



Monitoring Freedom of Expression and Media During the Revolution 17 October - 31 December 2019

مهارات
Maharat

Photo: Dar Al Mussawir

Introduction

The Lebanese revolution launched on October 17th carried till to the end of December 2019 major transformations in Lebanese social life and this must leave many repercussions on the future of Lebanon for the coming years.

This study aimed at monitoring and documenting the revolution in regards of freedom of opinion that was the most powerful mean to raise the voice of people to reach all the Lebanese regions, and reached different countries around the world through the media coverage of international media organizations. The revolutionary voices of people challenged all political leaders; which is something encountered for the first time in Lebanon. Thus, this affected deeply the entire community, including journalists, media institutions, activists, unions, and academics.

Based on the importance of the revolution, and on the use of freedom of expression, this study documents freedom of opinion and expression related issues since the launching of the revolution on the 17th of October 2019 until the first of December 2019.

The most significant thing is that freedom of expression has reached its peak during the revolution, and this is an unprecedented phenomenon in Lebanon. People criticized politicians freely and their expression reached the extent of defamation, and public accusation of corruption and theft. This way of expression was used daily by the protesters through different media platforms without any fear or formalities. Thus, the popular movement deserved the name "revolution" because it broke all the principles of the traditional ways of expression, and broke the barrier of fear of prosecutions, as if people on the streets wanted to destroy the image of politicians, since they lack the ability to remove them from their posts.

Media institutions also broke many professional and ethical rules, where some of them provided their space for protesters without any control or monitoring, or through intense discussions; others went for unjustifiable silence (like the case of Lebanon TV). Therefore the protestations and popular movements were main part of media coverage of some TV stations, where these institutions seemed part of the revolution and a mirror for the protesting people.

Hence, media institutions became the voice of the revolution from one side and the voice of opponents from another, and journalists were also categorized as allies and opponents of the revolution. This resulted in violent reactions against journalists during their field coverage.

Based on this fundamental role of media during this revolution, it is crucial to document issues related to freedom of opinion and expression that became the weapon of protesters against the authority forces that tried to oppress them.

The freedom of opinion and expression related events can be documented through three categories:

First: oppression campaigns against freedom of opinion and expression,

Second: freedom of expression is the weapon of the revolution,

Third: media institutions amidst the revolution.

First: Oppression Campaigns against Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Freedom of expression was decreasing in Lebanon before the October revolution, where the cybercrime bureau summoned many activists in charges related to freedom of expression especially when expressing about issues related to corruption or criticizing politicians. What promoted this situation were the statements of the prime minister in the caretaker government Saad Hariri who called for strict financial sanctions on any “media violations”, and the statement of the president Michel Aoun who criticized the media performance that insults the presidency, the state, and the economy.

This reality changed after the October 17 protests, with the street acclaims that suddenly rose in many places criticizing the political leaders and their parties, which were "red line" and "taboo" before these protests, and those who expressed their opinion against them would be summoned and subject to investigation by the cybercrime bureau.

But this high ceil of freedom was eventually encountered by the political authority with some oppressive tools that will be mentioned and documented throughout this report. The report also documents the violations against media while covering the protests.

The Right to Protest and Express

The attack on journalists during coverage

During the protests that were launched on October 17, many reporters for Lebanese media institutions were verbally or physically attacked during their coverage of the protests. Below a list of attacks in chronological order:

- On October 18th 2019, the security forces attacked Al-Jadeed photographer Mouhamed Samra while he was filming live with the reporter Ramez Al Kawdi at Riad el Soleh. The MTV crew including the reporter Joyce Akiki, and the photographer Christian Abi Nader were beaten by some protesters and their camera was broken in Down Town Beirut. The LBCI reporter Houda Chedid was pushed severely when the security forces were dispersing the protesters in Baabda.
- On October 19th 2019 Al-Jadeed team including the reporter Joelle el Haj Moussa and the photographer Mohamed Barbar were threatened and expelled from Saida by the supporters of Amal Movement.
- On October 24th 2019, the supporters of Amal Movement and Hezbollah attacked Al-Nidaa photographer Ramzi el Haj at Riad Soleh, where he was beaten with a stick on his head to prevent him from coverage; while others harassed Al-Hoora reporter Sahar Arnaout to prevent her from conducting her work. The MTV reporter Joyce Akiki was insulted live on TV by the composer Samir Sfeir while covering the protest of the supporters of Free Patriotic Movement in Baabda. The OTV reporter Lara al Hashem was insulted by some protesters in Zook Mosbeh, and she was expelled and banned from covering the protest.
- On October 25th 2019, Hezbollah supporters attacked Al- Shark photographer Ali Faraj, Reuter's photographer Alaa Kanaan, the AFP photographer Anwar Amrou, the MTV reporter Nawal Berri and broke their camera, and banned the Daily Star reporter Taimour Azhari from covering the attack on the protesters in Down Town Beirut.

- On October 27th 2019, MTV reporter Nakhle Oudaime and the photographer Christian Abi Nader were attacked while covering the Free Patriotic Movement protest in Nahr el Mot.
- On October 28th 2019, a freelance photographer Ali Hankir was beaten by one of the protesters while filming the road blocking in Nejme Square in Saida. Al-Manar crew was attacked by some protesters while covering in central Beqaa, and they tried to ban them from covering in Dahr el Baidar and Mansoura.
- On October 29th 2019, some journalists were attacked while covering the attacks against protesters on Ring Bridge, where supporters of some political parties attacked MTV team including the two reporters Ranine Edris and Zeina Bassil, and the photographers Loutfallah Bou Khazen and Elie Rashed whose hand was broken along with breaking the camera and stealing the Institution's logo. The BBC reporter Gaith AlSoleh was beaten on his head, so he was transferred to a hospital for treatment. The Daily Star reporter Taimour Azhari, and the LBCI reporter Ranim Abou Khazam, were banned from covering. The attackers tried to steal the mobile phone of Nidaa Al Watan reporter Maryam Seif and to push her but she was able to escape amidst verbal assaults, and they tried to break the mobile phone of protesters who were filming the attacks. One of the attackers tried to steal the phone of Annahar reporter Reine Bou Moussa while she was live on Facebook, but the security forces arrested him and gave her back her phone. The freelance journalist Youmna Fawaz was banned from filming by the attackers who insulted her and threw stones on her. Ali Awada, Annahar reporter was beaten by security forces by mistake thinking he was one of the attackers.
- On October 30th 2019, some protesters attacked NBN and Al-Manar teams while they were covering road blocking in Jiyeh, and they were banned from live coverage.
- On November 13th 2019, the Lebanese army banned Al-Jadeed reporter Halima Tabiaa from covering the unblocking of the road in Kola region. Some protesters attacked LBCI reporter Edmond Sassine to ban him from filming the cement wall building in Nahr el Kalb tunnel. The OTV reporter Rim Hamdan was harassed by

some protesters while covering the protest in Baada, and it escalated till she has beaten one of protesters with the microphone.

- On November 20th 2019, Al-Arabia reporter Ghinwa yatim was banned from completing her live coverage in Riad el Soleh by some attackers who insulted her and the institution and banned the photographer from filming.
- On November 25th 2019, a group of people attacked a group of media crews on the Ring, as they threw stones at the MTV team and asked them to leave the place, which led to breaking the camera, and another MTV team including the reporter Nawal Berri and photographer Khalil Akiki were detained in a building in Gemayzeh before the security forces managed to rescue them from the building.
- The Sky News Arabic photographer Hassan Rajeh was hit by a stone on his head. The LBCI reporter Remie Derbas was attacked where a supporter of a political party took her microphone and threw it away. Al-Jadeed reporter Layal Bou Moussa was insulted; the insults also were referred to the owner of Al-Jadeed Tahseen Khayat. The phone of the journalist Dima Sadek was stolen from her hand while she was filming the attack on protesters.
- On December 10th 2019, Annahar journalist Paula Nawfal was attacked while covering the protests. A video of her bleeding went viral; she was screaming “I am a journalist”. Nawfal said “I was in the car when one of the parliament police came along and hit me on the face”.
- On December 20th, one of the “Future Movement” supporters broke NBN camera while the reporter Munir Kabalan and photographer Mohamed Agha were covering the road blocking at Kornish Mazraa.
- On December 21st one of the Future Movement supporters attacked Al-Jadeed photographer Zakaria Khatib and broke his camera while covering the road blocking at Kola.

Summons to the cybercrime Bureau and Security Services

- On November 25th 2019, nine environmental activists were summoned at a police station in Mazraat Daher- Joun, because of a complaint filed by the operators of Bisri Dam. The summoned were: Amer Mashmouchi, Amani Baini, Rolan Nassour, Wissam Hanna, Ajwad Ayash, Claude Habib, Paul Abi Rashed, Saade Saade, and Hassan Hajjar.
- On December 2nd 2019, the cybercrime bureau summoned 4 activists from Nabatiye: Youssef Assi, Zaki Chakar, Mohamed Haj Ali, for posting on Facebook the attacks of “thugs” on them with the help of some municipality members at the beginning of the revolution. The lawsuit was filed by one of the attackers; there is a video documenting his attacks on the protesters in Nabatiye. The bureau asked the activists to sign a restraining order, which is an illegal and controversial procedure in Lebanon, but the activists refused. They were also asked to delete their Facebook posts, but they also refused. Investigators asked for the activists' phones to inspect them, which is also against the law.
- On December 2nd 2019, the Lebanese state security summoned the activist Georges Azzi because of a tweet posted on Twitter. After the reactions on his summon, the bureau called Azzi and cancelled it, while one of his lawyer was asked to delete the tweet to cancel his summon.
- On December 4th 2019, the cybercrime bureau called the activist Marwan Basha because of a lawsuit filed by the minister of industry in the caretaker government Wael Bou Faour accusing him of defamation in a Facebook post.
- On December 30th 2019 the cybercrime bureau summoned the activist Rabih Al Amin twice because of a lawsuit filed by the CEO of Al-Mawared Bank Marwan Khairuddin upon a Facebook post by Al Amin criticizing Khairuddin.

The main cases of attack, Arrests and Kidnaps of Activists

During the demonstrations that took place during November 2019, security forces made a number of arbitrary arrests and detentions against protesters, some of which reached enforced

disappearance, especially since the lawyers who volunteered to defend the protesters had to search for the place of detention without success, as the security services did not disclose any information about the detainees.

In this regard, Ghida Franjeh, member of the Lawyers Committee to defend the protesters, told Maharat News about more than 300 arrests related to the revolution in various Lebanese regions. While most of the detainees were released, 18 young men remained in detention because of “Istirahat Saida” case.

Franjeh said that based on her follow-up on these arrests, a number of legal violations took place with these arrests, the most important of which was kidnapping and violence.

- Kidnapping: In some cases, these arrests were arbitrary and similar to kidnapping, as they did not happen based on a judicial summon or in flagrante delicto, with the emergence of an important role for the military intelligence. Detention authorities (Military Intelligence and Military Police) prevented the detainees from communicating with their families and lawyers, and did not disclose their place of detention to their volunteer lawyers. This is what led a group of volunteer lawyers to inform the Attorney General about the enforced disappearance of the detainees, Samer Mazeh and Ali Basal, on 15/11/2019 before they were released on the same day.
- Violence: violence was evident on detainees after their release, and they assured that they were beaten and insulted. In addition, Franjiyeh highlighted the violence used against protesters especially by the Lebanese Army in Jal-Dib, riot police in down town Beirut, or by supporters of political parties in different Lebanese regions.

Franjiyeh also said that some activists were summoned by military intelligence without any judicial notice¹.

Documentation of Cases:

¹ <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/medianews/2019/12/3/>

عودة استدعاءات الناشطين اللبنانيين بسبب منشوراتهم: السلطة تضيق الحريات؟
<https://www.almodon.com/society/2019/11/15/>الأجهزة-الأمنية-بأساليب-المخابرات-السورية-اختطاف-وإخفاء-قسري-للمتظاهرين

- On October 18th a group of protesters were arrested by riot police for protesting and breaking in Riad el Soleh, around 77 protesters were arrested; they were either released immediately or the second day.
- On October 22nd a group of young men were arrested for burning “istirahat Sour”, some of them were released, and 18 appeared to court.
- On November 1st, the internal security forces arrested the activist Salim Ghadban for breaking into the association of Banks building in down town, where along with other guys he locked the gate of the building with steel chains as a protest against the banking policies. Ghadban was hardly beaten by the internal security forces before his arrest.
- On November 6th the security forces arrested Ali Asaad and Basil al Amin for protesting in Zaitouna Bay.
- On November 14th the activists Samer Maseh and Ali Basal were arrested by the military intelligence and where put in a “Rapid” car that belongs to military police at Gemayze.
- On November 14th the military intelligence arrested the activist and journalist Khaldoun Jaber while protesting on the road leading to presidency palace in Baabda against an interview done by the president that enraged the Lebanese people. Khaldoun was arrested at night from among the protesters and was taken to an unknown destination. He was severely beaten while arrested without knowing what the charges against him were.
- On November 15th the Lebanese army arrested a number of activists in Jal Dib for trying to block the road, among them was Fady Nader who was taken to the hospital unconscious after he was beaten.
- On November 21st the activist in the free patriotic movement Joe Khoury was attacked by some protesters and he was taken to the hospital, the attack was after Khoury criticized the revolution during a panel discussion at martyr’s square.
- On November 22nd the Hammana municipal police and the military intelligence arrested some minors who were trying to remove a banner in front of the free patriotic movement center in Hammana. Nizar Ghazal (12 years) Iwan Hatoum (15 years) Amir Awar (15

years) Ramah Hamed (18 years) and Chhada Awar (19 years) were arrested for sabotaging public and private properties; they were released few hours later².

- On November 25th some Amal movement and Hezbollah supporters destroyed the tents of protesters in Alam Square in Sour and threatened the protesters.
- On November 26th some Amal and Hezbollah supporters attacked the protesters in Khalil Moutran square in Baalbek, where they destroyed the tents and sound systems. The attackers were acclaiming “Shiite- Shiite” and “only God, Nasrallah, and Nabih”. The attackers besieged some protesters in a store, and then they were released with the help of Lebanese Army.
- On November 29th the activist Dana Hamoud was arrested after a humiliating fight with a security forces lieutenant, where he pushed her to the ground and tied her hand. This humiliating accident was documented in a video that went viral where some security forces member was asking people to stop filming.
- On December 8th some activists were beaten by the parliament police for acclaiming against authorities near St Georges Cathedral in Down Town Beirut, where a 14 years memorial mass for assassinating Gebran Twaini was taking place. The activists Hashem Adnan, Roy Dib, Michel Khairallah, Mario Assaf, Chady Jalbout were arrested near Nejme square for a short period then they were released.
- On December 10th the Lebanese army arrested 4 activists in Sarba: Elie Haykal, Jad Bou Nasreddin, Carlos Zoughaib, and Gilbert Ousaili for burning tires and trying to block the highway, the public prosecutor in Mount Lebanon Ghada Aoun ordered their precautionary arrest but the attorney general Gahssan Ouaidat released them.
- On December 10th a group of activists were attacked by the parliament police in Verdun next to Ain el Tineh for protesting in front the houses of some politicians living in the region.

القصة الكاملة لتوقيف قاصرين في حمانا وإطلاق سراحهم <https://www.almodon.com/society/2019/11/24/>²

- On December 15th the parliament police beat the protesters who were gathered in the streets leading to Nejme square.
- On December 22nd 2019, some supporters of the progressive socialist party attacked the protesters in Aley.
- On December 29th 2019, the bodyguards of the minister of communication in the caretaker government Mohamad Choukair attacked the protesters who were gathered in front of his house in Hamra.

Intimidation Campaigns against Activists

During the early days of the revolution, youth activists criticized or verbally insulted on social media or during demonstrations a group of political leaders, most notably the Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, then the same youths came out with videos apologizing from these politicians after they were subjects to pressure or intimidation, these apologies were entitled "before and after the Sahsouh" (intimidation).

The most viral video was for Louay Chebly from Saida apologizing from Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, and Nabih Berrri after he was asked from some guys (only their voices was heard) to apologize from the "shoes of Sayyed". Another video went viral for Karim Housam from Tripoly who was arrested for few hours for cursing Sayyed Hasan Naasrallah.

Another apology from a guy who was asking an MP Hassan Fadllalah affiliated with Hezbollah to disclose his file, and then few days later he apologized to him. Ali Baker also apologized from Hassan Nasrallah after he cursed him on TV during the protests on Ring Bridge on the 24th of November, and he asked him to save his family that was threatened.

Cyber bullying of Journalists and Activists

- The journalist and activist Nidale Ayoub filed a lawsuit on the 3rd of December 2019, against the journalist Husein Mourtada accusing him of Slander, defamation, intentional harm and incitement after he posted on Twitter a multimedia piece entitled "who is Nidale Ayoub" and accused her of being a CIA

agent. According to National News Agency, the case was transferred to cybercrime bureau for investigation.

- A video went viral for Jihane Khoury who was crying and the reporter asked about the reason and she said “happy, happy” as she was excited after the election of Michel Aoun as president. The video was disseminated to sarcasm among activists after the resignation of the government, and the phone number of Jihane was shared among the activists to ask her if she was still happy. (October 29).
- A video for Zahraa Kobeisi, on Al-Manar went viral after she was talking about the economic situation and she was smiling all the time and people started bullying her saying that she is a drug user and they insulted her Chador.(December 7).

Sharing the phone numbers of journalists

A number of media workers were subject to bullying by publishing their phone numbers, after which they were exposed to various pressures and threats. The most prominent of them is the reporter of Al-Jadeed in Saida, Joelle Al-Haj Moussa; as her phone number was circulated through WhatsApp groups to attack her. Haj Moussa said in an interview with "Maharat News" that the attack that targeted her came from supporters of political parties. Haj Moussa added: "What is happening is a way of intimidation, and an attempt to put pressure and stop the voice of people." As for targeting a large number of reporters and publishing their phone numbers, Hajj Moussa classifies it as part of the patriarchal thought prevailing in society, which tries to intimidate women to prevent them from doing their job.

- The same thing happened with Al-Jadeed reporter Nancy Sabeh who said on Twitter that “circulating my number is neither courage nor intimidation, and since you have it, save it, and when you’ll need it after your humiliation at hospitals and would need to raise your voice, call me and I will be ready to help you”. Sabeh confirmed in an interview with Maharat-News that “such behaviors do not affect our work as journalists, and we provide our phone number for everyone, because it is our duty to raise people’s voice”. She added “I am with the respect of

privacy, but people with such behavior deserve to publish their abusive messages”.

- The bullying campaign targeted other journalists of Al-Jadeed where their numbers were shared for disturbance, first with Ramez Al KAdi who tweeted “my number was shared twice during this revolution! The first time among ISIS and Nusra supporters when I said that Hassan Nasrallah is the leader of resistance and is not corrupted and if there is a political responsibility on Hezbollah he should take it. And now the second time. There are some who rejected the logic of sharing the number and insults, Thank you! To the fools, we say, change the pictures or change your logic! #shame”.
- The journalist Riad Kobaeisi was bullied and tweeted saying: “keep sharing my number, in this way you are contributing in supporting me with the biggest security system in Lebanon called the sore people. Do you imagine what it means having thousands of people sending me proofs about your corruption and thefts? Keep up”.
- The cyber bullying and sharing of journalists’ phone numbers targeted also other reporters from AL-Jadeed (Halima Tabiha, Layal Saad, and Rachelle Karam).
- The journalist Dima Sadek was also targeted by sharing her phone number and that of her mother’s and they were insulted and threatened. Dima shared on Twitter photos of whatsapp chats that contain the insults and threats and she captioned: “I forgive the acts of sharing my number and insulting me, but please stop, thank you”. Sadek added earlier that her mother was exposed to a health crisis as a result of receiving calls and messages that offended her and her daughter.
- **Insulting female journalists and activists**

During the demonstrations Women (especially activists and journalists) were subject to numerous violations and abuses. Such as the journalist Dima Sadek, known for her support for the revolution, was subject to a systematic campaign on social media, from supporters of some political parties, by launching the hashtag of # ديما الواطية which

was spread widely and included comments and pictures that offended Sadek. In addition to the exposure of Al-Jadeed reporter Rachel Karam to a similar campaign, with the hashtag "اشيل الدجال" spread due to a dispute with Al-Mayadeen reporter Ali Mortada.

Main Violations faced by female journalists

- The journalist at MTV Joyce Akiki was insulted live on TV by the composer Samir Sfeir, while she was covering the supporters of Free Patriotic movement (24 October)
- Some protesters at Zouk Mosbeh insulted the reporter Lara Al Hashem and they expelled her and banned her from coverage (24 October)
- The MTV reporters Ranine Edris and Zeina Bassi were attacked by some supporters of political parties during the attack on protesters on Ring Bridge. The LBC reporter Ranim Abou Khazam was banned from covering. The reporter from "Nida2 el Watan" Maryam Saifeddin was also a target where one of the attackers tried to take her phone and pull her away with lots of insults but she was able to get away. An attacker tried also to steal the phone of Annahar reporter Rim Bou Moussa while going live on Facebook, but the security forces arrested him and gave her back her phone. The freelance reporter Youmna Fawaz was banned from covering and was insulted (29 October)
- Some of the protesters attacked the NBN reporter Rasha Elzein while covering the blocking of Jiyeh Road, and banned her from covering (30 October)
- The Al-Arabiya reporter Ghinwa Yatim was banned from finishing her message live on TV at Riyah El Soleh, she was insulted and banned from covering (20 November)
- During the protestations on Ring Bridge journalists were attacked, where MTV crew was trapped in a building at Jemmayze including the journalist Nawal Berri before they were rescued by security forces. The LBCI reporter Remie Derbas was attacked where someone pulled the microphone from her hand and threw it away. Al- Jadeed reporter Layal Bou Moussa was also insulted. The phone of the

journalist Dima Sadek was stolen while she was filming the attacks on the protesters (25 November)

- The journalist from Annahar newspaper Paula Nawfal was attacked while covering the protestations. (10December)

Verbal Assaults of Female Protesters

- The senior professor of "Cultural Studies and History" at the American Lebanese University, Pierre Sarkis, wrote on his Facebook page: "To prostitutes, and despicable people, especially the ones acclaiming against the President of the Republic. Look at yourself from which garbage barrel you were born?"
- The journalist Abdou Helou said live on OTV "those who have their wives with them send them home early, it's been said that Ukrainian girls are joining the squares".
- The political analyst Scarlet Haddad stressed the patriarchal jokes of Abdo Helou about female protesters and said: "we will see how many pregnancy cases will result from these protestations".

- Criticizing Politicians, insults and defamation

- o On November 5th, the Director General of Customs, Badri Daher, filed a complaint, through his attorney, George El Khoury against Al-Jadeed TV, and the journalists, George Salibi and Riyadh Kobeissi, for exposing him in the episode "down with the corrupt rule." The Attorney General, Judge Ghassan Aouidat, referred the complaint to the Central criminal investigation Department to take the required action.
- o On November 12, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the caretaker government, Gebran Bassil, submitted a complaint of defamation against the website of Al-Jaras magazine after the website posted on their Instagram page an audio recording of an unknown woman that shared information about Basil's purchase of three plots of land in Batroun.

- o On November 29, the Progressive Socialist Party announced in a statement that the Attorney General at the Court of Cassation Judge Ghassan Oweidat, referred the complaint submitted by the head of the Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Jumblatt, against the journalist Hassan Mokalled and the journalist Josephine Dib, to the Central Criminal Investigation Department for investigation. Mukallad and Deeb stated on more than one occasion, that Jumblatt transferred huge amounts of money abroad, and that some European banks refused to receive these transfers.
- o On December 4, the Minister of Industry in the caretaker government Wael Abu Faour filed a lawsuit before the attorney general in Mount Lebanon, against the admin and operator of a Facebook page in the name of Marwan Basha , on charges of defamation, insult, abuse, and stirring strife, posted on his web page.
- o On December 5, each of the two journalists from Al-Jadeed, Adam Shams El-Din and Rawand Bou Khouzam were summoned in two separate cases. The first was held by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri against Bou Khouzam on charges of inciting sectarian strife after indicating that she has been attacked by supporters of the Amal movement and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri while covering protests in front of "Eden Bay". As for the second lawsuit, it was filed by Randa Berry against Shams El-Din on charges of defamation, and fake news during the program “down with corrupt rule”.
- o On December 5, journalist Radwan Murtada announced he was summoned with two cases brought by Judge Nicola Mansour. The first is after an article about Mansour releasing a drug dealer. The second is after a television episode and a post on Facebook with the crime of demeaning the judiciary.

- **Charges of violating civil peace and insulting religions**

- o On November 6, a group of lawyers in the Free Patriotic Movement filed a complaint against those who blocked the roads, and it was registered at the Public Prosecution Registry in Beirut (No. 7561 / m 2019 dated 6/11/2019).
- o On November 14, attorney Ali Tawbah filed a complaint against the former minister, Charbel Nahhas, with the crime of inciting sectarian strife and insulting a sister country after Nahhas's famous talk about the people of the south and the environment of Hezbollah.
- o On December 3, lawyers, Michel Fallah, Muhammad Ziyad Jaafil, Nadim Qoubar, and Nouredine Baalbaki, filed a complaint to the Public Prosecution in Beirut against Sabreen Abdel-Khalek, after a video of her on the presidential palace road that went viral in which she insulted the divine soul. Lawyers have requested that she would be summoned for crimes of insulting religion; provoke sectarian strife and insulting the divine soul.

This comes after a video of Sabreen during a demonstration in support of President Michel Aoun, and she says in an interview to the media: "In the sky there is God, on his right there is Michel Aoun and on his left there is Gibran Bassil."

On the same subject, the Episcopal Commission issued to the press release in which it said: "(...) the Episcopal Commission deeply regrets that exaggerations in the love of any leader to the level of his deification and put him on the right of the gods and saints. Out of respect we hope not to insult Divinity, and the Holy Trinity, and not mixing religion and politics, to avoid any insult to the heavenly messages. "

Freedom of expression is the weapon of the revolution

1. **Raising the ceiling of freedom of expression: “all of them means all of them”**

Slogans and chants acclaimed by the demonstrators during the revolution of October 17, 2019 targeted a large group of political leaders, in an unfamiliar scene in Lebanon, breaking "taboos" that were not easy to overcome.

Among the most frequent slogans: "Revolution, revolution," "People want the fall of the regime," "all of them means all of them." They often used the slogan "all of them means all of them and ... is one of them" and changing the names of political leaders. Among the slogans acclaimed:

- "Yalla yalla yalla ...Hariri go outside" this slogan was used during the first days of the revolutions calling the prime minister Saad Hariri to resign
- "leave, leave, leave you are not everyone's father" this slogan was used against "everyone's father" slogan used by supporters of free patriotic movement referring to the president Michel Aoun.
- "hela hela ho..." this slogan was widely used during the first days of the revolution against the minister Gibran Bassil
- "all of them means all of them, nasrallah one of them" referring to the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah
- "all of them means all of them, berri one of them" referring to the parliament speaker Nabih Berri
- "down with the rule of corrupt" referring to any oppressive act faced by protesters, this slogan was used earlier in 2015 with movements against the former minister of interior Nouhad El Machnouk.
- "distribute chocolate and feed us" used as a sarcastic slogan against the minister of telecommunication Mouhammad Chouceir who owns "patchi" a chocolate factory
- "the council of thieves" against the parliament
- "down with the rule of banks" referring to the financial policy of the central bank

- “ta2 ta2 ta2iye... a government of thieves” is another slogan³.

2. The battle of media coverage

News coverage was characterized by live broadcasting, which is difficult to control, as reporters found themselves confronting direct insults and incitement at times, as well as telling people their rightful demands, accusing officials and breaking taboos by naming leaders who were not previously named, such as Nabih Berri and Hassan Nasrallah. Soon the media were categorized as supporters of the protest movement or questioning its background.

It is noticeable that the media coverage varied in many cases, such as reporting protests in front of the Central Bank, as some outlets supporting the protests were absent from these coverage, indicating their interests and media agenda, especially that there are many media outlets that received loans from the central bank with low interest.

- **Affiliation of Lebanese media**

This inconsistency in the contents of the Lebanese media was tackled in the Al-Arabi Al Jadeed newspaper, as well as the Elaph website: “All of the above may not seem surprising to those who follow the activity of the Lebanese media institutions. Political parties and wealthy families are totally present in the media landscape ... The Lebanese media score the highest in terms of political affiliation: 78.4 per cent of the media platforms analyzed belong directly to the state, parties, or political figures ”.⁴

In an interview with Al-Adab site, Dr. Nahawand Al-Qadri classified the media institutions into two directions: “The first promotes the people in power, and ignores what is happening. They are lost whether to support the movement or to be concerned of it and employ it later in regional conflicts. This kind of media doesn’t practice self-criticism, and does not care that people are protesting as a result of humiliation and do

³ - تظاهرات لبنان: شعارات وهتافات وشتائم لم توفر زعيماً. <https://www.france24.com/ar/20191021>

⁴ <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/medianews/2019/10/18/>
<https://elaph.com/Web/News/2019/11/1270840.html>

not care anymore about the regional struggles or ideologies. The second kind of media went with the flow of the revolution, and became revolutionary more than the protesters, and focus on the criticized persons as being the whole problem while they are only part of the problem (...)”⁵

3. The role of alternative media platforms

The pages of the Lebanese people on social media during the demonstrations turned into something like a situation-analyzing media, video platforms for demonstrating the protests, symbolic pictures, and satirical comments.

While the Lebanese lack of confidence in the traditional Lebanese media, which is either owned by political parties or relies on political funds, many people turned to alternative media platforms, which provided information quickly based on "citizen journalism", which is characterized by the rapid exchange of information and videos; bearing in mind that these features were accompanied by many challenges, most notably the accuracy of the information and the credibility of these alternative platforms.

The main Alternative Platforms

- Megaphone platform was launched by young journalists, activists and designers, to fact check and analyze local news using new tools, in the aim of encouraging critical thinking, transparency, and accountability.
- Data Aurora and Maharat Foundation launched the interactive "www.lebanonprotests.com" platform. It is an independent platform that documents the demands of citizens and monitors the response of authorities. This platform allows daily access to the data, statistics and timelines related to the revolutions like comments and engagements on social media anywhere in the world where users can view the data, download them and share them.
- Civil societies, NGOs and websites launched the "guide of the Revolution" initiative in support of the revolution in Lebanon. The site included a guide to

⁵<https://al-adab.com/article/الحراك اللبناني والاعلام>

- the protests and their timing, providing the necessary needs for the demonstrators, and providing information about lawyers in cases of detention.
- The "lebanonprotests.xyz" site which is an interactive map for protestations along Lebanon, and for blocked roads. The map shows the size of demonstration in every region.
 - "Lebanon's Revolution" is an English platform that provides news about the revolution with the possibility to display topics in multimedia formats.
 - The English page today, affiliated with <http://www.beirut-today.com/> website that introduces itself as an independent online newspaper that enables writers, bloggers, activists, and members of society to express their diverse ideas and opinions, away from the influence of advertisers and political figures.
 - The "alternative media" page on Facebook that introduces itself as "interested in transferring the news of the revolution with transparency". The page posted calls to close public facilities after unblocking the roads following the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri. The page also published news and videos of the protesters' activities.
 - The Facebook page "Akhbar Al-Saha" covers events and news related to the protests in different Lebanese regions because according to the page admins, media did not cover enough news; and they succeeded in sharing videos about protests in remote villages where traditional media did not cover.
 - The Facebook page "Loubnan Yantafed" covers events and news of demonstrations in various Lebanese regions
 - The Facebook page "[Blog Baladi](#)" covers events and news of demonstrations in various Lebanese regions

17 October Newspaper

On the other hand, a number of journalists launched a new newspaper that speaks in the name of the revolution named "17 October" and it includes articles and drawings.

The newspaper publishes its content on 16 pages, funded through people's donations, and includes articles written by journalists, including Khaled Saghie and Jaafar Al-Attar. Al-Attar wrote on his Facebook page: "A newspaper from the heart of the revolution and its pulse. 16 pages about our dreams. It started with a question: can we issue a newspaper? We were in Riad El Soleh 10 days and came up with the design and content."

4. The role of influencers in documenting the revolution

During the revolution, a number of influencers from different backgrounds appeared on social media platforms, and they played an important role in documenting the news related to the revolution, especially on the Instagram and Twitter, so they became either a source of information, they covered the news, or contributed in documenting the events of the revolution through pictures shared on social.

The revolution statistics platform of the Lebanon protests platform showed the influential role of journalists on Twitter as they became the most active among tweeters and influencers in the revolution speech on the Internet.

Third: Media institutions amidst the revolution

1. Absence of Public Media

The public media (especially Lebanon TV and Radio Lebanon) did not react with the October 17 demonstrations. The demonstrations appeared to be shocking to those in charge of these institutions. The blackout that prevailed in the official public media indicates the absence of any strategies for covering such events, and the solution was to escape from them.

The absence of Lebanon TV from covering the revolution has raised questions. The "Lebanon 24" website indicated that there was a divide between the Lebanese Minister of Information Jamal Al-Jarrah on one hand and the editor in chief of news and political programs at Lebanon TV, Saeb Diab on the other hand, on how to deal with what is going on in the country.

AL-Jarrah insisted that "State TV" should not cover demonstrations "against the state", and that no interview with any Lebanese figure should take place without his approval. Diab was forced

to abide by Al-Jarrah's decision, so Lebanon TV continued to broadcast regular programs and resume old series.

It is to note that the media blackout of Lebanon TV prompted a group of Lebanese artists to protest inside the Lebanon TV building on October 22 against the failure of the official TV to cover the popular movements.⁶

2. Syndicate of Editors and the Revolution

During the 50 days of revolution the syndicate of Editors issued two statements.

The first one on October 7th condemning the attacks on journalists and called the military and security authorities to issue orders to their units to provide total protection for journalists.

The second statement was issued on October 9th in solidarity with the directors, after the increased cases of summoning of directors in newspapers and news agencies.

• The “Alternative Syndicate” Initiative

On November 6, a media initiative advocated for the formation of a union for journalists, as an alternative for the two existing press and editors' unions, and an electronic petition⁷ was spread on social media calling for the creation of the alternative union, and journalists signed it. It was said in the petition: “We want a syndicate that is positioned to defend the profession against every attack, whether from the authority, employers, or security services.”

It was also said: "We are journalists, we are not represented by the press and editors unions, we declare that we are part of the popular revolution to defeat the regime and replace it with a secular system based on principles of social justice and public freedoms, foremost of which is

كفنانون يفتحمون تلفزيون لبنان اعتراضاً على عدم تغطية التظاهرات.

<https://elaph.com/Web/News/2019/10/1269054.html>

⁷ عريضة الكترونية

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/12vzGXMzWku3uSgoSuOYK6njGa2eo4vTjrwHqvwrPV9A/viewform?ts=5dc2b7e3&fbclid=IwAR1E8N9S7IJdrWo3gKlcfYMXuvT7GkHiS6A42wwug4EBFZLG16hfLt4PmJ4&edit_requested=true

freedom of the press." The petition drew attention to the shutdown of press and media institutions during the past years, "and neither of the two unions had a say in that." It adds: "In recent years, too, we have witnessed a dangerous reality related to the freedom of the press and the media, through summons to trials, some of which were military, that do not distinguish between information and opinion, and only aim to tame them. The Press Syndicate to which we aspire is also supposed to protect the spaces and platforms of expression in Lebanon, to protect the media and its freedom. "

The "Alternative Media Syndicate" has invited all media workers to several protests, mainly joining the protest with other professionals in front of the Palace of Justice in Beirut, on Saturday, November 16, 2019. The union explained that the protest is to demand an independent judiciary that protects freedom of media and does not oppress it.⁸

3. The National Media Council

The head of the National Media Council, Abd al-Hadi Mahfouz, has frequently appeared in the media, and he has issued a series of statements about freedom of opinion and expression. The first was on October 24, in which he affirmed his solidarity with "the rightful demands of the people that imply a response from the political authority with them and an understanding of the pain of the Lebanese citizen affected by the sectarian system".

He called on the demonstrators to "not be exposed to journalists and photographers who perform their professional and media duty and the need to facilitate their work in order to preserve media freedom, media diversity and the right to expression. This presumes the solidarity of the media institutions among them despite their different opinions in response to the citizen's right to know what is going on and to provide effective immunity for workers in the media field. "

He also called on the media institutions to "adopt the correct and objective information and to correct the performance of the protesters and keep it away from the language of insults and

⁸<https://www.nidaalwatan.com/article/8483-نقابة للصحافيين بديلة عن نقابتي الصحافة والمحررين>

defamation, and to preserve what the revolution has resulted in terms of breaking sectarianism and achieving effective national unity."

On November 21, Mahfouz said during a TV interview, "The media was the first authority in the popular demonstrations." The description of the media situation was summarized between two phenomena: the phenomenon of correct, accurate and objective information, and the phenomenon of rumor and confusion. "Therefore, what is required in the media, and in light of the possibility of the country falling into chaos and collapse, is that the actual function of the media is building and directing a rational, calm, and inclusive speech. The way out is still possible, as is the collapse and chaos."

On December 3, Mahfouz considered that "intense debates among supporters of government bring tensions, especially when the media promotes them" noting that "the role of the media is to correct the performance and calm down the parties, instead of turning into barricades between the people and authority."

4. Resignations from Al-Akhbar and Al-Mayadeen

During the October 17 revolution, a number of male and female journalists in Al-Akhbar newspaper submitted their resignations based on their opposition to the newspaper's approach to the popular revolution and its biased coverage of the revolution and the demonstrators. The journalist Joey Selim was the first to announce his resignation from the newspaper in protest against the editorial line followed in dealing with the revolution, and considered that the newspaper published rumors that contributed to the incitement of demonstrators in the street.

Journalist Mohammed Al-Janoun also announced his decision to stop writing in the newspaper, and he said in a tweet that he "found that it did not give the required rights to the popular October 17 revolution." He added: "I thank the newspaper for the opportunity it gave me 5 years ago, and the free pen is not counterfeit with policies or affiliations."

After that, the journalist Mohamed Zbib announced that he had resigned from the newspaper, as he was head of the economics department. He said in a Facebook post, "The capital supplement issued today has nothing to do with me, and Ghassan Diba and others who were the founders of this initiative did not contribute in it," explaining that the resignation comes "in protest against the newspaper administration's stance towards the revolution." The two journalists, Sabah Ayoub and Vivian Akiki, subsequently joined their three colleagues, who resigned.

Sabah Ayoub announced that she had resigned from "Al-Akhbar" as a result of "an accumulation of reasons, the latest of which was the newspaper's performance in covering the popular October 17 revolution." Her colleague, Vivian Akiki, also announced that she had resigned for the same reason, adding that she "no longer finds herself in this place."⁹

While Zahreddine did not clarify the reasons, neither did klaib, who wrote on his Facebook page, saying: "In line with my thoughts, my convictions and my conscience, I resigned from Al-Mayadeen channel, wishing it constant progress and success."

5. **Deducting the Salaries of employees in Media Institutions**

With the start of the demonstrations on October 17, a group of Lebanese media institutions announced a reduction in the monthly salaries of their employees, justifying this with the decrease of their revenues from advertisements and the deteriorating economic crisis.

- "OTV" employees got half of their paychecks with promises to pay the second half later, without knowing when.
- "MTV" employees whose salaries are less than \$ 1,200 have not been affected, and the deduction has occurred for those who earn more than \$ 1,200 by a rate ranging between 30-50 percent according to each case, without clarifying for how long this situation will last.
- LBCI employees' salaries were cut in half.

⁹سبحة الاستقالات تكرر في "الأخبار" .. 3 أسماء جديدة على اللانحة <https://www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/642228>

- Al-Jadeed employees are subject to deduction of salaries between 5 and 30 percent, depending on the salary of each employee. Employees who have a salary of one million LBP are subject to a five percent discount. Salaries between one million and six hundred thousand and three million are subject to a ten percent discount. From three million to four and a half million, 15 percent is deducted. Department directors have a salary deduction of thirty percent.
- Annahar employees have not received their salaries since last September, but the administration provided the employees with two payments during the months of November and December to cover part of their expenses of 500 thousand LBP per payment.
- Daily Star employees have not received their accumulated wages for six months. The crisis in the newspaper was exacerbated after the administration dismissed journalist Benjamin Reid, for helping his colleagues organize a protest so the newspaper pay the accumulated salaries. Journalist Taymour Al-Azhari announced his resignation in solidarity with his colleague Benjamin Reid, and Antonia Williams also announced her resignation in protest against non-payment of late wages and in solidarity with Benjamin.
- On November 4, the expelled employees from Al-Mustaqbal TV protested in front of the TV building to demand paying their late salaries. The negotiations between the TV administration and the expelled employees resulted in an agreement to pay salaries and compensation in 25 installments on monthly basis.

It should be noted that the payments of employees who were expelled from Al-Mustaqbal newspaper, are still being paid by the newspaper which was shut down on February 1, 2019.

Conclusion

This study aimed to document the process of how the Lebanese media covered the October 17, 2019 revolution, given the great role that these media played in mobilizing

the popular movement and providing it with continuous support, and that this revolution constituted a major shift in social life in Lebanon and in particular in the Political life, as what was before October 17 is not the same as after it, and that this movement will result in a fundamental change in the approach to public affairs in Lebanon, and that it is difficult now to anticipate the changes that will follow this popular movement.

And if the study had not analyzed the content of media speech, the monitoring of the media during this period showed how some TV stations accounted for the public through the live coverage that reached every home, while other stations were against this revolution.

The study also documented the space of freedom of expression that prevailed during this stage, with the attacks on male and female media workers in the street, and the attacks against the activists in the demonstrations by the authority that sought to intimidate the protesters.

Perhaps the most prominent achievement of the revolution is what happened through the media that opened its air to activists and demonstrators to express their opinion against the entire political class, so they broke the taboos and accused decision makers with corruption, saying that because their selfishness, corruption and inefficiency is what led to the economic collapse and the impoverishment of the country and the people.