25 TV: A Case Study of the Media During the Egyptian Uprising

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Abstract

This case study examines 25 TV, an Egyptian television network named after the uprising that began on January 24, 2011, and the programs that attempted to combine social media use and more traditional broadcasting techniques. The examination looks at the Egyptian government involvement in broadcasting before, during, and after the uprising; the difficulties created by this structure; and the results of a survey of 25 TV staff about their perceptions of the network, including its successes and failures.

Introduction

Most Western media referred to the Egyptian uprising as a revolution of social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter.

After the ouster of then-President Hosni Mubarak, Wael Ghonim, a marketing manager for Google who had created an important Facebook page during the uprising, said social media had been the backbone of the success. "This revolution started on Facebook, Ghonim said upon the ouster of Mubarak in February 2011. "I've always said that if you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet." (Smith, 2011, para.5)

At the outset, most people outside of Egypt were familiar with the use of Information and Communications Technologies during the uprising. What is less clear is how many Egyptians were familiar with these technologies. For example, "The 6 April Youth Movement," which used an Egyptian Facebook group, supported workers in an industrial town in the Nile Delta called El-Mahalla. Another Facebook group, "We Are All Khaled Saeed," began after an Alexandria youth was beaten to death by two Egyptian police officers after he was arrested at a cybercafé. Photos of Saeed's body in the morgue went viral online and were seen my Google's Ghonim, who put up the website anonymously. During the protests against Mubarak that began on January 25, 2011, the use of ICTs generated texts, emails, photos, and video that documented what was happening in Cairo's Tahrir Square and elsewhere.

The mantra became organize on Facebook, communicate on Twitter, and tell the world on YouTube.

But Mohamed Gohar, a longtime television producer in Egypt, knew social media had to be combined with television because few in the country participated in or had access to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or similar outlets. As a result, Gohar created 25 TV, a television network that tried to bridge the gap between traditional media and social outlets.

This study analyzes the creation of 25 TV, the role it played in Egyptian society, and its successes and failures.

Literature Review

At the outset, it is important to understand the role of the media in Egyptian society. Under Presidents Gamal Adbel Nasser (1954-1970) and President Anwar Sadat (1970-1981), the state owned and supervised all media and used them to promote the government's positions. Private Egyptian broadcast outlets, magazines, and newspapers were illegal. Although a similar system worked for many years when Mubarak took power in 1981 after Sadat's assassination, the administration faced the challenge of ICTs. The first state-owned satellite communications company, Nilesat, was launched in 1996.

Terrestrial broadcasting remained almost entirely a state monopoly, with a vast network of stations operating under the structure of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, which was established in 1979.

In terms of television, ERTU operates two national terrestrial stations, six local channels covering 27 governates, and three satellite channels. (UNESCO, 2013, p. 13)

In 2001, the government licensed Dream TV, the first of several private satellite channels owned by members of Mubarak's close associates. These channels provided mainly entertainment and were prohibited from presenting news. In 2005, the Mubarak government allowed the licensing of the first private newspaper in Egypt, *Al Masry Al Youm*.

Despite this seeming "liberalization" of the Egyptian media, the key word here is licensing. Whatever the government gave, the government also could take away if the owners crossed a political line that the government imposed.

Throughout the period from 1952 to 2011, journalists knew how to behave toward the government and also how to earn money by toeing the line. In the book *Hurriya'alaal-Hamish* [Freedom on the Margins], journalist Karim Yehia reported how corrupt the media and their journalists had become. In one of the chapters, entitled "The Hijacked Syndicate: On the bureaucracy and isolated leaders," Yehia detailed insider deals and bribery that had become rampant among the members of the journalists' syndicate, which included print reporters and editors. (Berger, 2003, p. 15)

As Berger notes in her assessment of the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate:

> …the deterioration of the syndicate's leadership from "leaders of bridges" between the state and people in the seventies to the corrupt "nationalistic leaders" and "isolated leaders" in the eighties and through the Mubarak era. With insider deals and bribery rampant in so many other sectors, it became politically expedient for party players and regular journalists to buy into the game too. "The work of the syndicate came to resemble [that of] a*simsaar*, or smalltime broker, selling the authorities to the people, and selling the journalists to the ruling powers," Yehia writes. (Berger, p. 5)

Simply put, this historical backdrop provided few independent journalists and voices except for those who had set up Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and other social media to provide information to people during the Egyptian uprising. But that did not necessarily mean that those engaged in social media could extend these practices into a bona fide journalistic strategy, Moreover, the governments—the two military takeovers and former President Mohamed Morsi—established tighter control over the media and engaged in attacks—both through the law and through violence—against the budding journalistic independence.

After Mubarak's ouster the transitional period headed by the Supreme Council for Armed Forces witnessed attacks on journalists. During the 18-day demonstrations in Tahrir Square and related protests, attacks targeting journalists included a journalist killed by a sniper and attacks against journalists from Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, The Associated Press, the BBC, CBS, CNN, Danish TV, and others, according to the according to Freedom House's annual report in 2013. Freedom House then changed Egypt's freedom of the press status to "Partly Free" in 2012 to "Not Free" in 2013. The report changed the status because of the following:

> …due to officially tolerated campaigns to intimidate journalists, increased efforts to prosecute reporters and commentators for insulting the political leadership or defaming religion, and intensified polarization of the pro– and anti–Muslim Brotherhood press, which reduced the availability of balanced coverage. (Freedom House, 2013, para. 1)

After the election of Morsi, the crackdown on the media intensified. According to Freedom House, the 2012 constitution, pushed aggressively by Morsi and the Islamist groups, included prison sentences for journalistic malpractice—restrictions that existed under Mubarak. The Morsi government targeted its critics with such lawsuits. For example, Islam Afifi, the editor of *Al-Dostour*, was charged with publishing lies about the president and endangering national stability and security. The Arab Network For Human Rights Information, a Cairo-based human rights watchdog, listed more than 20 criminal cases for insulting Morsi during the first six months after his election. The Freedom House report added that under Morsi, more state media employees were subjected to professional investigation than in the 18 months of the first military rule, targeting those who provided outlets for critics of the president and his government. Security personnel targeted dozens of journalists in Alexandria in May 2012 while covering protests, and threats to journalists who criticized the Muslim Brotherhood increased significantly.

By December 2012, clashes between supporters and opponents of Morsi escalated on the street, leading to the death of one journalist, Al-Husseiny Abu Deif, and the injury of several others. Two foreign reporters were also attacked.

Supporters of Islamist groups besieged the Media Production City, targeting journalists who were critical of the Morsi government. After the military's ouster of the Morsi regime in July 2013, the situation did not improve. 2013 proved to be the deadliest for journalists in Egypt, with 12 documented reports of journalists killed as a direct result of their work in the field. The forced dispersal of the pro-Morsi protests in August 2013 in Rabaa in caused the death of eight reporters after the military had again taken power. Four other reporters lost their lives while covering clashes throughout the year. (Freedom House, para. 15)

The laws governing freedom of speech did not witness a significant change in 2013. While the Press Freedom Index issued by Reporters without Borders showed a minimal improvement in Egypt's ranking to 158 from 166 the previous year, the report stresses that the country has maintained a "deplorable" ranking near the bottom of the 179 countries on the list, with physical attacks on journalists, trials, and lack of transparency. (Bakr, 2014, para. 23)

The military closed several Islamist and pro-Morsi satellite channels, including Al-Jazeera, Mubashir Misr, and the Brotherhood-owned Misr 25, for having allegedly incited violence. Many have charged that the religious channels adopted an extreme discourse that portrayed the opposition to Morsi as infidels, traitors, and "fulul" [remnants of the old regime]. (Shahine, 2013, para. 32)

The Role of Social Media in the 2011 Uprising

Even though popular media seized on the importance of technology, including two books, *Distant Witness* by Andy Carvin, formerly of National Public Radio, and *Citizens Rising: Independent Journalism and the Spread of Democracy* by David Hoffman, media researchers have downplayed the significance of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets as longstanding trends in the Egyptian media and the uprising.

One 2012 study puts the issues rather succinctly.

> While there is a significant amount of debate as to whether cyberactivism currently has an influential role in promoting actual change and boosting political transformation, even the critics and skeptics agree that cyberactivism does have a great deal of potential to influence meaningful social and political change in the future….The continuity and consistence of the cyberactivists' potential to bring about political change will largely depend on their ability to successfully organize and debate controversial and complicated issues. (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2012, para. 51)

Two British researchers, drawing on technical data and interviews, also found a lack of importance for social media, primarily because they only reached on sector of the population: the intelligentsia.

> …despite the media hype about "Facebook Revolutions," the Egyptian activists we interviewed rightly reject simplistic claims that technology some how *caused* the 2011 uprisings, and they say it undermines the agency of the millions of people who participated in the movement that brought down Hosni Mubarak. (Aouragh &Alexander, 2011, p. 1344)

As the researchers accurately point out, the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology counted 23 million broadband Internet users out of a population of 83 million and nine million mobile-phone Internet users—many of whom may be from the same educated and/or wealthier population. About 30% of households have Internet connections. Analysts found at the time of the uprising, less than 1% of all Egyptians had Twitter accounts. (Aouragh & Alexander, p. 1347)

The Center for International Media Assistance issued a report a year after the Egyptian uprising in which it expressed optimism and caution about the use of social media in building democratic regimes.

> …these were not Facebook or Twitter revolutions, however much cyberutopians would like them to be. However, the Internet's potential as a tool that can help the process of democratization is undeniable, and of course the Internet also can be used for oppression by authoritarian governments in the Arab world and elsewhere. (Ghannam, 2012, p. 7)

The author notes the need for an ethical structure and journalistic training for those using social media. The report includes complaints that user-generated contest proved difficult to authenticate and lacked standards of accuracy, although some media outlets like 25 TV had started such training programs (Ghannam, 2012, p. 9).

A recent review of 150 academic publications criticizes the overzealousness by researchers of placing too great an emphasis on the role of social media in the uprisings.

> There is a more durable tendency in the academic literature and media discourse surrounding the uprisings to invest emotionally in them and to project specific political commitments….That is not to suggest the reform movements cannot be powerful agents of historic change but simply that there is nothing intrinsically about a protest culture, network, or space that is politically fertile or generative of new identities. (Markham, p. 90)

Analysis

25 TV was named after the date the revolution against the Mubarak regime began on January 25, 2011.

"The idea came when I was watching all the first 18 days of the revolution. Mohamed Gohar said in an interview with the author. "We were all shocked and impressed by the power used by the young people to start the Egyptian revolution. On the day Mubarak stepped down I saw it as a great opportunity to use these young people to create a new media in Egypt with new ideas and new innovation." (Gohar, personal communication, December 27, 2013)

But Gohar, who had built 14 networks throughout the Middle East, said the need after the uprising was to translate the success of social media in reporting and organizing the demonstrations throughout the country into a journalistic enterprise. According to the CIA, more than 25% of the Egyptian people are illiterate and about 80% have no connection to the Internet. (The World Factbook, 2014)

Therefore, social media would not be an effective means to reach many of the 83 million Egyptians. He said he decided to create a television network to bridge the gap between the youth on social media and many other Egyptians who did not have access.

As noted earlier, no private broadcast licenses were issued in Egypt until 2001. Only government channels could transmit news and entertainment, but the Mubarak government granted licenses to individuals, mainly businessmen with close ties to the regime, for entertainment channels. That changed slightly during the period just after Mubarak's resignation in February 2011. As UNESCO notes in its 2013 report:

> In the early days of the revolution, a number of measures were taken to enhance media freedom. The Ministry of Information was effectively put into abeyance, and key figures in a number of ministries and other bodies, including the Journalist Syndicate and the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, were replaced. Many rules limiting media freedom were also effectively suspended, while others were widely flouted. The sometimes-informal rules, as well as the practices, regarding media licensing were significantly relaxed, and new media outlets were authorized to operate. (UNESCO, p. 6)

The license that Gohar obtained came through the State Information and Press Department in the Ministry of Information. He could not obtain a license to broadcast directly inside of Egypt, so he applied as a foreign company through a connection to a Bahrain satellite. That transmission then went through the Egyptian Media Production City, which is located about 100 miles north of Cairo. The broadcast satellite cost 25 TV about $24,000 a month.

According to its website, Nilesat provides broadcasting services for both television and radio within the coverage of its satellites. Nilesat said it broadcasts 700 television channels, but it also provides a central location to stop outlets the government deems illegal or inappropriate—as has happened with 25 TV and other channels. (Nilesat, 2014, para. 1)

Gohar contacted 24 individuals whose work he saw on social media to start the network, combining the reports of the bloggers, videographers, and others in Tahrir Square. Many of them accepted the invitation and worked with professional journalists and videographers to create the network.

25 TV started with about 50 people in the Cairo newsroom and one-person news operations, who did audio, blogs, and video throughout the country—eventually growing to about 100 people. The network started with a soft launch of one to two hours a day on the air in February 2011, mainly news bulletins, and became a 24/7 operation, including rebroadcasts on April 6, 2011. The network added a website, streaming audio and video—both in

Arabic and English—and a YouTube channel. Eventually, 25 TV broadcast 25 different programs from politics to sports, including 65% of the content in live broadcasts during the day.

"The goals of 25 TV were supporting the goals of the revolution and calling for constructive dialogue and positive change, supporting civilian-based rights and responsibilities," Gohar said in an interview with the author. "We were talking to people who no other media talked to at all. They got the message." (Gohar, personal communication)

Following are some of the other goals presented to advertisers and investors:

--In the Middle East, many people believe that the West has long supported dictatorships and adhered to double standards when it comes to the promotion of democracy. A new approach started in the social media and moved to 25 TV that was ready to develop and emphasize the West's present-day support for democracy, helping change the public's perception.
--Focus on the West's efforts to support human rights around the world. For example, highlighting the efforts of the West and international monitors who surveyed Egypt's presidential elections.
--Focus on the importance of the rule of law by doing extensive coverage of court cases and highlighting the West's lead in that area.
--The West must be willing to be accountable to the Middle East by demonstrating that it is concerned about the lives of people in this region and is committed to their well being.
--Promote stability that leads to democracy, which is the only true path to freedom.
--Produce programs that highlight similarities to build trust between people and cultures.
--Comprehensive settlement between the Arab World and Israel is in the best interest for both sides. In the past, the world thought a comprehensive settlement would lead to better governments in the Arab World. We believe the opposite. Under a well-functioning democracy, people will see it is in their interest to have peace.
--The Egyptian media should promote peace by giving a voice to the Israeli people more than the government. The news about Israel should be unbiased and covered in the same way as it would in any other country.
--Shed light on terrorist activities without excusing the violence. Produce programs that contradict the terrorists' ideas and convince fundamentalists to renounce their views, and respect and embrace equality and human rights. (Gohar, personal communication)

Gohar also insisted on applying journalistic standards of objectivity, fairness, and balance—standards he learned while working for NBC News in Cairo.

25 TV launched its first live broadcast on April 1, 2011, from Tahrir Square, where it provided special coverage for a Friday protest, which was called "Saving the Revolution." The protestors called for all of the revolution's demands to be met and for a democratic Egypt to be established.

On its first official broadcast on April 6, 2011, the network decided to broadcast live from the city of El-Mahalla in the Nile Delta to commemorate the "6th of April Strike" in 2006,which sparked the first public labor action in Egypt's history, calling for the improvement of the country's political, social, and economic status.

On April 25, the station decided to revive the spirit of Sinai Liberation Day, broadcasting live from Al Arish with a host of programs that shed light on Al Arish's unique characteristics. One program, "Sammani" [Talk to Me], explored one of the few remaining tunnels that provided a way to provide humanitarian supplies into Rafah, a Palestinian city under Israeli control in the Gaza Strip. Another program, "Ala Fein" [Where To?], broadcast the stories of Sinai's youth and their struggle with the previous regime. "Kol Youm," [Every Day] 25 TV's daily talk show, invited village elders, and young men and women from Sinai to present their desire for a more developed, democratic society.

One important confrontation between 25 TV and the Egyptian government, which at the time was under military rule after the resignation of Mubarak, occurred on October 9, 2011, when the military killed an estimated 28 people and injured more than 200 when Coptic Christians protested outside of the offices of Egyptian state television near 25 TV in Maspero in central Cairo.

The Copts, who represent an estimated 10% of the 83 million Egyptians, marched in protest against the destruction on September 30 of Mar Girgis [St. George] Church in Marinab near Aswan. (Human Rights Watch, 2011, para. 11)

Human Rights Watch interviewed 20 participants in the demonstration who testified that at least two armored personnel vehicles "drove recklessly through crowds of demonstrators, in some cases appearing to pursue them intentionally."

The organization disputed the claims of state-run Channel One, Nile News, and Radio Misr, which had reported that the demonstrators had killed three soldiers—a claim later found to be untrue—and called upon citizens to defend the attacks against the military.

"Such calls could easily have been taken as a signal for citizens to attack Copts and therefore would have amounted to incitement to discrimination and violence against Copts," Human Rights Watch said.

Dina Rasmy, a newscaster on state television's Channel Two, declared later in a statement posted on Facebook that she was "ashamed" of working for state media, which, she said, "had proven itself to be a slave for whoever rules Egypt.

"Rasmy added that national television was effectively encouraging civil war by encouraging Egyptians to go to Maspero to support the army against what it called "Christian aggressors." (Gundy, 2011)

25 TV broadcast the demonstration until Egyptian military police entered the offices of Video Cairo, the headquarters of the television outlet. In some cases, staff members exchanged identity cards, which designate religion, with Sunnis taking papers from Christians and, in some cases, were beaten. Seventeen protestors, including a Coptic priest, sought refuge in the building and were subsequently smuggled out of the area over the next day, wearing clothes and equipment from 25 TV. (Gohar, personal communication).

The network also moved quickly to cover major news events, including having much of its schedule devoted to significant stories, such as the massive riot at the stadium in Port Said, Egypt, on February 1, 2012. The incident happened after a soccer match between Al-Masry of Port Said and Al-Ahly of Cairo. At least 79 people were killed and more than 1,000 people were injured after the game when Al-Ahly fans were attacked with various weapons

The New York Times and Egyptian sources reported that the riots served as retaliation on the part of the authorities toward the so-called "ultras," or supporters of the Cairo team who were actively involved in the demonstrations in Tahrir Square. (Kirkpatrick, 2012, para. 2)

The most popular show on 25 TV, "El Sit Ghalya" [Lady Ghalya], centered on Ghalya Alia Mahmoud, an Egyptian maid who provided cooking tips and political commentary. Gohar plucked Mahmoud from his sister's kitchen, where she was working as a maid and cook. At home, she fed 15 people from her family on an income of less than $200 a month. Her show and her meals focused on typical Egyptian food, such as the fava-bean dish known as "ful" on a budget of $4 a day. The diet included mainly vegetables and bread, with a once-a-week serving on Fridays of meat.

On her show, Mahmoud mixed dishes and political commentary in a kitchen not unlike her one at home. She cooked with tin pots on propane burners and did not bother with measuring cups. All of the ingredients came from the Cairo markets near her home. "Does she feel sorry for Mr. Mubarak?" one caller asked her during a program. "Yes, as sorry as he felt for me when he was in power." Such tongue-in-cheek responses made her a star.

The program began on August 1, 2011, at the beginning of Ramadan, the holy month when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk and then start eating as much as possible until the next day. "All women can cook. They're smart, and they can do anything if they try," Mahmoud told *The Washington Post*. (Fadel, 2012, para. 8)

On camera, Mahmoud seamlessly handled the cooking tasks and the political chitchat. Dressed in colorful dresses, an apron, and a headscarf, she became so popular that men proposed to her even though they knew she was married. Children called into the show for tips on dealing with parents. Wealthy women dialed the program to ask about traditional dishes.

The messages on her show provided even more important lessons than her recipes. She offered to give dietary information to Coptic Christians, who abstain from meat and dairy products during their time of fasting. She said she did it to prove that heightened sectarian tensions, which she said she believed were stirred up by the government, didn't exist in Egyptian neighborhoods.

"The government only treated the crème de la crème with respect, and the rest of us were invisible," she told *The Washington Post*. "I have so much hope that for my two girls, the country will be different," (Fadel, para. 17)

Following were some of the other important programs that aired on 25 TV:

25 TV News Bulletin

The news bulletin was 25 TV's special addition to Egypt's media landscape. 25 TV was committed to providing unbiased, independent, and objective reporting of the facts. The bulletin followed local and international events and focused on giving voice to all sectors, parties, and groups regardless of political or religious affiliation.

"Meshwar Lelmidan" – [A Trip to the Square]

"Meshwar Lelmidan" was a 30-minute socio-political show that aired three days per week. The program followed young people who have participated in the uprising in different capacities as political activists, interest groups, artists, or even average citizens who had compelling stories to tell. Each episode included a trip to Tahrir Square, with videos or photos of incidents and events that occurred during the uprising, provided by guests or taken from the 25 TV library. The guests told their part of the story of each photo or video.

"Kol Youm" – [Every Day]

"Kol Youm" was a one-hour-long daily socio-political talk show focused on current internal affairs as well as important events on the international scene. It aimed to provide viewers with information through video reports, interviews, and eyewitness accounts. The show helped build informed public opinion through unbiased professional reporting of events. Three young Egyptians who were all involved in the uprising and had no experience working in media before this program presented the show. Their genuine and honest interest in Egypt's future was the foundation of the show.

"#Hashtag"

This 15-minute daily show aired five days per week. The show's name was derived from the hashtags used most commonly on Twitter. "#Hashtag" covered information from the Internet that the average viewer might not be familiar with. It covered everything from online blogs to citizen journalism and social networks, including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The program aimed to bring what people were reporting, saying, and doing online to the television screen in an effort to familiarize the wider public with the Internet.

Miral Brinjy, a young Internet and social media activist who participated in the revolution since the first day presented "#Hashtag." Miral had a degree in political science and international law, and she began blogging anonymously in 2006.

"Dalil" – [Guide]

"Dalil" was a 30-minute political talk show that provided viewers with reports on the country's current events and affairs through talking to average citizens about their lives and needs. It then used these reports to ask presidential candidates about their platforms.

"Sama3ny" – [Talk to Me]

"Sama3ny" was a 30-minute reality show that aired three days per week. The program followed Sief Krfan, the presenter, as he pursued his favorite hobby: searching for people, groups, or initiatives adopting positive ideas for change. Krfan addressed his viewers directly, sharing his thoughts and feelings on each story.

Krfan was a young physician, who worked during the uprising at the field hospital in Tahrir Square. While helping the injured, he was shot in the back by riot police. But that didn't stop him. Despite his injury, he continued to help others. His experiences led him to start listening to different people's stories. He followed these stories back to their roots and took steps to obtain positive change using the information he'd gathered.

"Alsha3b Yurid" – [The People Demand]

"Alsha3b Yurid" was a 30-minute political reality show that aired three days per week. The show followed the host as he traveled around the country to talk to people from different backgrounds and ideologies who had legitimate demands, giving them the opportunity to express their problems and concerns as well as issues affecting their daily lives. The show attempted to convey people's demands and needs to the responsible parties, hoping to make a difference and create change. The show ended every episode with a brief commentary by the presenter.

Ez El Din, the host, participated in the uprising. While he was documenting the dramatic and violent incidents on February 28, 2011, he was shot in his right eye. A pellet still sits in his right eye and can't be removed due to the danger of the operation.

"7ala 3agbana" – [A State We Like]

"7ala 3agbana" was 30-minute cultural and artistic show that aired twice per week. The show featured young Egyptian artists working in various fields, including visual and video art, music, and film. The show followed artists at concerts, galleries, studios, and other places that inspired them.

"7ala 3agbana" covered art events and artists across the country and helped to raise the profile and awareness of contemporary Egyptian art, acknowledging the importance of art as a tool for change.

"Welad Baladna" – [Sons and Daughters of Our Country]

"Welad Beladna" was a one-hour socio-political debate show that aired five days a week, featuring rotating presenters from the channel. The show presented youth representing various groups, initiatives, and political parties in each episode to discuss and answer questions related to their involvement in forging change and advocating policies based on their differing agendas.

"El Basta" – [The Porch]

"El Basta" was a one-hour weekly music show, which was filmed with young independent music groups and bands in an interactive context with a small group of their fans in an informal and friendly "MTV Unplugged" type setting. The show featured bands that performed in Tahrir Square during the uprising along with other talented young musicians, and aimed at providing audiences across Egypt and the Arab world with an opportunity to see and hear music with which they were not previously familiar. The show was presented by the musicians themselves who provided insights into their music and talked about the tracks before they performed.

"Kamin" – [Roadblock]

"Kamin" was a 20-minute weekly action reality show that followed police at roadblocks while they processed different vehicles as well as searches and arrests. The show also followed police officers on raids and arrests to raise the viewers' awareness of the dangers surrounding the police throughout their daily work and the different various procedures they followed in the different situations they faced.

"Al Gisr" – [The Bridge]

This weekly religious program aimed at bridging Coptic Christianity and Islam with sheikh and a priest.

"Ara'a" – [Views]

This program was based on a weekly survey. It asked one question every week to the different categories of the viewers in order to measure public opinion about one of the current issues in politics, economics, or social life.

"Ma'a" – [Together]

This program used the research and experts from a think tank to analyze the week's top news stories in the Egyptian media.

"Ibn El Hetta"- [Area Man]

The program gave viewers information about the Egyptian parliamentary elections. The program covered the candidates, the platforms, their ideas, and the voters' opinions. The program gave viewers minute-by-minute coverage of the elections, the results, and public sentiment.

"Formet El Sahel"- [Getting in Shape]

Formet El Sahel was a 30-minute weekly sports show that offered viewers complete guidance on how to get in shape. Through easy instructions explained by a professional trainer, the show helped viewers achieve physical fitness.

"Lahza be Lahza"- [Moment by Moment]

This daily program offered a preview of the day's top stories from several perspectives. It also aimed to highlight the less evident sides of each event in an unbiased, objective manner.

"Soura"- [Picture]

Soura was a 30-minute and sometimes a one-hour weekly investigative program that discussed the media in Egypt, particularly as they operated before the January 25 uprising. The program aimed to root out corruption as it manifested itself in various forms of the media.

The presenter of the show was a seasoned journalist, who, through exclusive interviews and in-depth research, revealed shortcomings and corruption in the media industry with evidence to back up his findings.

"Star"

This 30-minute weekly cultural show featured young Egyptian artists. Each week, guest artists appeared on the program to discuss their art, their past, and their vision for the future. Each young artist was given the opportunity to express his or her dream for the future of art and culture in Egypt. Also, each episode wrapped up with an exhibition displaying the artwork of featured guests. "Star" gave a voice to Egypt's artistic youth, putting their work in the spotlight and allowing the next generation to weigh in on important cultural issues.

"Takareer"- [Reports]

This journalistic special reviewed a group of reports that were shot on location. The show filmed the most important current events and developments and then reviewed different opinions on the topic. It also looked at the solutions raised by those engaged in the problem-solving task and commented on them.

Survey

An anonymous electronic survey was sent to 72 former employees of 25 TV via surveymonkey.com. Twenty-three people responded, or a rate of 32%. The results seemed relatively consistent with the profile of most employees.

The predominant age group was between 25 and 34, which included 14 of those surveyed, or 61%. All except one respondent was younger than 54. Those who responded included 64% men and 36% women, generally a much higher percentage of females than much of the Egyptian media. The group included 23% who worked as reporters, 41% as producers, 14% as technical staff, and the rest in a variety of other positions.

The political views centered on secular and democratic, with responses of 36% for the former and 59% for the latter. No one selected an affiliation with the religious parties, while 9% described themselves as pro-Mubarak and 13% chose pro-military.

The respondents engaged in a high level of the use of social media, with all using Facebook. About 50% used Twitter, 18%were on Instagram, and 9% also employed other platforms.

In responses to the reason the individuals joined 25 TV, a genuine excitement exuded from nearly all the people. The respondents talked about the need for impartial news that reached all sectors of Egyptian society. One individual noted: "25 TV was a unique TV initiative in Egypt. It had a clear vision that was reflected in the channel's programs, strategy, and working environment. The channel had a unique combination of adhering to top-notch news reporting and TV production standards, policies, and ethics while representing and engaging huge but marginalized demographics of the Egyptian population such as youth, the working class, and citizens from towns and suburbs outsize of the country's capital, Cairo."

The team seemed extremely proud of the quality of the news production, with 14 out of 18 rating the quality of the information as good or excellent. The difficulty, according to the respondents, centered on the political influence of 25 TV. More than half of the respondents rated the influence as fair or poor.

Nearly all of those who responded remained with 25 TV until it closed in October 2012. Now it is apparent that they see little positive about the news sources available to them. More than 90% rated state media as fair or poor, while 72% gave private news programs, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, similar marks.

The respondents would like to see a democratically elected government, with only one favoring the continuation of the military control. One respondent covered many of the comments put forward by colleagues. The important issues of this individual included:

--Strict law enforcement regarding violence crimes, violence against women and fraud;
--Effective clear development plans in agriculture, manufacturing, education, and health care;
--More freedoms to, support for, and cooperation with civil society organizations;
--Holding government officials and employees as well as private corporations accountable for their actions and decisions.

In final comments about the experience at 25 TV, many longed for a return of the network—something that is unlikely to happen anytime soon.

One respondent put it this way: "Like many before me, I consider myself lucky to have known, worked, and learned from Gohar. His teaching methods while unorthodox are effective for those who are looking to learn journalism, media, and their critical socio-political role. Gohar is a visionary, an inspirational figure, and a leader." Unfortunately, the respondent added, he was unable to create a business model to sustain the network.

Discussion

Why did the adaptation of social media to television fail? Why did 25 TV close?

The answers are relatively simple, but the background is not. Advertisers had grown comfortable with state-owned news broadcast and privately owned entertainment networks. As a result, the advertisers, in Gohar and other analysts' view, boycotted 25 TV. Furthermore, the government headed by the Muslim Brotherhood and then the military, which overthrew that government, refused to issue a license to broadcast. Gohar said the Muslim Brotherhood government declined to provide a reason, while the military denied the request because it considered 25 TV "pro-Western and pro-Israel," he said. (Gohar, personal communication)

But the roots of the end of 25 TV, which had gained a significant audience, went far deeper. Abdallah Schleifer, writing for the Saudi-backed *Al Arabiya*, argues that Egypt lacks the basis for a television network like 25 TV because the country's news media has a decidedly partisan bent. Moreover, the country basically has never developed an extensive free press.

Schleifer served as the former bureau chief of NBC News in Cairo and as a professor at the American University of Cairo. "[T] hat partisan tone, long predates [Mohamed] Morsi's presidency, the Arab Spring or even the introduction of the printing press in early19th century Cairo," he writes. (Schleifer, 2013, para. 2)

Under a monarchy in the 19th century, Egypt faced a significant influence from the French, including the arrival of Lebanese and Syrian journalists to Egypt, including the Taqla brothers who founded the newspaper Al-Ahram. The structure centered on partisan politics and continued that way under Nasser, who helped to launch a military coup in 1952 and then nationalized the media when he took over the presidency two years later. Nasser followed the Soviet example of state ownership of the media not unlike that in the Soviet Union, which supported the Egyptian leader. (Schleifer, para. 8)

The author noted that Egypt's Higher Council for Journalism adopted a code in 1998 in an attempt to reduce partisanship. The code recognizes the right of the reader" to objective journalism that honestly attempts to reflect reality and the movement of events and the different opinions, and preserve each citizen's right to comment on printed material and not being used in slandering, black mailing, falsely accusing, or personal insults." (Schleifer, para. 15)

The Mubarak government tolerated some independent newspapers in the final years of his presidency, but the journalists often came from the state media, bringing the same values with them, including an absence of Western reportorial guidelines, such as objectivity, fairness, or balance. Egyptians—at least those who could afford a satellite dish—began to see alternative approaches to news coverage in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the arrival of Al-Jazeera. Al Arabiya. and others. Even so, Gohar's 25 TV, Schleifer writes, went far beyond these outlets.

> The newsreaders and anchors were young and dressed with the informality of youth. Educated, middle-aged Egyptians watching the news bulletins were reminded of their own children as well as struck by the lack of bias. (Schleifer, para. 11)

In the latter months of 2012, Gohar discovered that the signal of 25 TV was being jammed from an unknown source, probably the Morsi government and the Muslim Brotherhood. After the military ousted Morsi on July 3, 2013, 25 TV could not receive a license from the new government.

Gohar sees problems with both the Muslim Brotherhood—now banned in Egypt as a terrorist organization and its leaders on trial—and the military takeover of July 2013 after a year of Islamic rule.

In an analysis in the midst of the Brotherhood's rule, Gohar sent out an email to his supporters, which was entitled "The Media's Performance in Egypt and Where It's Headed."

> How do we help the opposition media in Egypt, a country that is becoming increasingly Islamist, to support the nation's transition to democracy? The same large organizations and social media players that supported massive protests that forced a longtime autocrat from office on February 11, 2011, have recently inflamed riots and street protestors. That has hindered the peaceful transition to an open democracy. (Gohar, personal communication)

Gohar, whose 25 TV was being constantly jammed at this point, urged calm among demonstrators.

> …the media has focused more on the disagreements between protestors, ignoring their larger goals and setting back the country's transition to democracy. Outrageous accusations in the press have created fear and encouraged violence. At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood has sought to control the media and inflate the power of the presidency. That has created a situation that could restrict the freedoms of minorities, women, and secularists, potentially reducing many people to second-class citizens.

The creator of 25 TV criticized the media for their poor performance in encouraging people to vote in the first constitutional referendum, particularly the lack of information about democratic principles, which had not been a part of the lives of many Egyptian citizens. "The media ignored the crucial message that the vote offered Egyptians an unprecedented freedom of choice. A large bank of voters waiting to be swayed found themselves instead alienated from the political process," he wrote. (Gohar, personal communication)

Moreover, he thought the media had to be more analytical than negative during the Morsi presidency. Also, he noted the Muslim Brotherhood's hold on power was not "a done deal"—an example of his understanding of the Egyptian political process.

The mood, which made the Egyptian revolution successful in the eyes of the international media, was the unity of many types of people: activists, regular citizens, heads of state, and the MB [Muslim Brotherhood]…The early unity that brightened the image of the demonstrators during the first days of the revolution has been obscured. (Gohar, personal communication)

The desires of the Egyptian people—such as jobs, social equality, and citizenship—disappeared from the agenda. These were the points that foreign media highlighted during the early days of the revolution, but when Egyptians set those ideas aside, the main objectives were blurred. The media should return to the key values of the revolution, Gohar said.

Conclusion

For 18 months, 25 TV brought a bright, shining light to Egyptian television in an attempt to reach those who used social media and those who did not. The heady days of February 2011 have long since slogged in a period of discontent with the Muslim Brotherhood and a return to the dictatorial stance of the military. Neither the Islamists nor the military have tolerated a free press—as evidenced by virtually the same promises and then restrictions in the latest constitution.

As UNESCO points out in its 2013 report, the power of the government remains strong.

> The legal framework, which formally remains almost entirely in place, establishes…control over all of the institutional structures established by these laws, such as the Journalist Syndicate, the Supreme Press Council, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union and the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority. (UNESCO, p. 15)

Furthermore, the arrest and harassment of journalists both domestic and foreign make it unlikely that Egypt will see a return to the journalistic vigor of 2011 and 2012 anytime soon.

Nevertheless, the Egypt uprising did see an increased interest in ICTs and the use of social media tools, particularly among those in their 20's and 30's. UNESCO reported: "There is certainly a vast array of blogs operated by Egyptians, both in the country and from abroad, which includes a wide array of political blogs, as well as social and personal blogs." Furthermore, the Arab Social Media Report found the number of Facebook users increased by 2 million in the first quarter of 2011, representing 10% of all Internet users. Also, the number continued to grow in 2013, with more than 11 million users, or more than 14% of the population and a growth rate of 19%. That number includes 86% under 34 years old and 63% male. (UNESCO, p. 15)

As outlined earlier, however, a huge number of Egyptians do not participate in social media. Therefore, a connective tissue must exist between social media and traditional media. Unfortunately, no radio or television outlet has been able to provide what 25 TV did so well during its existence. Moreover, it is unlikely that the government authorities will release their grip on the freedom of the press in Egypt. Thus, the necessary connection will not occur any time soon.

After numerous death threats and the inability to obtain broadcast licenses for what he set out to do with 25 TV, Gohar left Egypt for Canada, where he is engaged in a variety of film and television projects. He sees two important components for a free press in Egypt. First, the secular movement—where the use social media is high—needs to find a political platform and candidates with whom they agree and can help organize. Second, these officials need to force Parliament to provide less restrictive laws to protect freedom of the press to revive independent voices throughout the country. Without these fundamental changes, Gohar sees a continuation of military rule and the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood rather than an honest debate about the future of the country. Then, the use of ICTs and television could join again to bring an honest and open dialogue to a country that in such a short time has gone from hope to despair. (Gohar, personal communication)

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