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The Need for Interdisciplinary Research of the Arab Mass Media

Mohammad Ayish
Harris Breslow

American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Abstract:

This paper critically reviews mainstream models of mass communication research in the Arab world and proposes an interdisciplinary perspective that addresses communication within a broader theoretical and analytical framework. Scholarly works on 20th century Arab mass communication can be placed in six subject categories: propaganda, development communication, historical accounts, international news flow, technical and professional works, and general theoretical works (Ayish, 1998). Recent significant technological, political, and social developments have redefined not only perspectives about the Arab world's transitions, but also about how mass communications contribute to this change. The paper subsequently examines three research areas of particular relevance to scholarship of media usage within, and of the Arab world. The first is concerned with the political economy of flow, a global apparatus of systems of movement of people, ideas and cultural products, financial instruments, and goods. The second area is concerned with the study of the rapidly increasing mobility of subjects that is a phenomenon of the political economic apparatus of flow and that has changed the context within which the Arab mass media are both disseminated and consumed. Lastly, the paper discusses the relevance of this work to the changing nature of the production of identity. Here the authors describe identity as a contingent phenomenon that is determined by a host of political, economic, social, cultural, and other factors that delineate the production of one's sense of self, while arguing that the articulation of the political economic apparatus of flow has rearticulated the relationships amongst the factors that identity draws upon and is demarcated by.

Keywords: Arab Mass Media; Arab World; Development Communication; Identity; Identity Production; Interdisciplinary Research; International News Flow; Propaganda

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Résumé:

Ce document revisite d'une façon critique les principaux modèles de recherche sur la communication de masse dans le monde arabe et propose une perspective interdisciplinaire qui aborde la communication par une structure théorique et analytique élargie. Les travaux intellectuels au 20ème siècle sur la communication de masse peuvent être divisés en six catégories: propagande, développement de la communication, exposé historique, circulation des nouvelles internationales, travaux techniques et professionnels, et travaux théoriques généraux (Ayish, 1998). De récents développements technologiques politiques et sociaux importants ont redéfini non seulement des perspectives à propos des phases transitoires dans le monde arabe, mais aussi à propos de la communication de masse et contribuent à ce changement. Cet article, par la suite, examine trois sphères de recherche d'un intérêt particulier de connaissance de l'utilisation des médias à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du monde arabe. Le premier est préoccupé par la circulation de l'économie politique en cours, la bureaucratie des systèmes des mouvements du peuple, idées et produits culturels, instruments financiers, et biens. Le deuxième est préoccupé par l'étude de la croissance rapide de la mobilité des sujets qui est un phénomène de l'appareil politique et économique en mouvement et ceci modifiant le contexte à l'intérieur des médias de masse arabes, lesquels sont dissimulés et consommés. Finalement, cet article examine la pertinence de ce travail à la nature changeante de la production de l'identité. Ici les auteurs décrivent l'identité comme un phénomène contingent qui est déterminé par une animation du politique, économique, social, culturel, et autres facteurs qui déterminent la production dans un sens ou dans l'autre, bien que soutenant que l'articulation de l'appareil politique et économique du mouvement a rebâti les liens parmi les facteurs dont l'identité s’en influence et se démarque.

Mots-clés: Circulation des nouvelles internationales; Développement de la communication; Identité; Média de masse arabes; Monde arabe; Production de l’identité; Propagande; Recherche pluridisciplinaires

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Arab Communication Research Trends

Communication research in the Arab World has been closely connected with the rise and development of mass communication as an academic field across the region. Abdul Rahman

(1985) notes that the University of Cairo Institute for Journalism, Editing, and Translation became operational in 1939. Ayish (1998) observes that, in other Arab countries, the academic study of communication has gained momentum during the past few years, with almost every Arab country having a minimum of one university-based journalism and mass communication program. By the end of 2012, there were over 75 mass communication programs offered at state and private universities with specialties in journalism, public relations, advertising, communications technologies, broadcasting, and most recently in new media and online media. A good number of those programs, housed at universities in Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have graduate components and degrees in areas such as journalism, public relations, and mass communication. The development of academic mass communication programs in the Arab world over the past six decades has not followed a single model of media education. The model employed by Cairo University, for example, exposes students to highly intensive doses of mass communication knowledge to the exclusion of liberal arts-based knowledge. Recently, however, the Cairo University model has slowly drifted closer to a balanced combination of mass communication and liberal arts education. A second model of media education in the Arab World has clearly thrived on the traditions found in American mass communication education, which emphasize functional theories of media effects while accounting for considerable liberal arts components in their programs. A third media education model in the region has derived from European, especially French, traditions that emphasize the sociological features of the mass communication phenomenon. The European tradition has been marked by critical elements pertaining to political economic analysis within the cultural studies research framework. An interesting aspect of the French tradition of media education is its clear-cut separation of media education as an intrinsically liberal arts education that situates vocational media training as exterior to the academic preparation. All the training required of journalists, according to this view, is a university degree in sociology or political science along with some additional post-graduation vocational training in media work.

The dominance of these three media education models in the Arab world has had significant impact upon not only how media practitioners approach their professional work, but also in how researchers have approached mass communication issues. As Ayish (1998) noted, the Cairo University Model defined how researchers came to view mass communication issues as "stand alone" topics to be addressed apart from the broader socio-political and cultural contexts. Media institutions and practitioners are the centre of analysis privileged by this model: these institutions and practitioners are the sources of media effects, and to fully understand these effects, we have only to investigate how their messages impact audiences. The intermediary effects of social forces are rarely considered in this type of analysis, which draw on the statistical analysis of content and/or audience surveys. As the third section of this paper suggests, those studies may be characterized as media-centred analyses that suggest that the mass media are responsible for the social woes and problems found in the region. As suggested by Ayish (2006), content analysis studies view mass mediated messages as an exclusive product of the media practitioners' intellectual and professional values and norms, with little to no attempt to investigate the potential impact of the broader social context on content production.

The traditional American functionalist approach to media education has been conspicuous in how Arab communication researchers have viewed the relationships among the various national mass media and their respective publics. Much like the Cairo University tradition, the American functional research model has been intrinsically quantitative, seeking to

quantitatively investigate media effects with little consideration for qualitative variables. A good deal of mass communication research over the past six decades has used this quantitative approach to both investigate the effects of the mass media upon audiences, and to justify hypotheses that describe media effects as a function of audience exposure to mass mediated messages. As section IV of this study demonstrates, many studies have been carried out that employ the conceptual frameworks of agenda setting, the two-step flow and cultivation theories—all of which quantify media effects. It has been noted that, in the Arab World, quantitative research has always failed to account for the full range of variables that impinge upon audience exposure to mass mediated messages. We contend that researchers within this tradition seem to be too obsessed with statistical analyses, while qualitative interpretations of such media effects are given the least of attention.

The critical or cultural studies tradition in media research is a fairly recent newcomer to Arab mass communication scholarship. This tradition has been most commonly found in universities in Lebanon, Jordan, Algeria, and Tunisia as non-media perspectives came to bear on media analysis. One aspect of this trend is the involvement of scholars from the disciplines of sociology, political science, economics, and psychology in the critical analysis of the mass media. In this respect the history of Arab critical analyses of the mass media has tended to follow that of its European counterpart (Hall, 1990). A second aspect of this trend is the rise of Arab "media empires" and the increasingly visible relationships between private media institutions and politicians in countries such as Lebanon and those in the Gulf region, which have also driven the recent increase in the use of this form of analysis. The main theses advanced in critical studies of the Arab mass media are that the private media in the Arab world are a façade that mask the complex relationships between business interests and politicians. Hence, the political economy perspective seems to be most conspicuous in the analysis of how this symbiosis between business and politics serves to sustain the status quo in rather subtle ways. One important implication of this tradition is that it under-appreciates the very intrinsic qualities of mass media institutions by viewing them as mere tools in the hands of businessmen and politicians. According to this view, Arab media practitioners and institutions are helpless to affect tangible changes in the community because they are steered by business and political interests.

This study argues that, while mass communication practitioners and institutions are the backbone of any analysis, researchers should combine their media perspectives with those from other disciplines in order to account for the full picture of the role of the mass media in modern Arab societies. This approach is of some significance as Arab researchers turn their attention to the evolving new media phenomenon in the context of the region's political economic transitions.

Arab Communication Research in the 1990s

Ayish (1998) noted that Arabs' preliminary encounter with communication scholarship occurred during the post-independence era, when mass media infrastructures were being constructed as part of national development projects. Scholarship concerning communication theory was largely viewed as a luxury that Arab societies could not afford at a time when they were preoccupied with nation-building concerns. Arab elite groups, representing a wide range of political and ideological positions, held high expectations regarding the role of mass media organizations in bringing about social and economic transformations. Communication training programs,

sponsored largely by international organizations, placed a heavy emphasis on the training of media practitioners capable of running print and broadcast operations within existing social and political settings.

Ayish identified a number of research categories in his review of over 700 works on communication research in the Arab world up to the late 1990s. Foremost among these were propaganda studies arising out of the region's engagement in cold war-style political and military conflicts. Another research category included development communication studies that had emerged primarily in the context of the use of the mass media for national development in the post-independence era. Although one of the pioneering modern communications studies, by Daniel Lerner, was conducted on then evolving Middle Eastern societies in the mid-1950s, it was a purely American project that sought to shed light on the potential role of the mass media in social and political transformations. Western models on the effects of mass communication upon social processes were uncritically adopted by newly emerging Arab societies, generating widespread interest among scholars and applied researchers who sought to define the contributions of the mass media national development efforts. Research during that era also embraced international news flow studies associated with global debates over a New World Information and Communication Order during the 1970s and the early 1980s. Imbalances and biases in news flows from and into the Arab world were important topics of research that sought to shed light on the nature, direction, and orientation of news transmitted by major international news agencies and carried by Arab print and broadcast media.

According to Ayish (1998), communication research in the post-colonial period also included historical studies that were descriptive accounts of the development of mass communications in individual Arab countries as well as across the Arab world at large. These serve as well-documented studies of the transformation of the Arab mass media, though they seemed to lack a critical approach to investigating the symbiotic relationships between media institutions and social, political, and economic arrangements. They also included a number of theoretical works that were marked by what came to be known as "Islamic communication models" that were in vogue in the mid-1980s. In its basic configuration, this tradition was no more than an exposition of how the mass media could be used to propagate Islamic ideas and concepts around the world. Such efforts fell short of meeting the minimum requirements of model building in both theoretical and methodological terms.

Another set of theoretical endeavors sought to classify Arab media systems within a socio-economic and socio-political context. Abu Zaid (1986) classified Arab press systems into two categories of mass media ownership: public mass media ownership in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Algeria; and mixed ownership in Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Oman, Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco. Rugh (1990) identified three press models in the Arab world of the 1970s: the mobilization press, the loyalist press, and the diverse press. The mobilization press was dominant in countries with single-party political systems that placed high value on the role of the mass media as tools of political mobilization. This model was evident in the cases of Nasser's Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Iraq and the former South Yemen. Other theoretical attempts have been formulated within the framework of Western typologies and conceptions, such as Schramm's four theories of the press. Some socially and culturally specific typologies have been developed by Rugh (1990) and Abu Zaid (1986), but they seem to have selectively applied Western concepts and are confined to mass communication.

Arab Communication Research in the Past Decade

The first decade of the 21st century, as marked by momentous political, technological, and military developments, was bound to define the Arab world's communication research agenda. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, followed by the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in the context of a global war on terror, gave rise to research that sought to investigate the role of the mass media in either promoting or fighting terrorism. The rise of online and social media in the region's communication profile has also come to bear on the scope of research carried out in the contexts of military conflicts and terrorism. However, the most defining development to shape Arab communication research has been the political turmoil experienced by the region over the past three years within what has been termed as the "Arab Spring". In this respect, researchers have sought to investigate the role of satellite television and new media in driving political uprisings with some scholars assigning social media a leading role in those developments.

One important implication of new research trends in the past decade has been a greater appreciation of the interdisciplinary nature of communication as a scholarly field of study. A good number of researchers have come to bring political and cultural analysis to bear on the mass media's role in either promoting or combating terrorism. The notion of the media as movers and shakers in the war against terrorism has lost some of its shine as analyses began to focus on the political, economic, and even cultural variables that drive media coverage. Researchers have sought to highlight the communication tactics and strategies followed by terrorist groups in studies of the mass media's treatment of terrorism, but the major bulk of analysis has been defined by significant political, economic, and cultural interpretations that have clearly contextualized the function of the mass media within these contexts. Professional values and norms found in the mass media were highlighted, but communication practices were also found to have been shaped by a host of political, social, cultural, and economic variables.

The same interdisciplinary research trend has also been noted with respect to the mass media's handling of the region's political transitions. Satellite television and the web have received the lion's share of scholarly attention, with some scholars framing the Arab uprisings as a product of media hype, and using news contagion theory to explain the role of transnational television and social media in fueling those developments. At this point, most of the discussions of media role in the Arab Spring have been informed more by commentaries and panel discussions and less by systematic research. Most of the television discussions in this area have been anecdotal in nature, and have drawn on observations of mediated content that have emphasized visual representations of mass demonstrations and violence. Commentaries on the use and effect of social media with respect to the events of the Arab Spring have focused on citizens' and governments' engagement in virtual communications with different messages. It has been generally noted that social media were instrumental in mobilizing and coordinating events on the ground. All in all, however, the notion that social media were driving the Arab Spring has not held much water, and more attention has been paid to the social, economic, cultural, and political underpinnings of the conflict.

The Dubai School of Government has carried out the most systematic studies of emerging social media in the Arab World. One study of the role of social media in the propagation of women's empowerment (2012a) noted, throughout 2011, that social media usage continued to grow significantly across the Arab world, coupled with major shifts in usage trends. From merely being used as a tool for social networking and entertainment, social media now

infiltrate almost every aspect of the daily lives of millions of Arabs, affecting the way they interact socially, do business, interact with government, and engage in civil society movements. By the end of 2011, the report notes, Arab users' utilization of social media had evolved to encompass civic engagement, political participation, entrepreneurial efforts, and social change. In another study on social media in the Arab World, the Dubai School of Government (2012b) noted that the passionate debate over the impact of social media in the Arab world was ongoing throughout 2011 and 2012. However, the debate has largely moved beyond both the classical polarized perception of the rigid paradigms of technologically deterministic views and the overly romanticized descriptions of "people power". The healthy debate that has dominated policy discourses for more than a year has finally shifted the question of the societal impact of social media usage from the "if" to the "how", "why", and "what next".

Interdisciplinarity, Globalization and the Apparatus of Flow

We want to begin this section of our paper by arguing that mass communication is a complex and multilayered phenomenon. Mass communication cannot be adequately studied from any one single perspective, for to do so is to dramatically simplify and limit what is a multivariate and multidimensional process. While it is true that interdisciplinary research of the Arab mass media has, of late, been making inroads within the Arab academic community, these inroads have occurred in other academic disciplines. If mass communication's study of the Arab mass media is to maintain both its immediacy and its relevance than it must do so by addressing interdisciplinarity and in so doing maintain both its vibrancy as a scholarly discipline and its primacy in the study of mass mediated communication. We note that we incorporate the term "mediated" because it has become increasingly apparent that many of the processes and phenomena that we discuss below are increasingly a function of the relationship between the mass media and digital devices—computers, tablets, and smart phones—and the digital channels that these devices employ—the world wide web, instant messaging, social media, and Over The Top communication services such as Skype and What'sApp, as they are about heretofore "traditional" mass media.

We want to centre our concern for interdisciplinarity on the phenomenon of the changing nature of the articulation of subjectivity and the social manifestation of subjectivity and identity. It is our opinion that identity lies at the nexus of the recent social and political change in the Arab world, and that identity serves as the linchpin upon which changes in the structures of mass mediated communication may be related to the recent events that have had, and are continuing to have, profound social and political effects upon the Arab world. Moreover, the changes to the nature of the articulation of subjectivity, and thus identity, are a manifestation of processes of globalization, which inform much of our ensuing argument. Prior to doing so, however, we want to offer up two caveats regarding what follows in this paper. The first caveat is that, although we have mentioned the Arab Spring, we will not be discussing these events and their relationship to mass mediated communication in the Arab world in any detail. The goal of this part of our paper is not to describe, theorize, or otherwise debate the significance of the events that have so recently occurred and that continue to unfold. Our intention, rather, is to offer an argument of the necessity and importance of applying interdisciplinary research within the discipline of mass mediated communication, as it is found in the Arab world, to the study of production of Arab mass mediated communication.

The second caveat that we offer concerns our discussion of globalization. We will not argue for any single definition of globalization that may somehow adequately satisfy the vast variety of phenomena that are included under this rubric and the array of theoretical and empirical perspectives that have been deployed to describe, discuss and theorise these phenomena. This is not the place to debate the nature of globalization nor is it our intention to exhaustively describe the variety of processes and structures through which globalization has occurred. Thus we will limit our remarks concerning globalization to the deployment of a worldwide infrastructure of digital communication networks that facilitate the instantaneous and near ubiquitous exchange of communication, information, data, cultural meanings, and beliefs on a global scale. We do so for two reasons. First, it is our belief that identity is a product of the subject's articulation to, as Raymond Williams (2008) would describe it, a structure in a whole way of life. In other words, subjectivity and identity, no matter how they are articulated within and articulate themselves through language and culture, are always already also produced within a crucible of material relationships. Second, discussions of globalization often, ironically enough, engage in a glocalized bifurcation; on the one hand, the global is discussed and described in ephemeral terms—often as an ineffable process, for example. On the other hand, the local is described concretely in terms of specific and tangible effects or changes to the local environment that may be empirically measured and that are the result of (ineffable) globalized processes. The perspective that we employ has the advantage of being concrete, of being materially evident, at both levels, for it is, primarily, a discussion of the global deployment of a material apparatus with both global and local settings, and thus engendering both global and local effects.

The perspective that we will employ is one that was first independently described by both Manuel Castells and Arjun Appadurai. Following both Castells and Appadurai, we use the term "flow" to describe a global infrastructural assemblage and mechanisms that facilitate the global transportation, distribution, and delivery of goods, services, and cultural objects; the transmission of financial and monetary instruments, information, and cultural meanings and beliefs; and the movement of people (e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1996; 2000; 2005; Urry, 2003). The deployment of the apparatus of flow is enabled, monitored, maintained, and controlled by a series of digital information networks that, in turn, have been integrated into a global network of networks, namely the Internet. Indeed, for Castells (1996; 2000), the commercialisation of the Internet in 1995 and its subsequent global build out is the proximal cause, the *sine qua non*, of the articulation of this apparatus.

One can easily point to examples of the transnational movement of goods and transportation of people via air, land, and sea; the electronic exchange of financial instruments across national borders; the global distribution of cultural objects, narratives, meanings, and values; and the dissemination of information that existed prior to 1995. In its role as a network of digital information networks, however, the Internet has enabled the immediate, ubiquitous, and almost-transparent exchange of information on a global scale. This, in turn, has facilitated the precise coordination and monitoring of all information, objects, and people moving through this apparatus, no matter the location or distance to be traveled. This has had two consequences: the near-global ubiquity of the Internet has facilitated the integration of digital information networks with physical transportation and distribution networks, subsequently enabling the expansion of communication and transportation networks from the transnational and multinational scales to the global scale, and thus, the global articulation of structures of flow (e.g., Castells, 1996; 2009).

The Intensification and Extensification of Identity

The integration of the Internet with transportation and distribution networks has also enabled the intensification of the various flows that move through this apparatus as a result of its precise coordination and the enhanced efficiency of the flows of people, monetary, and financial instruments, information of all types and objects moving among the various infrastructural components that constitute the apparatus of flow: more airplanes carrying more people at faster speeds in increasingly dense traffic patterns in any one part of the sky; greater volumes of monetary and financial instruments circulating through the global financial system and cycling through this system at higher and higher rates of speed among the world's global and regional financial centers and hubs; more and more information moving more swiftly across greater distances, thereby enabling more rapid and rapidly informed decisions on the part of a greater and greater number of actors who are located at increasingly varying and distant locales from one another; increasingly greater and greater amounts of entertainment and cultural programming distributed and delivered to increasingly diverse audiences as a result of a complex of primary, secondary, and tertiary content production, distribution, and licensing arrangements based on the exploitation of digital content platforms; and more containers holding more goods being carried by more and larger container ships moving among container terminals that employ increasingly larger and more complex storage and retrieval systems and that are, in turn, integrated into local transportation and delivery networks.

Each of the phenomena that we discuss below must be understood as an effect of the ability of each of the various channels of the apparatus of flow to act as a transnational transversal. A transversal is something that cuts across bounded spaces—in this case the boundaries that define the spaces of nation-states—and in so doing disrupts the relationships—social, cultural, political, economic—that have heretofore been bounded by and thus determined within the space of the nation-state (e.g., Allagui & Breslow, 2013; Latour, 2005; Mol & Law, 1994; Law & Mol, 2001; Urry, 2004). Of course, not every transversal channel that we have mentioned, above—communication, transportation, finance, cargo, and culture—is always disruptive of the relationships and activities that it comes into contact with as it traverses the bounded space of the nation-state. Our point, however, is that, once articulated within a global apparatus of flow, these transversals disrupt the relatively fixed relationships that one has heretofore been able to find within the space of any given nation-state. Indeed, one key disruption that has occurred as a result of the presence of the apparatus of flow and the articulation of network transversals across the boundaries of the nation-state has been the relationship between the identity of the subject and the state, and the relative ability of states, in their constitution of social, cultural, political, and economic subjects, to limit the nature of the articulation of identities—social, cultural, political, and economic—within their specific spaces (e.g., Byrne, 1997; Castells, 2005; Latour, 2005; Law & Urry, 2005).

This, then, is our first assertion; that the production of subjectivity and the articulation of subjectivity to identity now exceed the confines of the nation-state. One effect of the existence of transnational transversals upon the formation of subjectivity is the intensification and extensification of identity. On the one hand, subjectivity becomes the product of sub-state relationships that are no longer obliged to acknowledge the social, cultural, political, or economic primacy of the state, despite the state's continued control of its borders within which these relationships are articulated. This is the *intensification* of identity. On the other hand, no longer bound to the strictures of the nation-state, the subject is empowered to explore

supranational relationships within which political and cultural identities can be rearticulated across spaces that are external to the space of the nation-state (e.g., Castells, 1997; 2005; Prodnik 2012; Vlavo, 2012). This is the *extensification* of identity. Whether it has been intensified or extensified, the relationship between identity and the boundaries of the nation-state has become both highly contingent and increasingly problematic.

It is in the articulation extensified identities that we believe the Internet is having the greatest effect in its disruption of the relationship between the nation-state and the articulation of identity. The global deployment of the Internet within the apparatus of flow reorganizes the space of the state within which these subjectivities have heretofore been fixed, and have thus behaved, politically, economically, socially, and culturally. In so doing the apparatus of flow, in general, and the Internet, in particular, begin to render transparent the discursive, cultural, commercial, and juridical networks through which the nation-state exists, and within which identities have heretofore been deployed. Castells has described the contemporary relationship between the state, civil society, and political participation, in terms of a crisis of political legitimacy, a crisis in which

> considerable evidence points to the increasing alienation of citizens vis á vis their political representatives, and the institutions of representation . . . [A] high percentage of people feel able to change the world. But they feel empowered not through the political system but through autonomous mobilization.
>
> (Castells, 2005: 9)

This crisis is a byproduct of flow; along with identities and political behaviours, the global political integration of states through bilateral, multilateral, and global political, economic, and juridical treaties is increasingly *intensified* (extending more and more deeply into the political, economic, and juridical structures of individual states) and *extensified* (encompassing and affecting more and more aspects of these structures in increasing numbers of states) by the ongoing process of integration of the nation state within the global apparatus of flow.

Any analysis of this phenomenon will not be accomplished solely from within the discipline of mass communication, regardless of the research methods involved. The extensification and intensification of identity will not be analyzed through the use of content analysis, an analysis of the political economy of the mass media, audience ethnographies, or any other singular perspective or combination of perspectives from within the discipline of mass communication. Any fruitful analysis of this phenomenon will only occur through an interdisciplinary combination of mass communication with international political economy, studies of the public sphere, actor-network theory, and an analysis of the spatiality of systems of flow.

Networked Individualism

Our second assertion is that the Internet, as a key constituent component of the apparatus of flow, is causing stress to the collectivist culture that is commonly found in the Arab world, and the role that this collectivist culture plays in the production of identity. Theorists of networked individualism argue that the social transformation found in the late 19th and early 20th centuries should not be read as the opposition between community and society, but rather as a shift away from tightly bound communities that exist across fairly limited spaces towards an increasingly

networked individualism in which each person sits at the centre of his or her own personal community (e.g., Baym 2010; Kendall, 2011; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Wellman, 1988; 2002). This concept replaces neither the individual nor the community, nor does it follow Tönnies' (2005) opposition of community to society. Theorists of networked individualism argue, rather, that this should be seen as evidence of a cultural shift brought about by the growing presence of a variety of communication networks in our daily lives, the multiplicity of social networks that one traverses on a daily basis, and the instrumentality with which one makes use of one's position among this multiplicity of social networks (Wellman, 1988). In other words, the networked individualist perspective sidesteps the debate between community and society by relocating the debate over the nature of the contemporary individuated subject and the production of identity from social space to network space.

There are two features of networked individualism that have profound implications for the production of subjectivity and the articulation of identity within the Arab world and the disruption of the collectivist orientation that is a hallmark of Arab culture. The first feature of networked individualism is that one can sit at the centre of any number of social networks at the same time. This implies that networked individuals tend to view social networks instrumentally; one's membership in any given social network ultimately exists in order to fulfill some need or purpose that may very well be external to the values of community, collective experience, and solidarity (e.g., Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Wellman, 2008), although these values and the experiences that they imply are not precluded from the social networks forged amongst networked individuals, and that may also be found within this type of communicative environment (Prodnik, 2012). However, in many cases, once the need has been fulfilled, the network may be dispensed with.

This also suggests the second feature of networked individualism, the low costs that are associated with exiting online social networks. It is true that communities may be forged online. It is also true that these communities can articulate an experience that is shared by the members of the community, and which functions to produce a sense of shared identity and perhaps even solidarity. Nonetheless, networked individuals find it easier to end their membership in online social networks and communities than they may have otherwise experienced of their membership in so-called real world social networks and communities (e.g., Baym, 2010; Kendall, 2011). The question of course, is whether or not the ease with which networked individuals are able to exit online social networks carries over to their lives offline, in the real world.

To this end, we may have already begun to witness the impact of networked individualism upon collectivist Arab cultures. The Emirates Internet Project (EIP) is a longitudinal survey research project of patterns of Internet usage amongst residents of the UAE. The EIP is a participating partner in the World Internet Project, a consortium of institutions researching Internet usage in 36 countries. Partners survey a basket of common questions used for comparative analysis, and local survey questions to gain additional insight of local Internet usage, a number of which are designed to gauge the impact of Internet usage upon existing social networks. The EIP has found a moderate, yet telling impact of Internet usage among young people and their time spent with family members.

> [T]here are indications of a shift from time spent with families to times spent with friends, and thus a shift in the construction of . . . [social] . . . networks. This is most noticeable among Emirati youth, those UAE nationals below the age of 18,

> 66.7% of whom declared that they spend less time with their families since their adoption of the Internet.
>
> (Breslow & Allagui, 2012: 111)

The family sits at the centre of all social life on the Arabian Peninsula. Families are central to one's social relationships, and are consulted on both major and minor issues. The fact that time spent online by young Emiratis has the potential to disrupt time spent among members of the family is of telling importance, and signals a potential disruption to the very intricate and often very private social networks that are based on the family, and which have been so very important to social life on the Arabian peninsula (Breslow & Allagui, 2012).

Here, again, we cannot turn to any singular perspective within the discipline of mass communication in order to effectively analyze the effects of networked individualism upon the collectivist cultures of the Arab world and the changes to the nature of the production of identity within these collectivist cultures. Indeed, we cannot even remain solely within the discipline of mass communication in order to do so. Any fruitful analysis of this question will only occur through an interdisciplinary combination of perspectives. One would begin with the sociology of networks and network analysis with the online participant observation of the experience of networked individualism from within these social networks derived from anthropology; a content analysis of the online interactions generated within these networks will be necessary, which is, of course, the purview of both literary criticism and mass communication; the resulting structure of meaning, belief, and behaviour will necessitate a cultural studies perspective in order to understand the regime of signification that is produced within this environment; and finally, the very nature of this experience and its effect upon one's sense of self and one's relationship to others would be best understood through a perspective that sits at the intersection of psychology and social psychology.

Post-National Media Content and Culture

We turn, finally, to what may be seen as the most "traditional" aspect of this section of our paper, the production and dissemination of mass mediated content and its relationship to the social construction of identity. Here again, however, we find that this heretofore-traditional subject matter within the discipline of mass mediated communication has been affected by the articulation of the global apparatus of flow; in particular the use of contemporary systems of digital content production and digital communications networks. Our main concern in this section is to discuss the role that the production and distribution digital media content is playing in the global restructuring of the political economy of mass mediated communication, and the articulation of this restructuring to the relationship between mass mediated content and the social production of identity.

Whether one could ever point to a truly national mass media environment that produced and disseminated information and cultural mass media content by and for members of and within a single national community is a question that, we believe, is open to debate. Be that as it may, in the contemporary political economic structure of mass mediated communication we can safely say that there is no such thing as a truly national media environment. This is because of four developments, all of which revolve around the use of digital technology to, on the one hand, produce and repackage digital mass mediated content and, on the other hand, to distribute and

disseminate this content through Internet protocol (IP) networks (which are the constituent components of the global apparatus of flow), on the other.

The first development that we wish to note is the now-ubiquitous use of digital technologies in the production of mass mediated content. These technologies are increasingly inexpensive to purchase, more and more user-friendly, adhere to industry-wide format standards, and can be re-tasked to produce any form of content. Moreover, these technologies enable organizations at any level on the organizational scale—from local to regional to national to global—to easily and economically produce mass mediated content. This, in turn, has led to an explosion of actors on the commercial mass media scene, enabled and fueled by the availability of these digital production technologies, and thus an ensuing explosion of content that can be commercially exploited.

The second development is the explosion of delivery and consumption systems of this digital mass mediated content. From IP-enabled satellite delivery to terrestrially based IPTV transmission disseminated via both digital cable and digital broadcast networks, to the Internet, the reliance on the digital distribution of industry-standard formats has enabled the production of inexpensive, easy to use, globally available, portable devices—smart phones, tablets, game systems, and dedicated digital media players—that are employed to consume this content (e.g., Chester, 2007; Gershon, 2005). This results in an explosion of the audience for mass mediated content. In an era where dedicated white box digital media players can be purchased for as low as USD40, and low-cost smart phones for as little as USD60, increasingly larger segments of the global population are able to access digital mass mediated communications content.

The third development is one that has been fueled by the explosion of intuitional actors and the proliferation of audiences on the commercial mass media scene. Here we refer to the increasingly and overwhelmingly complex chain, an endless chain (Bagdikian, 2004), of interlocking partnership and ownership agreements concerning content production, repackaging (including reproduction) and distribution rights among primary, secondary, and tertiary mass mediated communications corporations (e.g., Bagdikian, 2004; Bennett, 2004; Castells, 2009; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Rice, 2008). These agreements vary in terms of the scope and scale with respect to content, distribution and geographical territory that they cover. What they have in common, however, is the fact that they all rely on, and presuppose, the intensive and extensive commercial exploitation of digital technology to produce, deliver, and disseminate mass mediated content (Castells, 2009). The commercial exploitation of digital mass mediated content becomes ever more intensive as a result of the increasing rate of profit that can be generated through the repackaging and redistribution of mass mediated content across a growing number of digital platforms, thus increasing the profit that may be generated from any piece of content (Louw, 2001). The commercial exploitation of digital mass mediated content becomes more extensive as the interlocking ownership and partnership arrangements that we discussed, above, in conjunction with the ubiquity of digital media consumption devices, enables the commercial delivery of this content to greater and greater segments of the global population, across more and more national borders at further and further distance from the content's point of production.

The fourth, and last, development that we wish to note is that the idea of a national audience, and national media content becomes highly problematic within a global mediascape where content can be cheaply produced, repackaged, and distributed across the world,. This is not to say that national audiences do not consume content produced in their home country, for indeed they do. However, the same audiences also consume great amounts of glocalized content—content that is based on a common format developed and first produced outside of the

home country and subsequently repackaged and produced locally to meet local cultural specificities (Iwabuchi, 2008)—as well as international content that has been produced in other countries and delivered to any number of digital platforms via any number of digital delivery systems.

We reiterate that any understanding of the effects of post-national media content upon audiences in the Arab world will not be possible through a singular perspective such as content analysis, audience ethnographies, or any combination of perspectives from within the discipline of mass mediated communications. To fully understand the complex effects of the global mass mediated communications apparatus upon national audiences, and the production of identities within these audiences, will require the integration of the above-mentioned perspectives from mass mediated communication with International Political Economy, organizational analysis, network analysis, and mobility studies. Indeed, mobility studies may be the most important intellectual current of all, given the fact that digital production and consumption devices have, since 2007, become increasingly mobile.

Conclusion

Although there is a long history of scholarly research of mass communication in the Arab world, this research has all too often proven to be functional in nature, or has otherwise dominated by the national context during the period of Arab nation-building. It has also been heavily influenced by empirical perspectives imported from primarily American schools of research and thought on mass communication, as well as by the institutional politics inherent in the relationships between the Arab state and national mass media institutions and organizations. Thus, although there has been a great deal of scholarship on the Arab mass media produced in the Arab world, it has tended to be narrowly, empirically and functionally focused as a result of external factors. We have argued that, in order to properly and complexly understand the nature of the Arab mass media as they exist today, and the role of the Arab mass media in the social changes that are occurring across much of the Arab world, a more complex, interdisciplinary approach must be taken.

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About the Authors

Mohammad Ayish is Professor and Head of the Department of Mass Communication at the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. He holds a Doctoral degree in International Mass Communication from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Dr. Ayish has over 60 articles and book chapters published in Arab and international journals in addition to four books. His most recent co-edited book is: *Explorations in Global Media Ethics* (2012). His research interests focus on new media technologies, social media, women and media, Arab broadcasting, media and cultural identity, and media ethics.

Harris Breslow is an Associate Professor in the Department of Mass Communication at the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Dr. Breslow holds a Ph.D. in Mass Communication from the Institute of Communications Research, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research focuses on the philosophy of space, new media and their role in the articulation of social space, the re-articulation of urban space in the Arab world, and the relationship between civil society, cyberspace, and urban space. Harris has written articles and chapters, research reports, is working on a forthcoming volume about the effects of the Internet on Emirati society, and has lectured widely on these subjects.

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