms and dignity. This indicates that Al-Jazeera played no significant role, other than facilitating or accelerating events, as Syrians at that time were at the point of resisting the regime regardless of information in the media. F1 pointed out that: "if people had been happy and satisfied, Al-Jazeera would never have been able to influence them, whatever efforts it might have made".

> Al-Jazeera did not ignite the revolution; the revolution was to happen anyway. But the channel was the fuel that was poured on the already ignited fire. (G1)

On the other hand, participants B3, C1 and C6 denied that Al-Jazeera (or any other media) played a direct or indirect role in their uprising, stressing that the channel had no significant coverage at the beginning of the revolt. They added that Al-Jazeera was not the only channel covering the Syrian uprising, so it could not be held solely responsible for exerting influence.

> It was a big deal in Dara'a anyway, what happened there was enough to cause an uprising, exactly the way it happened in Hama thirty-seven years ago when there were no satellite channels. It is not that Al-Jazeera, or any other channel, exaggerated to make it a big deal. We saw the protests with our own eyes and we talked about them before we saw them on TV. (B1)

All media outlets cared to cover the Syrian uprising; hence they all share the responsibility of possibly moving the protests from one Syrian city to another. If they did not transmit the atrocities, how would we know what was happening? (F2)

However, a number of participants did feel that Al-Jazeera's coverage was deliberately biased towards Syrians opposed to the regime, with the aim of inciting a revolution. J3 argued that: "Al-Jazeera kept repeating the footage of atrocities deliberately to incite Syrians against the regime". They also suggested that this deliberate coverage was not for the sake of the Syrian people, but to service the channel's agenda, which (as indicated by C1) mainly served Qatar's political line and interests in Syria and the Arab world. E3 also remarked that Al-Jazeera mobilized Syrians in a smart and effective manner, stating: "it transmitted the exact whole picture and encouraged Syrians to mobilize". Moreover, E1 noted that he had previously worked for a Saudi channel, which at the beginning of the Syrian uprising was seeking to highlight pro-regime stories and only interviewed regime supporters. However, when the Saudi king declared his country's stand in relation to the Syrian revolution, they stopped focussing on supporters, instead turning their attention to members of the opposition. He noted "Al-Jazeera did the same but in a more underhand way". E6 suggested: "Al-Jazeera only cares about serving its agendas".

It is significant that this participant's use of the term 'underhand' hints at a belief in Al-Jazeera's ability to implicitly cover whichever aspects serve its own goals and agendas under the cover of professionalism. This can be seen as particularly effective as the general population are likely to be

unable to recognise such bias, and the participant is a journalist who understands journalism and its methods. As previously discussed, many of Al-Jazeera's practices and mistakes were observed by some viewers, while others failed to recognize them until it became too late, which emphasizes the channel's professionalism even in proposing and inserting its hidden agendas. Finally, the participants acknowledged Qatar's influence on Al-Jazeera, adding that they had recognised this aspect several years following the commencement of the Arab Spring revolutions.

> Al-Jazeera had a role in mobilizing Syrians to serve Qatari and Muslim Brotherhood agendas … it dealt with the Syrian uprising according to its strategies and what interest the financer. (E1)

G1 commented that: "80% from Qatar corpus was created by Al-Jazeera, you can't split them, anyway there is no independent media". In addition, E5 noted that: "Al-Jazeera was ordered to support the Salafist and the radical current, this was its role". However, C1 argued that Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, following their financers' agendas, had always been in agreement concerning the Syrian crises, explaining that their coverage had explicitly supported the Syrian people, while implicitly seeking to destroy Syria as a country not a regime. He stressed that Syria has the most ancient capital in the world and, with all its rich sources and history, the country is not represented by Bashar Assad's regime. He also emphasized that:

> Al-Jazeera with all its potentials, its anchors, its role with Al-Qaeda and the War on Iraq… etc. is a media empire, and of course this empire is not a charity for Syrian people, especially as

it does not depend on advertisements. Such media organizations only work for their own interests. (C1)

The current researcher is aware that most human beings may find it difficult to recognize the influence of media on their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Gentile and Arturo (2003) noted that: "the effects of media usually happen at a level of which we are not consciously aware". In addition, Greene (1999) suggested that those who claim that they are not influenced by the media are, in fact, more likely to be subject to such influence. Hence, the questions addressed to the participants did not directly ask whether an influence took place, being rather a series of deductive and indirect questions providing a variety of rich answers from which the data could be extracted, so avoiding any inaccurate outcome. Moreover, Al-Jazeera's coverage and tools of influence were also separately studied in the content study chapter.

5.3 The Influence of Social Media:

This theme is relatively small, containing less data and analysis. It focuses on the participants' evaluation of the role of traditional media and the emergence of social media during the Syrian uprising.

The focus groups participants confirmed the significance of social media, particularly in helping Syrians to communicate, plan, gather and be updated about the latest news from the uprising. They emphasized the influence of social media on transmitting the revolution to Syria, and around the country. E6 pointed out that: "traditional media had a share in the Syrian

uprising, but social media had the lion's share". In addition, J1 stated that: "we knew about the new events from all around Syria constantly from social media before any other".

> At the beginning, no media channel was able to enter Dara'a to cover the events, everything we knew was through people and social media. (B1)

Participants E6 and B3 remarked that Syria had experienced many previous uprisings, which had been suppressed, with the traditional media remaining silent on the subject, or being prohibited, including Al-Jazeera. However, the emergence of the Internet and social media helped the most recent uprising to continue. This highlights the limitations of traditional media prior to the emergence of the Internet, particularly the ability for it to be prohibited and so prevent communication concerning events. This led this method to conclude that the Internet had played a significant role in the Syrian uprising.

> Since Syrian independence in 1946, many uprisings and coups have taken place, but the regime supressed them, met with silence by the international community. The only difference now is social media. Revolutions are not new to Syria, but social media is what helped the revolution continue this time. (E6)

> Uprisings took place in As-Suwayda and Al-Hasakah in 2004, and worse atrocities took place, but media did not have a role and Al-Jazeera was prohibited in Syria at that time. However, the Internet played a very significant role this time, and it is what really transmitted the message to the world. Mobile phones

captured plenty of events when traditional media could not cover them all. (B3)

Moreover, social media enabled individuals to reject or refute any inaccurate or misleading stories published by Syria's official media. C3 noted that, when Syrian official media denied any atrocities had taken place (claiming the circulated footage had taken place in Iraq), a Syrian man called Ali Abbas taped himself refuting the state media's statements, confirming that the footage had been filmed in Homs, including his shop and the spot where the security forces beat him. C3 stated that "even the official media was shocked at the way stories were being told, spread and denied". However, it is important to note that the participants generally referred to Al-Jazeera to confirm the accuracy of any news they saw on social media, as well as to find out more details. B3 stated: "we could never be certain about any event until we had seen it on Al-Jazeera". Furthermore, E2 commented that, at the beginning of the Syrian uprising: "we started to gossip about protests taking place in Damascus, then we immediately started to look on Al-Jazeera to make sure".

This theme illustrates the way traditional media has now lost its exclusivity, which has been maintained over previous decades. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that new technologies are reshaping the concept of media, ensuring it becomes at times more complex and potentially inaccurate, and can no longer be easily controlled. However, traditional media (primarily the more prominent outlets) still maintain significant status, with their news being seen as more trustworthy, credible and based on an accurate background, even when they are following a specific agenda. Hence, even if the participants considered the emergence

of the Internet and social media fundamental in shaping the events in Syria, Al-Jazeera still maintained its prominence, being their continued reference for truth, while acknowledging the role of social media in facilitating the work of the channel.

This theme highlights the important role played by both traditional and social media in the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. It also underpins the significance of the emergence of the Internet and social media in shaping and directing perceptions, attitudes and reactions, and consequently directing events. In addition, it demonstrates the way social media facilitated the job of traditional media in providing timely and comprehensive coverage, even when such coverage was prohibited by the regime.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the perceptions of a sample of Syrian nationals in relation to Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising and its influence on firstly, their insights, attitudes and reactions and secondly, their view of the channel's role in triggering, shaping and directing events. The findings of this chapter generally confirmed that Al-Jazeera had a minor and indirect role in the uprising, being limited to encouraging Syrians by broadcasting footage of atrocities undertaken by the regime.

The following chapter explores the views of Al-Jazeera's staff responsible for the coverage of the Syrian events, including their evaluation of the channel's coverage at that time, alongside the internal and external factors leading to this coverage.

Chapter 6: The Interviews

This method forms the third part of the triangulation conducted to explore Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising. After critically investigating the first two aspects of this study through the content analysis and focus groups, this current chapter adds to the findings and contributes to examine the editorial decisions and the journalistic practices inside the channel's newsroom. It also studies the external and political factors and commitments that contributed to shaping the coverage and directed the channel towards certain practices, as the research's previous strands suggested. Additionally, it views the journalists' reflections on the role of the channel during the Syrian uprising. The chapter presents the themes evolved from the analytical process of thirteen interviews, along with a description and discussion of each theme, followed by a critical analysis and assessment of the findings. These interviews were conducted to answer the third research question:

RQ3: What were the internal and external factors contributing to Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising?

- What decisions and practices were taken in Al-Jazeera's newsroom that shaped the coverage presented to audiences?
- What factors external to journalism may have contributed to Al-Jazeera's coverage; i.e. external forces and political pressures.

The interviews found that both journalistic factors and external and political factors played a significant role in Al-Jazeera's coverage during the Syrian uprising. Firstly, the journalistic factors including internal editorial decisions and journalistic practices, made following different

reasons such as the revolutions taking place in other Arab countries, and the channel's aim to give voice to ordinary people. Secondly, the external factors forcing the channel to work in a certain direction, such as the lack of correspondents inside Syria as a consequence of the closure of the channel's bureau, and the refusal of the regime's representatives to communicate with Al-Jazeera; this also includes the political factors suggesting commitments between Al-Jazeera and Qatar, as its financer.

It should be noted that in the quotations from the participants: firstly, current employees are marked with the letter (C) followed by their number and secondly, ex-employees are marked with (Ex), followed by his/her number.

6.1 Internal Factors: Journalistic Practices and Editorial Decisions:

The Interviews data suggests that, in line with general reporting practice, Al-Jazeera's coverage during the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising was controlled by a number of factors which reflected internal editorial decisions and accepted journalistic practices, as discussed below.

The participants of the focus groups and the content study identified a notable lack of coverage of the start of the Syrian uprising, which was followed two weeks later by an abrupt transformation to intense coverage. The interviewees attributed this to an initial absence of any clear editorial decision, with C7 stating that: "at that time, there was no editorial

decision". In addition, some considered the limited coverage to be intentional, and in response to an editorial decision to limit the amount of exposure. Ex2 stated "the coverage totally disregarded the Syrian story", while Ex4 also noted that "the coverage was minimal, unlike that of the Egyptian revolution". In addition, C3 added:

> We didn't ignore the Syrian events but also we didn't go in detail. This provoked criticism of Al-Jazeera. (C3)

The data revealed that the newsroom employees recognized that they had awarded insufficient airtime to the Syrian uprising, an aspect also acknowledged by the interviewees. Ex4 emphasized that this limited coverage also attracted criticism from inside the newsroom, confirming that: "many journalists did not agree with how the Syrian uprising was being covered". Ex3 also noted that he had argued with his management, including pointing out: "you are putting less important news stories in the headlines, but people being killed in Syria means nothing to you!". Furthermore, C1 revealed that the newsroom had failed to cover relevant stories, despite receiving a considerable number of videos from Syrian citizens, stating that: "people were calling us asking 'where are you?'. We were under real pressure". Moreover, C4 pointed out that employees were requesting permission to cover Syria appropriately in order to avoid criticism.

The interviewees suggested that these editorial decisions were due to various factors. Firstly, the journalists viewed the Syrian events as insufficiently newsworthy at its beginning in comparison to the revolutions

taking place in Libya and Yemen. This resulted in giving only limited time to cover all the revolutions taking place, with priority given to events considered more significant. Furthermore, C4 identified two reasons for Al-Jazeera's limited coverage at that time: firstly, there were no serious calls to overthrow the regime and secondly, the pressure Al-Jazeera was experiencing while attempting to cover the successive Arab revolutions:

> Our coverage in Syria at that time was sufficient when compared to other countries. It was impossible to move the news from Libya (where people were being killed) to the third headline in order to put Syria's routine protests in the first!" (C4)

Furthermore, the interviewees noted they did not wish to show events until they could confirm their level of significance:

> We didn't want to make something out of nothing, until everything became clearer. (C5)

Ex4 also commented: "some clearly said 'when it becomes a revolution, we will deal with it as a revolution'".

Secondly, Al-Jazeera was reported to have acted in a careful manner, verifying, fact-checking and ensuring the accuracy of any news it reported, in order to maintain the channel's reputation for professionalism and credibility. C8 emphasized that Al-Jazeera's policy is to act responsibly when it comes to its reporting and not be too hasty, even for news items already being circulated on other outlets: "we minimally cover until we have a real material, this is anywhere, not only in Syria".

As a media channel, we can't place a high level of focus on tens of protestors, yet we cover the event. To give adequate focus and time, the channel needs to understand why this is happening, and who are the demonstrators, then it decides how to deal with the level of this news … Editorially speaking, this is how Al-Jazeera's coverage usually works. (C2)

Channels must be careful when they cover events. This is especially in regards of new events in a country like Syria, where there have to be many considerations. Al-Jazeera can't just start covering events without knowing the truth. This was only about Al-Jazeera being careful. (C7)

Indeed, C4 indicated that its tendency towards caution tends to result in the channel limiting all its coverage, which was also true of the start of both the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, i.e. "our coverage was factual not selective". This aspect also included reducing coverage when it was necessary to protect the channel's staff working inside war zones, in order to prevent them from being threatened, chased, detained or killed. C3 stated: "in each coverage, we always keep in mind the safety of our staff at the bureau", while (C7) added "we want employees to bring news not to be the news themselves".

However, the sudden change in Al-Jazeera's coverage after the first two weeks, going from limited to intensive was also attributed to editorial decisions and different other reasons by the interviewees. Firstly, some suggested one factor concerned an improved accessibility to Syria, and the decision to contact trustworthy activists in order to offer comprehensive

coverage: "we appointed fixers, and we started to receive videos from everywhere" (C5).

> We intensified the coverage because an editorial decision was taken, and an office of activists was created. (C7)

Secondly, a number believed that the closing down of Al-Jazeera's office in Syria by the regime freed the channel from its previous concern for its staff, giving it the confidence to intensify its coverage once they were no longer in danger.

> Closing our bureau in Syria eased our job; we freely offered a full coverage as there was no one to worry about. (C3)

Those were the data explaining Al-Jazeera's limited coverage at the beginning of the Syrian uprising and how it intensified. Now to explain the coverage's lack of balance occurred after the coverage was intensified, the interviewees suggested different reasons too. First, the interviewees emphasized that the channel's coverage remained minimal until they were certain they were well-informed about events taking place in Syria. C5 stated: "our coverage of the Syrian events was minimal, but balanced, until we became sure that the regime was using weapons against people". In addition, (C8) noted: "we intensified the coverage when we were certain it was a revolution". Furthermore, C6 commented that "we reached a point where staying silent would have been a scandal for the channel".

Second, the interviewees noted that, in the twenty-five years since its inception, Al-Jazeera's mission had been to defend the rights and dreams of ordinary people, which impacted on the channel's editorial line and therefore its coverage of the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. Thus, Al-Jazeera's coverage simply continued to reflect its vision by concentrating on members of the general population and their suffering. C2 stated that Al-Jazeera's concern is to give voice to ordinary people, acknowledging that this could have potentially compromised the channel's professionalism during the Arab Spring:

> This was not deliberate, as Al-Jazeera has nothing against the Syrian regime, as is evident by the fact that, until this moment, we had pro-regime employees. (C2)

C5 also stressed that the coverage continued to conform to the vision, editorial line and news values adopted by Al-Jazeera since its establishment:

> We are not against the revolution, nor against the regime, we transmitted people's misery, this is all what we care about. (C5)

Moreover, C3 noted that Al-Jazeera was loyal to its rhetoric during the Arab Spring: "if Al-Jazeera had been on the side of the regime instead of the people, it wouldn't be Al-Jazeera anymore". Moreover, C4 highlighted that Al-Jazeera is considered to represent the general population, in particular as regimes already have the capacity to pay large amounts for

their propaganda: "in the end, i am presenting a people's platform, not a regime's". While C5 stated:

> The channel's policy is to defend humanity, if this is considered bias then we are biased towards people. (C5)

Third, the interviewees point to the factor of the employees' enthusiasm and individual mistakes, with the latter being emphasized as not necessarily deliberate, and not reflecting the channel's policies. Any mistakes, they indicated, should be seen as a result of employees' enthusiasm towards the promise of a new bright future for the Arab world, which (as highlighted by C3) may have impacted on their professionalism:

> We did make mistakes. The employees' enthusiasm, and the anchor's failure to choose appropriate expressions with the guests, revealed personal tendencies, and this is bias. (C3)

The interviewees also acknowledged that, at times, the use of emotive rhetoric (which employees preferred to term 'humane') tended to dominate the coverage: "the emotive rhetoric existed, let's call it the humane side, in which we were so very interested" (C2).

> There was a noticeable emotional involvement, and this is humane, I can't ignore my humanity just to be objective. (C7)

The interviewees also attributed this emotive rhetoric to employees being emotional because of their Pan-Arabic tendencies, which was reflected in their coverage, i.e. "Pan-Arabism is what led the employees to work for Al-Jazeera in the first place". (C1)

> The emotions and enthusiasm were clear and reflected the employees' pan-Arabism. This dominated the newsroom and was mixed with the coverage. Journalism wise, this needs to be reviewed. (C3)

Ex4 confirmed that, during the Arab Spring, Pan-Arabic sentiments spread within the newsroom, as they did throughout the Arab world, adding that some emotive words could, at times, leak into reports:

> In this situation, you can't control the scene from a professional and objective point of view and be detached in your coverage. (Ex4)

C6 also commented that Al-Jazeera's coverage became intense in response to the reality of people dying on a daily basis, adding:

> If someone is charged to be humane, then this is an honor … The footage was so sad, we unconsciously became biased. (C6)

Additionally, C8 emphasized that journalists were keen to maintain their balance and professionalism, but that: "not everyone can control his/her emotions and consequently his/her rhetoric". In addition, C2 commented:

> The employees' personal tendencies unconsciously appeared in

their coverage, especially as, deep down, the employees supported the Syrian people. (C2)

Moreover, Ex3 also acknowledged that employees were 'biased' in favor of the population, noting that everyone in the newsroom clapped when Ben Ali was toppled, comparing them to the BBC's employees, who clapped the toppling of the Shah of Iran in 1979. This comparison therefore sought to indicate that the reaction inside Al-Jazeera was not unusual for the media profession throughout the world. C1 confirmed: "we love it when the people win, and a regime is overthrown, especially as people were oppressed for so long". Al-Jazeera's emotive rhetoric has also been discussed in depth by media scholars, who have suggested that the channel tends to address its viewers in an emotive manner (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Abdullah 2014; Aburub 2010).

However, the interviewees of the current study emphasized that journalists played a significant role in maintaining the credibility of the content they presented to their audience, including significant efforts being made to verify the huge number of raw videos received from activists. The interviewees explained that a lengthy process of verification and fact-checking was conducted, arguing that, rather than wishing to mobilize the population, Al-Jazeera was focused on maintaining its own credibility and report events in an accurate manner.

> We were trying our best to check the sources' trustworthiness, and the credibility of the videos. Whatever we chose was seen on the screen, so it had to be 100% true. (C2)

C5 emphasized that they only took news in the form of videos "in order to be best examined", while C6 stressed that they blocked any activist whose output appeared to be exaggerated, and C3 confirmed that specialists from each country were hired to check videos in terms of their stated location. Ex3 also described the length to which they went to investigate the authenticity of videos:

> I challenge anyone to find any fake video broadcast about Syria on Al-Jazeera since the very first day. (Ex3)

In defending the emotive rhetoric found in Al-Jazeera's coverage, C1 described the difficulties of working in the field, caught between casualties and the danger presented by live ammunition, and how this unconsciously impacts on the journalists, particularly their views and judgments. C1 also stressed that watching events on a TV screen never truly reflects the reality of the journalistic experience, highlighting that journalists are human beings and are emotionally influenced by their surroundings, adding:

> The journalist, with his high levels of adrenalin, is part of the scene. I would still be a journalist not a warrior, but what I see is my main story using my professional tools. It is easy to speak theoretically about neutrality, but in field things are different … There is no neutral media but there is a professional one. (C1)

Which recalls McLaughlin's (2016) argument about the journalism of attachment which was previously explained. Furthermore, the interviewees pointed out that the existence of an emotive rhetoric is due to depending exclusively on Syrian activists for coverage, as the Syrian regime was closing Al-Jazeera's office in Damascus and its representatives were

refusing to interact with the channel. The interviewees also recognized that the activists on whom they were consequently forced to depend, were all biased: (1) "you can't expect a standardized coverage from people who are dying" (C1); (2) "those who covered were people from Syria, who chose to deliver their voice which is against the regime" (C2); and (3) "those fixers were ready to die to deliver their message" (Ex3).

> Our correspondents were not neutral, they themselves were suffering from the regime's suppression. (C7)

However, Ex4 believed that the activists wished to mobilize the viewers and thus, like many of the interviewees, blamed the regime for the unbalanced coverage: "when the regime closed our bureau, we were totally dependent on paid fixers, who only covered events from troubled places" (C5).

> If the regime had not closed our bureau and brutally threatened our staff, we would have still been able to offer a balanced coverage that equally showed both points of view, the way we do everywhere else. (C4)

Additionally, the data revealed a recognition among the interviewees that the channel's anchors were harsher in their questioning of guests who were pro-regime in contrast to those anti-regime, a factor was also identified by the content study of this research. Again, the interviewees attributed this aspect to the anchors' personal tendencies and errors, stressing that they were criticized and warned by management for such an approach, i.e. "it was the anchors' fault on an individual level, but not a channel policy" (C4) and "many of them adopted the Syrian voice on a personal level" (C2).

> Sometimes, employees believe the power of the words used must suit the significance of the footage, a personal style that does not reflect the channel's editorial policy at all, and it is criticized. (C5)

However, C8 believed that the anchors' attitudes were simply reacting to an unconvincing performance of pro-regime guests, stating:

> The pro-regime guests' justifications were weak, so the anchor can't just appear to be convinced and move on. (C8)

It is therefore significant that the large number of such explicit mistakes (which this method revealed to occur on a frequent basis) remained as part of the channel's coverage without being controlled. This was despite the fact, as emphasized by the interviewees in this current research, that mistakes are generally immediately spotted and stopped by management, with the relevant employees given a warning.

> It is strictly forbidden that any correspondent becomes a part of the event or use emotional words. They are given warnings. (C5)

> We, the employees, became emotional, but we tried not to show this on the screen. During the war on Gaza, we were crying in the newsroom, but we still received Afikhay Adrai. I blamed the anchor who did not wish to speak to him and the one who did not thank him at the end of the conversation. There is a big difference between my own wishes and being a journalist. (C4)

All these measures were discussed as being applied to prevent mistakes during the coverage, yet they still occurred during the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. This can hint at an intention by the channel to implicitly reflect certain views during that time, an observation indirectly supported by C8's examination of the channel's performance:

> Usually, whenever the management feels bias to occur, it immediately notifies the reporter or stops the report, but I don't know how controlled this was at that time. This was not the channel's policy, but maybe it allowed such things to happen. According to journalistic standards, mistakes were made."(C8)

> Al-Jazeera seeks to attract power, with the easiest way being to allow people to speak without restrictions … Al-Jazeera depends on 'populism' rather than 'democracy'. (Ex2)

The interviewees also acknowledged the deliberate use of emotive rhetoric on occasions, emphasizing this tends to be employed by any media to attract, and then impact on, its audience. They remarked it is acceptable for media to use various tools, so long as the event itself took place: "there was a lack of balance, but to be professional and report without enthusiasm is a very delicate equation" (C3).

> If I were asked to choose between an emotional footage and a normal one, I would choose the emotional, as long as it happened. This is how TV should be, and this is implemented by all channels. (C4)

> People were influenced because images and promos were meant to influence them and fire up their emotions, but we covered the truth. (C6)

These interviewees believed that the use of powerful and emotive language is crucial in order to prevent the news from losing its value: (1) "when you are in field witnessing all the atrocities, you can't just report plastic words!" (C1) and (2) "it can't be just solid words without any spirit, this way they lose their value, and you lose your viewers" (C7).

> Al-Jazeera is a news channel, this is its core business. If it didn't cover the uprising in this way, the channel would lose its value, and this contradicts its vision. (C5)

However, a number of the interviewees did question Al-Jazeera's objectivity during the Syrian uprising, acknowledging that, at times, the channel focused on some aspects while disregarding others. On the other hand, they also emphasized that this could be seen as both justified and unintentional. Ex4 argued that Al-Jazeera lost its objectivity and professionalism at some point during the coverage, justifying this by highlighting the channel's desire to support ordinary people. Ex5 added that "the coverage sometimes went beyond the journalistic standards and balance, it was emotional and took a judgmental approach", but he also emphasized this was not deliberate. Furthermore, C1 argued:

> We might have focused on some issues on account of others and this was wrong! But while I focus, yet I never lie!" (C1)

Some argued that Al-Jazeera was deliberate in its continuous, intensive and unbalanced coverage, because the channel wished to show a supportive stand against the regime and with the general population.

> Al-Jazeera offered momentum because it decided to stand by the people's side, so there was a tendency to highlight the opposition views. This process was not 100% innocent. (C2)

C1 also remarked that "they [the regime's stories] were not convincing, we did not give them enough space", with C3 adding that "Al-Jazeera was by the revolutions' side, we did not want those who defended Bashar to speak". Additionally, while Ex4 emphasized that "any continuous coverage can be considered mobilization", Ex1 believed the channel targeted Arabs and Syrians with its unbalanced coverage, which he attributed to the channel's 'populist' approach converting the Syrian uprising into a war. He also believed the channel appointed unprofessional fixers with sectarian ideologies in order to influence its audience, stating: "Al-Jazeera targeted Syrians, it even targeted Arabs as a nation". Two of these interviewees asserted that Al-Jazeera planned to mobilize the population employing a variety of techniques, i.e. exaggerating events and manipulating montage frames. Moreover, they both stressed that the channel became a platform that enabled radical leaders to freely mobilize without debate, while alternative opinions were given insufficient time, as well as being continuously interrupted and robustly challenged. They added that these Al-Jazeera techniques are also applied when covering other situations.

The coverage was biased and used different ways to deceive audience. The reason was the wish to overthrow Bashar Assad. (Ex2)

The interviewees discussed the fact that Al-Jazeera used a number of tools and techniques when reporting the Syrian events, and worked on the representation processes contributing to how events were presented to audience, i.e. the channel framed and amplified the events of the Syrian uprising within facts. Amplification does not necessarily infer fake news, with the interviewees suggesting that Al-Jazeera never broadcast footage that was either fake or untrue. Instead, they referred to the use of media tricks, i.e. the way events were filmed, including the camera angle, as amplification can show events as being more significant than they were in reality. C1 stated: "this is legitimate and illegitimate, it's complicated. Some say, 'this is unprofessional' and others say, 'I did not lie'". Ex3 also noted:

Every news channel has an editorial line. If my editorial line supports the Arab Spring, this does not mean I fake news that serves the Arab Spring, it is about how to narrate the story but not to create one. This is legitimate. (Ex3)

There was exaggeration to a certain point, media tricks can show a protest of fifty as being huge, but we never lied or fabricated! It was only about focusing more on the anti-regime side of the story. (C2)

This is the role of media; I decide the agenda and I shoot what I want to be shown on my screen. I can, for non-professional

reasons, mention a part of the truth and hide a part, but I cannot lie!" (Ex4)

Many scholars agree that mass media tends to construct, rather than mirror, realities, primarily through selecting and framing news and directing decision-making, which can shape public opinion by means of a consciously designed stylized media discourse and consequently manipulation (Reese 2007; Habermas 1989). The above discussion suggests that, in service of its editorial line, Al-Jazeera generally frames news and only covers those aspects within the larger truth it wishes to be received by its audience. This therefore results in its journalists departing from conventions of accuracy and objectivity, risking balance in the channel's coverage, i.e. being more critical of the regime and supportive of the protestors. The interviewees acknowledged coverage served certain editorial policies at Al-Jazeera, querying the ultimate objectivity of Al-Jazeera claim to neutrality.

Many interviewees expressed their objections to the changes undertaken by the channel during the Arab Spring, which they felt contradicted its original journalistic principles and professional image, i.e. to follow the channel's stated purpose to adhere to the journalistic values of honesty, courage, fairness, balance, independence, credibility and diversity, giving no priority to commercial or political over professional consideration as stated by the channel's vision on its website. This emphasizes that Al-Jazeera underwent a transformation in its editorial line and decisions, which consequently overlooked some journalistic principles: "Al-Jazeera replaced neutral employees of the BBC school with biased local mentalities" (Ex1).

Everything in Al-Jazeera became different. The team used to be objective, professional and able to defend its decisions and choices, while decision makers were more open-minded. (Ex4)

Many of the interviewees also queried the channel's reliance on activists, which they believed negatively influenced the channel's objectivity. However, this can be seen as an aspect of the channel's desire to keep pace with rapidly changing developments, particularly in light of the existing pressures and lack of resources, while simultaneously wishing to maintain its image and level of exposure.

All what Al-Jazeera cared about at that time is to have news and photos, so they depended on unprofessional fixers. (C8)

I was among the employees who criticized Al-Jazeera's policies at that time, I believed depending on activists would cause trouble for the channel, because only the channel would be blamed and held responsible for any mistake … this emphasizes the conflict between the journalists' desire to have updated material for their coverage, and strict professional regulations. (Ex4)

This unbalanced coverage included a preference for different tools to support a specific rhetoric that lacked objectivity according to some interviewees. This suggests the possibility that Syrian viewers might have received a sculpted image of the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising, which was not completely accurate, hence leading them to erroneous conclusions about events. Different studies have mentioned that Al-Jazeera lost a significant number of viewers during the Arab Spring. They

attributed this loss to the channel's lack of objectivity at that time. Likewise, the interviews data acknowledged this decline in viewers:

> Al-Jazeera lost a large number of viewers during the Arab Spring, and in the Syrian uprising, in particular. (C2)

The participants suggested various explanations for this loss of viewers, some feeling that this was not due to any change in Al-Jazeera's editorial line, but rather to a transformation in the nature of the events unfolding. Previously, the channel had focused primarily on the Palestinian cause, and the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, during which Al-Jazeera defended Arabs and Muslims. This coverage was praised by the channel's audience, who wished to see events from this particular perspective, i.e. "when Al-Jazeera was covering the Palestinian file, the number of viewers was at its utmost" (C2). But when it came to the internal political issues of Arab countries, including examining the divisions existing between Arabs, Al-Jazeera's coverage was unable to establish the consensus and approbation of its audience: "before, whatever you said about Israel you become a hero! Now things are different" (C1).

> Previously, Al-Jazeera had a unanimous coverage, people are all supporting Palestine and Iraq. But when it came to the internal issues of Arab countries, they had question marks. (C3)

> In Syria, the people themselves were divided, being both with, and against, the regime and so they were also with and against Al-Jazeera. (C4)

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A number of interviewees believed that Al-Jazeera's difficulties arose in response to the emergence of social media, which offers an easier way to access news, so attracting viewers unwilling to spend time watching news channels: "social media instantly offered important news and saved people's time" (C3). Moreover, the data suggested that the advent of local news channels (which offer exclusively local news in the style of Al-Jazeera) might also have reduced the number of viewers.

> The emergence of local news channels with unprecedented freedom attracted the viewers. This is something that did not exist before. (C3)

This reduction in the number of viewers was also suggested as being due to the Arab population's loss of optimism following the failure of the Arab Spring. This led them to blame Al-Jazeera for giving them unfounded hope, and so stop watching it altogether.

> People's dreams were abolished after the collapse of the Arab Spring, so they blamed Al-Jazeera for the enthusiasm. (C4)

> The populism adopted by Al-Jazeera created enormous demagoguery, resulting in depression for those who believed in the channel and were shocked by the truth. (Ex2)

6.2 External Factors: Logistical and Political:

External factors generally consist of events taking place outside a news organization, but still being capable of influencing the news, i.e. media systems, technology, political restrictions and political commitments. The

interviewees identified two main external factors influencing Al-Jazeera's coverage in Syria, i.e. the logistical and the political.

Logistical factors

These impacted on Al-Jazeera's coverage in a number of ways. As noted in the previous discussion, the interviewees attributed the channel's lack of coverage during the first two weeks of the Syrian uprising to its limited access to sources (i.e. due to censorship from the regime), as well as being prevented from covering the situation from inside Syria, i.e. the closure of Al-Jazeera's office in Damascus. The participants emphasized that this resulted in the channel facing serious difficulties in accessing reliable sources inside Syria.

> The limited coverage was not deliberate as a strategy, it was only due to the difficulty of receiving information and the danger of being targeted and censored. (Ex4)

This forced Al-Jazeera's management to find alternative methods of news gathering, depending primarily on non-routine sources (including ordinary citizens the channel was unable to fully trust), which in turn hindered the flow of news. Furthermore, the regime's censorship of the Internet (including disruption of service) also led to difficulties in obtaining information from activists. C1 noted:"we trained a large number of activists to be able to do the job properly, I personally did". In addition, C2 noted that "there were no sources, no staff and no freedom to work. Activists were exerting efforts to reach us".

> We had a weak access and many restrictions were imposed, we can't just depend on people we don't really trust. (Ex5)

> The coverage lacked balance because we could not totally depend on activists' news, especially at the beginning, as I would have been held responsible for any mistakes. (C4)

Secondly, the participants cited the restriction of Al-Jazeera's physical access as a factor in the channel's unbalanced coverage once it became intensive.

> We lost our balance because the regime closed our office [in Damascus] and the pro-regime spokespersons rejected Al-Jazeera's invitations to speak. In this way the regime lost its voice … on the other hand the opposition was so active. (C3)

Thirdly, the interviewees stated that they experienced difficulties in finding spokespersons to speak on behalf of the regime, which resulted in the coverage becoming unbalanced in favour of the opposition. They also remarked that the regime's attitude reflected a failure to confront the media, including obscuring events taking place inside the country, confirming that this had a negative impact on the regime, resulting in a loss of objectivity and credibility. C5 noted that, in restricting Al-Jazeera's access, the regime restricted itself, adding: "it [the regime] forced me to depend on opposing sources". Ex4, who expressed frustration with the regime's attitude, described the unbalanced coverage as the "the dictator regime's mistake not ours", while C8 highlighted the large number of activists willing to participate, saying "their position was stronger because they had their evidence". In addition, C2 stated:

> The pro-regime representatives refused to participate, the official Syrian story was totally absent, this is why the anti-regime story dominated the coverage and we lost a sense of balance … anyway they were not convincing, and this was their mistake. (C2)

However, the data from the interviews confirmed Al-Jazeera's eagerness to offer all available opinions to the viewers, following its motto 'The opinion and the other opinion':

> For us, the regime's opinion was as sacred as the people's, but their guests rarely accepted our invitation to speak on screen, and they closed our bureau. They forced us to be with the other side. (C4)

C1 acknowledged that Al-Jazeera's balance had been nominal, and its coverage lacking neutrality, but he put this down to any access to the views of the regime being solely available through its own preferred media, confirming that they had always criticized such stories as being 'provocative'.

The above confirms that it became logistically impossible for Al-Jazeera to freely choose their interviewees. This contradicts the suggestion made by the participants of the focus groups and by the previous research that Al-Jazeera deliberately set out to weaken the regime's position in the eyes of the viewers by selecting pro-regime guests incapable of defending the regime's views effectively in front of the anchors, as well as guests invited

to present opposing opinions. Instead, this discussion indicates that pro-regime sources refused to appear on Al-Jazeera, leaving the channel's producers with little choice but to restrict their guests to those who were available and willing to comment. Ex4 explained the approach to locating a pro-regime guest as follows: "we received whoever was available to put forward alternative opinions". In addition, C4 also reflected on the difficulties in persuading sources supportive of the regime to comment on air, noting how this influenced coverage:

> It was their decision, we were receiving whoever accepted an invitation to participate, whether they were strong or weak. (C4)

C8 also confirmed the channel's eagerness to offer a balanced coverage, which was impeded by the regime's rejection and threats, saying "we had no choice".

Political factors

A number of interviewees think that the limited coverage at the outset of the Syrian uprising was due to political factors, i.e. the close relationship between Qatar and Syria. They considered that Al-Jazeera halted its usual comprehensive coverage until Qatari officials had been able to talk to Syrian President Bashar Assad to demand he eased rising tensions. The data also indicates the potential for a comprehensive coverage of events to damage the relationship between the two countries.

> There was a good relationship between Qatar and Syria. Qatar thought it could convince Assad to calm the situation down, but they were wrong. (C1)

In addition, C3 emphasized the political factor of Qatar's close relationship with Syria in terms of endeavors to convince Assad to make concessions and undertake reform: "Qatar [through Al-Jazeera's coverage] didn't want to look as if it was adding fuel to the fire". Ex2 also stated that a Qatari-Syrian agreement had prevented Al-Jazeera's coverage from gaining momentum, while Ex4 added that the relationship was "on a personal level between the two presidents". The interviewees further indicated that Qatar was forced to recognize that Assad had no intention to implement concessions and reforms following his first speech to the Syrian parliament on March 30, 2011. This led Qatar to announce its political stance in favor of the Syrian population, thus resulting in Al-Jazeera taking Qatar's decisions into consideration:

> We thought Assad would announce significant reforms in his speech, but the speech had an extremely opposite direction. Thus, the Qatari stance changed, and Al-Jazeera lifted its reservations on the coverage. (Ex3)

Ex4 also confirmed that, as soon as Syria refused to reform in accordance with the wishes of Qatar, "the restrictions on the coverage were lifted", reinforced by the pressure placed on the channel from its audience:

> With the situation's exacerbation and the pressure the channel underwent, we could not ignore events anymore. (C3)

Many of the interviewees considered that the first speech made by the Syrian president formed a crucial factor in the sudden increase in Al-Jazeera's coverage. It had been generally assumed that Assad would announce significant reforms to satisfy Syrians and contain the uprising, but instead he dismissed the uprising as an 'external conspiracy'.

The interviewees suggested two potential interpretations of this speech. The first was that the content and its delivery disappointed the Syrian people and caused a serious rupture between the population and the regime. This led to a more serious uprising, resulting in Al-Jazeera having a considerable increase in available material:

> The speech immediately revealed that the regime and the Syrian people were certainly travelling in different directions. For the first time since the uprising took a different shape, we heard the slogan 'people want to overthrow the regime'. It spread all over Syria and became a revolution, so we dealt with it as a revolution. Systematic killings also followed the speech and events became similar to those in Libya, a regime that is prepared to kill its people. We finally came to the conclusion that if Bashar wanted to undertake reforms he would have done so. (C4)

The second interpretation was that the speech disappointed the Qatari leadership, which failed to settle events in Syria, and consequently changed its stance in favor of the Syrian people, followed by Al-Jazeera. C1 described the speech as a political and media turning point, confirming that Qatar's disappointment led to its government condemning the Syrian regime, and that "we [Al-Jazeera] took this into consideration". C2 also

asserted that "political issues led the channel to focus more on the situation in Syria".

In addition, some former employees took this view further, hinting that political considerations tended to control the situation to a greater degree than had been previously acknowledged. Ex2 stated that Qatar was disappointed because it figured out, after the story of a Syrian army jet crash in Libya (Al-Arabiya 2011), that Syria helped Qadhafi against the rebels after it preferred to stay neutral when Qatar asked it to fight against him: "here the channel's coverage turned from being silent to intensive". On the other hand, Ex1 discussed that Syria had changed its plans by not allowing Qatari gas pipelines to traverse Syrian land to Europe, butpermitting Russian pipelines instead:

> Qatar's stand changed due to reasons related to the Pipelineistan deal, Al-Jazeera's coverage changed because this is what Qatar wanted. (Ex1)

The above discussion suggests a link between Al-Jazeera and Qatar as a political entity, with news coverage directed by Qatari guidelines. This intervention is not necessarily direct, constant or focused on controlling every aspect of the station's output, but may rather be used in the service of situations considered to constitute a political necessity, with instructions then being communicated to higher management. It remains possible that, in order to ensure the channel's credibility, Qatar might accord it true freedom, although a number of the interviewees remained skeptical, pointing out that Qatar was unlikely to provide such a high level of funding solely for the provision of credible news. Instead, they considered that the

channel may be given a limited degree of freedom, but only for those aspects which continue to serve Qatar on a political level. It is clear that, as its financer, Al-Jazeera cannot refuse to conform to Qatari demands.

> Qatar does not pay millions of dollars for Al-Jazeera only to offer a professional coverage, no way. Al-Jazeera is not a charity, and no journalistic organization on this earth is lacking a political agenda. Believing so is nothing but a romantic vision. (Ex4)

Many of the interviewees in the current method acknowledged the relationship between Al-Jazeera and Qatar, including its influence on the channel's performance. This is supported by a number of discussions of this relationship in the existing literature (Miles 2005; Hroub 2011; Zayani 2005; Kühn et al. 2013; Ulrichsen 2011). Ex4 emphasized that this relationship became more noticeable following the onset of the Arab Spring, describing it as having been 'miserable' after Qatar-Gulf crises in 2017, when the channel's coverage explicitly and directly served Qatar's political agenda against its Gulf rivals (i.e. Saudi Arabia and Emirates):

> When the Arab Spring started, political accounts and agendas directed coverage. Qatar's interests became a burden on Al-Jazeera, which, in turn, could not be free the way it had used to be. But this was not as clear and miserable as it has become over the last couple of years. (Ex4)

Employing the word 'miserable' to describe Al-Jazeera's coverage emphasizes the channel's identification with Qatar's political line. The interviewees noted that Al-Jazeera is like any other news channel, with its

own agenda and a specific editorial line, which is generally influenced politically and/or financially by specific organizations.

> I don't think Al-Jazeera was ever separate from Qatar, no one can ever separate a channel from its financer, but it depends on how much you control the political level. (Ex3)

Moreover, the interviewees confirmed that this influence does not necessarily control the entire output of the channel, nor that it is totally subject to Qatari policies, otherwise its reputation (which has been built on this new style of freedom) would have failed and the channel become similar to any other state media. Interviewees C2 and C3 acknowledged that Al-Jazeera was influenced by Qatar's general viewpoint in terms of the coverage of events in Syria and that, at times, it was forced to submit to Qatar's political pressure.

> I don't think any news channel is 100% transparent. Al-Jazeera is Qatar's media weapon, but it's not Qatar's voice. (C2)

> To say that Al-Jazeera is totally independent from Qatar, and Qatar never interferes in its policies, is not true! But also, to say that the channel is totally subject to Qatari policies and is continuously subject to instructions, is also not true. It is more complicated, it's about harmony between the two policies … it is difficult to say that there is a political intervention in the channel's decision-making process, but this does not mean the channel makes whatever it wants. (C3)

A number of interviewees believed that Al-Jazeera had followed Qatari interests from the outset, with Ex1 pointing out that this was implicit and indirect and therefore not always immediately obvious. They emphasized that the channel always focused its criticism on countries that had a poor

relationship with Qatar, while overlooking the practices of those friendly to Qatar:

> When Al-Jazeera was launched in 1996, it only criticized three countries, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria, because they did not recognize the coup of Sheikh Hamad against his father. (Ex2)

> Before the Arab Spring, Al-Jazeera overlooked the situation in Syria, due to the excellent relationship between the two countries. This was unlike its approach to Egypt, whose regime was not on good terms with Qatar, which was also reflected by Al-Jazeera's coverage. (Ex4)

On a practical level, the interviewees confirmed that the relationship between Al-Jazeera and Qatar never took the form of direct instructions. C5, Ex4 and C6 stated that they were never directly instructed on which aspects of events to be covered and filmed. The data emphasized that the employees of the channel learnt from experience to understand the limits of their coverage, including that their management preferred tailored approaches to political situations, which always led them to try and garner approval. Thus, C1 stated "everyone knows what Qatar likes and doesn't like without being directed", while C2 noted: "you don't want to oppose your channel's editorial line on live television". In addition, Ex1 remarked: "some employees were given the task of indirectly ensuring the channel's agenda was being followed".

> There is a common frame for our coverage, determined by senior management. But again, this does not mean that we are given free movement. We do our best to create professional coverage, but I cannot claim that we always succeed." (C3)

On the other hand, a number of interviewees denied the existence of any relationship between Al-Jazeera and Qatar. C5 emphasized that "all decisions come from inside the channel, Qatar has nothing to do with Al-Jazeera, even if it is the financer". Furthermore, C7 argued: "the channel only cares about maintaining its journalistic position".

> Al-Jazeera has intensively covered many wars that go against Qatari interests, such as the war in Yemen. (C6)

Nonetheless, C4 emphasized that it is only the significance of a news item that determines the channel's coverage under the channel's vision, confirming "it is not something that we previously decide". C5 remarked "we tell our correspondents what news we want based on editorial meeting decisions". Both comments suggest that the first consideration when deciding which aspect of events should be covered tends to be channel's vision and agenda. However, C5 said that Qatar decided to finance Al-Jazeera as "Qatar wanted a regional powerful media outlet for itself", adding that this power came through giving the channel full freedom to cover what it wished, and that Qatar felt it sufficient for its own security that it was associated with Al-Jazeera. This therefore suggests that Qatar financed Al-Jazeera as a power in itself, while its own influence came solely through association.

However, it should be noted that the current researcher considers that it is not logical for a media channel to be considered free when it exists to be a power for a specific country. This has been supported by many studies indicating that Al-Jazeera never chooses to address issues related to Qatar in a negative manner (Al-Shammari 2015). Moreover, covering news that

contradicts Qatar's interests does not necessarily infer that the channel is free, while C5 and C6 emphasized that the channel is simply respecting the laws of the country in which it is operating.

However, the interviewees did view the missions of Qatar and Al-Jazeera to converge when it came to the latter's limited coverage of the uprising in Bahrain during the Arab Spring, which contrasted with its intensive coverage of the Qatar diplomatic crisis with the Gulf between 2017 and 2019, as well as the murder of Saudi opposition journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The data shows that the participants put forward three differing opinions, as discussed in detail below.

Firstly, there were those who acknowledged the channel's change in tone and lack of professionalism. Ex4 argued the Qatari intervention in Al-Jazeera was not as clear as it is now, saying: "now, Al-Jazeera is a Qatari channel, but before it was a channel financed by Qatar and broadcasting from Doha". In addition, C1 also noted that during Qatar's crisis with the Gulf:

> Qatar was defending itself with all its powers, because the threat was serious, they were threatening to militarily enter the country". (C1)

Moreover, C1 acknowledged that Al-Jazeera's coverage of events in Bahrain was too little and unprofessional, explaining this to be due to considerations related to the Gulf Cooperation Council, and to Iran.

Secondly, there were those who acknowledged the intervention, while at the same time justifying the channel's behavior. C4 stated that, rather than

being due to political intervention from Qatar, Al-Jazeera was forced to change its approach after being categorized an enemy entity by Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, accompanied by threats to bomb its offices. He also remarked "this made our job easier, otherwise our situation would have been embarrassing in relation to Qatar". However, it should be noted that simultaneously designating Al-Jazeera and Qatar as an 'enemy' suggests a potential link between the two. Additionally, this relationship is also emphasized by the statement that this saved Al-Jazeera from an embarrassing situation with Qatar. Analytically speaking, this suggests a link between Qatar and Al-Jazeera, as well as an unavoidable political pressure from Qatar, that automatically restricts Al-Jazeera's freedom, even if the country does not desire, or intend, to do so. It also indicates that Qatar enlists the services of Al-Jazeera when the country faces serious pressure. This, again, constitutes an explicit acknowledgment of the county's intervention in the channel.

Thirdly, there were those who did not believe the channel went beyond professionalism, duty and vision. Instead, they were of the view that it made no change to its coverage and tone, emphasizing that any unbalanced coverage was due to compelling circumstances, i.e. the shutting down of the bureau, or a lack of staff, and that any overly intensive coverage was in response to the reality on the ground. C5 also noted that the limited coverage of the uprising in Bahrain was due exclusively to the closure of Al-Jazeera's bureau and its lack of correspondents in the country. He also explained that during the Qatar-Gulf crisis:

Al-Jazeera's situation was very sensitive in a seized country. We covered the situation as truthfully as we could when covering a Gulf crisis. (C5)

Moreover, he emphasized that Al-Jazeera intensively covered the murder of Khashoggi because he was himself a journalist, stating: "we usually care so much about journalists".

6.3 Al-Jazeera's Potential Role as per the Interviewees:

The data from the interviews also included data concerning Al-Jazeera's communication of discontent, including its potential influence on the Syrian audience, which may have led to their eventual uprising. It should be noted that this theme complements the findings of this research's otherstrands examining the impact of Al-Jazeera's content on the audience, particularly in relation to the Syrian uprising.

The interviewees acknowledged that Al-Jazeera's coverage may have had an indirect influence on Syrian viewers in terms of the uprising, with C4 noting this could have been through the momentum driven by its coverage of the Arab Spring revolutions, so triggering Syrians' desire for change. Ex4, C2 and Ex5 also confirmed that Al-Jazeera encouraged revolutionary feelings by its intensive coverage, acknowledging that this prompted Syrians to share the general Arab desire for freedom at that time. However, Ex1 highlighted that the atrocities in Dara'a in 2011 were dwarfed by those that had taken place in Hama in 1982, which had not been followed by revolution, potentially: "because there was no Al-Jazeera nor social media".

The interviewees felt that the coverage may have inspired Syrians to revolt, but emphasized that this was not the deliberate intention of the channel, any more than it aimed to transfer the Arab Spring revolutions to Syria (Tausch 2011; Atwan 2011; Assad 2017; Martinez 2012; Anderson 2016). Ex4 commented: "I don't deny the influence, but I deny incitement. TV never makes revolutions, only people do". In addition, C4 also stressed: "our coverage was sometimes biased, but this was not deliberate … it is not media's job to make revolutions".

> Al-Jazeera did not incite people, it only raised enthusiasm, and this was not deliberate. (C2)

Additionally, the interviewees acknowledged that Al-Jazeera's broadcasting of events and atrocities acted to unify the population: "that is why people have made a connection between Al-Jazeera and the revolutions, and they are partially right" (Ex3). However, the channel's role can be seen to rest solely in transmitting awareness, in particular (as noted by C5) informing Syrians of events both within their own country and neighboring lands, thus highlighting Arab suffering: "Al-Jazeera drove awareness, and this is a positive thing" (Ex5).

> People revolted, not because they watched Al-Jazeera, but because they watched other revolutions succeeding on Al-Jazeera. (Ex1)

> When we give time to certain events, things become contagious. But this does not mean that we created the revolution, there is a difference. (C1)

The interviewees stressed that, had the channel aimed to incite Syrians or provoke a revolution in Syria, it would not have delayed its coverage of the initial stages of the Syrian uprising:

> Al-Jazeera was not targeting Syrian viewers, and the evidence is that its coverage was late. (C1)

They also added that Al-Jazeera was not the only channel to offer intense coverage of the Syrian uprising, with many Arabic and non-Arabic channels covering both the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising also displaying a similar stance. Thus, Al-Jazeera may have attracted the largest audience, but it cannot be viewed as being solely responsible for any influence. Additionally, the interviewees stressed that Al-Jazeera gave equal coverage to all the revolutions, and there was nothing particular about the coverage of the Syrian uprising:

> Bias was shown on Al-Jazeera's screen, and this was a defect, but every other channel offered the same intensive coverage. (C8)

> Al-Jazeera was not the only channel to cover the Syrian uprising, many Syrian channels offered more intensive coverage. (C6)

Moreover, there was a consensus amongst the interviewees that Al-Jazeera presented the truth about the events in Syria. The majority stressed that the channel's purpose was to give a voice to the oppressed, but that it cannot be held responsible for their viewers' reaction.

If it's the choice between being inflammatory or an accomplice, the first charge is much better!" (C3)

Al-Jazeera was the voice of the ordinary population during the Arab Spring, it covered the truth without any intention to incite, and it is not responsible for people's emotional reactions. (C4)

The interviewees emphasized that there were a number of more profound factors at play than the coverage of a media channel, even one as powerful as Al-Jazeera. They further stressed that a failure to acknowledge this fact belittles the will and sacrifice of the Syrian population. Such factors included the regime's oppression, its disrespect and disregard of the Syrian people, and the difficult circumstances under which they were living: "the regime is solely responsible for this revolution" (Ex4).

These people revolted because there was a criminal who tortured children and disrespected their families, not because Al-Jazeera incited them. (C4)

The interviewees emphasized that, in reality, it was the sacrifice of the Syrian people that prompted Al-Jazeera to eventually start to cover events in the country:

People are not naïve to be that easily incited. Accusing Al-Jazeera of inciting Syrians insults people's sacrifices and this is no justice!" (C4)

Syria was ready for that revolution, Syrians are not naïve to protest just because Al-Jazeera decided that they should do so. (C7)

We don't make revolutions, we only follow people and highlight their wishes. The revolution has nothing to do with Al-Jazeera, this belittles people's will. (C1)

Nevertheless, the interviewees believed that, although Al-Jazeera and its journalists focused, highlighted and amplified events but it was not sufficiently powerful to start a revolution. C1 noted: "we are a strong brand yes, but we can't make revolutions", while Ex5 stated:

revolutions have existed since the era of Spartacus. The media's role is to drive awareness, but it does not make revolutions. (Ex5)

No one takes to the street because a TV channel incited him, more important issues must exist! Media can't create historical movements. Arab media have been inciting Arabs against Israel for 50 years, but this could not liberate Palestine. (C3)

It makes us happy to believe we are such influencers and able to liberate the Arab world, but this is not true. (C4).

A number of interviewees, including C3, noted that, due to the change in the channel's political stance, the subsequent uprisings in Lebanon, Iraq and Sudan in 2018 and 2019, have been given less intensive coverage by Al-Jazeera. However, the revolutions continued to take place, and some, such as that in Sudan, have proved successful: "Al-Jazeera, at a later stage, heavily supported the Syrian revolution but still, in the end, the regime won!" (Ex4).

> In 2011 protests took place in Jordan and, despite the fact we gave the protests full coverage, no revolution and no bloodshed took place in the country. (C1)

The above discussion can be seen as evidence that it is not possible to accuse Al-Jazeera of having incited, or prolonged, the Arab Spring. Instead, the interviewees pointed to social media as playing a more significant role during both the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising, as follows: (1) "everything the governments wanted to blackout was disseminated on social media" (C8); (2) "credit should go to Facebook, as all communications and planning were on Facebook" (C7); (3) "I believe social media's role was greater than Al-Jazeera's" (C2); and (4) "Al-Jazeera's influence was very small in comparison to social media" (C6).

The role played by social media in the Arab uprisings of 2011 has been widely discussed in the literature (Ghanem 2011; Storck 2011; Khamis et al. 2012; Howard & Hussain 2011; Bhuiyan 2011; Tufekci, Wilson's 2012; Lindsey 2013), with some scholars acknowledging the integration between social and traditional media, citing the example of Al-Jazeera (Abdelmoula 2012).

This chapter has examined the evidence relating to factors prompting Al-Jazeera to cover the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. In addition, it has also considered the views of Al-Jazeera's staff concerning how their coverage may have influenced the perceptions of their Syrian audience. This now concludes the research's findings resulting from its three strands.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter discusses the data resulting from this research, including an analysis of the findings and the conceptual framework. Additionally, it considers the links between findings and their relation to the research questions, the main objectives, as well as the literature review. There is also a consideration of whether the emerging data accords with the findings of previous studies and how it identified and filled the potential gaps in the existing research and the contribution made by this current study.

This thesis examines the role of Al-Jazeera Arabic news channel during the Arab Spring, in particular its role in the Syrian uprising. This research initially aimed to explore the views discussed among the general population and in the media, alleging that Al-Jazeera directed the course of the Arab Spring. This subsequently evolved into a comprehensive study of three main aspects of Al-Jazeera's role in the Syrian uprising, thereby answering the research questions and filling a gap in the literature by providing an in-depth and integrated qualitative study of this topic.

There was a diversity of opinions in regard to Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising, as mentioned in the literature review of this research. Some believe the coverage was clearly tending towards the Syrian opposition, and blamed the regime for the atrocities (Khasib & Ersoy's 2016; Abdelmoula 2012;Ayaad 2014; Abdulnabi 2015), while others went further to argue that the channel fabricated the events, manipulated the

truth, and gave a sectarian character to the uprising, all aimed at overthrowing the Syrian regime, in the service of political international agendas (Anderson 2016; Martinez 2012; Byrne 2012). The data collected led the researcher to conclude that Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising cannot be considered as inaccurate, fake or untrue. This finding was supported by all of the participants from the focus groups, who emphasized that the overwhelming number of atrocities taking place in Syria at that time meant there was no need to fake inflammatory evidence. They also noted that, had Al-Jazeera chosen to broadcast inaccurate news, commentators would have easily identified the coverage as such, leading them to question the channel's credibility. However, from the content study, the researcher found that the manner in which this accurate information was reported to Al-Jazeera's audience showed support for those opposing the regime, sometimes including an attempt to exert influence, regardless of whether this proved effective. The findings also identified a number of factors that explain the channel's coverage.

This thesis aimed to answer the three research questions, and the findings of its three methods detailed earlier in the previous chapters are thus discussed in relation to each question.

7.1 Studying Al-Jazeera's News Content of the Syrian Uprising:

The current research, mainly the content analysis, found that Al-Jazeera offered a relatively limited degree of coverage mainly in terms of quantity during the first two weeks of the Syrian uprising, which also tended to convey a mildly anti-regime tone. This then increased abruptly to

prioritizing events in Syria, while continuing to display an explicit anti-regime stance. This finding concurs with previous reports from a number of scholars (Abdullah 2012), and was also supported by the data of this research's other two strands, the focus groups and the interviews. However, this abrupt change indicated that the channel was confused and needed time to determine the extent of coverage required initially, especially that Al-Jazeera does not generally ignore important events (i.e. significant protests and atrocities), as those mentioned by the focus groups participants. Indeed, the interviews with Al-Jazeera staff, also acknowledged this abrupt change and suggested significant reasons for it.

Previous studies highlighted that media stories are never reported in their raw format (Hall 2006), but rather form a bridge between real events and a selective, and not necessarily impartial, impression (McCombs 2014; Alvarez 2006). In addition, Aburub (2010) pointed out that the media tend to focus on two areas: firstly, 'content' (i.e. selected topics), and secondly 'form' (i.e., selected material), as well as the potentially persuasive body language of the news anchors. This indicates that media content can influence (and at times shape) public opinion (Habermas 1989), i.e., when frequently exposed to a media source having a specific agenda (McCombs, Shaw 1972; McCombs 2014).

Aburub (2010) and previous studies of Al-Jazeera during the Arab uprisings and other earlier events highlighted many characteristics that Al-Jazeera adopted in its coverage. Firstly, being emotive (Abdullah 2012, Aburub 2010; El-Nawawy, Iskander 2002); emotions are able to shape the contours of public opinion when focused on, as discussed by Richards (2007). Secondly, being encouraging and promoting anxiety (Owais 2011; Abdullah 2012; Rinnawi 2012; Al-Shareif 2016; Baroud 2012). Thirdly, an

inflammatory and negative framing of the regime (Rinnawi 2012; Al-Shareif 2016; Al-Sadi 2012). Fourthly, the anchors had an explicit anti-regime stance (Abdullah 2012; Al-Sadi 2012; Aburub 2010).

In regard to the channel's coverage of the Syrian uprising, following the initially ambiguous stance, the analysis of the 'Hasad Al-Yawm' program in the content study of the current research found evidence of explicit and unconditional anti-regime coverage. The coverage was also identified as emotive, including by promoting alarm, and directed against the regime, maintaining a negative framework with help from its sources, and focusing on juxtaposition to influence the audience's decoding process. As examined in the analysis chapters, Al-Jazeera's anchors were also found to demonstrate explicit support for anti-regime rhetoric when discussing events with both guests opposed to the regime and supporting it. The presence of these similar features in coverage of different previous and current events suggests that Al-Jazeera frequently employs a specific style to cover certain stories, adopting a specific stance, perhaps depending on how the channel wants these events to be promoted, according to its agenda at that time.

Some of the previous studies also examined Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising in terms of its content and goals (Khasib, Ersoy 2016; Abdulnabi 2018; Abdelmoula 2012; Ayaad 2014; Harahsheh 2013), with their findings also corresponding to those of the current research. Nevertheless, the latter offered more details about the content features, also

presented various scenarios about the factors and goals other than just focusing on the channel's relationship with Qatar as previous studies did. However, it should be noted that none has presented an in-depth qualitative study establishing a comprehensive picture of the role of Al-Jazeera's coverage at the initial stage of the Syrian uprising, and none has conducted an audience study with Syrian nationals to study the outset of the uprising. The current research is also unique in that it identified this aspect during a significant turning point in the Syrian status quo, marking the transition period between the coverage of previous Arab uprisings and the one in Syria before it increased in complexity.

The focus groups participants generally emphasized that Al-Jazeera's coverage at the outset of the Syrian uprising was faithful, accurate and objective, lacking any phony aspects, it was even restrained in its capacity to show all atrocities. They also justified any unbalanced coverage by citing: (1) the lack of reporters; (2) the regime prohibiting Al-Jazeera from working inside Syria; and (3) inadvertent mistakes. However, some believe that political pressures also played a role. Analytically speaking, the focus groups participants were mostly critical of the regime and its practices. They also expressed satisfaction with the channel's increasing coverage, which showed an anti-regime stance, after being disappointed with the limited one at the very beginning of the uprising. This finding therefore indicates that the coverage tended to align with the views of those who opposed the regime rather than being balanced, as discussed by the participants. This unbalanced coverage was also acknowledged by the interviewed members of Al-Jazeera's staff.

Many commentators discussed Al-Jazeera's performance in regards to the Arab Spring, some went extreme in their arguments such as Atwan (2011), Baroud (2012), and Abi Sa'ab (2012).

7.2 Studying the Role of Al-Jazeera's Coverage in Shaping the Syrian Perceptions:

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, many scholars and commentators, both academic and non-academic, discussed Al-Jazeera's coverage during the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. Some highlighted Al-Jazeera's tendency to cover demonstrators in its coverage of the Arab uprisings, presenting the different ways the channel controlled its broadcast to serve this coverage (Abdelmoula 2012; Khasib & Ersoy 2016; Owais 2011; Abdullah 2012; Rinnawi 2012; Al-Shareif 2016; Al-Sadi). Others went further and explicitly argued that Al-Jazeera, during the Syrian uprising, consciously shaped events and fabricated facts with the aim of inciting Syrians and fulfilling political goals (Anderson 2016; Barlett 2015; Abdulhamid 2017; Atwan 2011; Baroud 2012; Abi Sa'ab 2012; Martinez 2012; Byrne 2012).

In order to further investigate the influence of Al-Jazeera, so as to answer the second research question, the focus groups examined the methods employed. The findings resulted in the emergence of three themes. The most dominant of these focused on the fact that the role played by Al-Jazeera only indirectly and inadvertently encouraged Syrians to protest, and thus, although it could be assumed that it facilitated and accelerated events, it did not deliberately mobilize or incite Syrians.

A second, lesser, theme stressed that the events in Dara'a were sufficiently serious to start a revolution. This pointed out that there was little coverage by Al-Jazeera at the outset and that this could therefore not be seen as influencing, highlighting that Al-Jazeera was not the only media outlet intensively covering the Arab Spring revolutions, so it would be unfair to hold the channel solely responsible for the reaction of the population.

Many scholars believe that some aspects of the media can play a vital role in influencing attitudes toward social, political and economic factors (Entman 2008; Leonard et al. 2002; Azran 2013; McQuail 2005; Van Loon 2008), while others disagree (Gilboa 2005; Livingston, Eachus 1995). However, it was also discussed that politics tended to remain a largely mediated experience, with most citizens relying on the news media for information (Cushion 2015), which heightens the possibility of this influence, if any. This role of the media, according to Russ-Mohl (2013), can be equal to that of an army in terms of power and influence, particularly during wartime.

Yet, the above findings suggest that Al-Jazeera cannot be considered to have exerted a major impact on the perceptions and attitudes of Syrian viewers, or at least not one that was deliberate. These findings therefore indicate the limited impact of media on public opinion, being simply one amongst many other influences (Armoudian 2016; Gilboa 2005; Hafez 2008). While as noted in the previous section, the content analysis revealed an explicit anti-regime stand by Al-Jazeera, containing many features that

could be expected to impact on how this content was decoded. However, a more nuanced discussion of the above findings indicates that Al-Jazeera's coverage tends to align with Klapper's (1960) 'Phenomenistic Theory', in which he referred to 'reinforcement theory', i.e. that the primary influence of media is to reinforce, rather than transform, existing attitudes and behaviors. Or that it influences those who were hesitant or unwilling to form an opinion.

In the case of the Syrian uprising, this was due to Syrians perceiving the Al-Jazeera's coverage as being 'normal' news, and a restrained, rather than exaggerated, covering of the reality of the situation. This reinforcement underpinned a feeling that action was necessary, so triggering Syrians' courage to act, particularly after watching the success of other Arab revolutions. Hence, the coverage did not change Syrians' attitudes as these attitudes already existed. However, it is necessary to also keep in mind Al-Jazeera's accumulative influence and liberalizing role for the Arab population, including Syrians, prior to the Arab uprisings (Lynch 2006; Amin 2004; Quinn, Walters 2003; Abdelmoula 2012), and its powers as a media channel, Lynch (2005) argued that one Al-Jazeera cameraman is more effective in generating political power than several thousand protestors.These findings generally challenge the view of some commentators that Al-Jazeera played a deliberate role in the Syrian uprising (Anderson 2016; Martinez 2012; Byrne 2012).

The participants of the focus groups in this current research denied that they had experienced any consistent and rigorous exposure to Al-Jazeera's content. However, during a number of the discussions, the responses from

the participants revealed that, in fact, the participants paid close attention to the channel. This included the fact that they had always referred to the channel in order to check the credibility of news they had heard or read on social media, thus indicating their trust in Al-Jazeera. According to McCombs et al. (2011), believability is highly correlated with reliance on a medium, which is also significantly correlated with exposure. Arguably, the believability of a news outlet moderates the impact of exposure and reliance upon it, and generally at that time Al-Jazeera had high believability, as suggested by the participants using it as a source to verify what they encountered elsewhere. As they also emphasized that, in response to the channel focusing on stories ignoring the events in Syria in a later time, the participants subsequently ceased to watch Al-Jazeera. However, there is significant evidence for strong attitudinal consequences on an audience as a result of increased exposure and attention to news content (McQuail 2005; McCombs et al. 2011).

The findings indicate that the participants' perceived Al-Jazeera's coverage to be accurate and impartial, while the content study and the interviews with Al-Jazeera's staff revealed that the coverage was not completely neutral, i.e. it tended to support demonstrators and ordinary people against the regime. However, the focus group participants did not identify this tendency or any possible impact from it on their perceptions and attitudes. This might be because the channel's anti-regime rhetoric aligned with the participants' own beliefs, causing them to overlook bias in the channel's coverage and consequently its potential influence. This can be observed in the way the participants defended and justified any questionable reporting decisions made by the channel, as discussed in the chapter on the focus groups. Aburub (2010) argued that Al-Jazeera would not easily lose the

trust it had previously acquired with Arabs, which implies that either the channel had little influence on their viewers' decoding of their coverage, or that people were subliminally influenced. This is supported by Gentile and Arturo (2003), in particular that media influence usually takes place at an unconscious level, and those who claim that not to be influenced being the most likely to be impacted (cited in Gentile & Arturo 2003).

The third theme to emerge suggested Al-Jazeera exerted a direct and deliberate influence, one that aimed to incite Syrians through its coverage, so aggravating the situation. In addition, this inferred that the channel's rhetoric was biased, inflammatory, and emotive, provoking Syrians to revolt. Furthermore, this also indicated that this was not for the sake of the Syrian people, but in service of the channel's own agenda, which primarily serve Qatar's political line, as well as its interests in Syria and the Arab world. This aligns with discussions concerning this issue in the literature (Zayani 2005; El-Oifi 2005; Abdulnabi 2018; Azran 2013), as discussed in further detail in the next section.

Scheff (2013) argued that traditional communities, which include Arabic societies, tend to place greater importance on emotions. Since its establishment, Al-Jazeera has been considered to focus on the emotional reaction of its audience (Aburub 2010; El-Nawawy, Iskandar 2002), which, reflecting Scheff's argument, could suggest why it became the most watched and trusted channel among Arabs. This third theme was primarily suggested by those (i.e. the inhabitants of Homs and Damascus) who were only able to view the events in Dara'a on television at the beginning, as they believed Al-Jazeera exaggerated in its coverage in an inflammatory

manner. This contrasted with those actually living in Dara'a, who believed Al-Jazeera's coverage was highly restrained. This infers that it was those who were unable to experience firsthand the reality of the situation who tended to perceive the channel as having a role in the Syrian uprising, just as those who were unable to see the events taking place in Dara'a believed Al-Jazeera was exaggerating. Therefore, these views are not necessarily based on solid facts. The participants from central Damascus, who did not witness any serious atrocities, continued to believe that Al-Jazeera's coverage was inflammatory at the commencement of the uprising.

These three themes can be seen as valuable because they present the inside story of the events in Syria, clearly identifying how a sample of Syrians viewed and compared the events taking place on the ground to Al-Jazeera coverage. As noted previously, no existing research undertook a study of Al-Jazeera's audience to estimate its impact on Syrian perceptions, attitudes and reactions at the outset of the Syrian uprising, which should make the above findings a valuable contribution to the knowledge in this field.

The interviews with Al-Jazeera staff found that they acknowledged deliberately making some editorial decisions that could not be seen as balanced and tended to support the population rather than the regime, focusing on the emotive aspect. They stressed that this is common media practice. However, they also emphasized that the channel mainly aimed to report news in an accurate manner, rather than mobilize the population. They considered that Al-Jazeera's intensive coverage may have encouraged Syrians to rise up against the regime through the transmission of revolutionary sentiments, but emphasized this was not deliberate, as Al-Jazeera covered uncomfortable truths and was not responsible for how its viewers decoded this coverage.

However, a further theme was highlighted by a small number of former employees of the channel, who believed Al-Jazeera's lack of balance to be deliberately aimed at mobilizing the population. They felt that the channel had offered momentum, amplified events and manipulated montage frames, while simultaneously allowing radical leaders to speak freely on its screen and restricting the speech of the regime's supporters, as well as employing further techniques serving an anti-regime narrative.

Nonetheless, the existing literature has widely discussed the lack of freedom and the level of intimidation in Syria (Al-Abdullah 2010; Rubin 2007; CPJ 2012; BBC 2018). External observers, like the researcher and every other person who looks at the situation from outside, are unable to accurately assess the experience of the Syrian population before and during the uprising, with them alone being able to evaluate how they think they may have been influenced by Al-Jazeera in terms of perceptions, attitudes and reactions to events. This, because those who did not go through the same conditions are unable to estimate the influence of the accumulated atrocities on the reaction of the population when compared to the influence of the media. On the other hand, analytically speaking, it is unlikely that Al-Jazeera's coverage (which rigorously defended Syrians, while also publicizing atrocities using an anti-regime rhetoric and stance) exerted no influence on Syrian viewers, particularly as they had lived through same unpleasant circumstances, as they discussed. The participants' satisfaction with Al-Jazeera's anti-regime coverage thus raises questions concerning how the conditions influenced the decoding processes of the interviewees. This is particularly so as they praised Al-Jazeera's coverage when it

defended them, but were critical when it reduced its coverage of Syrian stories and no longer identified itself with their demands later. Accordingly, the focus group participants' description of Al-Jazeera's coverage as neutral (which was supported by neither the content study nor the interviews), may simply have been an interpretation on their part, rather than a completely accurate observation.

Throughout history, revolutions have taken place in response to many complex factors and reasons, which have not been confined to the role played by the media, particularly as, for most of this time, such media did not yet exist. Likewise, the Arab Spring can be seen to have swept through the region primarily in response to economic and freedom-related factors, rather than (as has been widely discussed) the influence of the media (Spencer 2011; BBC 2011b). Yet, it must be acknowledged that Al-Jazeera was trusted by its Arab viewers (Auter et al. 2005), and covered the details of the Arab revolutions with a rhetoric that defended and supported protestors and people's needs and demands. It can therefore be considered to have instilled a sense of unity and power in Arabs, who felt supported by such a powerful news channel (Freeland 2011). This coverage may therefore have had encouraged a 'domino effect', as well as influencing the size and intensity of the revolution. At the same time, it can be concluded that (as cited by the focus group participants) previous Syrian uprisings took place without any assistance from the media, i.e. in Hama in 1982, Latakia in 1999 (George 2003), As-Suwayda in 2001 and Al-Hasakeh in 2004. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the 2011 Syrian uprising also took place without any media assistance, but only if it took place in a different timing and condition not amid an unprecedented revolutionary wave sweeping the Middle East.

The role of the media can be minor, indirect or inadvertent, yet it mostly existed and made an influence. Especially that the focus groups participants emphasized that, while similar atrocities have frequently occurred in the past, the specific incident of the fifteen detained boys led to a unique reaction, mainly due to the encouragement experienced by Syrians through watching the success of other revolutions against similar oppressive aging regimes, as portrayed by media channels (Al-Jazeera 2018), primarily Al-Jazeera and social media. Additionally, while an organized uprising by the Muslim brotherhood took place in Hama in 1982, in an attempt to launch a coup against the regime (Gowans 2013), the 2011 uprising consisted of an unplanned popular agitation in response to an atrocity that was not unusual in the country. This confirms that there was a significant trigger for the revolt.

The Syrian uprising is primarily a response to the oppression experienced by the population (Al-Abdullah 2010; Rubin 2007; CPJ 2012; BBC 2018), triggered by the previous Arab Spring revolutions being rapidly conveyed through both traditional and social media, during a time when an overwhelming revolutionary spirit was sweeping the Arab world (Abdullah 2012; Kamel 2014). Moreover, it is also significant to note that one of the uprisings' main reasons, as per the focus groups participants, the fifteen boys who were detained and tortured, can be seen as a result of media reporting of the Arab Spring revolutions; this happened because they circulated anti-regime slogans inspired by the Arab Spring, which had only reached them through the media. Hence, it can be seen that even the main

reason for the Syrian uprising took place as a result of the media's coverage of the Arab Spring (Al-Jazeera 2018).

Aburub (2010) identified a lack of balance in Al-Jazeera's choice of guests, i.e. a populist with simple language and a loud tone tends to overpower the message of more academic, knowledgeable and rational figures, resulting in viewers psychologically absorbing and retaining the opinions of the former. The participants also believed that Al-Jazeera was deliberately selective in its choice of guests, allowing them to freely state views it did not wish to be seen overtly supporting. This included selecting effective speakers to defend the general population and those who were weak to defend the regime, so highlighting those aspects it wished to emphasize, while protecting its editorial line from any responsibility. A number of scholars have also noted that the channel's anchors took care to demonstrate professionalism and objectivity, while at the same time directing their guests to express views that served the channel's discourse. This was generally through making pro-regime statements with anti-regime guests, so enabling them to express their own views in a forceful manner, this feature was also identified by the findings of this current research. Additionally, debates with Al-Jazeera's guests differed in tone according to their political affiliation (Aburub 2010; Al-Sadi 2012).

However, the interviews with Al-Jazeera's staff highlighted that it had not been easy for the channel to find pro-regime guests willing to share their views on Al-Jazeera, thus preventing them from being sufficiently selective. This contrasts with the opinions expressed by the participants of the focus groups that Al-Jazeera selected its guests to serve its own narrative and agenda. Nonetheless, the staff members stressed that the

channel's producers were familiar with the background and potential of speakers, being well aware of the aspects the channel wished to cover, as well as respecting the ability of their anchors to deal with all types of guests, and therefore the channel had no need to select weak pro-regime speakers to maintain weak pro-regime views. Which was alsofound by the content study informing that Al-Jazeera's anchors tended to employ a more aggressive style of language and tone with speakers supporting the Syrian regime. Thus, the acknowledgment from Al-Jazeera's staff that the channel's production team was aware of their guests' background and potential, stating that Al-Jazeera's anchors were chosen to debate the guests accordingly and that they were able to manage even the most forceful of guests, suggests that bias existed and could have potentially influenced outcomes.

As a result, the focus groups generally perceived and evaluated Al-Jazeera's coverage as truthful and did not include any fake stories. The majority of participants rejected any deliberate attempt by Al-Jazeera to influence its Syrian viewers through its coverage and so encourage them to revolt.The participants of the focus groups and Al-Jazeera staff interviewees indicated that Al-Jazeera would not have been capable of starting a revolution in Syria if Syrians had been content with their circumstances, particularly during the few months of the Arab spring. Otherwise, they added, this influence must undergo a long process which takes years to make a difference, not few months as the case of the Arab spring. But referring to literature Al-Jazeera since its establishment worked on changing Arabs public sphere in many aspects and gradually changed Arabs mindset in a long-term effect (Abdelmoula 2012). This was likely to have mentally

prepared Arabs and Syrians for a revolution, indicating their enthusiasm, courage and acceptance of uprisings at the start of the Arab Spring.

The interviewees' opinions of this aspect ranged between viewing this as deliberate and clearly inadvertent, including a limited coverage of pro-regime views, due to feeling the content was weak, provocative, lacking in conviction and illogical, in addition to using photographic angles that portrayed an anti-regime protest as being greater in size than it was in reality. However, the content analysis concurred with previous literature discussing Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring and Syrian uprising by: firstly, identifying a deliberate anti-regime coverage (Gore 2013; Youssef 2013; Atwan 2011; Miles 2011; Hasan 2011; Abdelmoula 2012) and secondly, indicating the channel's deliberate purpose (Abdulnabi 2018; Anderson 2016; Martinez 2012; Byrne 2012).

7.3 Studying the Factors Behind Al-Jazeera's Coverage of the Syrian Uprising:

Previous literature tended to emphasize the relationship between Al-Jazeera and Qatar, as the channel was originally established to introduce Qatar as a key player in the region and the world, also to eliminate threats from the country (Miles 2005; Hroub 2011; Zayani 2005; Sakr 2007; Khatib 2013; Riley 2017; Whitaker 2011; Souaiaia 2011). This makes the channel a tool of Qatar's foreign policy and less independent than it shows (Zayani 2005; El-Oifi 2005; Abdulnabi 2018; Azran 2013). Many scholars suggested that the channel is not completely free to decide what to broadcast and that the

material is determined by the Qatari government (Al-Shammari 2015, Cherribi 2006; Wright 2005; Miles 2005; Kraidy, Khalil 2007, Aburub 2008, Hroub 2011; Al-Sadi 2012). However, other scholars deny Qatar's influence on Al-Jazeera's performance, confirming the channel's independency and professionalism (Boyd-Barrett, Xie 2008; Sakr 1999).

This approach considers the relationship between Qatar and Al-Jazeera to form the motivation for the anti-regime coverage, i.e. that the channel aligned itself with Qatar's political stance in supporting the Syrian opposition against the regime (Harahsheh 2013; Eldar 2011; Hroub 2011; Byrne 2012; Kirkpatrick 2014; Al-Sadi 2012). A considerable proportion of the literature also discussed Al-Jazeera's dramatic change in coverage from being limited at the start of the uprising to becoming intensive, suggesting this was also due to the channel's relationship with Qatar (Abdulnabi 2018; Kanan, Shalaby 2011; Abdullah 2012). However, while none of these studies has undertaken a comprehensive consideration of the reasons for Al-Jazeera's anti-regime coverage in the Syrian uprising, this current research offers a detailed interpretation of the factors behind the channel's coverage.

The discussions with the focus groups found that a proportion of the participants supported the above mentioned and believed Al-Jazeera's coverage to be deliberately emotive, inciting Syrians to act and so aggravating the situation within the country. In addition, they claimed that the channel wished Syrians to revolt against the regime in service of a specific political agenda supporting the interests of their financer (i.e. Qatar), stressing that this powerful media empire is not a charitable

institution and therefore must gain some benefit from its financial input. In response, the themes arising from the interviews with Al-Jazeera's staff (which aimed to identify the reasons behind the channel's coverage), suggested that four logistic reasons lay behind the acknowledged anti-regime coverage offered by the channel.

Additionally, a number of further interviewees acknowledged the existence of a political motivation, with the most dominant theme outlining the relationship between Qatar and Al-Jazeera as being moderate, stressing that no media channel is completely independent of its financer. However, they also emphasized that this relationship is neither direct nor constant and does not interfere in every aspect of the channel's coverage and performance, but rather relates to promoting harmony between employees and the channel being able to recognize its backer's preferences in terms of coverage. By contrast, a small number of these participants noted that this is an overt relationship that has existed since the channel was founded.

The logistic reasons suggested by the participants are plausible and capable of explaining certain aspects, but they do not justify the sudden change in coverage from limited to intensive, neither they do with rigorous anti-regime coverage. For example, being unable to access the country, and depending exclusively on activists explains the volume of the coverage, but not the predominance of anti-regime rhetoric used within it. Later, when the channel was able to re-enter Syria, the channel's anti-regime coverage continued, suggesting that this was intentional bias, not enforced. While the logistical factor mentioned by the interviewees regarding the lack of pro-regime speakers and official resources can be deemed reasonable, it does

not completely justify the lack of balance, as Al-Jazeera could still have offered more balanced coverage in terms of its use of sources, language and tone.

The interviewees also considered that the channel covered events in an accurate manner, but the events themselves were full of atrocities. The interviewees added that this did not make the channel responsible for how the audience decoded and perceived this coverage, nor for how they reacted. As previously noted, the impact of accurately reporting inflammatory content differs from reporting content in an inflammatory manner. No channel can be held responsible for how its audience reacts to inflammatory content, but it is clearly responsible for how this content is delivered. However, this study's content analysis concluded that Al-Jazeera broadcast accurate information concerning distressing events, but in a manner that could be considered provocative. Hence, while acknowledging that the content was inflammatory, it is also important to examine the channel's political economy and news production. A considerable amount of research has focused on the influence exerted by the media, indicating that this lies not only in how news is received but also how it is delivered and presented (McQuail 2005; Miller, Bokemper 2016; Hartley 1982), i.e. urging viewers to be cautious in decoding any coverage (Seib 2008; Friedman 2003; Alalawi 2015).

Additionally, in investigating the origins of Al-Jazeera's vision, which is also one of the suggested reasons, many scholars pointed out that the channel was founded to protect Qatar and promote its place as a key player on the world stage (Miles 2005; Hroub 2011). This power was based on

attracting Arabs by defending them and ensuring that their voices were heard. Al-Jazeera's pro-people vision can therefore be seen to start from this point and consequently impact the relationship between Al-Jazeera and Qatar. Moreover, the interviewees justified many of the channel's actions by attributing them to journalists' individual mistakes. However, such errors were present in every analyzed segment of the content study of the current research. This degree of error cannot be justified in a well-known and professional channel such as Al-Jazeera. The interviewees' failure to recognize this aspect is emphasized by their insistence that the channel's management rigorously verified the news content and reports, and mistakes were immediately identified and corrected, and therefore it could not be held responsible for any errors. These are two contradicting statements concerning how carefully verified material can retain such a consistent degree of individual mistakes. This raises doubts about the channel's performance and the way it dealt with the Syrian story, which can be interpreted as using deliberate oversight to maintain an unbalanced coverage for some reason, i.e., for the purpose of inciting emotions under the cover of individual mistakes.

As discussed previously, some interviewees acknowledged that their anti-regime coverage had been deliberate, including that pro-regime views were presented to a limited extent because reporters felt the content was weak and that, like their producers, they knew that a professional approach required more in-depth coverage. However, the current researcher considers that those aspects the journalists viewed as being illogical might have been important to viewers holding different views, while simply ignoring them can lead to accusations that the channel only covered those aspects that suited its narrative and editorial line. They also acknowledged

using camera angles that implied that an anti-regime protest was larger in size than it was in reality, thus indicating that the channel sought to amplify those events, which would have had a greater impact on viewers, particularly those living under the same difficult circumstances. This, again, can be seen to raise questions concerning the channel's objectivity.

Discussing the human factors impact of Al-Jazeera's outcome mentioned above brings to mind the studies that consider it difficult, or nearly impossible, for journalists to be neutral observers, especially during wartime, although scholars such as McLaughlin (2016) argued that objectivity has informed its legitimation as a neutral medium of information even in the midst of battle. Pragmatic objectivity (Ward 1999, 2004) might be able to partly explain the journalists' clear anti-regime attitude suggested by the interviewees, although it was clear in many areas in this study that this attitude was beyond professional journalism standards, evident in the fact that interviewees called it a mistake.

However, the discussion in the current study of the political reasons for the channel following Qatar's political line probes Al-Jazeera's independence and credibility, suggesting that its coverage could be controlled by factors and influences that compromised its objectivity and professionalism. The literature emphasizes that no media channel is truly objective and lacking in influence from its financial backers (Barkho 2006). This is significant as (apart from a small degree of revenue derived from advertisements) Al-Jazeera is completely financed by Qatar (Abt 2004; Telhami 2013). Many focus groups participants and Al-Jazeera interviewees asserted that it would not make sense of Qatar to pay such high sums simply to defend Arab rights and freedoms. They thus suspected that other considerations must lie behind Qatar's generous financing of a news channel whose content appears to contradict its political line.

This approach is not illogical for a country where democracy is not primary in its system. In order to fulfill its potential, Al-Jazeera requires an overall freedom that does not currently exist; without freedom there is no possibility of change and Al-Jazeera's freedom remains under the control of the Qatari Government (Lynch 2005; Whitaker 2011). This is also true of the political system of the Arab world as whole, which tends to be disproportionately authoritarian, lacking in true democracy and any variety of input when it comes to decision making on ground. It is also noteworthy that Qatar has made considerable a financial contribution to the free Syrian Army in its fight against theregime (Anderson 2017; Eldar 2011; Hroub 2011; Byrne 2012), and it was the only monarchy that opened up a fund for donations from its population aimed at supporting the rebels (Kirkpatrick 2014). This aligns with Al-Jazeera's anti-regime coverage of the Syrian uprising.

The above analysis thus indicates that logistic reasons are not always sufficient to justify Al-Jazeera's lack of balance and the explicit anti-regime coverage identified by this research. While political factors can more comprehensively explain the way Al-Jazeera covered the Syrian uprising, (i.e. the sudden change in the degree of coverage), this requires a more detailed investigation. This outcome questions whether it was journalistic or political factors that exerted a greater impact on shaping the channel's coverage. The above discussion indicates that it was the latter, which contributes to the literature emphasizing the Qatari role in the channel's performance.

7.4 Theoretical Contribution of the Study:

The objectives of this current study were to analyze Al-Jazeera's news content concerning events at the outset of the Syrian uprising, and to evaluate its impact on both its Syrian viewers and the subsequent course of events. Additionally, this study investigated the factors leading to this coverage.

Practically speaking, the study's findings represent an original contribution to the development of a theoretical approach to the understanding of the impact of media on shaping audience perception. In addition, the findings revealed a chain of other minor theoretical approaches, i.e. the impact of media ownership on journalistic outcomes, the development of Arab journalism, and the role of Social media, which will not be discussed in this chapter.

This study concludes that the descriptions by the members of the focus groups of the events they had witnessed demonstrated that Al-Jazeera's news content, which is this research first strand,was an accurate reflection of events taking place in Syria. Yet, the findings of the content study exploring Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising revealed that this news content was presented with an anti-regime rhetoric containing many supportive features and characteristics. In addition, the findings from the interviews indicate that this content was influenced by many factors, including journalistic factors, journalists' attitudes and ideological positions; institutional forces; external forces; and political factors and commitments.

The findings of the first strand, the content study, is the base on which the contribution of this research was developed. The second strand investigating the impact on Syrian viewers of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the

country's uprising contributes to the studies of the impact of the media on public opinion. This has been evaluated in different ways by various media scholars, with a number emphasizing its impact (Entman 2008; Leonard et al. 2002; Azran 2013; McQuail 2005), while others considering it to have little influence (Armoudian 2016; Gilboa 2005; Livingston, Eachus 1995; Hafez 2008), and others viewing it to be confined to reinforcing pre-existing opinions (Klapper 1960). The findings of the current research mainly indicate that Al-Jazeera exerted an indirect and inadvertent influence on the perceptions of Syrian viewers through its consistent anti-regime coverage, which encouraged them to rebel. However, they also confirmed that the channel never played a primary role in the emergence and continuation of the uprising. These findings contribute to studies acknowledging the role of the media in reinforcing pre-existing opinions (Klapper 1960), particularly in response to the observation that Al-Jazeera was only able to encourage its viewers to rebel due to their pre-existing resentment towards the regime.

Moreover, in this particular context of Al-Jazeera and the Syrian uprising as an aspect of the Arab Spring, this research contributes to the study of Arab journalism. Such studies were only recognized due to the emergence of Al-Jazeera, which was a pioneer in raising the global profile of Arab journalism. This research has investigated the reasons for the nature of the coverage of the Syrian uprising by Al-Jazeera in its third strand, particularly as it supported ordinary people against the power of a regime which is not unusual for the channel remaining true to its founding approach. Therefore, this strand has examined whether this coverage arose as a result of professionalism, enthusiasm, reviving pan-Arabism, or in order to serve certain political agendas and interests. The findings suggest

that all of these factors exerted a measure of influence on production, but it has identified the most significant as being the political.

Relatively speaking, journalists are generally challenged between firstly, following journalistic values alongside their individual ambitions, and secondly, fulfilling their occupational obligations while conforming to institutional obligations and agendas (Reich, Hanitzsch 2013). Each can be seen to have an impact on the other, with individual ambitions influencing journalistic values, while institutional obligations and agendas influence both. In addition, many commentators have identified an obligation to reflect the interests of an owner or financial backer as playing a salient role in determining media outcomes (Barkho 2006; Richards 2007; McCombs et al. 2011). In addressing the research third question examining the factors behind the channel's coverage, the findings emphasized that Al-Jazeera's journalistic practices during the Syrian uprising responded to all three aspects, i.e. journalistic factors, external factors and political commitments. The analysis determined that political commitments were the most significant factors in comprehensively explaining the development of the anti-regime coverage, although this can also be viewed as a result of professional factors. Consequently, this study confirms that the most significant controlling factors when it comes to media and journalistic outcomes consist of institutional obligations and conforming to the agenda of a financial backer.

The thesis' contribution to the examination of the role of journalistic practices in shaping audience perception was undertaken by analyzing how the journalistic practices followed by Al-Jazeera's journalists shaped the channel's output and influenced the perceptions of Syrian viewers. The findings reveal that the channel's journalistic practices arose from a number of different factors: firstly, logistical; secondly, journalistic

tendencies and ideologies; thirdly, the organizational ethos; and finally, political pressures.These aspects were found by this study to influence the news content which, as revealed by the content analysis, conformed to an explicit anti-regime rhetoric. This approach was also identified as playing a role in determining how the Syrian audience processed and decoded the resulting content, as well as encouraging them to act in accordance with the direction of the coverage. This has thus led this research to confirm a paralleled impact between media and audience. However, it should be noted that these findings emphasize that the approach taken by Al-Jazeera did not necessarily change the attitudes of the Syrian population, but rather acted to reinforce their existing views. This confirms that the channel would have been unable to influence its viewers had they not already held similar opinions, thus being prepared to accept the viewpoint presented by Al-Jazeera.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes the study by integrating its various aspects and answering its main question posed in the research regarding the concerns about the role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising. Moreover, it addresses and answers each research question separately and independently based on the chief findings. Additionally, it identifies the limitations of the study, offering recommendations for future research.

The chief reasons for conducting this research was to explore allegations about the role Al-Jazeera played in fuelling the conflict in Syria from the outset. Specifically, it examined Al-Jazeera's news content when presenting the Syrian story, investigated the impact of this content on the perceptions of those Syrian audience members who participated in the study, and explored possible factors behind this coverage drawing on the knowledge of current and former Al-Jazeera employees. This involved three empirical studies employing three qualitative methods; a content study, focus groups and interviews.

It is important to note that there were considerable parallels between the findings from the focus group participants and the Al-Jazeera interviewees, which is important evidence verifying the data and demonstrating its likely accuracy. Significantly, multiple individuals from different backgrounds with varying levels of interest and investment in both the channel and the events that took place provided similar information. It is relevant to ask if concerns about the researcher's influence causing bias were considered when conducting the research. Certainly, the researcher's enthusiasm for generating an integrated complete and comprehensive interrelated data set might have led to a focus on certain areas and opinions. Furthermore, it is

necessary to consider whether the researcher's questions, as prepared for the focus group sessions and the interviews, and the analysis process itself focused more on findings that reflected similaritieswithout overlooking the others. However, triangulating the research using actual content heightens the validity, credibility and accuracy of the data and the analysis. Moreover, the researcher was careful to conduct each data collection step, which were all objectively analysed based on solid analytical methods, Braun and Clarke (2006), from a neutral standpoint, willing to see what emerged from the raw data.

After completing the data collection and analysing the research findings, the following answer of the research's main question about the role of Al-Jazeera in the Syrian uprising emerged and it became apparent that Al-Jazeera's coverage played a role in the Syrian uprising, while this might have been an indirect and inadvertent role it is acknowledged to have existed. Historically, revolutions have had nothing to do with media, but the Syrian uprising occurred under unique conditions. It was one in a series of uprisings sweeping the Middle East region, and it was not the consequence of an organized insurrection or coup. This chain of uprisings was linked by a variety of media outlets; both social and traditional media, and of these sources Al-Jazeera was widely watched and trusted. People in the different Arab countries almost experiencing similar challenging living conditions came to know about the revolutions elsewhere through the media, and uprisings swept through the region over a short period. The pressures placed upon the population and difficult living conditions have since been identified as the main drivers of the Arab Spring revolutions (Khondker 2011), but the intensive coverage of the first revolution, which took place in Tunisia, has been suggested to have encouraged unrest in the other Arab nations resulting in a domino effect (Abdelmoula 2012). As the

Syrian uprising followed four previous revolutions, and the Syrians were subject to comparable difficult living conditions (Wikas 2007; Al-Abdullah 2010; Rubin 2007; BBC 2018), as well as exposed to a highly intensive media pump due to these earlier revolutions, it is reasonable to suppose that the Syrians were encouraged to act and influenced by events elsewhere(Al-Jazeera 2018).

Likewise, Al-Jazeera, by covering the atrocities in Syria using a discourse that reflected an anti-regime rhetoric might have influenced the Syrian audience. However, social media, people's will, repeated atrocities and disrespect of the populous were factors that also motivated and influenced the actions of the Syrian people. Hence, Al-Jazeera's role in influencing people and the Syrian uprising's course of events can only be viewed as one among multiple other factors, which somewhat undermines its impact.

The content study component of this thesis identified clear anti-regime coverage, and was analysed and found to be presented in such a way as to influence the Syrian audience. Yet, despite this, the majority of the Syrian audience members interviewed denied it had any influence, questioning the idea that they might have been mobilized simply by watching the atrocities portrayed on Al-Jazeera and nothing more. They emphasized that Al-Jazeera is not the only channel to have covered the uprising intensively, and as such it is not the only media outlet with some responsibility for shaping opinion.In the interviews with the channel's staff, Al-Jazeera's intensive and unbalanced anti-regime coverage was acknowledged and attributed to logistic factors arising from journalistic and external circumstances which can justify many aspects of the coverage but not all. Others attributed the coverage to political commitments associated with Al-Jazeera's relationship with Qatar and its political outlook, discussing the

potential benefits to Qatar arising from the channel's content and the space Qatar enjoys in Al-Jazeera.

The respondents in all the focus groups stated that the role of social media was more powerful than that of the traditional media. They emphasized that social media helped protestors communicate, plan, gather and remain updated. Social media also had a more direct role in influencing Syrians, expanding the revolution into Syria and diffusing it throughout the country. They indicated that the internet and social media are relatively the new inventions, which had been introduced since the previous uprising in Syria, when only traditional media reported events reaching a smaller audience and making less influence. Interestingly, the role of social media was also acknowledged by the Al-Jazeera interviewees as crucial and more influential than that of traditional media during the Arab Spring. Yet, the focus groups participants did mention that they always referred to Al-Jazeera when checking the credibility of whatever they saw on social media, even if the latter were more efficient in terms of organizing and updating the revolution. Social media per se has no gatekeepers (Wall 2015) through which anything can be disseminated, and this makes them less trustworthy to audience members, who may then be exposed to fake or inaccurate news at any time. Typically, this does not happen so frequently with traditional media (especially prominent channels such as Al-Jazeera), as careful gatekeeping takes place to guarantee the selection of news to suit organizational regimens (White 1950), while still being credible and objective. It is essential to employ strategies that ensure verifiable news is presented, while creating a barrier to inaccurate items, or those with propagandist agendas. While undoubtedly, both forms of media, have specific roles and are increasingly being blended, requiring audience members to be critical.

Undeniably, the research findings point to the fact that the most important role was that played by the internet, which, combined with other technologies, was a key player in moving the Arab Spring uprisings from Tunisia and Egypt to Syria, and spreading knowledge of the uprising from Dara'a to other Syrian cities. The internet is a significant new invention since the last uprising in Syria, which took place against the backdrop of traditional media only. The internet supports the dissemination of information (both true and false) via social media in an unprecedented way (Ghannam 2011; Storck 2011; Khamis et al. 2012; Howard & Hussein 2011; Bhuiyan 2011), it also helps traditional media by liberating them from their previous restrictions and limitations. For example, the internet and smart phones enabled Al-Jazeera to receive footage from key events, at a time when the channel and its professional equipment were not permitted in Syria. In addition to the other significant factors that distinguish the recent Syrian uprising from any other uprising in Syria previously. These include the timing, and the surrounding and prevailing conditions.

For practical reasons, Al-Jazeera exclusively depended on Syrian activists and eyewitnesses to cover the Syrian uprising, which helped the channel portray events despite not being physically allowed inside Syria. Although, generally, citizen journalism has many advantages and plays an influential role in the public sphere (Wall 2015; Khamis et al. 2012), citizen journalists, activists and eyewitnesses are not professional media personnel and often report events according to their personal viewpoints, compromising the reliability of the material they present (Richards 2007). Hence, Al-Jazeera's reliance on activists negatively affected the credibility of its coverage according to some focus group' participants, as they believe activists exaggerated many events causing the Syrian revolution to lose credibility. However, they acknowledged that even when official media

channels were allowed into Syria, which rarely happened, their content was always censored and no one was permitted to speak freely in-front of the camera. Al-Jazeera interviewees believed this was problematic as well, but they explained that the activists were their only source to report on events inside Syria, as they had no access and regime representatives did not readily share their views with the channel. They presented this information as evidence that the Syrian regime appeared to want to hide something from the world; i.e. its atrocities against the Syrian people. It is also an evidence that Al-Jazeera's main content was faithful, apart from how intensive, thorough or biased it was.

8.1 Research questions answered:

The three research questions will be answered in this section, and the significance, implications and contributions of the findings will be identified. Additionally, the research limitations will be acknowledged, and recommendations proposed. First, the researcher will present the research questions and offer a brief comprehensive response extracted from the findings.

RQ1: How did the Al-Jazeera Arabic news channel report the events of the Syrian uprising at its beginning in March and April 2011?

- What were the textual features in terms of coverage?

- What sources were used in news reports?

- What visuals were used in news reports?

- What are the features of the anchors' debates with the different guests.

- To what extent was coverage balanced?

Al-Jazeera, through its 'Hasad Al-Yawm' news program, covered the Syrian uprising with coverage that unconditionally supported the Syrian people and demonstrators taking action against the regime. The coverage was emotive, encouraging, provocative and for many anxiety provoking. The reporting on the program framed the regime and its narratives negatively. Al-Jazeera's anchors' performance played a role in serving the above-mentioned rhetoric, especially when interviewing anti-regime guests relative to pro-regime ones. While the voiceovers for the reports repeatedly blended opinion with facts and explicitly used anti-regime terminology and descriptions in their discourse, they also narrated people's stories using defensive and emotive language. In general, Al-Jazeera's coverage during the Syrian uprising, from its outset in March and April 2011, employed provocative rhetoric, which possibly generated emotional and psychological responses in Syrian viewers, potentially influencing their perceptions, attitudes and reactions.

Previous studies mostly had the same opinion in regard to Al-Jazeera taking the side of the Syrian demonstrators against the regime in terms of news content (Abdullah 2012; Khasib, Ersoy 2016; Kanan, Shalaby 2011; Abdulnabi 2018), mainly Khasib and Ersoy (2016) who discussed the channel's use of sources in regard to the Syrian uprising, and Abdelmoula (2012) who discussed its anti-regime coverage. Anderson (2016) went further to mention that Al-Jazeera fabricated events and broadcast fake news, stressing that the channel was a key player in the Syrian uprising.

The findings of this research came to support the previous findings, adding more detail and value to this area of interest.

RQ2: What were Syrian audience's perceptions of Al-Jazeera's coverage?

- How did the Syrian audience perceive and evaluate Al-Jazeera's coverage and its role in the course of events in Syria?

Al-Jazeera inadvertently influenced Syrian viewers' perceptions, attitudes and reactions to events. It also inadvertently played a role in transporting the uprising from the other Arab Spring countries to Syria, through its detailed coverage and enthusiastic reporting of the other revolutions. What was happening elsewhere instilled hope among Syrians, motivating them to revolt to counter the oppression and lack of freedom they suffered. It also took an inadvertent role in provoking and inciting Syrians against the regime, thereby exacerbating the situation in Syria. This arose from its intensive and thorough reporting of the atrocities practiced by the regime in the different Syrian cities, and the timely sharing of information with Syrians about what was happening. Thus, this coverage underlined Syrians' need to revolt and to continue revolting for the sake of freedom. Nevertheless, the study found, the channel was not the main driver of the Syrian uprising. No concrete evidence was found to suggest Al-Jazeera contributed to the emergence of the Syrian uprising or exacerbated the situation within Syria; its role was only about encouraging people rather than inciting them. The force behind the conflict was the pressure Syrians were experiencing, and the atrocities the regime were carrying out against the people. It is also important to note were the Syrians happy, no amount

of negative media coverage could have influenced them to revolt, as the focus groups participants confirmed.

No previous research studied the Syrian audience to see the impact of Al-Jazeera news coverage of the Syrian uprising on their perceptions, attitudes and reactions, but different scholars pointed to the inciting influence the channel would have had through observing the explicit anti-regime content (Anderson 2016, Martinez 2012; Byrne 2012). Khasib and Ersoy (2016) do not believe Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising played the principal role of the media, which should be to de-escalate conflict and prevent violence through facilitating understanding between the parties and modifying the public's perception about various hostilities. The finding of this research do not support the claim that Al-Jazeera's coverage deliberately incited the Syrian audience, only that it may have inadvertently encouraged anti-government positions.

RQ3: What were the internal and external factors contributing to Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising?

- What decisions and practices were taken in Al-Jazeera's newsroom that shaped the coverage presented to audiences?
- What factors external to journalism may have contributed to Al-Jazeera's coverage; i.e. external forces and political pressures.

Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising at its outset was informed by two groups of factors: internal journalistic factors, which are the professional and practical drivers that determined the coverage due to logistic reasons; and the external factors and political commitments that

meant coverage leaned in a particular direction in service of the agenda and the interests of the channel's financer, the state of Qatar. Previous studies mainly focused on Al-Jazeera's relationship with Qatar and the impact of this relationship on the channel's output, stressing that it decides the coverage and controls the outcome (Shammari 2015; Harahsheh 2013; Zayani 2005; El-Oifi 2005; Abdulnabi 2018; Abdemoula 2012). The findings of this research totally support this Qatar-Al-Jazeera discussion, but also highlight many other reasons that can be plausible and justify the anti-regime coverage.

8.2 Gaps and Contributions:

This study is the first to qualitatively investigate Al-Jazeera's role in the early weeks of the Syrian uprising by thoroughly probing the case from different and crucial perspectives, using triangulation of three data sets to deliver a comprehensive and integrated picture of this role. It is also the first to conduct an audience study with Syrian nationals to explore Al-Jazeera's impact on their perceptions, attitudes and actions during the beginning of Syrian uprising. Moreover, it is the first to deeply investigate the factors of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising. Its findings contribute to develop on the understanding of the media's impact on public opinion, especially the scope and influence of journalistic practices in shaping audience perceptions. Additionally, on a wider scale, it provides information regarding how media company owners might influence performance and content to produce certain outcomes, how it can be politically used as a form of soft power, and how this can influence the audiences abroad. It also contributes to advancing understanding regarding the role of Arab journalism, by highlighting how the emergence of Al-

Jazeera as a pioneer in the region introduced Arabs to issues such as democratization, rights and freedom. This also has relevance elsewhere in the world, where scholars and journalists are considering the role of the media in societal development. Moreover, the thesis raises awareness among Arabs generally, clarifying the need to be more sceptical when decoding media content, especially in war time. It achieves this by highlighting that no media outlet (including Al-Jazeera, which unconditionally supported Arab causes and defended their rights) is free from goals and agendas, as political motivations are often at the forefront. Indeed, the evidence presented cautions all audiences about the need to be more aware of how they formulate their perceptions of events, and encourage them to avoid taking just a single source into consideration. This, in turn will motivate Arabic youths and the upcoming generations to seek out a solid foundation for their opinions, rather than simply trusting a single channel, such as Al-Jazeera. It is hoped that as information about human rights and freedoms are received from sources other than the media, criticality will increasingly inform audience members' decisions, resulting in positive developments throughout society. Such an awareness would contribute to furthering understanding about how to achieve greater stability in the Arab region.

8.3 Limitations:

There are a number of limitations affecting this thesis, as detailed here:

In the study's first strand, the principal limitation was the researcher's restricted access to "Hasad Al-Yawm" broadcast. It was only possible to obtain 15 episodes because the program's management was unable to

provide all the episodes broadcast throughout March and April 2011 as requested. Therefore, the researcher chose specific dates of episodes that would reflect key events, identified by the researcher from Al-Jazeera's website, such as significant demonstrations, mass killings and Assad's speech.

In the second strand, the chief limitation was not being able to conduct focus groups inside Syria. This prevented the researcher from being exposed to different Syrian classes and sectors, and limited access to minority groups in Syrian society. However, the researcher dealt with this limitation by expending extra efforts to identify with actual members of Syrian society, making her sample as diverse as possible, by conducting focus groups sessions in the different cities and countries in which Syrian refugees exist. However, this is not merely research into public perceptions, and so this limitation did not majorly affect the research.

A further consideration with the second strand is that the participants were mainly refugees, many of whom had survived several atrocities and were still living in difficult conditions, away from their homes and their loved ones. Thus, there is a possibility that the participants' views were informed by their circumstances. This limitation could not be readily adjusted for without access to people in Syria, which was not possible due to the continuing danger and instability there. To ensure the participants were not adversely affected by the study, the researcher offered the participants access to the services of a counsellor experienced in handling similar cases, working for a refugees' NGO.

The study looked at the impact of Al-Jazeera's coverage on Syrian viewers' perceptions by studying how they perceived and decoded Al-Jazeera's coverage of the uprising events that occurred in 2011, which was almost 8 years prior to the date of this study. One might question whether participants would be able to accurately recall the details of a traumatic set of events so far in the past. Moreover, it would be anticipated that participants perceptions could have changed since that time. However, the participants did demonstrate excellent recall, perhaps because the uprising in Syria in March and April 2011 was so unexpected and shocking to all involved. These events overturned the Syrian status quo and so cannot readily be forgotten. Here the focus is, of course, on the initial events before the situation became more complicated and confusing several months later.

In regard to the third strand, limitations were observed relating to Al-Jazeera's former employees. Accessing potential candidates meeting the criteria set was challenging, as they lived in different countries in different time zones and had demanding jobs. Many of them did not answer phone calls and messages and many others stopped replying later after initial interest, which left fewer options for the researcher to ensure meeting the minimum number of former employees required to interview for the study.

8.4 Recommendations for Future Research:

This research could usefully be advanced upon by conducting the following complementary studies:

Firstly, a comparative study of Al-Jazeera's coverage of all the Arab Spring revolutions and counter-revolutions, to investigate differences in coverage between countries. Since this research studied the coverage of the Syrian

uprising, and this idea came to the researcher while conducting her research as it would add a further comprehensive image of Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring. This recommendation can also study if and how the coverage of each revolution changed, which will offer further investigation of the consistency of the channel's stance and the reasons behind it, if any.

Secondly, to qualitatively and thoroughly study Al-Jazeera' role in transmitting details of the Arab Spring revolutions from one Arabic country to another, by studying each revolution in isolation to connect the findings. Studying the evolution of the Arab Spring revolutions made a part of the current study through studying the Syrian case, while it worth to separately be investigated and studied to enable better identifying Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring.

Thirdly, to study Al-Jazeera's wording in depth to identify the potential for it to exert psychological and subliminal impact on Syrians and other Arab Spring nationals. The current research studied the impact of Al-Jazeera's coverage on the participating Syrian audience, while it would also be beneficial to study the psychological impact of Al-Jazeera's coverage during the Arab Spring and how this impact would have affected the revolutions' course of events.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Pre - selection survey

Note: This document was translated into Arabic

The purpose of this research is to study the impact of media on public opinion, in particular to identify the role of Al Jazeera news channel in shaping the Syrian public opinion during the beginning of the "Arab Spring" in 2011, and to explore whether its coverage contributed to the "Syrian uprising".

I am using this survey to know more about your background and experience in terms of media use, the more you use and depend on media in your life, especially in regards of the Arab Spring and the Syrian Uprising, the more you can help me in my research, because you will be able to provide deep points of view and comments. According to your answers on this survey, you may be invited to a focus group.

Please read the questions carefully before you answer, especially in regards of the events' timings, and choose the answer that reflects your experience. Please note that if you do not feel comfortable you can stop completing the form and leave at any time.

Thank you

1. With what gender do you identify as?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Prefer not to say

2. What is your age?
    a. Under 20
    b. 21 – 30
    c. 31 – 40
    d. 41 – 50
    e. 51 – 60
    f. Above 60

3. From which Syrian city do you come from?
    a. Damascus
    b. Daraa
    c. Aleppo
    d. Homs
    e. Hama
    f. Others

4. What is your highest level of study?
    a. High school
    b. Bachelor
    c. Masters
    d. PhD
    e. None of the above

5. How much time do you spend watching news every day?
    a. I do not watch news
    b. Less than one hour
    c. One hour plus
    d. Four hours plus

6. Which news channel do you prefer among the following
    a. Al Jazeera
    b. Other Arabic news channels
    c. Other Western news channels
    d. Local channels
    e. Others

7. What is the main reason for your preference of channel?
    a. I prefer channel(s) with the most detailed coverage of events.
    b. I prefer channel(s) with brief summaries of the most important events.
    c. I prefer channel(s) I can trust to give me the truth.
    d. I watch the news on the same channel(s) as my favourite programs.
    e. Other

8. Did you watch the news closely during the "Arab Spring" **when it started**?
    a. Always
    b. Most of the time
    c. sometimes
    d. never

9. Were you in Syria in **2011** when the "Syrian uprising" **started**?
    a. Yes
    b. No

10. If yes, when did you leave Syria?
    a. 2011 – 2015
    b. 2016 – 2018

11. If not .. have you been frequently informed about the events happening in Syria by your family or friends staying there?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. What news channel were you watching **that time**?

a. Al Jazeera
b. Al Jazeera and other channels, including Western and other Arabic channels
c. Only other Arabic news channels
d. Only Western channels
e. Local channels
f. Others

13. If your answer includes Al Jazeera, what particular program(s) relating to the "Arab Spring" were you watching (up to three programs starting with the one you watched the most)
    a. ………………………………
    b. ………………………………
    c. ………………………………

14. How do you prefer to be contacted?
    a. Mobile number ………………………………………
    b. E-mail……………………………………………………

Please note that your personal data will be needed only for the purpose of recruiting and contacting you. Data will be will be kept strictly in accordance with current Data Protection Regulations and will be deleted once this data collection method is finished.

Based on the results of this pre-selection survey you will be invited to join a focus group, where you can share your experiences and contribute to this study.

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your time is precious and is appreciated.

Appendix 2: Focus groups questions

1. How did you know about the revolutions taking place in the Arab world?

2. How did you know about the protests taking place in Dara'a?

3. What is the main reason for the first protest in Dara'a? (There were sub-questions following the expected answers).

4. Do you think the Syrian Revolution would take place if there was no satellite channel coverage?

5. How do you describe the protests at the very beginning?

6. Did Al-Jazeera start broadcast the Syrian events from the very first day?

7. What do you think about Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian events?

8. What do you think about Al-Jazeera's coverage of the events in Dara'a? (A series of sub-questions about events informed by the literature review followed to verify these events and know more about the reality that took place at that time).

9. Do you think Al-Jazeera had a role in moving the revolutions from Tunisia and Egypt to Syria? If yes, how do you describe this role?

10. Do you think Al-Jazeera had a role in moving the uprising from Dara's to the other Syrian cities? If yes, how do you describe this role?

11. Do you think Al-Jazeera had a role in exacerbating the situation in Syria?

12. Do you think Al-Jazeera had a role in influencing Syrians' perceptions?

13. What was your opinion about Al-Jazeera? Did this opinion change? Why?

14. In your opinion, what is Al-Jazeera's goal behind Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising?

Appendix 3: Interviews questions

1. How is the programme's material decided?

2. Are your free to decide any material and can you freely speak about it?

3. Does the channel interfere in your decisions? If yes, who makes this intervention? In case of intervention what type of news should be prohibited, if any?

4. What do you think about Al-Jazeera's coverage during the first two months of the Syrian uprising?

   - If the answer was "the coverage was normal" I ask ..
     - Do you think the coverage was biased against Assad regime at the beginning? Especially after the first 10 days of the uprising?
     - The focus groups participants noticed that you were biased through your guests so you receive weak pro-regime vs strong anti-regime.
     - What about … (I give examples from the content analysis findings that shows bias).

   - If the answer was "the coverage is biased", I ask …
     - Why was it biased?
     - Do you think this bias was instructed by the channel's management?
     - Is it possible that the channel broadcast inaccurate or fabricated footages as some people say? Some participants saw the channel broadcast huge protests live in their villages while in reality there was nothing! Why would such a thing happen?
     - Why was there little coverage in the first 10 days of the uprising?

- Why did the channel suddenly intensify the coverage and show bias after 10 days?
- Do you believe the channel had the deliberate intention to encourage the Arab viewers and incite them to revolt through its biased coverage and language?
- Did the channel intend to target the Syrian people an attempt to make them revolt?
- Does this bias have anything to do with Qatar's and other countries' political decisions, as claimed by some?
- If Al-Jazeera were not financed by Qatar, would its coverage be the same?

5. Do you think Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring had a role in transmitting the uprising from one country to another as it was claimed by some?
   - If the answer was yes … I ask …

     - How?
     - Is there any reason for that?
     - Do you think the coverage encouraged the uprising in Syria?
     - Was there a reason behind this coverage?
     - Was this coverage deliberate by the channel? Why?

   - If the answer was no … I ask …

     - New York Times described Al-Jazeera as the common thread between the Arab uprisings. What do you think?

- Don't you believe that cancelling the programmes for a continuous live coverage and giving the people a voice on the screen would have had an influence on the viewers and encouraged them to react?

- The focus groups participants said that Al-Jazeera had a role in spreading the revolution all over Syria and encouraged them to revolt, as they would neverhave not known what was happening in other places if it had not been for Al Jazeera. What do you think?

- It was said that Al-Jazeera was keen to distribute mobile phones and internet connection to the people. don't you think that the resultant coverage expressed certain people's point of view at the exclusion f others?

- Scholars say that Al-Jazeera always adds emotions to its rhetoric, specially on its Arabic channel? What do you think is the channel's aim when addressing people's emotions? Do you think that this influences the viewers and thus helps promote the spread of uprisings?

6. The focus groups participants defended Al-Jazeera's performance at the beginning of the Syrian uprising, but they also said that they do not trust the channel anymore because, in their view, it is politicized and inflammatory, and aims to destroy Syria even if it does not explicitly say so. What is your opinion?

7. It is said that many prominent anchors resigned when the Arab Spring started, claiming that the channel is biased and provides unprofessional coverage. What do you think?

- Do you believe that Ali Hashem resigned because the channel spiked his story about terrorists clashing with the Syrian Army?"
- Why Luna Shibel and Ghassan bin Jeddo resigned?

8. Do you think Al-Jazeera had an impact on the Syrian public opinion? Was this deliberate? Why?

9. Some people claim that Al-Jazeera wanted the Arab Spring to happen and the governments to be overthrown, do you agree?
   - Did the channel do anything to help this come true?
   - Different studies discuss that Al-Jazeera sought to spread democracy in the Arab world and incited Arabs against their regimes? Do you agree? Why?

Appendix 4: Coding sheet

Anchors' language (lead):

- The anchors mentioned in their introductions things that were not really said by the speakers.
- The anchors start with the unimportant part of the news to highlight a particular idea.
- The anchors used words that make one doubt the official narrative.
- The anchors' language is provocative through the tone, the use of words, expressions and metaphors.
- The anchors were adding unnecessary phrases or words to their sentences to highlight a certain view they wanted.
- The anchors talk about biased sound bites.
- The programme always counters the official narrative with a contradictory view from a strong source.
- The anchors keep on talking about the protests and how the security forces deal with them.
- The anti-regime views take more of the episode's time than the pro-regime ones.
- The anchors scare the Syrian viewer.

- **Anchors' questions to the guests:**
- The anchors' questions ignore the Syrian official narrative and hint the opposite (confirm people's refusal of the regime's decisions).
- The anchors' questions direct the answer of the guests.

- The anchors tease the viewers by fully narrating the official stories when they themselves do not believe in them as evidenced in previous reporting.
- The anchors refer to vague sources, like a Syrian official, for example.
- The anchors leave the anti-regime guests to speak for long times even if they do not really answer their questions.
- The anchors leave the pro-regime guest to speak less (check all episodes) and interrupt them more.
- Red-colored pop-up boxes appear saying things that contradict the Syrian official narrative.
- The anchors scare the Syrian viewer by highlighting events using specific words and descriptions.
- The anchors use inflammatory language against the Syrian regime.
- They tell stories about the people as facts and about the regime by reporting from the regime's media.
- They focus on the word "freedom".
- The anchors make the anti-regime guests' job easier, while making it harder for the pro-regime guests to express themselves.
- They use unnecessary sentences to highlight certain things.

- **Reports language:**
- Use of emotive language.
- The voice over teases the viewer talking about the official narrative in details even though they themselves do not believe in it, as evidenced in previous coverages.
- When the report talks about pro-regime views or narratives it still shows anti-regime videos.
- Use of inflammatory language.
- Rare attempts at being neutral.

- Dependence on weak resources.

- Sometimes unimportant stories are given priority to validate a point, which shows bias

- Adding sentences which are not really needed to highlight a point.

- The report's tone encourages people to react.

- Scaring the Syrian viewer.

- Highlighting the widely spread revolutions, and reports exaggerate the spread of the revolts.

- Protests divide people.

- Repeated use of the word "peaceful".

- Very little time of the report was dedicated to the pro-regime protests.

- Talking about the pro-regime events is always mixed with anti-regime paragraphs or sentences, and contradiction are highlighted .

- Telling stories about the people as facts and about the regime by reporting from the regime's media.