

Media and Democratisation:

What is Known about the Role of Mass Media in
Transitions to Democracy

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Executive Summary

This report explores what is known about the roles of the mass media in transitions to democracy. It offers a fundamental overview of thinking regarding democratisation through the media, and covers the major works, theories, and themes relevant to the study of mass media in transitional contexts. Throughout the review, we explore selected regions (i.e. Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Arab world) in more detail to provide a comprehensive outlook on previous works that aim to understand, explain, or predict democratisation processes (i.e. regime change, institutional change, and democratic socialisation) with reference to the media. Our study aims to uncover a sufficient basis for a theory of mass media during democratisation through reviewing and aligning existing work and empirical evidence on this subject.

The review starts by elucidating the potential role of the media as a democratising agent. We then explore the relationship between media reform and institutional change during democratisation periods, and move to review the literature on the contribution of media to institution building and due performance in Central and Eastern Europe. We continue the discussion on the effectiveness of media for democratisation by assessing the relationship between political accountability and the accountability function of 'watchdog journalism' in Latin America. This is followed by a review of major works that look at the media as an instigator to or determinant of changes in individuals' political attitudes or behaviour during periods of democratisation. Later, we discuss in detail the relationship between the media and change for democracy in the most recent region of interest in terms of potential democratisation, the Arab world, and finally, we assess the media's revolutionary roles in regime changes with particular focus on the rising debate about the connection between social media and the Arab Spring. As we address different stages and levels of democratisation, we critically revisit and question some of the commonly held assumptions about the relationship between media reform and democratic transformations.

The following list offers a summary of trends and findings from the review:

- A state of the discipline for the study of mass media and democratisation is difficult to construct as there is little coherence between the various theoretical and analytical approaches employed. Fundamentally, the study of mass media in democratising countries is an exercise of a different quality than the study of mass media in established democracies of the West in which media studies originated, the countries and regions of democratisation have a varying level of comparability with one another.
- There is very little research which would explore how exactly the media fulfil their normatively ascribed role and contribute to democratic institution building in the transition countries. It is often difficult to separate what is being claimed about the impact of media on the institution-building process from broader assessments of their democratic qualities or contribution to democratisation in general. So far, there has been very little, if any, empirical research specifically designed to verify these arguments.
- It is unclear whether the media are an agent of democratic change and consolidation or not as the issue of whether the media lead or follow change for democracy is yet to be resolved. The evidence on the

effective contribution of the media to institutional change during the consolidation phases of democratisation, particularly with respect to enforcing political accountability through watchdog journalism, is both mixed and inconsistent. This might reflect the high normative expectations by the research community concerning media reform which was assumed to simply replicate the established Western models.

- Whereas mass media have often simply been assumed to play a (generically) positive role in democratic transition, particularly for citizens of transitional countries, there is in fact little evidence that fits with this assumption. The available evidence of both the broad and specific power of mass media to influence individuals fails to correspond clearly to higher levels of a proto-democratic political culture in non-democratic regimes. The scattered nature of available empirical evidence also limits its ability to illuminate conclusions about the role of mass media in the process of democratisation. Thus, assuming a simple and positive relationship between media reform – i.e. changes in the quantity and quality of information sources and enhanced freedom of expression – on the one hand and successful democratisation on the other hand can be misleading.
- Despite clear and loud enthusiasm about new media's possible roles in bringing about (democratic) transition or transforming societies, the revolutionary role of the 'newest' medium (i.e. the internet) has found little empirical support. The available evidence is sporadic and insufficient to inform a theory of the mass media's role in political socialisation during periods of democratisation. Similarly, the major outcomes from the debate regarding the connection between social media and the Arab Spring suggest that social media are not strong enough to cause revolutions despite their contribution to the public sphere and new forms of governance. That is, empirical evidence provides no strong support for claims of significant new media impact on regime changes in the Arab world.

The findings suggest the need for an inductive investigation that is *theory-generating* rather than *theory-testing*. In addition, studies should extend our knowledge of the mechanisms of media effects in non-Western settings, and enhance our understanding of the dynamics of information environments and audiences in transitional contexts. Future research will also need to consider the velocity and scope of the transformation of digital media environments. As far as policy-making is concerned, the findings suggest that the relationship between institutional media reform and democratisation is far from simple, and that there is a need to consult empirical evidence and consider socialisation processes in future policies.

1. Introduction

Scholars have different understandings of democratisation. This is mainly because there are various, though not necessarily contradictory, ways of understanding what democracy is (e.g. Schmitter and Karl, 1993). Defining democracy can range from a minimalist requirement of free competitive elections (e.g. Schumpeter, 1943) to definitions emphasising multiple forms of participation (see Rozumilowicz, 2002, for an overview). Democratisation can be best understood as ‘a complex, long term, dynamic, and open-ended process; it consists of progress towards a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics’ (Whitehead, 2002: 27). This requires two distinct approaches.

The *first* approach focuses on the conditions that predate democratisation, seeking domestic and international factors that make it likely for democratisation to start and to succeed (e.g. explanatory and condition-focused). The *second* one focuses on democratisation processes, emphasising the proximate causes rather than long-term causes (e.g. descriptive and situation-oriented) (see Haerpfer et al., 2009, for an overview; also Munck, 2007). In any case, democratic transition presents a hybrid regime where institutions of the old regimes coexist with those of the new state, and authoritarians and democrats often share power (Shin, 1994); whereas democratic consolidation refers to the challenges of making new democracies secure (Schedler, 1998). A possible third approach might refer to aspects of democracy in countries with no immediate threat of breakdown.

Current democratisation theory is closely linked with the early modernisation theory which establishes a theoretical link between the level of development of a given country and its probability of being democratic (Lipset, 1959; Lerner, 1958). It argues that, beyond certain thresholds of economic development, societies become too complex and socially mobilised to be governed by authoritarian means (Hinnebusch, 2006: 374). The thesis that modernisation favours democratisation has been repeatedly challenged. Counter-arguments have relied on cases showing a breakdown of democratic regimes in highly modern countries, and a continued existence of workable democracies in poor countries (Berg-Schlosser, 2007). Despite the challenges, plenty of evidence in the literature shows that modernisation does help democracies not only survive (e.g. Przeworski and Limongi, 1997), but also emerge (e.g. Boix and Stokes, 2003; see Dahl, 1971, for a discussion). As of today, the fact that modernisation operates in favour of democracy is beyond serious doubt (Welzel, 2009: 81).

The literature points to many domestic factors in explaining democratisation processes (parties: Capoccia and Ziblatt, 2010; institutional factors: Geddes, 1999; Welzel, 2009; civil society: Whitehead, 2002). Democratisation literature generally tends to downplay the role of international factors in democratisation, but as globalisation has made states more vulnerable to the demands of the global forces, scholars have started to pay more attention to the influence of external variables (e.g. ‘neighbourhood’ effects: Brinks and Coppedge, 2006; diffusion: Huntington, 1991). However, proponents of the political culture theory argue that mass beliefs are of critical importance for a country’s chances of becoming and remaining democratic. They state that *intrinsic* preferences for democracy, just like *instrumental* ones, do emerge under authoritarian regimes and that, when these preferences are weak or absent, people may consider such regimes to be democratic. Accordingly, the relationship between modernisation and democratisation is perceived to be mediated by the emergence of emancipative beliefs (see

Welzel and Inglehart, 2006, 2009, for a discussion). It is here that the mass media have been recognised as a potential but influential democratisation actor since, unlike earlier instances of democratisation, the current global wave of democracy takes place in a media-saturated environment (Veltmer and Rowsley, 2009).

2. Mass Media and Institutional Change during Democratisation

The role of the media in the process of democratisation has been greatly underestimated (e.g. Randall, 1993), partly because the literature on political science and communication is largely fragmented (Hackett and Zhao, 2005). Studies which have addressed the relationship between the media and politics in democratisation contexts usually have two major concerns: (1) democratisation through the media and (2) democratisation of the media itself (Hackett and Zhao, 2005; see also Salgado, 2009). It is difficult to identify a direct relationship of cause and effect between the media and democratisation as the available empirical evidence is anecdotal and so cannot be subjected to rigorous empirical testing (see Voltmer and Rowsley, 2009). The media may be viewed either as dependent on society and mirroring its contours or as primary movers and moulders (McQuail, 2005). Likewise, media freedom has been perceived as an indicator of democratic reform (see McConnell and Becker, 2002), or as a precondition for democratic institutions to work properly (e.g. Berman and Witzner, 1997; Dahl, 1989). For both media and democratisation scholars, the mass media are regarded as one of the key democratic institutions (Street, 2010; McQuail, 2000) vital in improving the quality of the electoral system, political parties, parliament, judiciary, and other branches of the state, even civil society, and safeguarding their democratic performance.

In normative media theory, democratic political structures are often assumed to precede the growth of media markets. This assumption may not be accurate for some emerging democracies, but the proposition that democracy influences the function of the media is a plausible one (e.g. through legislation, protection, etc.). This is based on the long-standing theory of media and democracy in which there are normative expectations regarding the media itself (e.g. normative values) as well as regarding how other institutions should treat the media (e.g. structure). Overall, freedom and independence are the most universally endorsed ideal characteristics of the media.¹ The normative functions of the media are often based on the characteristics of representative or liberal democracies. These include serving as (1) a forum encouraging pluralistic debate about public affairs, (2) a guardian against the abuse of power, and (3) a mobilising agent encouraging public learning and participation in the political process (see Norris, 2000, for a detailed overview).²

Thus, transforming the media into fully democratic institutions is a challenging task mainly because (1) the relationship between government and the media is highly ambivalent, (2) reformed media institutions will still retain elements of the logic and constraints of their predecessors, and (3) journalists in the newly transformed media organisations will still hold values that are rooted in their professional life under the old regime (Voltmer and Rowsley, 2009). This transformation is often achieved through liberalisation of the media so that an ideal media environment includes two media sectors: a market-led media sector and a non-market-sector (Rozumilowicz, 2002). In transitional democracies, the guarantee of communication freedoms is rarely

¹ These are often measured through global annual indexes such as the Freedom House Survey which looks at the degree to which each country permits the free flow of news and information considering the legal, political, and economic environments, or Reporters without Borders Worldwide Press Freedom Index, which assesses the state of press freedom based on violations directly affecting journalists and news media, taking into account the legal situation and behaviour of state authorities.

² Other normative values that are highly regarded where public communication is concerned include equality, diversity, truth and information quality, and social order and solidarity (McQuail, 2005).

disputed constitutionally and has been implemented in virtually all transition countries (Voltmer and Rowsley, 2009).

In democratising contexts, the media tasks are generally and usually subsumed under the 'accountability role' which the media have been normatively ascribed as one of their main functions in a democratic society (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1990; Schudson, 1995; Randall, 1998; Scammell and Semetko, 2000a; Norris, 2006; Voltmer, 2006a). The notion that the press should hold the government and political elites accountable – that is, answerable to the electorate and subject to eventual punishment in case of wrongdoing – is particularly strongly rooted in the liberal, Anglo-American tradition of journalism, assigning the press the label of the 'fourth estate' and expecting it to act as a 'watchdog', exposing the transgressions of the public officials and other power holders within the democratic system (Waisbord, 2000). In addition to elections, the media are seen as instrumental for both the main dimensions of political accountability (see Schedler, 1998; Whitehead, 2002), vertical (the ability of citizens to oversee actions of the power holders) as well as horizontal (the system of 'checks and balances' between state institutions, public agencies, and branches of government). Simply, they serve as a means for voters to make decisions by disseminating information about government actions.

However, as a challenge to legislative democratisation, emerging democracies are thought to develop unique types of media systems that differ significantly from those in established democracies, and journalistic professionalism is argued to be embedded in the wider cultural traditions of a given country and to reflect the needs and expectations of audiences (McConnell and Becker, 2002). This creates several – and larger – gaps between the 'ideal' and the reality of journalism than in established democracies.

Thus, the role of the media in democratisation can be best understood – and is examined here – along the stages of political transformation. In the pre-transition period, the media may play a witnessing role, as well as a legitimising role for the changes taking place before the regime loses its hold on power (Bennett, 1998). It may also exert direct pressure and constitute an actual 'trigger' for democratisation (Randall, 1993). During the transition period, the media may set the agenda for political debate, offer alternative interpretations of the ongoing events, and create support for emerging political parties. While previous research suggests that the media tend to be most supportive of democracy in the early stages of democratisation (Randall, 1998), their performance is vulnerable to political control which manifests itself in highly opinionated and politicised reporting during transition phases. The media's role in the early stages of democratisation can be very influential because of its potential impact on political decisions (Salgado, 2009) and political orientations (Schmitt-Beck and Voltmer, 2007). As far as the consolidation phase is concerned, the media are expected to sustain democratic discourse and guard against backsliding, whether institutional decay or individual corruption (Randall, 1998), a role often challenged by growing cynicism and decline of public trust in journalism.

More so than in established democracies, the distinction between local and global media offers an additional insight into the influence of the media on the democratisation process. The expansion in global communication during the third wave of democratisation has highlighted the role of the 'demonstration effect' by the international media, which enlightens audiences about the absence of political freedom or economic affluence in their lives

(Huntington, 1991). Global media may also contribute to democratisation by directing foreign political elites and audiences towards problems in a particular country (Voltmer and Rowsley, 2009) or by affecting the creation of foreign policies through the so-called 'CNN effect' (Livingston, 1997).

Domestically, the relationship between the growth of free media and the process of democratisation is considered to be reciprocal. Once the liberalisation of the media has been achieved, democratic consolidation and human development are strengthened as journalists in independent media facilitate greater transparency and accountability in governance through quality news reporting (Norris, 2009). This relationship is reflected in mobilisation theory which states that multiplying media produces greater opportunities in terms of accessibility for more political engagement (Loveless, 2010). At the consumption level, it is suggested that, because of a 'virtuous circle', attention to the news gradually reinforces civic engagement, just as civic engagement prompts attention to the news (Norris, 2000).

However, there is very little research exploring how exactly the media fulfil this normatively ascribed role and contribute to democratic institution building in the transition countries. The overview of the relevant literature specifically dealing with media and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe over the past two decades (Splichal, 1994; Corcoran and Preston, 1995; Downing, 1996; O'Neil, 1997b; Sparks and Reading, 1998; Mughan and Gunther, 2000; Bajomi-Lázár and Hegedüs, 2001; Gross, 2002; Price et al., 2002; Sükösd and Bajomi-Lázár, 2003b; Paletz and Jakubowicz, 2003; Jakubowicz, 2006; Voltmer, 2006a; Jakubowicz and Sükösd, 2008; Dobek-Ostrowska and Głowacki, 2008; Dyczok and Gaman-Golutvina, 2009; Klimkiewicz, 2010; Dobek-Ostrowska et al., 2010; Downey and Mihelj, 2012; Gross and Jakubowicz, 2012b) suggests that existing scholarship tackles the question of the impact of the media on political accountability and institutional reform during the democratisation process mainly indirectly, and primarily in the form of qualitative studies using interpretive and historical approaches. This finding should not be surprising given the scarcity of empirical research on the relationship between media and democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe as well as other transition countries in general, which many of the above quoted authors explicitly admit and bemoan at the same time – with only a little change over the years. Patrick O'Neil's observation from 1997 that 'we know little about the relationship between media reform and the formation of stable democracy' (O'Neil, 1997b: 3) is echoed in most subsequent volumes, as is his critical comment that 'while studies of democratization recognize the importance of the media, few have gone beyond these basic assumptions to study how and why such institutions may advance or impede democratization processes' (O'Neil, 1997: 4).³ Writing five years later, Karol Jakubowicz noted that:

There is currently no unanimity in the literature on the relationship between mass communications and social change. The issues of whether mass media lead or follow change, whether they mirror or mould society,

³ According to O'Neil, there is little empirical scholarship on the role of the press in the moments of transition: 'Even where the role of the underground or opposition press is cited as an important instrument in the formation of civil society and the undermining of undemocratic regimes, there is lacking an elaboration of how open information makes the transition from the political margin to become a central element of new democracy. . . . There is a general agreement among Western social scientists that democracies depend on a free press; however, studies of the interrelationship between the media and democracy have paid little attention to how a free press forms in newly democratizing societies' (O'Neil, 1997a: 3).

and whether they should be conceptualized as agents of social change or of the status quo are yet to be resolved. (Jakubowicz, 2002: 203)

In their conclusion to the volume which remains one of the most explicit attempts to discuss the relationship between media reform and democratisation, Monroe E. Price and Beata Rozumilowicz confess that, at the end of their quest, the direction of causality is no clearer than before:

Our Holy Grail of inquiry has involved determining whether there is a causal effect between liberalized media and a democratic society, and as happens in most religious searches, reaching a final destination is elusive. How can we tell whether, as is so widely assumed, media reform is a necessary condition of democratization, or rather, whether free and independent media are merely attractive, superb, and even justifying products of an already liberalized society? Does media reform promote democratization or is the existence of healthy and independent media merely a consequence or sign of a society that is already on the way toward greater democratic practice? (Price and Rozumilowicz, 2002: 254)

The editors admit that, based on the case studies included in the volume,⁴

no grand theory or overwhelming conclusion can be drawn. If the case studies illustrate anything, it is that the relationship between media reform and political transition is best considered as retail, not wholesale, as narrow and functional rather than dramatic and overarching. (Price and Rozumilowicz, 2002: 254)

Seven years later, Marta Dyczok complained that 'there is very little theoretical literature on media and democratization' (2009: 31) and stressed that 'the central question which needs to be addressed and theorized is whether a free and independent media is an agent of democratic change and consolidation or not' (2009: 32), highlighting thereby the lack of unambiguous outcomes from previous studies regarding this crucial issue.

2.1 Media and Institutional Change in Central and Eastern Europe: 'Lessons to be Learned'?

One of the main reasons to focus on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) when examining the roles of media in the process of democratisation lies in the fact that this region, at least for its most part, can be considered to represent a more or less 'complete' case of democratisation. We have witnessed the beginning, middle, and end of transition as many of the countries of this region have not only moved away from authoritarianism towards democracy but have succeeded in doing so (e.g. with membership in the European Union). Unlike other regions of scattered (Africa), perpetual (Latin America), or possibly burgeoning (Middle East) democratisation, CEE allows us to examine the roles that the mass media have played in the successes or failures of transition. Additionally, this region has received enormous academic attention, providing us with both depth and breadth of

⁴ The volume contains chapters about media reform and about democratisation in countries as diverse as China, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jordan, Ukraine, Uganda, India, Poland, and Uruguay.

knowledge in which to embed investigations of the complex process of institutional reform, political socialisation, and the role of the media.

The fact that more than two decades after the beginning of transition in Central and Eastern Europe, the very question about the contribution of the media to the process of democratisation remains very much unanswered – or answered in a way which is far from unequivocal – could possibly also be attributed to the shift in research orientation of a large part of CEE media scholarship in the course of the last decade. While many of the studies published in the 1990s and around the turn of the century have declared, at least on the paper, democratisation as one of the central topics, their successors from the mid-2000s onwards are characterised by a more systemic approach and comparative perspective, often directly inspired by Hallin and Mancini's (2004) seminal book on comparative media and politics (see in particular Jakubowicz and Sükösd, 2008; Dobek-Ostrowska and Głowacki, 2008; Dobek-Ostrowska et al., 2010; Downey and Mihelj, 2012) and discussing particular aspects of media system transformation in the context of broader processes of Europeanisation and globalisation (Czepek et al., 2009; Klimkiewicz, 2010). Although indispensable contributions to our understanding of the transformation and recent challenges of the CEE media systems, these scholarly outputs rarely (with notable exceptions, see Jakubowicz, 2012) engage with the actual link between media and institutional reform, or democratisation in a broader perspective.

With so few studies directly tackling this topic (and even fewer supporting their arguments with empirical evidence), it is often difficult to separate what is being claimed about the impact of the media on the institution-building process from broader assessments of their democratic qualities or contribution to democratisation in general. Within this broader framework, the prevailing opinion among media scholars has certainly been critical, pointing to such characteristics of the CEE news media as low institutional autonomy, high political parallelism, low (and further declining) professionalisation, as well as increasing tabloidisation of media content (see e.g. Jakubowicz and Sükösd, 2008; Dobek-Ostrowska and Głowacki, 2008; Zielonka and Mancini, 2011; Gross and Jakubowicz, 2012a), which are all qualities regarded as unfavourable for the development and firm establishment of journalism's accountability role. Summarising this discourse, Katrin Voltmer noted that:

the media in many new democracies often seem to lack the qualities that would qualify them for playing a key role in promoting accountability and inclusive politics. They are frequently criticized for remaining too close to political power holders to be able to act as effective watchdogs; political reporting is regarded as too opinionated to provide balanced gatekeeping; while commercial pressures on news coverage often encourage an overemphasis on the trivial and popular at the expense of serious and sustained attention to international affairs and complex issues on the policy agenda. (Voltmer, 2009: 137–8)

Rapid commercialisation of the media after 1990 has been one of the most frequently quoted reasons for the apparently flawed democratic performance of the media in the CEE countries, particularly in those where privatisation of the news media sector took place at an early stage and to a greater extent (Sparks and Reading, 1998; Lauk, 2008; Balcytiene, 2009). It has been repeatedly pointed out – though again mostly on a theoretical level – that,

while the end of censorship, the diminishing of direct political control, and the overall pluralisation of the media sector created conditions for the media to effectively aid the democratisation process and the creation of the democratic public sphere, the simultaneous process of replacement of ideological control with market-driven imperatives has quickly made the goal of serving the public interest secondary to the search for profit.⁵

Still, not all authors share such a negative perspective on the development of the media's democratic roles in the region. Reviewing the first decade after transition, Peter Gross sees certain positive effects of the media on the democratisation process in post-Communist Eastern Europe, even if the very notion of 'effect' is slightly relativised:

If we accept Silvo Lenart's proposition that media effects should be examined in terms of the climate they create, rather than their direct impact, an argument can be made that the Eastern European media have positively contributed to the transformation, despite their negative side effects. (Gross, 2002: 164–5)

As one of the most important achievements of the media, Gross quotes 'the creation of a public climate of competition between a wide range of competitors for political and economic power or for cultural predominance' (2002: 165). Another positive effect can be seen, according to him, in the media's informative role, since 'the media also brought to the fore new issues, new parties, new leaders, and potential leaders, new ideas and possibilities, and contributed to the creation of varied new nongovernmental groups, which is to say, civil society' (Gross, 2002: 165). His position can be read as supporting a notion that the media facilitate, rather than directly stimulate, the establishment of democratic institutions:

The Eastern European media's most significant contribution to the initial phases of democratization in 1989–2000 has thus been to serve as examples of and conduits for the newly available political, economic, and cultural options, on the one hand, and as facilitators of political, market, and cultural competition, on the other. (Gross, 2002: 167)

Indeed, Gross stresses that the impact of the media has to be assessed in a broader context, as 'other institutions and factors are proving far more central to democratisation than the media, which will continue to serve as important adjuncts to the transition from Communism and the transformation to democracy', and concludes by openly dismissing the idea that the media can themselves drive the democratisation process; as he puts it, 'we can speculate that democratization through the media is highly improbable, if not outright impossible' (Gross, 2002: 171).⁶

The notion of the media as 'adjuncts to the transition' rather than agents of change has been shared by other authors, highlighting the interdependence of particular actors of the political process (Jakubowicz, 2006; Voltmer, 2006b)

⁵ Analysing the Slovenian daily press early in the 1990s, Košir (1993: 1236) concluded that most stories claiming to be investigative reporting merely created scandals that did not serve the public interest. The commercialisation of mass media had 'brought about the trend of investigative journalism at any cost' (Košir, 1994: 16). Since then a number of Slovenian media scholars have pointed out that there is almost no real investigative reporting in the Slovenian media, although many journalists claim to engage in it (Zdovc and Kovacic, 2007: 523).

⁶ This statement is convergent with Peter Gross's earlier thoughts, as represented by the following: 'We in the West were wrong in assuming that the media will help establish democracy. Independent, impartial, professional media are expressions of well entrenched democratic societies and function in their support. They cannot be spontaneously created in a society in transition to help that transition' (Gross, 1998: 10, quoted in Dyczok, 2009: 32).

which influence each other in their democratic roles. Quoting Morris and Waisbord, Marta Dyczok summarises that ‘there seems to be an emerging consensus on the fact that “paradoxically, the media’s ability to uphold democratic accountability eventually depends on the degree to which political institutions have adopted democratic structures and procedures”’ (Morris and Waisbord, 2001; quoted in Dyczok, 2009: 32). Similarly, Karol Jakubowicz talks about a model of ‘non-equivalent or asymmetrical interdependence’ between socio-political factors and media systems, in which social conditions, including social change, create conditions for or trigger media action to influence society (Jakubowicz, 2006: 5, see also Jakubowicz, 2012).

As noted above, so far there has been very little, if any, empirical research specifically designed to verify these arguments. The case study by Stetka (2013), looking at the achievements of investigative journalism in the Czech Republic, provides some support for the interdependency model, as it argues that the fight against corruption, to be successful, has to be a joint effort of various accountability institutions, including civil society, the judiciary, and the prosecution authorities, as media pressure itself may not be enough to enforce accountability and safeguard systemic changes *vis-à-vis* the issue of political corruption (Stetka, 2013).

2.2 Mass Media and Political Accountability in Latin America

Although the conclusions from studies of Central and Eastern Europe are limited by their small scope, they are very much in line with those made by Silvio Waisbord (2000) when assessing the accountability function of ‘watchdog journalism’ in Latin America, where according to him this genre has significantly gained in prominence in the last couple of decades. Drawing on empirical examples of public scandals from several countries of this continent, including Brazil, Colombia, Peru, or Argentina, he argues that ‘accountability hinges on the combined actions of a network of institutions rather than on the solitary actions of one organization’ (Waisbord, 2000: 229). However, even within these limits, the role of the press is indispensable in exposing issues which either the state wants to keep secret or which involve corruption of public officials. In those scandals he reviews in his book, ‘the press has unquestionably helped to raise accountability by publicizing information and actions that resulted in “throwing the rascals out”, whether through the resignation or the voting out of individuals suspected or charged of corruption’ (Waisbord, 2000: 240). Far from ascribing Latin American watchdog journalism an all-powerful status, Waisbord is nevertheless not nearly as pessimistic concerning its practical effects as are many Central and Eastern European media experts and journalists, as was revealed by a recent study (Stetka and Örnebring, 2012). As he summarises:

I have argued that muckraking does not eliminate corruption but raises awareness about its existence. It does not create accountability but adds efforts to a more vigilant society. It does not make power-holders responsible for their misdeeds but forces them to give answers for their acts. . . . It does not have all the answers to the many deficits of contemporary South American democracies but can point them out. (Waisbord, 2000: 250)

Waisbord’s ‘cautiously optimistic’ perspective about the impact of Latin American media on political accountability has been shared by other scholars

writing on this region. According to Sheila Coronel, Latin America represents 'perhaps the most instructive case' of the watchdog role of media, as it is 'widely acknowledged that sustained investigative reporting on corruption, human rights violations and other forms of wrongdoing has helped build a culture of accountability in government and strengthened the fledgling democracies of the continent' (Coronel, 2003: 9).⁷ Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000) argue that 'the state of accountability in Latin America is not as bleak as most of the literature would suggest', since 'in several Latin American countries, the media are playing a central role in exposing abuses and keeping governments in check' (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, 2000: 154), not just by damaging the political capital and reputation of public officials but, subsequently, also by triggering 'procedures in courts or oversight agencies that eventually lead to legal sanctions' (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, 2000: 151). Taking a different perspective on the contribution of media to accountability, Mauro Porto (2012) has shown that changes in Brazil's largest television network (TV Globo) since the fall of the authoritarian regime in 1985 – namely greater professionalisation and development of critical reporting – 'forced the chief executives to adapt their communication strategies, with complex obligations for the quality of social accountability' (Porto, 2012: 43). In his words:

Changes at TV Globo contributed to improve the performance of elections as mechanisms of vertical accountability. . . . Despite its traditional deference to presidential authority, the rise of a more assertive and independent model of journalism at TV Globo enhanced mechanisms of accountability that contribute to limit presidential power. Thus, the opening of TV Globo has strengthened the social accountability function of television. (Porto, 2012: 170)

Sharing Porto's criticism regarding the lack of studies directly linking the development of mass media and democracy,⁸ but focusing on public service media instead, Carolina Matos (2012) in her comprehensive study on the connections between media and politics in Latin America arrived at the conclusion that, 'in spite of the challenges they face regarding political pressures and the lack of large audiences, the "public" media in Brazil, and in many Latin American countries do have a potential to be a force for change and to contribute to the better provision of quality debate' (Matos, 2012: 240).

The study by Juliet Pinto (2008) on watchdog journalism in Argentina has, however, portrayed the current state of this genre in a less optimistic light, observing (based on content analysis) that, after two decades of being part of the mainstream, 'watchdog press had lost its bite by 2005', which, in author's opinion, was caused by the economic crisis as well as by the changing organisational culture of the news media, favouring corporate interests (Pinto, 2008: 751). This trend of gradual diminishing and weakening of investigative

⁷ Demonstrating the impact of investigative journalism on political accountability in Latin America, Sheila Coronel gives examples of several presidents who were removed from office, including Fernando Collor de Mello of Brazil in 1992, Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela in 1993, Abdala Bucaram of Ecuador in 1997, and Alberto Fujimori in 2000, all of whom had to step down 'due in large measure to investigative reporting on their complicity in corrupt deals' (Coronel, 2003: 10).

⁸ According to Mauro Porto, 'the role of mediating processes of democratisation has become a significant subject of academic inquiry. Yet most studies on the topic do not offer a clear operationalisation of the concept of "democracy" and often fail to analyse the linkages between political institutions, civil society and the mass media' (Porto, 2012: 35). Carolina Matos raises a similar point when saying that 'the media have been closely connected to democratisation process throughout the world, from the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 to the rise to power of Yeltsin in Russia . . . The contested issue is how precisely this effect takes place, and whether the influence is more indirect and subtle' (Matos, 2012: 174).

journalism – never particularly strong to begin with, as has already been pointed out – has been observed in many Central and Eastern Europe as well, especially since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2007/8 which put news media organisations under unprecedented pressure and resulted often in the trimming of investigative departments (Rudusa, 2010; Salovaara and Juzefovics, 2012; Stetka and Örnebring, 2012). Such tendencies, revealing the fragility of the news media as an institution whose performance is tightly dependent on external economic conditions, further underscore the necessity to examine journalism's role in fostering the democratisation process within the broader societal and economic framework of consolidating democracies.

Thus, the challenges of institutional research reveal both the relative scarcity of research providing an unequivocal answer regarding this issue (particularly in context of Central and Eastern Europe), as well as some challenges for this approach in general (i.e. data collection in Latin America). One of the most obvious concerns the fact that the media themselves are counted among the key institutions of democracy (McQuail, 2000), which means they too need to be 'democratised' before they can be reasonably expected to contribute to democratising other institutions. This is indeed reflected in the scholarship, which notes that previous values and personnel can survive in newly transformed media organisations (Voltmer and Rowsley, 2009). In other words, the normative expectations for the democratic performance of the media, largely derived from the characteristics of Western liberal democracies where democratic political structures historically precede the growth of mass media, have often not been fulfilled, as the vast majority of the literature cited agrees. The process of liberalisation of media from state and party control has been seen as the basic precondition for the media to become a proper forum for pluralistic public debate and to facilitate greater transparency and accountability in governance through quality news reporting (Norris, 2009); however the processes of commercialisation and tabloidisation of content which quickly followed the growth of media markets in the newly democratising countries have been viewed as obscuring and – at least partly – inhibiting the democratic roles the free media were entrusted by normative media theory.⁹

Based on the reviewed literature, one might plausibly argue that the contribution of the media to democratisation might well be at its strongest during regime change – including mobilisation against the old regime. In later stages of democratic consolidation, the media get often watered down by market pressures as well as by (newly emerging) political constraints. Quoting the landmark 1984 presidential elections in Brazil where TV Globo allegedly played a 'catalytic role' in ending the rule of the military junta (see Guimaraes and Amaral, 1988), Vicky Randall argues that it is these kind of occasions (rare as they might be) that represent the high point of the media's role in the democratisation process, which then gets gradually weaker as the political system becomes more consolidated:

The media tend to be most supportive of democracy at a particular political conjuncture, when they are themselves emerging from political control, are strongly identified with the process of democratization and, moreover, benefit from the public's enormous hunger for news and for political change. At an earlier 'stage', their contribution will inevitably be more

⁹ Some scholars contend that the media, by being overcritical and excessively negative, may lead to political cynicism and the erosion of fragile governments that are struggling for legitimacy (Voltmer and Rowsley, 2009; see also Bennett, 1998).

restricted but to the extent that they offer alternative accounts of social and political reality and even that they draw people into a sense of shared public space, they can be seen as helping to pave the way for democratization. As the process of transition approaches the consolidation stage, the media's contribution becomes more equivocal. When deprived of state financial support and facing a public whose news appetite has been blunted by growing cynicism, they increasingly become prey to the pressures of commercial survival. (Randall, 1998: 245)

Nevertheless, the above quoted examples of research from Latin America suggest that there is at least some evidence of an effective contribution of media to institutional change during the consolidation phases of democratisation as well, particularly with respect to enforcing political accountability through watchdog journalism, which is something the research from Central and Eastern Europe does not quite parallel. However, it is also possible that the overwhelmingly sceptical assessment of the impact of media on the building and due performance of democratic institutions in the CEE region might reflect the high normative expectations concerning media reform which was assumed to simply replicate the established Western models (Jakubowicz, 2006; Splichal, 2001).¹⁰ Here, the somewhat different evaluation by Peter Gross (2002) has to be mentioned, in which he characterises the evolution of media in the CEE region as 'unperfect', as opposed to the more common term 'imperfect', suggesting a possibility of further improvement until the envisaged 'perfect' state is achieved; according to Gross, such a goal can never be accomplished, and should therefore not be used as a measure for the assessment of media's democratic performance (Gross, 2002: 169).

¹⁰ The context in which any transition to democracy takes place is considered highly salient for any reform plan (Berman, 2008).

3. Mass Media and Attitudinal and Behavioural Change during Democratisation

The democratisation literature rests on institutional foundations; yet full democratisation is not realised unless citizens undergo socialisation to new values, attitudes, and behaviour norms of democratic culture (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam, 1993). Given the substantial body of work that has demonstrated mass media's influence on citizens' political attitudes (Lerner, 1958; Pye, 1958; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Patterson and McClure, 1976; Patterson, 1980; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982; Iyengar et al., 1982; Postman, 1986; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; McQuail, 1987; Page et al., 1987; Fan, 1988; Entman, 1989; Brody, 1991; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Postman and Powers, 1992; Zaller, 1992, 1996; Bartels, 1993; Iyengar, 1994; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Fallows, 1997; Norris, 1997; Dalton et al., 1998; Newton, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Schmitt-Beck, 2003), it is not unreasonable to think that the mass media play an important role in political socialisation for the citizens of countries undergoing democratisation. There are two reasons to expect this.

One, the theory of media dependency posits that, as turmoil and periods of transitions exist, citizens are more likely to turn to the media as a source of reassurance and information. In turn, they are more highly subject to the effects of media in contrast to a 'normal' period in stable societies (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976; Loveless, 2008). Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck (2006) offer two rationales for this expectation: (a) democratisation is a highly politically charged environment and so (b) there is an increased level of uncertainty associated with that period. Arguably, this places heavier informational requirements on individuals and, among the several sources of information from which they can choose (parties, social networks, *inter alia*), the mass media are an obvious choice.¹¹ This theory of media dependency leads us also to the conclusion that this heightened media use (and thus effects) will subside as countries reach certain levels of political stability and thus to media theories derived from – and designed for – stable, modern democratic societies.

A second reason to expect the mass media can play a salient role in democratising countries, less pragmatically and more normatively, is that the requirements of democracy include certain habits, beliefs, attitudes, and values (Almond and Verba, 1963; Dahl, 1989; Diamond, 1993) and the role of the media can provide insight into the development of a democratic civil society and individual political development. The responsibilities of democratic citizenship, while perhaps generally considered less acute in stable democracies, are heightened in the chaotic process of democratisation, in which the socialisation process is disrupted or limited and all institutions of politics, economics, and society are in a state of flux. Media are capable of producing changes in values, attitudes, and behaviours congruent with democratic citizenship (see the beginning of this section). Thus, 'media can play an instrumental role in resocialization and modernization by teaching a new way of participating in politics and socioeconomic life and by encouraging new individual and national aspirations' (Gross, 2002: 90).

¹¹ In the case of the post-Communist states, the assumed media naivety of citizens of democratising countries is a flimsy assumption at best. These viewers are arguably ideologically savvy in being able to distinguish what constituted actual news from propaganda in Communist media outlets. Compared to many Western viewers, they are likely to be much more highly adept at recognizing propaganda and thus being resistant to its persuasion. Compare this to Manaev's argument (1991) that, under conditions of 'monopropaganda' (i.e. mass media are managed by a single socio-political group, in his case, the party elite in the former Soviet Union), mere disagreement with the media is a source for democratisation.

The literature on political socialisation in countries transitioning to democracy has focused on changes in individuals' values, attitudes, and behaviours that emerge from their social locations (socio-economic status, Lipset, 1959) and socio-political predispositions (Mishler and Rose, 1995, 1997; Röhrschneider, 1999), as well as institutional exposure and evaluation (Evans and Whitefield, 1995; Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Röhrschneider, 1999; Waldron-Moore, 1999).¹² However, there are very few works that include the mass media as significant determinants of value, attitudinal, or behavioural change. For the most part, media research in transitional countries has largely attended to the complex processes of liberalisation and privatisation of media institutions in non-Western regions via the remaking of media ownership, media legislation, economic freedom, *inter alia*.

Despite this omission in studies of political socialisation, mass media have also often simply been assumed to play a (generically) positive role in democratic transition, particularly for citizens of transitional countries. This is largely predicated on the varieties of a 'free press theory' which aligns a free and plural press with a free and democratic society (McQuail, 1987; also Bartels, 1993; Swanson and Mancini, 1996; Schmitt-Beck, 1998; Norris, 2000; Mutz and Martin, 2001; Habermas, 1995). In other words, the mass media can be considered a positive contribution to democratic political culture, and thus democracy, assuming that the media are legislatively protected from undue political and economic pressure, operate in a competitive market, preserve the rights of journalists, and are free from control by political actors.¹³ Yet, however satisfying and reassuring this may sound, there is in fact little evidence that fits with this assumption. While empirical work does exist, it does so in a scattered manner, the sum of which limits its ability to illuminate conclusions about the role of the mass media in the process of democratisation as it affects individuals in these countries/regions.

Why are the findings scattered and limited? The greatest limitation is that, unlike the established democracies of the West in which media studies originated, the countries and regions of democratisation have a varying level of comparability with one another. As such, there is an unsurprising and resultant lack of coherence in approach. Given the number of approaches and broad findings of media effects in the West, work in transitional countries often start in different places, emphasising local/regional media attributes – whether institutional or cultural. As one simple example, whereas some regions of democratisation have the physical infrastructure of modern media (e.g. the former Soviet Union), others do not (e.g. sub-Saharan Africa). This influences how the mass media can function, thus restricting how mass media can be studied and their effects on individuals understood. Second, the regions in which democratisation or transition have taken place have little of the roughly similar cultural, historical, political, economic, and social profiles that many of the countries in the West comparatively share (and from where media theories largely originate).¹⁴ This is an obvious limitation to the utility of existing theory and, in conjunction with the first point, undermines attempts at building coherence across regions of transition. Finally, at the research end, the scattered nature of comparative media work is mostly a

¹² These citations refer to Central and Eastern Europe as an example of a developed democratisation literature. This is done for simplicity not preference.

¹³ In these 'free' media environments, individuals have better choices among media from which they can make better and more efficient use of media.

¹⁴ This includes the societal differences between the West and the rest of the world in regards to the long-standing, highly socially embedded relationship between 'free media' and individuals found only in the West.

function of a lack of data, whether quantitative or qualitative, in transitioning countries.

Here, we present an overview of some of the work done that looks at the media as an instigator or determinant of changes in individuals' political attitudes or behaviour during periods of democratisation. To be clear, we cannot include every work that touches on the mass media and have aimed to identify works that examine the direct link between individuals' exposure to the mass media and subsequent attitudinal or behavioural changes during democratisation (this includes the more infrequent studies of democratic attitudes present in authoritarian regimes). While we draw examples from the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America (and elsewhere), we strictly limit our survey to works in which mass media are investigated as catalysts to individual-level political socialisation in democratising countries.¹⁵

We begin with studies on the diffusion hypothesis and pre-transitional influence of the media and move to the mass media's role in fostering support for democratisation and democracy. We then look at studies on the mass media as sources of information and generic democratic values and behaviours. We conclude with the shift within this sub-field from the traditional media to new media and how these studies may augment our understanding of the role of mass media in periods of democratisation.

3.1 Media Diffusion

For societies in transition, Lerner argues that 'western media', in as much as it diffuses into transitional countries, raises expectations and aspirations, widening horizons, ultimately enabling people to want better alternatives for themselves (1958; see also Pye, 1958; Lipset, 1959; Schramm, 1964; Huntington, 1991). He argues that, in non-Western countries (particularly ones that are modernising), the media teach people participation by presenting them with choices among new ideas, situations, and opinions (Lerner, 1958).

This diffusion of democracy via mass media rests on the notion that cultural information is embedded in broadcasts, in turn transmitting normative political and social values of the broadcasting country to the target country, argued then to imbue consumers with stronger attachments to these values. (Loveless, 2009: 119; see also Yilmaz, 2009)

Thus, in transitional countries, we would expect to see democratic attitudes correlated with a high (or at least disproportionate) consumption of Western broadcasts and print media.

Diffusion as a source of individual political development is at the core of many theories of democratisation; yet scholars generally use the term abstractly, deferring to an international *zeitgeist* of democracy, demonstration, and occasionally international pressure (particularly over issues such as human rights or ideological congruency, Lipset, 1960; Huntington, 1991; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Mainwaring, 2000). The specific process of diffusion, however, is generally left underdeveloped, leaving us with the expectation that citizens who consume greater amounts of international (i.e. specifically Western) media would be more likely to be

¹⁵ There are works included here in which the countries under investigation are not strictly democratising. However, they have demonstrated institutional instability in the recent past and thus suggest transition potential (either towards or away from democracy) and are thus included.

exposed to the implicit cultural norms of an established democratic society and therefore manifest higher levels of democratic attitudes (Fuchs and Roller, 1994).¹⁶

So, what evidence is there? Despite the allusion to international media diffusion as a source of individual political development in many theories of democratisation, there is, succinctly, very little. Rohrschneider (1999) argued that values can diffuse from West to East but provides only an indirect test of diffusion, arguing that if democratic attitudes did not emerge through direct participation with new democratic institutions, individuals' exposure to international media must be the explanation. Others have tried a more direct approach. Kern (2011), using recently released survey data in East and West Germany, finds no evidence that television from West Germany affected the spread or intensity of protests in 1989. Using later survey data in five Central and Eastern European countries, Loveless (2009) finds no evidence that international media consumption of the citizens in these countries corresponded to higher levels of democratic values than those who did not. In one case, the former East Germany, research shows that individuals exposed to international media (in this case, West German television) exhibited both a higher life satisfaction in and regime support for East Germany (Kern and Hainueller, 2009). In other words, rather than absorbing the values of the sending country, they simply used it as entertainment. As with other regions, foreign media can be identified as a source of information, for example, for the Middle East in the pre-pan-Arab satellite TV period (Ghareeb, 2000), yet fail to reveal consistent evidence of having cultivated pro-democratic attitudes in citizens despite scattered evidence (for the 'Arab Spring' see Khamis and Vaughn, 2012).

Part of the diffusion argument has rested on the notion that, in lieu of cultural exportation, informational technologies and democracy (i.e. freedom) are related inasmuch as the means of communication are decentralised and easily available (Jenkins and Thorburn, 2003). De Fleur (1970) argued that the diffusion of the media must include the diffusion of media technology, a difficult hurdle in lesser developed countries. This is not a path-dependent argument where media freedom equals political freedom: it depends what is done with them (de Sola Pool, 1983; Innis, 1950). In congruence with this technological approach, more sophisticated statistical analysis has produced the empirical finding that communication technologies are in fact necessary – but not sufficient – to initiate democratisation (Groshek, 2011). Groshek (2011) also shows that, in this technological determinism frame, media diffusion has a causal effect (Granger-causality) on transitions to democracy, in countries where the media served more information functions or where socio-political instability levels were higher. His conclusion is that 'diffusion' may be revolutionary rather than instructive of political socialisation. However, this again relies on the traditional media or print and broadcast. Newer technologies of potential revolution have presented researchers with myriad new directions, which are taken up further below.

If traditional media have seemingly produced little in terms of fomenting democratisation, what then of the uses of the media to *inhibit* democratisation (a negative take on the title of this paper)? Although there is evidence that the mass media can stimulate anti-regime activities in quasi-authoritarian societies (e.g. Hong Kong post-handover, see Chan and Lee, 2007), some ask

¹⁶ This is not to say that Western media represent the acme of media objectivity and play the role of a pure marketplace of ideas, but that, in comparative terms, they have certainly had a longer record of attempting to achieve and practise these normative goals.

whether the Communist media are injuring themselves or have a grip on people's views (e.g. about corruption, see Zhu et al., 2012; for examples from the former Soviet Union, see Hopkins, 1970). In the specifically Chinese example, Stockmann and Gallagher (2011) find that the media are used by authoritarian leaders to bolster legitimacy by propagandising citizens' experiences in the legal system. Further, unlike Soviet Communism, Chinese propagandisers supply messages that not only adhere to institutional constraints but also meet the somewhat developed consumerist demands of the Chinese audience, although others do find that the (state) news media in China have negative effects on people's attitudes towards political institutions, fostering distrust in government (Chen and Shi, 2001). There is therefore evidence of the power of the mass media to influence individuals; yet this fails to correspond clearly to higher levels of a proto-democratic political culture in non-democratic regimes.

3.2 Political Socialisation

As pointed out above, the institutional transformation of countries moving away from authoritarianism is insufficient for democratisation. The 'learning' of democracy, or citizens' democratic political socialisation, is required to cement changes in the 'rules of the game'. Citizens who profess and practise democratic political values as well as others in their society are more likely to adhere to and ultimately embody these values as transition continues. This constitutes a congruent political culture to democracy and thus a buttress to democratic consolidation. The study of political socialisation during periods of transition refers to whether and/or how much citizens exhibited support for democracy (or at least the transition), generic democratic political attitudes (e.g. efficacy, trust, tolerance), or behaviours (e.g. voting, mobilisation). Few advocate that the mass media are the only – or even the primary – mechanism for political socialisation in democratising countries. However, given citizens' limited first-hand experience of politics, the mass media are most likely to be the predominant source from which individuals develop political understanding (Schmitt-Beck, 1998; Mutz, 1992).

For the early period of democratic transition in Eastern Europe Semetko and Valkenburg (1998) find that individuals in East Germany who paid initial attention to political news displayed higher levels of internal efficacy, although this declined steadily over this period (1991–3); West Germans displayed similar if steadier attention.¹⁷ Similarly, Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck (2006) find evidence for strong media effects (via media dependency) in democratising countries (Hungary, Bulgaria, Uruguay, and Chile) and explicitly link these media consumption behaviours to political knowledge, political participation, the evaluation of political parties, and preferences for democratic political order. Further, as awareness of the political world requires gathering information (Pye, 1962; Almond and Verba, 1963), mass media can serve as a clear informational source. Loveless (2008) has shown strong 'information-seeking' media behaviour in Central and Eastern Europe as citizens of new democracies purposively use the media to obtain political information and this pattern of media use is especially pronounced in new democracies that have not proceeded very far in the process of democratic consolidation. In addition, this 'information-seeking' has positive effects on individuals' development of internal political efficacy (Loveless, 2010).

¹⁷ Although their measure of 'attentiveness' was less directly a media variable than attentiveness to the combined usage of television news and newspaper (Semetko and Valkenburg, 1998: 200).

In Hong Kong, talk radio plays a significant role in generating political discussion by providing mediated public forums in which listeners are more opinionated and thus more active in political discussions (Lee, 2007). In the 'natural experiment' of mainland China and Taiwan, Wei and Leung (1998) found that the amount of media engagement as well as political (television) news moved with attitudes towards (among other effects) individual political efficacy. In 28 countries of Africa and Asia, Nisbet and his co-authors (2012) show that internet use, but not the national level of internet penetration, is associated with greater citizen commitment to democratic governance, particularly in countries closer to potential democratisation.

Basing research on the deep literature on media effects during political campaigns, for Russia, the parliamentary and presidential elections of December 1999 and March 2000 show signs of having been won in large part through the partisan use of (particularly state) television (White et al., 2005). State television (which had been most supportive of the Kremlin) was much more likely to be favoured by the supporters of the pro-regime Unity party; while commercial television (which provided a more even-handed coverage of the elections) was more popular and respected among the supporters of anti-Kremlin parties and candidates and less popular among supporters of Vladimir Putin (see also Enikolopov et al., 2011). For Brazil, Mexico, and Russia, McCann and Lawson (2006) show evidence that media-intensive electoral campaigns provide information to low socio-economic-status citizens in readily digestible form, but they fail to stimulate sufficient attention to politics among these citizens, thus closing the 'knowledge gap' (for a strictly Latin American study of Brazil and Peru, see Boas, 2005). Such effects, they argue, may be larger in emerging democratic systems, reminding comparative media scholars that context matters (Lawson and McCann, 2005). In the form of a case study, for Mali, there is an association between forms of media use (radio, newspaper, and television) and individual political knowledge, participation, and socialisation (Nisbet, 2008), a pattern associated with a narrowing of gaps in democratic socialisation between social groups.

In a cross-national study in Latin America (eight countries), television news encourages party identification in the short run, although the development of television may weaken Latin American parties in the long run (Pérez-Liñán, 2002). In other cross-national investigations, Salzman and Aloisi (2009) suggest an indirect influence between various forms of news consumption and participation and social engagement, which in turns produces changes in individuals' political behaviour. Morgan and Shanahan (1991) demonstrate generic negative effects of television (for Argentinian adolescents), such that those who watch more television are more likely to agree that people should obey authority, approve limits to freedom of speech, and blame individuals for being poor.

Unlike the above included studies, studies of the media in African countries have been less shaped by traditional media studies. In particular, such studies are less reliant on the institutionalised notion of media. That is, rather than thinking of the mass media as 'mass', these media studies tend to focus on the role of the media as a transition from traditional cultural patterns, including media as cultural dissemination, the use of election posters as 'mass media', and the unbalancing of tribal life (see Wasserman, 2011; Eribo et al., 1993; West and Fair, 1993). The outputs of these studies are hard to compare with traditional media studies as the mechanisms of 'media effects' have little export to other democratising or transitioning societies. This does not limit their importance, only their generalisability. Others view

the media's role as a meso-level process in which the media can support, reinforce, or, in some cases, establish social connectivity among individuals and groups: the mass media as communication and thus an impetus to civil society (sub-Saharan Africa: Hydén et al., 2002; South Africa: Kuper and Kuper, 2001). Africa, because of this, often constitutes a theoretical outlier compared to the attempts of media researchers to export Western media theory to other regions of democratising countries.

3.3 *New Media*

The study of mass media has long examined the 'traditional' broadcast and print media. 'New media' refers to the internet and its extensions such as mobile technology and software/websites that instantaneously connect individuals (i.e. social network sites) via the internet. Because of this connectedness, there is an optimism among scholars of the internet about a revival of political engagement and even participation (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010; Di Gennaro and Dutton, 2006; Valenzuela et al., 2008; Zúñiga, 2012; Ward et al., 2003; Weber et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 2010), if just as an alternative to traditional participation (Polat, 2005). As such, there has been an expected rise in the study of the effects of individuals' internet use on levels of political participation in recent years (Delli Carpini, 2000; Valenzuela et al., 2008; Zúñiga, 2012), with the emphasis on a causal direction that runs from social media to political attitudes and behaviours (Boulianne, 2009; Jennings and Zeitner, 2003; Shah et al., 2002).¹⁸ This relationship makes intuitive sense as exposure to more information and political discussions has, in the context of traditional media, produced higher levels of engagement and interest (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Schmitt-Beck, 2003; Newton, 1999). Accordingly, these theorised effects of social media have accumulated some evidence on forms of participation which require little effort ('slack-tivism') and thus translate into various forms of political knowledge, interest, and activity (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2008; Vitak et al., 2011; Oxley, 2012; Wojcieszak and Mutz, 2009).

Unlike traditional media, the internet, and social media in particular, has a channelling function of taking users from links of interest to related, and occasionally political, material (Coleman and Blumler, 2009), thus allowing individuals to gather more information and consequently develop higher levels of political knowledge (and political efficacy, see Vitak et al., 2011). Others have suggested that social media force users to confront (political) information that they would otherwise avoid (Zhang et al., 2010) or that social exchanges on social media can often be political (Wojcieszak and Mutz, 2009) and thus facilitate the sharing of information (Zúñiga, 2012). Yet, as others have pointed out, comparatively among discussed and shared topics, social media has a low level of actual political knowledge (Boyd, 2008).

In the case of democratising countries, for example, there is some evidence that social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) in Finland and Russia are used as a means to organise civic activism by building, reinforcing, and coordinating emerging social campaigns (Gladarev and Lonkila, 2012). In Bulgaria, Bakardjieva (2012) uncovers civic and political engagement surfacing on a website and forum dedicated to motherhood, an 'informal' exchange credited with increasing political awareness of Bulgarian politics. However, can we consider Russia and Bulgaria countries of continuing transition or are these only indirectly related to late-period democratisation? Elsewhere the new

¹⁸ Others suggest that this causal direction is ambiguous or endogenous (Lassen, 2005).

media's hypothesised role is both more commonly and most visibly argued to be as an instigator of proto-democratic action.

The revolutionary nature of the media fits comfortably with both traditional and newer conceptualisation of the role of the mass media. Traditionally, the BBC World Service, Radio Liberty, Deutsche Welle, and Voice of America were radio broadcasts specifically designed and implemented as portals into the West. They were to serve as counter-examples and provide alternative accounts of world events (Parta, 2007; see Abusalem, 2007, for pan-Arab state diffusion via satellite television). Yet largely these did not seem to culturally connect; smaller, diasporic media (Pidduck, 2012; Skjerdal, 2009) have shown more potential (although in the former study, political mobilisation effects are not directly observed). Alternatively, if democratisation can be conceptualised as resistance, *local* radio has been demonstrated to play a strong role in raising political consciousness (O'Connor, 1990; Manaev, 1991).

The difficulty of the subfield of the mass media's role in political socialisation during periods of democratisation is that much of what is argued is theoretical. This is not inherently a non-productive route, as it both sets our expectations and guides our initial inquiries. However, while traditional media have a long theoretical development (if in mostly established democracies), newer media do not and this has led to a theoretically derived optimism about the role of the internet (Shirky, 2011; Dahlgren, 2000; Oates et al., 2006). For example, the internet can serve this role via the creation of a public sphere of dissent and opposition in Latin America (Everett, 1998) or in Africa (Ferdinand, 2000; Thornton, 2001).

Yet, despite clear and loud enthusiasm, the possible roles of the newest medium (the internet) in bringing about (democratic) transition or transforming societies have found little empirical support. In the Arab world (Khondker, 2011), new media have shown – at best – scattered evidence in transforming political orientations or activities of citizens. This may be a reflection of either Western-centric theoretical biases or simply extensions of offline realities such that individuals who are already interested, knowledgeable, and engaged in the political process are the most likely candidates for online activity as well (Boulianne, 2009; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003).

In Africa, the study of media has tracked with the development literature which takes institutional reform as paramount (thus, democratisation is measured by the extent of privatisation: Tettey, 2001). In Asia, the internet is argued to be able to overcome repressive state roles (Abbott, 2001); however, to this point, including what we have seen above in the Chinese case, the evidence that the internet will create or save democracy is far from conclusive (Hindmann, 2008; see also Morozov, 2011). Some have suggested that the internet does not fulfil the original technical argument that as technology developed it would expand, taking with it 'connectedness' as a means to democratisation (Hoffman, 2004). Instead, political decisions and social actors may impose limitations uniformly upon all media, rather than the internet countering limitations of broadcast and print media. Note that while there are studies on the internet's ability to transform small groups or narrowly defined country-specific issues, cataloguing them here would not make them more generally relevant to a theory of the mass media's role in political socialisation during periods of democratisation.

3.4 *The Challenge of Attitudinal and Behavioural Research*

Newer approaches may serve as examples of the future of comparative media studies, taking into account cultural and historical factors. Paluck and Green (2009) examine a radio programme aimed at promoting independent thought and collective action in problem solving in post-genocide Rwanda. Using field experiments of broadcasts to randomly selected communities over one year, the data amassed by the authors indicated that, while the broadcasts were not effective in shaping listeners' beliefs and attitudes, these same listeners were more resistant to directions and calls for obedience from the authorities and showed evidence of acting independently. Regardless of the mixed outputs of this research, the depth and breadth of data collection in such a project is hard to generalise.

Fundamentally, the study of mass media in democratising countries is an exercise of a different quality than the study of mass media in established democracies. To assume a simple and positive relationship between changes in the quantity and quality of information sources and enhanced freedom of expression on the one hand and successful democratisation on the other hand can be misleading. In sustaining this assumption, we learn little of the implication of changes to the local media landscape in *transition* periods, particularly during a time where information can be sought from many different sources such as the internet and extended social networks. We impose normative assumptions about the nature of media content that may or may not be democratising, especially in periods of transition in which elements of both democracy and authoritarianism often coexist. For individuals, investigations are predicated on an exposure-effect framework such as agenda-setting and priming, rather than, for example, the formation and change of individuals' attitudes which are more significant outcomes in terms of democratisation theory (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008, 2010; Holbert et al., 2010). Finally, given the cultural specificity of the mass media, investigations tend to generalise such processes across segments of the population with various political beliefs.

Thus, the study of the mass media and any individual-level effect that they may engender in transitioning countries remains – as a subfield – largely inchoate. As Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck have noted, 'all these [media] studies [on which we base our theoretical assumptions] have been conducted in the context of established Western democracies, so it remains an open question whether the same pattern will appear in new democracies' (2006: 234).¹⁹ Therein lies the central question: meaningfully different how? This is the challenge to transitional studies. How people learn democratic values during the period of democratisation is important. For the regions of the world embroiled in change, in which new data collection, inductive theorising, and often significant cultural knowledge are requisite to make sense of the role of mass media in fluid societies, there seems to be scattered interest. That is unfortunate but, despite this, the works included here often represent genuine comparative research that force researchers out of the confines of well-worn paradigms into unfamiliar – albeit exciting – theoretical territory.

¹⁹ As but one example, steadily growing political sophistication and monotonic positive changes in civil society are not directly fungible concepts in the chaotic process of transition; and, as several others have mentioned, the media themselves were in a state of flux (Gross 2002).

4. Media and Democratisation in the Arab World

Until recently, the Arab world was considered exceptional because democratic governance has progressed so little in the region compared to other parts of the world. Nevertheless, over the past three decades, most Arab countries have experienced different degrees of liberalisation, and in some cases, even democratisation for a limited amount of time. Such reforms have mostly been driven by globalisation of the economy, technological advancement in the information field, and wider liberalising trends (Cavatorta, 2009: 321–2). The persistence of authoritarianism in the region has channelled academic efforts to explaining factors leading to the survival of the authoritarian regimes.

Among the most discussed factors is the weakness and ineffectiveness of civil society organisations (see Bellin, 2004). While the number of non-governmental organisations has largely increased in recent years, their functions have remained restrained by their lack of intellectual appeal, and by the authoritarian structures that constrain the emergence of a democratic culture (Cavatorta, 2009). Other explanations include the absence of a strong and independent middle class (see Tessler and Gao, 2005). This is often returned to 'rentierism' and the 'resource curse hypothesis' that allow entire social categories to become dependent on the state for economic success and advancement, in addition to the development of a large state apparatus and robust regime coalitions (Cavatorta, 2009; Tessler and Gao, 2005). Opportunities for change thus arise only at times of economic crises (Sadiki, 1997).

The emergence of several political parties and development of parliaments in the Arab world has also contributed little to democratising the region as the decision-making process remained in the hands of unaccountable and often unelected groups (see Willis, 2002). Such reforms were designed as part of a containment strategy aiming to increase regime legitimacy at a time when calls for political change were increasingly intense and widespread (Tessler and Gao, 2005), and so they allowed some Arab regimes to control the speed of change, to ensure the 'right' people are winners in the new political economy, and above all, allowed business to continue as usual behind the scenes (Neep, 2004: 82). In other words, liberalised and modernised forms of authoritarian governments were developed (Hafez, 2008: 8), while real political openings remained regulated and partial. Furthermore, poverty, low literacy rates, and the fact that the region is geographically remote from the epicentre of democratization,²⁰ have all been named by scholars as strengthening factors to authoritarianism in the Arab world. The international community is also widely criticised for strengthening authoritarianism through providing the ruling regimes with both legitimacy and material resources (Cavatorta, 2009).

Some other scholars concentrated on the culture of Islam, which distinguishes the region, as a major explanatory factor for the survival of authoritarianism in the Arab world. They argue that Islam is an inherently undemocratic religion and consequently generates an authoritarian political culture (see e.g. Lewis, 2002). The foundation of this argument is, however, disputed as Islamic religion is largely perceived among Muslims to provide a governance model through which the welfare and governance of the society can fairly be realised. This is reflected in the emergence and popularity of

²⁰ Studies have shown that countries tend to change their regimes to match the average degree of democracy or non-democracy prevalent in their neighbourhood as well as to follow the direction in which the majority of the countries in the world are moving (e.g. Brinks and Coppedge, 2006).

political Islam, which aims to adapt religious teachings to serve political purposes, across several Arab countries. Furthermore, previous empirical research showed that large majorities in many Arab countries want their countries to be ruled by democratic systems, and that this desire does not diminish among supporters of political Islam (Tessler and Gao, 2005). The finding is in line with studies showing no impact of religiosity on attitudes towards democracy (Tessler, 2002, 2003).

The significant changes that affected the Arab media scene, driven by greater political liberalisation, an expansion of national privatisation programmes, and the diffusion of new communications technologies, have given the media a key role in the debate about Arab democratisation. These changes resulted in, among other outcomes, the relaxation of government controls over broadcasting, the creation of more autonomous radio and television corporations, and the abolition of some ministries of information (see Ayish, 1997, for an overview). The emergence of a transnational media market has also intersected powerfully with cross-national media professionalisation, whereas increased competition has compelled Arab broadcasters to diversify their programming (Kraidy, 2012).

The increase in the number of publications about Arab media (see Zayani, 2005; Rugh, 2004) in recent years is largely a reflection of the rapid and substantial development of Arab media industry in the last couple of decades (Zayani, 2011), which also explains the presentist nature of the field and its primary focus on digital and transnational media. The pan-Arab satellite news channels are argued to reflect traditional government-controlled, reformist government-controlled, and liberal commercial patterns (see Ayish, 2002, for a discussion). These distinctions suggest that the Arab media exhibit features from the totalitarian and developmental models (Nossek and Rinnawi, 2003), and show that Arab media systems are increasingly commercialised but still exhibit strong parallelism (Kraidy, 2012).²¹

The emergence of a new Arab public sphere and the role of transnational satellite television in democratising the region have been at the centre of debate among positivists and critics. On the one hand, the emerging public sphere, lying beyond the realms of government, parties, and social movements, is argued to have the real power of modernising political values and attitudes (Hafez, 2008). This is because satellite television has had the ability to reach the literate and illiterate alike, to reunite Arab communities scattered by war, exile, and labour migration, and to provide people with a platform from which to communicate with policy-makers and the wider public (Sakr, 2001). The rise of satellite media as mediators between the state and the society also tends to correspond with the decline of political institutions and consolidation of authoritarianism in the region. Arab media are, therefore, perceived to replace the function of political parties through expressing what people think, moulding public opinion, mobilising people for non-parliamentarian political action, and at times influencing the behaviour of Arab regimes (see Lynch, 2006; Hafez, 2005, 2008, for a discussion). Lynch (2008) argues that the impact of Arab media on democratisation can be best described as shaping the political opportunity structure and transforming the strategies of political activists.

²¹ There have been several attempts to classify the Arab press according to a set of distinguishable system models. The most well-known was by William Rugh, who divided the Arab print media into four classifications according to the degree of state control of the media: the mobilisation press, the loyalist press, the diverse press, and the transitional press (Rugh, 1987, 2004). Rugh's categories have been criticised by some scholars for a host of reasons ranging from lack of theoretical foundations to simplification and generalisation of the media systems (see Mellor, 2005, for an overview).

On the other hand, the existing public sphere is seen to be largely dependent on political subsidies. Studies show little sign of Arab broadcasters making much in the way of financial profit (Sakr, 2007). Critics of the Arab public sphere are generally concerned about the quality rather than the quantity of news information. For example, Pintak (2011) argues that more information did not necessarily mean better information as there was little space for Western style notions of journalistic accuracy and objectivity to take root. Others point to a clear pan-Arab bias with regard to the selection and interpretation of news (e.g. Hafez, 2005), which led to regionalising rather than globalising the public sphere (see Khouri, 2001). There are also concerns regarding the heavy coverage of conflict and populist issues (Lynch, 2008) and the increasing uptake of the same socio-cultural content on satellite television (Rinnawi, 2006). Moreover, satellite media have been criticised for leaving little room for internal affairs like political reforms and development indicators (see Karam, 2007; Mellor, 2005). The effectiveness of Arab satellite news broadcasting as an agent of democratisation is therefore argued to be dependent on the development of parallel organisations and institutions of democratic politics (see Hafez, 2005).

Arab media research is generally characterised by a focus on Al-Jazeera at the expense of other media institutions (Armbrust, 2005).²² Research about the 'Al-Jazeera Effect', which refers to the link between the arrival of pan-Arab satellite television and the shifting of public attitudes towards the democracy agenda in the region, is well-documented (Seib, 2008; Neep, 2004). Scholars have championed the channel for its reaction to oppositional movements in Arab countries under authoritarian regimes (Hafez, 2005), but critics charge it with setting up falsely polarising debates and emphasising sensational and violent news for the sake of ratings (see Lynch, 2008).

As research on Arab media audiences is still in its infancy (Haugbolle, 2009), there has been little evidence to support the assumption that the media have massive effects on Arab political opinions and behaviour, and research findings tend to illuminate the complexities of this relationship in the Arab context. Indeed, pronouncements about Arab media influence have too often been positivist in character but without being grounded in empirical research (see Sakr, 2007). It therefore is more common to find evidence for the media as a key to the political opportunity structure (see Lynch, 2008). Available effect studies tend to be based on impressionistic evidence, with little serious attention to the theoretical underpinnings or casual mechanisms underlying the contention (see Sakr, 2007).

The debate about the impact of Arab television on democratisation is dominantly concerned with institutions and behaviour rather than attitudes (see Lynch, 2008). This tends to undermine the media's role in cultural transformation in favour of structural and political changes (see Kraidy, 2012), as well as to dismiss democratic transition as a gradual process of slow sedimentation (see e.g. Armbrust, 2012).²³

²² See Tawil-Souri, 2008, for an overview of Arab television in academic scholarship.

²³ As the Islamicisation of Arab media has increased, driven by economic needs of media production and opposition to Western forms of cultural imperialism (see Tawil-Souri, 2008), the major concern has turned to be whether this trend suggests social change towards fundamentalism in the region.

4.1 *The Challenge of Media and Democratisation Research in the Arab World*

The ability of current democratisation theory to determine when, why, and where democratisation happens is rather limited. A few years ago, the editors of a comprehensive volume, which reviewed critical prerequisites and driving social forces of democratic transition during the third global wave of democratisation, addressed the topic of potential spreading of democracy to new regions. As far as the Middle East and North Africa are concerned, they concluded that 'a sweeping democratic trend throughout the region does not seem likely in the near future' (Haerpfer et al., 2009: 383). With the coming of the Arab Spring a couple of years later, the difficulty of predicting potential democratic transitions did not appear to be the only challenge for applying democratisation theory to the Arab region. The validity of addressing the region as a collective pan-Arab entity is further questioned at a time when multiple paths of democratisation or non-democratisation seem possible.²⁴

Such dilemmas, however, are inherent to democratisation research in general. Barbara Geddes reflected on this issue several years ago in an article which synthesised the results of a large number of studies about the late twentieth-century regime transition and democratisation. She wrote:

Scholars have greeted the increasing number of democratizations with delight, intense attention, and theoretical puzzlement. It seems as though there should be a parsimonious and compelling explanation of the transitions, but the explanations proposed thus far have been confusingly complicated, careless about basic methodological details, often more useful as description than explanation, and surprisingly inconsistent with each other. The basic problem faced by analysts is that the process of democratization varies enormously from case to case and region to region. Generalizations proposed have failed either to accommodate all the real-world variation or to explain it. (Geddes, 1999: 117)

Political scientists have generally downplayed the role of media in democratisation, but the perception of media as an influential democratising factor is likely to increase after the Arab Spring. Unlike other democratisation agents in the region, the media – especially new media – are generally more difficult to contain and control by authoritarian regimes. Diamond (2010) labelled the new information and communication technologies as 'liberation technologies'. Despite its potential, the lack of empirical evidence and context in many of the studies addressing the role of media in the Arab Spring has rendered researchers reluctant to ascribe new media a leading role in democratic transitions.

Katrin Voltmer has lately explored the relationship between communication technologies, anti-regime movements, and political dissent against authoritarian rule over the past 50 years. She concluded that technological innovations, while opening up new opportunities of organising collective action, are almost always accompanied by new constraints and particular disadvantages:

²⁴ E.g. Egypt and Tunisia experienced successful mass pressured revolutions at relatively similar points of time and showed similar outcomes in their parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, only in Tunisia has the Arab Spring thus far resulted in 'significant' democratisation, which indicates some differences in political culture and civil liberties. For more details see the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2011: http://www.sida.se/Global/About%20Sida/S%C3%A5%20arbetar%20vi/EIU_Democracy_Index_Dec2011.pdf.

Activists and scholars alike were quick to attribute the astonishing success in bringing down long-established dictatorships to the power of the new communication tools . . . it might be equally revealing that 2011 was not the first time that the media were attributed a central role in overcoming dictatorial power. 1989 was dubbed the 'first television revolution'. It is now almost forgotten that the revolutionary moment of the late 1980s coincided with another big change in the communication environment . . . depending on what communicative function of collective action for regime change we are looking at, different communication technologies and media might have their specific advantages and disadvantages. (Voltmer, 2013: 1–16)

Whereas Voltmer's analysis suggests that democratisation cannot be caused by new communication tools alone, lack of contextualisation is an issue in democratisation research more broadly. According to Welzel (2009):

Researchers have too often tried to take sides, favouring one particular factor over all others. But the real challenge is to theorize about how different factors interplay in the making of democracy. (Welzel, 2009: 75)

Generally, research on media and transition to democracy in the Arab region faces several challenges. The majority of these challenges stem from the relative newness of the Arab media field as well as the notable dispersion, fragmentation, and incommensurability of its subject of analysis (Zayani, 2011). The strong desire for fast information on the Arab media often led to the provision of analyses weakened by grave empirical and theoretical deficits (see Hafez, 2008, Ayish, 2008, for a discussion; also see Sabry, 2007, and Hafez, 2010, for a discussion about the applicability of Western theories and models to the study of the Arab media).²⁵

²⁵ Scholars refer to a host of obstacles that limit media research in the Arab region, including limited knowledge of Arabic among foreign scholars, governments' restrictions on field research in their countries, limited access to unbiased data, lack of trained personnel in the Arab world, undeveloped networking mechanisms among Arab researchers, the lack of serious communication journals in the Middle East, the absence of a reward structure in most government institutions that favours research productivity, and failure to utilise research findings to generate new conceptual frameworks for better understanding of the region's media systems (for a discussion of such obstacles see Ayish, 2008; Hafez, 2008; Amin, 2008; Zayani, 2012).

5. Revising the Media's Revolutionary Role: The Rise of Social Media?

During the pre-transition phase, the capacity of domestic media to contribute to either institutional or attitudinal change is inevitably constrained by the fact that they are predominantly or completely controlled by the state and used largely as an instrument for government propaganda. Drawing on the experience/literature about media and democratisation in Eastern Europe, their function was encapsulated by the metaphor of a 'transmission belt' which was essentially supposed to transfer information from the Communist Party to the public, while suppressing alternative sources of information and criticism of the system (O'Neil, 1997b). Under these conditions, an attempt to examine the impact of the media on the institutional dimension of democratisation would arguably be futile, and indeed most literature on the role of media in regime change focuses on the attitudinal dimension, emphasising the contribution of the media to gradual 'erosion of credibility and legitimacy of the nondemocratic regime' (Gunther and Mughan, 2000: 412). During the periods of the toughest control over domestic information flows, such impact has been mostly attributed to the foreign media, namely to broadcasting of international radio stations like BBC World Service, Deutsche Welle, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, or Voice of America, many of which were operated by Western governments with the mission to undermine the Communist regimes (Puddington, 2000).

Despite the significant effort the Communist governments put into deterring these broadcasts, by jamming their signals as well as imposing harsh penalties on their listeners (Downing, 1996), they remained an important alternative news source not just for a small circles of dissidents but in many countries for mass audiences as well.²⁶ Still, there does not seem to be a genuine consensus about the level of impact of these stations on the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe; while praised for their contribution by former dissidents – in Václav Havel's opinion, 'the influence and significance [of the RFE/RL] have been great and profound' (*Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, 2005: 40) – others believe their effects should not be overstated, as they were only one factor triggering the change, and certainly not the most important one (Shirky, 2011),²⁷ or point to the importance of personal, rather than mediated, communication ('word-of-mouth') during the actual period of revolution (Johnson, 1995).²⁸

Very much the same can be argued about the role of samizdat (self-produced) publications and other 'small technologies of communication' like VCRs, ham radio stations, audio-cassettes, home photographic labs, photocopiers, or video-dubbers, creating what has been termed 'a horizontal information culture' (S. Frederick Starr, 1990, quoted in Downing, 1996: 89) or a 'second public sphere' (Sükösd, 2000), existing alongside the official and state-permitted communication channels. While it is hardly disputable that these types of media successfully disrupted the information monopoly of the communist regimes (wherever in place) and enabled dissenters to share and discuss their ideas, building group identity and the organisational structure of

²⁶ According to the report *Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, originating from a conference at Stanford University, these Western broadcasting stations reached 'about one third of the urban adult Soviet population and closer to a half of East European adult populations after the 1950s' (*Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, 2005: 39).

²⁷ In the opinion of the author, 'despite this emphasis on communications, the end of the Cold War was triggered not by a defiant uprising of Voice of America listeners but by economic change' (Shirky, 2011: 5)

²⁸ Describing the revolutionary events in 1989 Czechoslovakia, Owen Johnson writes that "The Velvet Revolution was revolution from the bottom up. It broke out without the benefit of domestic media and, though foreign broadcasts provided some information about the suddenly explosive situation, information spread chiefly by word-of-mouth communication" (Johnson, 1995: 228).

the opposition movement (Voltmer, 2013), again the assessment of their overall role in the process of the regime change seems nearly impossible to disentangle from other factors and variables.

There is a broad agreement, though, that as a consequence of the process of liberalisation within authoritarian political systems (as for example in the late 1980s in many of the CEE countries) and the gradual easing of government control over political communication, the national media could become platforms for dissemination of alternative information or critical viewpoints, contributing thereby to the delegitimisation of the existing regime, even if unintentionally (Randall, 1998; Gunther and Mughan, 2000). As Gunther and Mughan remind, 'liberalization can set in motion processes of change that are difficult or impossible to control' (2000: 414–15), arguing that 'when some mild criticism of the shortcomings of the existing system was allowed, support for the regime began to erode' (Gunther and Mughan, 2000: 415). Case studies of democratic transition from some of the South European countries (Gunther et al., 2000; Ribeiro, 2013) confirm the widening gaps in the censorship apparatus in the last years of the dictatorship, allowing for occasional broadcasting of social critique as well as relatively uncensored reports on political events in Western Europe, which allowed the audiences to critically compare their own situation with the one in those countries and nurtured the demand for political pluralism. This broadly corresponds to the two roles ascribed to the media during the pre-transition phase by Bennett (1998), as quoted by McConnell and Becker (2002: 9), namely the 'witness role' (the process of making public the transformations that are taking place in society) and the 'reifying role' (providing a variety of images and information about the societal changes that coincide with one another).

However, as far as the role of social media in democratisation is concerned, scholars tend to adopt a dichotomous vision of the topic; either emphasising the 'revolutionary' role of social media in empowering people living in non-democratic societies or minimising its role (for a detailed review of both approaches see Comunello and Anzera, 2012; Joseph, 2011). A third approach, moving beyond the enthusiastic and the sceptical outlooks regarding the role of social media, is referred to as contextualism. This approach tends to use comparative research to emphasise the impact that political, social, and economic variations have on the role of the social media in collective action (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013: 4). Here, social media are not likely to be interpreted as the 'main cause' of such complex processes, nor can they be seen as completely uninfluential (Comunello and Anzera, 2012: 453).

The role of social media in Arab democratisation have generally been perceived positively; the uprisings in the Arab world have often been labelled the 'Twitter Revolutions' or 'Facebook Revolutions' in recognition of the prominent part played by these tools in the coordination of mass protests, communication of real-time images and up-to-date information, and for their appeal to the international community, foreign civil societies, and diasporas (see Cottle, 2011; Barkai, 2012; Lim, 2012). In addition, scholars argue that social media had a notable impact on the content and quality of media coverage in mainstream Arab media (Khamis et al., 2012). However, despite the optimistic readings of social media's roles in democratic change, the horizontal, non-organised, and non-hierarchical structure of social media powered movements seemed to limit their success in post-revolutionary periods compared with organised and tested movements. This led some to conclude that their role can be contingent on how well organised the groups

using social media are (Beaumont, 2011), as well as on the extent to which the addressed issues touch the society at large (Barkai, 2012).

The role of social media in political change in the Arab world also seems to be dependent on an array of contextual factors. For example, Lynch (2011: 303) argues that social media may have played an important role at key moments in the unfolding of those revolutionary events, but they did so within a context shaped by older media such as Al-Jazeera, by political anger over heavily manipulated elections, and by material changes such as a rapidly deteriorating economic situation. This makes it increasingly difficult to separate new media from old media: in the Arab Spring, the two reinforced each other (Aday et al., 2012). These findings were echoed by other researchers who proposed that protests in Egypt and Tunisia can be explained by more than one factor, including long-standing grievance, emotional trigger, the sense of impunity, and access to new social media (see Bellin, 2012).

The debates regarding the connection between social media and the Arab Spring suggest that, while social media can be effective in reshaping the public sphere and creating new forms of governance (e.g. Shirky, 2011; see also Zweiri and Wootton, 2008; Etling et al., 2009, for the impact of social media on political and social organisation), they are not strong enough to cause revolutions (e.g. Anderson, 2011; Papic and Noonan, 2011). This is reflected in the available empirical evidence which provides no strong support for claims of significant new media impact on Arab Spring political protests (see Aday et al., 2012; Dajani, 2012). The role of social media is thus seen to be facilitated by the presence of revolutionary conditions and the inability of the state apparatus to contain the revolutionary upsurge (Khamis et al., 2012). In fact, scholars note that a significant increase in the use of the new media is much more likely to follow a significant amount of protest activity than to precede it (see Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). These outcomes are often drawn from comparative research looking into the roles played by social media in protests among the different Arab countries (e.g. Howard and Parks, 2012; see also Wolfsfeld et al., 2013, for a review).

There have been several attempts to systematise theoretical concerns and empirical research about the role of social media in political change. Some scholars suggest distinguishing between the internet as a *tool* for those seeking to bring about change from below, and the internet's role as a *space* where collective dissent can be articulated. (1) They argue for transcending the debate between utopian and dystopian perspectives on the role of the internet in political change, (2) they propose a shift away from perspectives that isolate the internet from other media, and (3) they call for a better understanding of the dialectical relationship between online and offline political *action* (see Aouragh and Alexander, 2011, for details). Others have called for the abandoning of any technological deterministic framework: instead focusing on the complex interactions between society, technology, and political systems (Comunello and Anzera, 2012). Moreover, scholars stress the importance of considering political context before attempting to analyse the role of social media, as the nature of the political environment affects both the *ability* of citizens to gain access to social media and their *motivation* to take to the streets (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). Finally, researchers have called for the focus to move from the newest technologies and to the long-term social and cultural effects of internet and mobile phone use (Hofheinz, 2011; for further insights from a communications and internet studies perspective see the special section of the *International Journal of Communication*, Spring 2012).

6. Conclusion

A state of the discipline for the study of mass media and democratisation is difficult to construct. It presupposes that there is a corpus of interrelated works, despite the existence of various theoretical and analytical approaches. We have discovered that there is little of this coherence. It is important to be clear about what this state of the discipline involves. We are not interested in the replication of existing theories that correspond to work in established democracies. For example, there are works that demonstrate the role of the mass media in 'setting the agenda' of an upcoming election. This is not informative for the study of mass media and democratisation as it is merely another brick in the already standing edifice of established media effects.

What we have sought to elicit from studies are consistent and generalisable findings that differentiate the study of mass media during periods of democratisation from the study of mass media in established democracies. This report has been driven by the possibility of aligning existing work to uncover a sufficient basis for a theory of mass media during democratisation. It has taken a fairly strict inclusion standard based on generalisability. Simply, works that appeal to a higher degree of nomotheticism (vs ideographic work) are more often indicative of a higher level of innovation and/or generalisability (although this is not a hard rule). The foremost issues in the countries/regions of interest have both the institutions of the state and the mass media in a state of flux and thus find little correspondence to relatively fixed, 'only game in town', institutions of established democracies. As noted above, we seek theories and effects that differentiate the role of mass media during democratisation from mass media in established democracies. Thus, given the fluidity of democratisation, the study of mass media and democratisation is aiming at a moving target.

Like much of the most recent theoretical work on the internet and its extensions in social media, we continue to ignore the largest assumptions in continuing media studies. Scammell and Semetko remind students of the mass media of two things: 'first, the central importance of media for democracy is . . . virtually axiomatic [and] second, the model of democracy which media are supposed to serve is also largely taken for granted' (2000b: pp. xi–xii). The field of mass media and democratisation may (finally) offer an occasion for us to confront these foundational assumptions by unmooring both democratic and mass media institutions from their rigid and fixed, normative locations. If we consider instead that the two do not so easily – and inevitably – coordinate, we may begin to unpack the complexities that lie at the heart of this field of study. McConnell and Becker (2002) suggest this powerfully by setting out a typology of various scholarly approaches in the study of mass media and democratisation in which media produce democracy, democracy produces media, media simply move with higher freedom, or there is no relationship between media freedom and democracy. These represent a criss-cross of contradictory approaches that, of course and as they note, excludes the almost unbearable positions that media might actually hinder democratisation or vice versa (McConnell and Becker, 2002). Thus, the state of the discipline above is, at best, pre-paradigmatic.

For academic researchers, progress may require a break with deductive approaches. We should stop thinking of the media in terms of traditional models, as these models are static and thus have difficulty explaining the dynamic processes of democratisation. There may need to be a period of inductive investigation that is theory-*generating* rather than theory-*testing*. In short, further studies should extend our knowledge of the mechanisms of

media effects in non-Western settings. It cannot be expected that media freedom will automatically lead to political freedom or appropriate political socialisation. Similarly, media institutional liberalisation is not path dependent (Jenkins and Thorburn, 2003) and different cultures will exploit nascent technologies differently (Williams, 1974; de Sola Pool, 1983), thus the path of media evolution will present evidence to us of possible other manners of media influence that are not congruent with Western models. Pursuit of media effects with Western media assumptions in non-Western settings should force us to reconsider the historical/cultural dimensions of media consumption and what we mean when we say media effects.²⁹ Therefore, future research should further parse media usage, contextualise analyses in the levels of consolidation (cross-nationally or ideally with times series/panel data), and allow inductive, systematic, and investigative analysis to rule the day.

Second, studies of mass media during periods of democratisation should avoid the mindless replication of existing work as it overlooks what is powerful and unique in democratisation: how institutions change, relationships among political institutions, individual learning, and cultural shifts. As Loveless writes: 'the real change is the cultural patterns of interaction with information, with others in the community, and with civil space, although these are much harder to see and much more difficult to estimate but arguably closer to a genuine media effect' (2010: 470).

Third, there is a need to enhance our knowledge about the dynamics of media landscapes and audiences in transitional contexts. Future studies should further our understanding about how information-seeking behaviour and/or preferences for political information consumption are affected by rapid changes to political and information environments in democratising contexts, and how audiences make sense of complex media transformations that accompany political transitions. This may require integrating theories of non-mechanical media effects and democratisation theories in order to shed light on the relationship between media use/behaviour and the embracement of democratic values following regime changes.³⁰

Finally, whatever we know, or assume to know, about the roles of media in the process of democratisation today might be challenged in democratisation processes in the future, simply because of the velocity and scope of the transformation of digital media environments. It is quite probable that future democratic revolutions 'won't be televised', as the political impact of television will gradually subside in favour of the internet and social media, or other new communication technologies yet to emerge. The biggest challenge for the research in the area of media and democratisation might therefore be how to avoid being immersed in a conceptual framework bearing an imprint of long obsolete social and technological circumstances. The future research will certainly need to broaden its scope and incorporate the analysis of non-institutionalised forms of communication, as well as actors of civil society which thrive in the rhizomatic structure of cyberspace (e.g. WikiLeaks, Anonymous, etc.), challenging not only the traditional modes of communication but ultimately also the notion of the process of democratisation as such.

²⁹ The reason that we continue to focus on institutions and individuals is because these are the only elements we feel capable of observing and therefore controlling.

³⁰ State of the art academic research highlights the importance of selective exposure for understanding media effects. See e.g. Bennett and Iyengar (2008).

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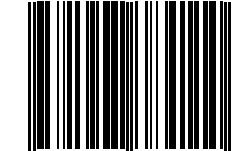
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