

Bloggers at Crossroads:
An Exploration of Bloggers' Adaptation to Post-Revolution Tunisia

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ABSTRACT

BLOGGERS AT CROSSROADS: AN EXPLORATION OF BLOGGERS' ADAPTATION TO POST-REVOLUTION TUNISIA

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This thesis examines the extent to which bloggers' have adapted their practices and behaviors after the Revolution in Tunisia. This inductive qualitative research merged two bodies of literature (*digital politics' literature* and *Sociologie des usages' literature*) in order to build an innovative theoretical framework and three exploratory categories of analysis: i) change of bloggers' profile, ii) change of the platform and the use of ICTs, and iii) change of the targeted audience. Indeed, this paper argues that bloggers adapted to the new political and media environment by questioning their individual motivation to express online and their writing style, by maximizing their use of digital new platforms following their potentials for content production and diffusion, and by partially adjusting their practices to their audience's needs and expectations.

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Introduction

The uprisings that shook up the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) between 2010 and 2012 attracted the interest of the academic community because of the important role social media was deemed to play in the insurrection (Douai, Auter, & Domangue, 2013; Howard & Hussain, 2013; Lecomte, 2013a). Scholars highly debate the role of digital technologies, especially regarding their contribution to the public sphere. Yet, there is surprisingly no literature examining the adaptation that online activists such as bloggers have had to face during the period of democratic transition despite their historical presence and active participation in the recent years to political upheavals. Indeed, the blogosphere was once central to activism by constantly challenging the regime censorship, especially since 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis (Chouikha, 2015; Lecomte, 2011). Now, their place within the public sphere remains unclear considering the emergence of new ways for expression. Consequently, this research (MA by thesis) aims to fill this gap by using the case study of Tunisia to examine *to what extent have cyber-activists, especially bloggers, adapted their practices and behaviors during the ongoing democratic transition context in Tunisia?* This paper argues that cyberactivists adapted to the new political and media environment 1) by questioning their individual motivation to express online and their writing style, 2) by moving towards new platforms following their potentials for content production and diffusion, and 3) by trying to reach their audience's needs and expectations. These three main findings follow the three categories of analysis covered by this paper and are drawn from an original exploratory theoretical framework.

Within the literature on digital politics, which focuses on the role played by digital technologies on political environments, there are three main perspectives explaining the

relationship between social media and political systems. Yet, none of them specifically portrayed the evolution of bloggers practices following political upheavals. A first group, the cyber-optimists, believes that the unprecedented characteristics of the internet – such as the interactivity between users – revolutionize the political system as the key to a complete paradigm shift where citizens can finally become first-plan actors, politically mobilized and equals (Morris, 1999; Ringmar, 2007; Shapiro, 1999). Applied to non-democratic environments, it means that it becomes possible to avoid censorship of the control of the state via the Internet and social media, which literally becomes a ‘liberation technology’ offering new opportunities for collective action (Al-Saqaf, 2012; Diamond, 2010; Fenton, 2012; Howard & Hussain, 2013; Ringmar, 2007; Shapiro, 1999; Siapera, 2012; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). A second group follows the cyber-sceptic’s perspective, supporting the idea that digital technologies do not have a positive or a negative impact on politics but rather normalize and reinforce existing norms and behaviors of the offline world in the cyberspace (Margolis & Resnick, 2000). Within media systems, this approach considers that traditional media and social media are incredibly linked, as they feed off each other, which contributes to a normalization of the media sphere (Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides, & Freelon, 2012; Chadwick, 2013; Douai et al., 2013; Hermida, 2012; Howard & Hussain, 2013; Lecomte, 2013a; Lynch, 2008; Maier, 2010; Moussa & Douai, 2014; Singer, 2005; Vaccari, 2013). The last group, defending a cyber-pessimist perspective, think that digital technologies, rather than fostering democratic practices, atomize individuals create echo-chambers where like-minded people might reinforce extreme ideologies (Barber, 2001; Putnam, 1995; Sunstein, 2004).

However, digital politics literature does not focus on the interaction between the individual and the communication technology, but only on the outcome. On this matter, the literature of the *sociologie des usages* brings an interesting perspective on social use and practices of communication technologies' users. In fact, the study of processes of appropriation of a technology and the strategies adopted with to social media platforms, such as transplatform practices (which implies a simultaneous use of several online platforms to maximize their potentials) provide interesting insights of how changes in practices emerge with the political changes such as democratic transitions (Breton & Proulx, 2002; Cardon, 2008, 2012; Couldry, 2012; Crespel, 2011; Jouët, 2000; Millette, 2013; Neihouser, 2016; Pronovost, 1994).

Moreover, while digital politics literature and the *sociologie des usages* both describe different attitudes towards the use of digital technologies, there is very little research specifically on bloggers and their adaptation to new political environments. This gap remains surprisingly under-studied and needs to be filled, considering the well-known importance of bloggers and online activists during the revolution (Diamond & Plattner, 2012; Douai et al., 2013; Howard & Hussain, 2013). The lack of information on that specific scope justified fieldwork interviews with Tunisian bloggers and experts to gather original data about a vital issue for studies on digital politics and democratic transitions. Indeed, the evolution of bloggers' practices provides interesting information about the integration of essential characters of activism into the emerging public sphere resulting from a democratic transition. Prior to this research, Lynch (2015) and Zayani (2015) are among the few to have studied the specific output of social media – and bloggers – in democratic transitions contexts and how these actors have adapted to their environment. On

the one hand, Lynch's study only examines broadly the negative role played by media for democratic transitions without providing any convincing insight about bloggers. On the other hand, while Zayani's concluding chapter provides insightful new avenues for research on bloggers adaptations to the new Tunisian media system, there was a need for a more in-depth investigation focusing specifically on the issue of bloggers' adaptation to the context of democratic transition.

In fact, the concept of democratic transition, which is central to understand the context of our research case of study, is defined by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996) in their study on democratization in Europe and South America:

A democratic transition is complete when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when the government *de facto* has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*. (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 3)

As the country successfully fulfills these criteria – despite some light economic and security turmoil – the Tunisian political and media environment appeared to be an excellent case for this research focusing on adaptation in a context of a democratic transition. In fact, this research does not aim on to assess the impact of bloggers' practices on democratic transition, but rather to observe how bloggers have adapted to a context of a democratic transition in which the liberalization of the media system and the end of a generalized censorship opens new opportunities for expression. Ergo, the theoretical and empirical importance to address this gap in the literature, especially with a research case as convenient as the Tunisian one, justified this research fieldwork interviews since there was shockingly no empirical data supporting or challenging the literature on this matter.

Synthesis of the Argument and Chapters' Breakdown

This whole debate leads to an overarching argument: depending on the opportunities available to them within the political and media environments, bloggers might change their practices and their behaviors regarding what they consider to be their *raison d'être*. Indeed, once they reach their goal justifying their online activities, they have to strive for their survival, which can only be possible by trying to adapt to the new environment. This leads individuals to challenge the motivations behind their use of a specific ICT, in our case, mainly blogging and social media platforms. This varies from a person to another according to the degree to which they have appropriated the use of a technology and their familiarity with transplatform practices. These changes could be perceived through three exploratory categories of adaptation: i) change of bloggers' profile, ii) change of the platform and the use of ICTs, and iii) change of the targeted audience¹. Hence, the Tunisian democratic transition offers an exceptional case of study to understand the extent to which activists have adapted to changing environments.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section lays the foundations of this research by exploring the relevant literature. Indeed, it presents the essential elements of digital politics' literature opposing three perspectives, cyber-optimistic, cyber-pessimistic, and cyber-sceptic. Through this overview, it becomes obvious that, while being insightful, this literature fails to fill our research gap because it only connects digital technologies to their political context without considering the individuals behind the

¹ These categories of analysis come from several scholars from the *sociologie des usages*' literature, especially following Proulx's and Breton's study of the uses of ICTs and its level of analysis (2002; 2015), Jöuet's concept of appropriation and identity building through the use of ICTs (2000), and Millette's concept of transplatform practices (2013).

machines. Consequently, the literature on the uses of information and communication technologies (*Sociologie des usages*) completes our first body of literature by providing a more “user-centered” scope to the use of digital technologies. This literature review leads us to an original theoretical framework and exploratory categories of analysis that have been tested with the data gathered. This part is then followed by the research methods, describing the case selection process, the data collection technique, and the data analysis that followed. This provided the necessary elements to understand the process of data collection and to be aware of the main limitations of this research.

The second section of this paper presents our main results through three distinct chapters. These chapters follow the three exploratory categories of analysis presented earlier, provide an in-depth analysis of the data gathered through the interviews realized in Tunis between August and September 2017, and underline interesting findings regarding our argument. **Chapter I** sets the tone by putting under the microscope our participants’ profiles and how they evolve. Three main findings have been particularly salient. First, we observed a moderation of the content produced while bloggers’ style has not fundamentally changed, which occurred as an adaptation to post-Revolution dynamics and opportunities of the media and political systems. Second, an analysis of the participants’ degree of belonging to the concept of “blogging” reveals that Tunisia’s new dynamics make them more aware of their differences, which initiates a personal reflexion about their place in the cybersphere. In fact, this degree of belonging predisposed their adaptation process as it was closely linked to their attitude towards digital technologies. For instance, those who were critical of the blogosphere tend to transfer their online activities off the cybersphere Third, while they started to blog for similar reasons, their motivation to blog substantially

diverged after the Revolution. Specifically, we discovered that personal motivations pushed bloggers to adapt and to diversify their online practices to stay online while structural motivations provided opportunities to move their communication practices on other media platforms. This last element structures their reflexion about how and why to adapt to the new media context, which leads us to the object of the second chapter.

Indeed, **Chapter II** focusses on the communication technology they chose for expression. By focussing on their choice of platform and their precise use of it, we have been able to establish four different paths of adaptations: 1) *Continuing to blog*, 2) *Moving to an alternative media platform*, 3) *Moving to a traditional media platform*, 4) *Stopping to blog*. A close analysis of these patterns reveals that the extent to which the appropriation of their use of communication technologies occurred affects the pattern chosen by the participants. Specifically, participants who diversified and maximized their use of digital technologies tend to remain in the online world while participants who never fully embraced digital technologies' assets for expressing online ends to gradually abandon digital technologies in their daily practices. Consequently, the participants who chose the first path fully appropriate their use of ICTs through transplatform practices and respect Proulx and Breton's criteria for appropriation while those who chose the second path only show a partial appropriation of digital technologies. The two other paths, on the other end, reveal disillusion of the transformative power of digital technologies, which pushed the participants to leave the cybersphere to join traditional platforms or to get involved in offline organizations. Therefore, the platform choice and the adaptation of bloggers' practices is highly connected to their willingness to appropriate and maximize their use of ICTs in their daily practices.

After tackling our first two categories of analysis (the changes in blogger's profiles and the platform they use), **Chapter III** follows our third category of analysis by offering interesting insights about the adaptation of the participants' practices in regards to their audience. Our analysis leads us to discover that bloggers have not seemed to adapt their practices according to the audience targeted but rather to tailor the content they produce and to choose a platform to use according to the platform's *potential* for information diffusion. In fact, they only try to maximize their content's outreach without aiming to know better their audience, as it does not appear to be a necessary condition to express online. This is mainly caused by the complexity to interact with the Tunisian audience, who is socially and geographically segmented and are fond of instantaneous and easy-consumable information, which clashes with bloggers' often in-depth content. Consequently, it is difficult to establish a clear inference regarding the extent to which they have adapted their practices according to audience's retroaction.

At last, the concluding chapter underlines that, overall, the theoretical fieldwork is confirmed by the data regarding the two first categories of analysis. The third category of analysis – about their adaptation to their audience – only partially responds to our research question by providing interesting elements, yet, not conclusive. Therefore, more research on the audience's consumption of the information spread by bloggers and former bloggers deserved to be done in order to clarify the extent to which bloggers have adapted to the post-Revolution Tunisia.

Section 1: Literature Review and Research Design

1. Literature Review

To understand the relevance of investigating changing practices and behaviors of bloggers after political upheavals, one must understand how digital technologies are thought and used. No consensus has been established within the literature on digital politics. Yet, a debate among scholars seems to oppose two main theoretical perspectives concerning the use of digital technologies; (1) digital technologies as ‘liberation technologies’; (2) digital technologies as a normalizing force. These two conceptualizations of digital technologies are intrinsically linked to different political attitudes and behaviors of the actors using these technologies. This particular aspect is closely related to another, yet different, body of literature, the *sociologie des usages*, which focuses on individuals as central actors in their relationship with communication tools. While digital politics’ literature focuses on the relationship between digital technologies and the political environment, the *sociologie des usages*’ literature rather focuses on the individual behind the screen and its interaction with technologies through processes of appropriation and identity building. Nevertheless, while providing interesting elements to grasp the phenomenon under investigation, bloggers’ adaptation to democratic transitions has never been investigated despite their crucial importance in Tunisia at the time of the revolution. Thus, combining elements from these two bodies of literature with a fieldwork investigation was essential to fill the literature gap on that matter.

1.1 Digital Technologies as ‘Liberation Technologies’

With the increasing use of the digital technologies and the Web 2.0 – which is “a conceptualization of the Internet as a platform in which users are the primary engineers

of information” (Ricke, 2014, p. 1370) – many scholars have promoted an enthusiastic vision of the potential use of digital technologies by the population. Indeed, these cyber-optimists believe that these technologies can play an active role in empowering citizens within the public sphere. However, even if cyber-optimists believe that political change is possible through digital technologies, none of them explained what happens to online activists when a democratic transition occurs and how they adapt to this new environment.

As soon as during the late 1990s, Shapiro (1999) and Morris (1999) recognized the incredible potential of the internet of changing power relations. As underlined by Shapiro, fundamentally, “the Internet gives individuals the ability to bypass many intermediaries [...] and thus to make a decision that traditionally was made for them. [...] New technology gives people the ability to personalize the information they receive and the social environments they inhabit” (p. xv). Ringmar (2007) confirms some of the basic points underlined by Shapiro. For instance, rather than just conceptualizing information and communication technologies (ICTs) as tools to bypass media monopolies and controlled state media, he stresses that the global interaction of citizens within the online media system has a surprising effect on democracy of creating an environment for informed and active discussions (Ringmar, 2007, p. 108). For instance, according to Ringmar, “Blogs can expose not only bums, but also liars and hypocrites, and in the process, they help improve our democracy. [...] Blogs inspire and help coordinate political action” (2007, p. 95). By changing power structures, digital technologies provide new opportunities to citizens to interact with political actors.

This idea of creating new opportunities is, in fact, central for this perspective, which calls for an active role of the internet and its technologies for political change. This is demonstrated by Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010), using the literature on contentious politics and building on Charles Tilly's work. By using a typology of digital technologies action repertoire distinguishing internet supported and internet-based forms of contention², they argue that these technologies, by their core characteristics (instantaneity, low cost, interactivity, etc.) lowers the threshold of commitment required to engage in political and social actions (2010, pp. 1151-1152). For instance, high threshold activities, such as organizing/participating in protests or spreading alternative information, become easier and more accessible through digital technologies.

On that particular matter, Siapera (2012) and Fenton (2012) underline that, without any doubt, digital technologies have transformed the way information circulates. In fact, different forms of journalism, such as participatory journalism, j-blogs, and social media journalism, emerge from the advent of the internet (Siapera, 2012, p. 155). This allows new voices to come to light and forced journalism to revisit its practices to adapt to changing environments (Fenton, 2012, p. 122). However, it would be foolish to believe that digital technologies, magically, create democracy. It is rather a necessary condition, not a sufficient condition: "neither journalism nor the Internet *creates* democracy and democracy does not invent journalism or indeed the Internet." (Fenton, 2012, p. 120). In fact, social media and digital technologies constitute more of a tool *fostering* political and social change or, as many would call, liberation technologies.

² This typology follows Tilly's concept of repertoire of collective action, which is defined as the "set of means that are effectively available to a given set of people' and which they use to act collectively in order to make claims on individuals and groups" (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010, p. 1147).

Using different examples from all over the globe, Diamond (2010) stresses the vital role played by digital technologies in providing the necessary vehicle for their political demands, especially in oppressive political environments. For Diamond, “liberation technology enables citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom” (p. 70). By underlining the importance of blogs and alternative media platforms in China and Malaysia, Diamond does not imply that they are directly throwing out authoritarian regimes but that they rather provide tools for a more dynamic contention (pp. 75-76). Following the same idea, Howard and Hussain (2013) underline how digital technologies enabled Tunisian and Egyptian not only to organize protests but to share grievances and to build solidarity links, which strengthen strategies and collective action (p. 23). In fact, these technologies appear to be vital under authoritarian regimes, as they constitute “the only public spac[e] where autonomous — or even anonymous — discussion can take place” (p. 35).

On a more practical level, several initiatives have been launched in the Arab world to bypass censorship and provide access to reliable information. Walid Al-Saqaf, for instance, created in 2009 *Alkasir Solution for Internet Censorship Mapping and Circumvention*, a software enabling citizens to have access to regime-censored internet content. This kind of initiative appears to be vital for online activists. In fact, “as with social-networking websites, regimes filter blogs because of their inherent ability to allow users to generate and publish unrestricted content” (Al-Saqaf, 2012, p. 132). By facilitating internet navigation in censored environments, digital technologies provided tools to key

actors for pushing further contention and, thus, create a global political awakening leading to the massive political upheavals across the MENA region.

Hence, according to this perspective, digital technologies fosters change by providing a space and the necessary tools for contention in restricted political and media systems. Indeed, the availability of these technologies allows online activists such as bloggers and ordinary citizens, at the same time, to increase mobilization and to improve their political environment. This was particularly salient during the Gafsa revolts of 2008 for relaying online information unavailable in regime-controlled media or the *Nhar 3la 3ammar* operation, a series of protests bursting in May 2010 (Barhoumi, 2011; Chomiak, 2011; Chouikha, 2015; Lecomte, 2013b, p. 286). Yet, while this perspective provides an interesting way to explain how digital technologies can make change happens, it surprisingly does not explain online activists' adaptation to their new environment once a democratic transition occurs. Besides, all the academic community does not share the cyber-optimist perspective. In fact, many scholars defend a much more skeptical perspective of the use of digital technologies.

1.2 Digital Technologies as a Normalizing Force

For these scholars, digital technologies neither contribute to maintain political *status quo* nor to foster political change. In fact, they are normalized within the existing media system, which reinforces political actors' existing behaviors. Rooted in a cyber-sceptic perspective, this stream admits that social media can both produce positive or negative outcomes in the public sphere because 'new' media follow what Margolis and Resnick call the process of "normalization of the cybersphere" (2000, p. 2). Indeed, online media tend to

reproduce traditional media practices and *vice-versa*, which normalize content producers practices and create a *hybrid* media system where both old and new media are intertwined (Chadwick, 2013; Munn, 2012). These close ties between mainstream ‘traditional’ media and new forms of online journalism are well-explained by Lecomte (2013a) in its study of the information production cycle during the Arab Spring. For the author, this process is not a ‘one-sided’ construction but a collaborative process in which several actors produce and transform information through multiple steps, as summarized in the following diagram (figure 1):

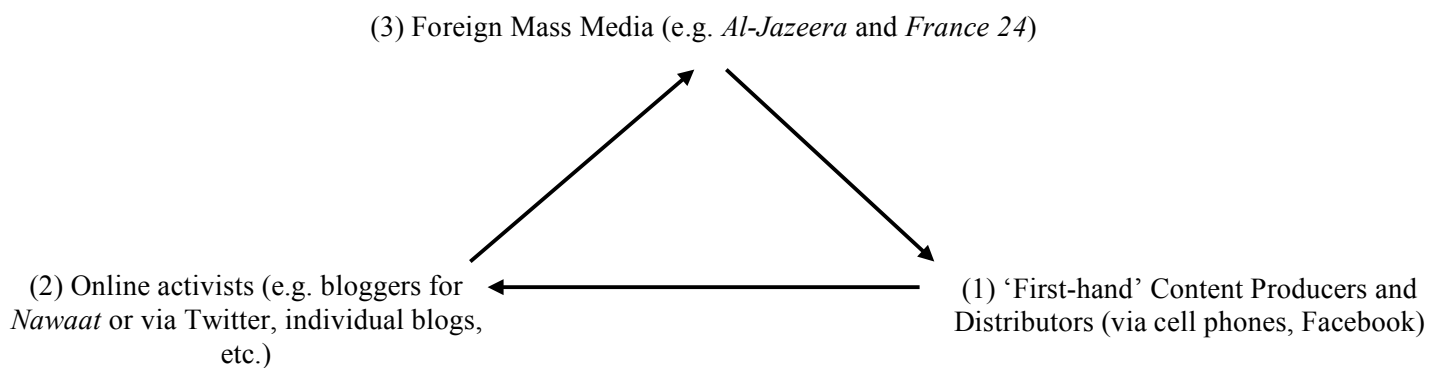


Figure 1 Information production cycle during the Arab Spring according to Sami Ben Gharbia (adapted from Lecomte, 2013, p. 164)

Even if the diagram has been created to explain this relationship during Arab protests, it remains very relevant to understand media systems’ dynamics. In sum, the first group of actors, individuals directly witnessing events, collects ‘in the field’ the information and relays these contents online. Among all the information available, online activists select the relevant content and spread it on their platforms. Finally, mass media, especially regional and international media, benefit from that content already available – that also does not imply any fieldwork investigation – and relay it on their media platforms. (Lecomte, 2013a, pp. 164-172).

This vision of an intertwined media system is widely confirmed by many scholars. As noted by a group of researchers from the United States Institute of Peace (Aday et al., 2012), “it is increasingly difficult to separate new media from old media. In the Arab Spring, the two reinforced each other. While Al-Jazeera and other satellite television channels leaned heavily on Twitter and other online sources, new media often referred back to those same television networks. (Aday et al., 2012, p. 21). In a more critical article, Maier (2010) describes the close links between traditional media and blogs and social media in terms of content sharing but underline the vital role of online forms of journalism in providing a more independent source of information and its potential to enhance a more vivid place for debating (pp. 550, 558). Thus, social media, even if they are normalizing within the media system, can still contribute to an evolution of practices and the diversification of the media system (Douai et al., 2013; Hermida, 2012).

Yet, while these scholars underlined the interactivity between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, others rather believe that social media does not provide any significant contribution to the media system. Indeed, Vaccari (2013) concludes after investigating seven Western democracies that the internet is not more special than other media platform such as television or newspapers:

as the internet becomes integrated with the everyday lives of large parts of the population, [the internet] should become less of a niche channel for the politically interested and more similar, in terms of the level of engagement of its audience, to other media. The integration of digital media with other channels of communication (both mediated and interpersonal) is blending these different systems of message production and distribution. (Vaccari, 2013, p. 157)

In fact, even in the Arab world, this trend seems to be reproduced. Moussa’s and Douai’s findings, drawn from an extensive study of Arab online and print newspapers, also

underlined that the internet, apart from minor differences, does not significantly affect mainstream journalistic practices and media dynamics (2014, pp. 140, 149). As noted by Lynch (2014), while social media briefly disturbed political and media systems in the region, “they have had ambiguous effects on the long-term balance between state and society or between competing social forces” (2014, p. 93). Overall, social media and digital technologies are far from being magical means for change and are rather normalized within the system.

Following this trend, cyber-pessimists push further the idea of the normalization by underlining the downside of digital technologies. Benjamin R. Barber (2001) describes this reality by arguing that too high expectations have been set on the ICTs’ potential to improve public life, as “technology cannot save us from ourselves; it can only reflect all too candidly who we are” (p. 43). Moreover, Barber not only underlines the normalizing effect of digital technologies but also insists that their very characteristics (e.g. unprecedented speed of the information flow and the absence of intermediaries) constantly undermine democratic vitality by isolating citizens and creating echo-chambers that only gather like-minded individuals (Barber, 2001, pp. 44-46; Putnam, 1995). As reinforced by Sunstein, this can affect democratic environments by stimulating extreme ideologies to flourish due to the self-confirmation of ideas among groups who are not exposed to opposite ideas (2004, pp. 58-59). In fact, cyber-pessimists question the relevance of digital technologies as appropriate means for political deliberation. Margolis and Resnick, even if they are more nuanced than Barber or Sunstein, also note this reality that reinforces existing behaviors: “the Web is a wonderful vehicle for citizens who are already interested in politics. If they choose, ordinary citizens can acquire a plethora of data and gain access to the public face of

the democratic political process” (2000, p. 22). In sum, digital technologies are not “democratic generators”: they only are the result of what people do with them.

According to this literature, digital technologies – and the actors using them – can positively contribute their political environment but tend to be normalized into pre-existing practices and institutions. While none of this specifically focus on online activists’ adaptation in a context of democratic transition, it would be reasonable to guess that the normalization described by cyber-sceptics could mean that the tech-savvy actors may change their practices over time according to the extent to which they decide to be normalized within the system. Hence, the normalization of the cyberspace can affect the way its users behave and adapt to their environment following upheavals.

1.3 *Sociologie des usages*’ Literature

Although several elements drawn from the perspectives described above lead to interesting answers to this research central question, none of them significantly tackles how online activists may change their online practices in contexts of political change. In order to fill this gap, the present section will underline the contribution of the *sociologie des usages* – a multidisciplinary field of research focused on the use of information and communication technologies (Proulx, 2015) – to this research’s literature review. Indeed, the main concepts and elements carried by this school of thought offer an interesting way to define and categorize the relationship between the user and a specific technology and, more importantly, to understand changes in practices within the Tunisian cyberspace.

Studies on the use of information and communication technologies emerged in France during the 1980's in reaction to the increasing presence and diversification of ICTs (Proulx, 2015, p. 1). Although this field of research shares the same object than the Uses and Gratifications theory (UGT), the scope used by the former approach is in direct opposition with the latter. In fact, while UGT scholars study the effect of media on the audience, seen as consumers, the research about the uses of ICTs rather focus on the individual's ability to impact communication technologies (Jouët, 2000, p. 493). This scope offers a unique analysis where ICTs are no longer considered as technologies shaping individuals seen as consumers but mainly as tools consciously chosen, appropriated and used by a person (Badillo & Pélissier, 2015, p. 2; Neihouser, 2016, p. 39).

An essential element of this approach to communication technologies is the concept of use and, more specifically, the concept of social use. Although this concept is highly debated among scholars and can be defined as a continuum ranging from adopting a technology to the process of appropriation (Breton & Proulx, 2002, p. 255), Florence Millerand's definition of the concept of use appears to be the more operational definition by gathering all vital elements of the approach:

[...] l'usage renvoie à l'utilisation d'un média ou d'une technologie, repérable et analysable à travers des pratiques et des représentations spécifiques ; l'usage devient « social » dès qu'il est possible d'en saisir - parce qu'il est stabilisé - les conditions sociales d'émergence et, en retour d'établir les modalités selon lesquelles il participe de la définition des identités sociales des sujets (1998, p. 4).

This definition assesses two essential characteristics that must be underlined. First, it points out the necessity to consider the concept towards the individual's use of the technology by stressing that the individual uses a medium for specific reasons rather than

for trivial purposes. Second, the idea of use is analyzed through a social scope by considering the context surrounding the individual and, consequently, understanding the process of identity building emerging from the interaction between the user and the technology, as also noted by Perriault (2009).

Serge Proulx and Philippe Breton (2002) also defends a similar stance concerning the concept of use. According to them, it also carries a complex interconnection between specific individuals and communication tools. They insist on two elements characterizing the use of ICTs: the importance of external factors and the specific characteristics of the user (Breton & Proulx, 2002, pp. 254-255). In fact, they underline that external pressures, such as the availability and the social approval of a communication technology within communities, and the individual's skills and motives, both determine the use of a given ICTs in its context. Thus, it becomes essential to consider simultaneously the context surrounding ICTs' use and the individuals using them in order to have the relationship between these two structural elements.

In fact, the specific relationship between the user and communication tools is salient when it comes to understanding the appropriation process behind the use of a specific ICT. As described by Breton and Proulx (2002), the appropriation of an ICT is fully completed when three underlying conditions are fulfilled: 1) the individual needs to possess the minimum required skills (on technical and cognitive levels) relative to the use of the communication tool; 2) the use of the ICT has to be an integral part of the regular activities and practices of the user in an original and creative way; and 3) innovation opportunities must be possible throughout the appropriation process (p. 256). Following the same idea,

Josiane Jöuet (2000) stresses the importance of the knowledge acquisition process (through interactions between the communication tool and the user), which is essential for the appropriation of ICTs:

Quel que soit le type d'usage, l'appropriation se construit dans la relation avec l'objet de communication et l'usage comporte donc *de facto* une dimension cognitive et empirique. Sa construction met en jeu des processus d'acquisition de savoirs (découverte de la logique et des fonctionnalités de l'objet), de savoir-faire (apprentissage des codes et du mode opératoire de la machine), et d'habiletés pratiques. La médiation de l'objet technique instaure une situation interactionnelle spécifique qui exige un travail social d'ajustement pratique de la part des interactants [...] (pp. 502-503)

In this excerpt, rather than considering the concept of appropriation as a linear process, Jöuet underlines that studies about the use of ICTs emphasize the individuals' involvement in their own appropriation of the technical tool by underlining the possibility for them to grow through the acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, through their understanding of the characteristics of a given technological tool, users enter a process of constant re-evaluation of the possibilities offered by an ICT, which change their use of communication technologies.

The architecture of the platforms and the possibilities for users' identity building processes through a simultaneous use of several platforms is incredibly important when it comes to understand the evolution of the use of ICTs. (Burchell, 2017; Cardon, 2008, 2012; Couldry, 2012; Crespel, 2011). A brilliant example of this transformation is, in fact, demonstrated by Mélanie Millette's work on transplatform practices in Canada (2013). Using the example of a podcast called *Lada and Georges*, she underlines that the emergence of new Internet-based communication tools, such as social media platforms, add another level of complexity to the use of ICTs, especially when users are simultaneously

active on several social media platforms. In fact, Millette defines this idea through the concept of transplatform practices (“pratiques transplateformes” in French), which refers to a use of the internet where content is spread to several platforms by taking advantage of the interactive functions (e.g. sharing, commenting, etc.) inherent to these platforms (2013, p. 50). This definition assumes that users tend to develop two key strategies in order to maximize their use of these platforms and to expand the potential audience, which is 1) *relaying* the same content on the different platforms and 2) *declining* similar pieces of information on the platforms without repetition, acting more as complement to one another (pp. 50-51). These strategies attest for users’ attempt to adapt and even tailor their use of ICT as their appropriation of the technology increases, according to their own motivations but also to maximize their visibility online. Thus, Millette’s research exemplifies how users adapt their use of ICTs according to changes in their priorities, but also according to external factors such as audience considerations.

1.4 Justification of The Literature and Conclusion

It was essential to combine two complementary bodies of literature considering that there is surprisingly very little evidence when it comes to the evolution of bloggers’ practices, especially considering their historical importance in Tunisia and beyond (Howard & Hussain, 2013, pp. 35-37). Lynch (2015) is one of the few to discuss, broadly, the place of social media and the changes post-Arab spring. In fact, he underlines that rather than strengthen democratic efforts, “the acceleration and intensification of political communication nurtures a sense of constant crisis, while the flow of rumors through partisan and sectarian networks exacerbates social distance” (Lynch, 2015, p. 97). Lynch’s concern is also shared by Zayani (2015), who describes in his concluding chapter the

reconfiguration of the media system in Tunisia after the Revolution and bloggers' complicated adaptation to this new environment (pp. 196-197). Indeed, he underlines that despite citizens' expectations, bloggers, as a group, have been idealized and did follow different paths in order to fulfill their own ambitions after the revolution (p. 196). Yet, the debate presented above, while addressing important questions unsolved by the academia, remains incapable of explaining the extent to which bloggers have adapted during the democratic transition. Indeed, the literature strongly focuses on the role held by activists using digital technologies to foster change but leave unsolved the issue of the adaptation of online activists during the democratic transition following a major political upheaval. This concern justifies the need for more research in order to fill this theoretical and empirical gap since only a few pieces of research have touched that particular matter.

In sum, digital politics' and *sociologie des usages*' literature capture precise, but different, scopes for understanding our research question. On the one hand, the three perspectives associated to digital politics studies – cyber-optimistic, cyber-pessimistic, and cyber-sceptic – provide conceptual frameworks to comprehend Arab uprisings and the attitudes held by its main protagonists. In fact, the opposition between a cyber-optimistic analysis of the assets of digital technologies, and a cyber-sceptic scope putting forward the normalization hypothesis appears to be essential to our understanding of bloggers' attitudes towards digital technologies. On the other hand, the concepts of use, appropriation and transplatform practices, as presented by the *sociologie des usages* academia, broaden our exploration of bloggers' individual choices and motivation, which guides us to a deeper understanding of processes of adaptation. Together, these two bodies of literature give us the main tools to understand Tunisian bloggers' adaptation to the post-Revolution context,

linking together the political context to the individuals, using digital technologies as the essential intermediary component (**figure 2**). Thus, it justifies the need for a theoretical framework allaying digital politics perspectives and the *sociologie des usages* to completely grasps every aspect surrounding the research problem.

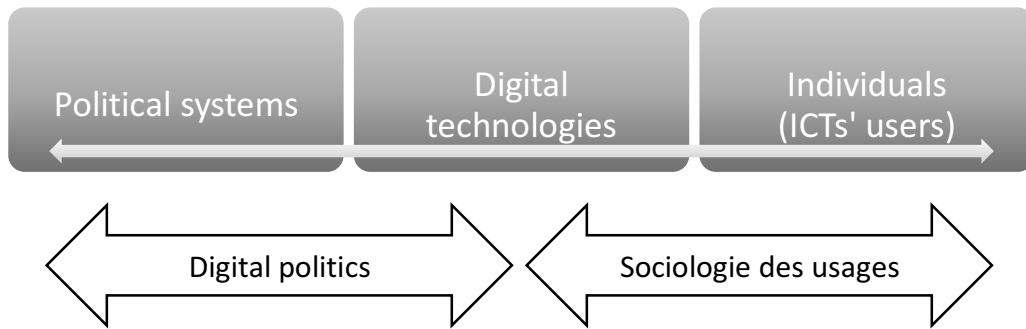


Figure 2 **Synthesis of the Literature Review**

2. Theoretical Framework

Considering the available literature on this research topic, it appeared essential to build an original theoretical framework to guide the data processing. Therefore, the framework explained in this section was elaborated by combining elements from our two bodies of literature, essentially based on the three digital technologies perspectives and Proulx's, Breton's, Jöuet's, and Millette's work (*sociologie des usages*). These pieces of research were the foundations of this theoretical framework and contributed to the three exploratory categories of analysis, from which a three-part argument has been inferred. Hence, as an exploratory process, the data was confronted to this framework, which contributed to test this framework's validity.

In order to establish an exploratory theoretical framework for this paper, the two bodies of literature were first combined to only keep the most salient elements from both and then to elaborate categories of analysis to be tested with the data gathered. Indeed, merging digital politics' and *sociologie des usages*' literature allowed us to reach a high level of accurateness in our understanding of individuals' use of digital technologies while having a more holistic comprehension of the implications of individuals' attitudes towards digital technologies on political systems.

Within the literature used, three main components became salient when it comes to understand individuals' evolution of communication practices. Indeed, Proulx (2015) proposes several elements to consider when it comes to appropriation of communication technologies, which are, essentially, the analysis of the ICT's use, the analysis of the users' daily practices and the analysis of the context of the use (2015, p. 4). Proulx and Breton

complete this list by adding that its appropriation processes require at least tech-savvy individuals and the technologies used need to provide innovation opportunities (2002, p. 256). These concepts inherent to appropriation processes have the potential to assess in far depth the evolution of bloggers' practices. In fact, it underlines how vital it is to understand both the use itself – what ICT is used, how this technology impacts the user's life, etc. – and the context surrounding this use, which concerns the profile of the individual (e.g. background, style of expression, etc.) as well as the context of production and the audience targeted.

In addition, Jöuet (2000) focuses on the identity building inherent to the use of ICTs through knowledge acquisition processes, which appears to be an essential dimension to understand how bloggers decided to adapt after the Revolution. In fact, she stresses that the ICT's use highly conditions the user and the composition of his identity (2000, pp. 502-504). Moreover, the three perspectives of digital politics also inform us of different positionalities towards digital technologies, ranging from an optimistic vision of ICTs' potential to a profound disillusion towards digital technologies (Barber, 2001; Diamond & Plattner, 2012; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Sunstein, 2004). The attitudes linked to these perspectives are, in fact, decisive elements impacting individuals' choice of communication technologies. These are inherent to their background and experiences and consequently, we can logically assume that they will affect their practices when the political or media context forces them to adapt.

At crossroads, Millette's work on transplatform practices (2013) contributes to our understanding of bloggers' adaptation faced to the multiplication of online platforms.

Indeed, the concept of transplatform practices has the potential to assess the choice of platform according to the potential maximization of the simultaneous use of various platforms, using strategies of relaying and declining contents. Focussing on this type of practices informs us both on the evolution of the users' online practices and their objectives behind this use, for instance, reaching new audiences or accomplishing a personal goal.

These salient elements of the literature were highly appropriate to answer our research question. Indeed, this exploratory theoretical framework has the potential to rightfully process the data and reveal interesting findings on our research question. Moreover, drawn from the theoretical framework, our three categories of analysis – i) change of bloggers' profile, ii) change of the platform and the use of ICTs, and iii) change of the targeted audience – attempted to test empirically the validity of the theoretical framework on the field. In fact, by using three different, yet non-exclusive, categories of analysis covering bloggers' profiles, the communication tools they use and the audience their content is intended to, this paper provides a complete overview of bloggers expected areas of adaptation and fill an important gap by combining close, yet different, bodies of literature.

3. Methodology

Understanding bloggers' adaptation to the new Tunisian political and media system requires an in-depth research detailing the changes in their behaviors and online practices. Only this can provide significant insights about their individual motivations and the place they consider having within the public sphere. This research roots in the academic literature on digital politics and *sociologie des usages* but has the ambition to provide new original qualitative data on bloggers' re-orientation following the Revolution. Such data has been gathered through individual, face-to-face and semi-structured elite interviews with bloggers, online activists and experts. The sample was controlled to respect the diversity of profiles among the Tunisian cyberspace. Moreover, the interviews were transcribed and coded using *NVivo* to assess the main trends among the three categories of analysis established prior to the field trip. Despite some limitations regarding the sample selection due to the availability of potential participants, this method allowed this research to respect scientific standards and attests to the validity and the reliability of the findings.

3.1 Case Selection and Justification

This research on the adaptation of online activists to democratic transition focuses on the Tunisian political and media environment, prior and following the Revolution of 2011. The timeline chosen is comprised between 2005 and 2017. This case study has been chosen for several reasons, both theoretical and empirical. Tunisia fulfills theoretical requirements when it comes to defining democratic transition and witnessed important changes within the media and political systems in the recent years. According to the definition presented by Linz and Stepan (1996), Tunisia represents an excellent case of democratic transition. Even with a fragile economy and security problems, Tunisia has

shifted towards its democratic transition, producing relatively effective governments and reaching political compromises (e.g. the 2014 Constitution contrasting secular and religious forces) (FreedomHouse, 2017; Jamal & Kensicki, 2016, pp. 212-213; Storm, 2014, pp. 122-124). However, Tunisia is far from what Linz and Stepan described as a “consolidated democracy”, where democracy is considered the only possible way of doing politics (1996, p. 6). Nevertheless, it still qualifies as a sufficient case of democratic transition.

Indeed, democratic mechanisms have been used since the Revolution – several elections were conducted, the government created, amend and repeal laws, a new Constitution has been adopted in 2014, etc. – but lots of areas normally regulated by political forces remain in gray zones. For instance, the limitations over media publications, as regulated by the former Ministry of Communication under Ben Ali’s regime, were repealed after January 14th 2011 but the several initiatives that followed to provide new guidelines to media organizations failed to accomplish this goal. Organizations such as the *Instance nationale pour la réforme de l’information et de la communication* (INRIC) or the *Haute Autorité indépendante de la communication audiovisuelle* (HAICA) remained incapable to guide media organizations towards a complete transformation the practices inherited from the authoritarian era due to a lack of a solid legal basis to this end (Chouikha, 2015, pp. 71-75). Nevertheless, the end of regime-based censorship opened new opportunities for free speech, especially online. For instance, the Tunisian Facebook population significantly increased after 2011, from 2 million users on the eve of the Revolution to about 4 million in 2013, which attests for an interest for public expression within the population, especially for youth (Mtibaa, 2014, p. 70; Touati, 2012, p. 4; Wheeler, 2017, p. 29). In addition, alternative media platforms emerged from the shadows

of censorship, allowing some platforms to expand (e.g. *Nawaat*) or even new ones to appear (e.g. *Inkyfada* in 2014). Thus, new means of expression have still emerged despite some barriers inherent to the process of democratic transition

The time sequence studied also strengthens the justification for this research case of study. The Tunisian political and media environment is compared and analyzed through two key time periods, the pre-revolution period during which online activists were particularly active (especially comprised between 2005 and 2010) and the democratic transition that followed (2011 to the present day). The choice of these dates is essential to understand the dynamics of online activism in Tunisia. In fact, the year 2005 constitutes a milestone for online activism with the emergence of protest movements for undermining the World Summit on the Information Society (Chouikha, 2015, pp. 60, 65). This year witnessed the migration of several “first-generation online activists” to the blogosphere as the primary space for cyber-dissent (Lecomte, 2011, pp. 390-391). The vitality of the blogosphere under the regime is particularly visible during the Gafsa mining area revolts in 2008, during which many activists were heavily active online (Allal, 2010; Carboni, Crisponi, & Sistu, 2015, pp. 241-242; Chomiak, 2011; Chouikha, 2015, pp. 64-68; Howard & Hussain, 2013, pp. 35-40; Lecomte, 2011, p. 5; Touati, 2012). The pre-revolutionary period extends until the end of the year 2010 and the democratic transition period starts after Ben Ali’s departure on January 14th, 2011, followed by several initiatives building the foundations for the new democratic state. Hence, the comparison between the two periods is essential to understand the extent to which adaptation occurs in the context of the democratic transition. While it is an ongoing process, Tunisia has witnessed relatively

important changes of its media sphere and has undoubtedly experienced a democratic transition, with all the ups and downs that come with it.

Such contexts were ideal to observe the extent to which online activists have adapted to a new political environment fostering democracy because many of them have witnessed this transition and were able to provide data for both time periods investigated. Moreover, my ability to speak French fluently facilitated the access to Tunisian online activists. Evidently, it is a relevant asset since French is the language of activists and bloggers in Tunisia. Thus, by allowing me to gather the necessary data to solve the puzzle of this research (Halperin, 2012, p. 224), the validity of this research case study is reinforced.

3.2 Recruitment and Sampling Considerations

As the population for this research is limited to a small number of individuals well connected one to another, we only targeted few potential participants prior to the field trip. After meeting the first participants, the Snowball sampling method was used to recruit relevant participants. Indeed, even if most bloggers are public figures, it would have been difficult to establish the first contact without an intermediary person. Indeed, during the field trip, many participants helped to get in touch with other fellow bloggers they knew. This method was highly efficient to recruit quickly and cleverly the necessary sample to conduct this research. Because it is difficult to estimate the size of the pool and to constitute a representative sample drawn from it, we based our estimation on Howard's and Hussain's analysis of the Tunisian blogosphere during the Revolution (2013, p. 129). According to their data, about 500 blogs constituted the active blogosphere during the Revolution.

However, from this number, 17 were central within the information flows. Considering that the media environment has changed since 2011 and that some disappear from the public sphere, a small sample is sufficient to gather the necessary data on bloggers, as long as their profiles and experiences are diversified.

Among the participants interviewed (10 in total) during the field research, eight are online content producers (directly producing content or “behind the scene”) with various degree of belonging to the title “blogger”. The two remaining participants are specialists of the Tunisia media system and activism in Tunisia. This sample is balanced in terms of the period during which the participants blogged and according to the type of platform they used or use now.

It is important to note that the participants have been recruited for their proximity with the blogosphere. This selection allowed to gather several subjective perceptions of the blogosphere and its evolution through the years from people who were intensely active online to more “occasional” online users. Although the number of participants for this research is quite limited, the data collected is reflective of the possible adaptations profiles of online activists in Tunisia. However, since a lot of bloggers have been excessively interviewed after the Arab Spring due to their popularity, many of the people contacted during the fieldwork research have never replied or declined the invitation to participate. Consequently, the pool of available participants, already small, has considerably shrunk.

Yet, the sample selection constitutes the most important limitation of this research, as it has been hard to find bloggers interested to participate considering the time and the

resources available for this research. Nevertheless, I managed to balance the type of profiles and to get very different backgrounds and experiences from the participants. Hence, sufficient data have been gathered and allow this research to provide interesting trends and findings filling gaps from the literature.

The risk of constituting a non-representative sample is another limitation of this research. However, this risk was minimized by using a sampling matrix categorizing the characteristics of every participant (e.g. period of activity, affiliation to a traditional media organization, an alternative media, type of coverage, etc.). This ensured that the sample represents the main characteristics of the blogging population, at least, by gathering a diversity of profiles. Moreover, this matrix not only contributed to strengthening the sampling method but, as an ongoing process, created an analysis tool to contrast participants' profiles and practices. The recruitment technique raises a similar concern in terms of representativeness. Indeed, the participants could only constitute a marginal segment of the population. However, this method allowed the researcher to access to different circles of people, as former participants were encouraged to think about anyone, inside or outside their usual circles, who might be interested in the research project. As mentioned before, the representativeness of the sample was controlled on a regular basis to ensure the integrity of the data collection. Thus, while the recruitment was an important challenge for this research, the sampling matrix and the recruitment technique were chosen to ensure the quality of the sample.

3.3 Research Method

The research requires a field research in order to gather original empirical data to assess the adaptation of Tunisian bloggers during the ongoing democratic transition. Since no research has been done on that matter, this inductive research focused on three exploratory categories where an adaptation of bloggers' practices and behaviors was expected to occur. These categories of adaptation, while being broad, grasp the main areas of bloggers' practices, as follows: i) change of bloggers' profile, ii) change of the platform used, and iii) change of the targeted audience. Each category contributes to the others by dressing a detailed portrait of the blogger and the evolution of the blogging population, background, and motivations, by assessing the evolution of the information published and the platforms used, and by evaluating the audience bloggers cater to. The findings drawn from these categories will then contribute to evaluating not only the extent to which bloggers have adapted to the new political and media environments but also to assess the impact democratic transitions have on their choices and practices.

This research's method has been inspired by pieces of work from Halperin and Heath (2012) on political science research and Saldaña (2013) on coding for qualitative researchers. Their books provide essential insights for conducting valid and reliable research and are especially useful for qualitative research using data collection techniques such as interviews. Indeed, Halperin and Heath especially contributed to the choice of the data collection method provided important arguments supporting face-to-face elite interview. As for Saldaña, he presented coding method – such as the subcoding and the descriptive coding – and methods for mapping and analyzing data that ensured the rigorousness of the process and lead to reliable findings.

3.3.1 Data Collection Technique

Considering the research question and the literature highlighted previously in this paper, the decision to conduct individual, face-to-face and semi-structured elite interviews with bloggers and specialists close to the blogosphere was logical for several reasons. First, following Halperin and Heath recommendations, this type of data collection allows the researcher to gather detailed information due to the possible to precise and push further unclear or unexpected topics or questions (2012, p. 254). Conducting individual face-to-face interviews, rather than focus groups interviews, appeared essential to maximize the amount of data gathered considering the small number of participants available. Indeed, recruiting online activists and specialists ensured that the most knowledgeable people on the topic contribute to responding to this research's central question. Consequently, the semi-structured form of interviews has been chosen. By using open and closed questions, we were able to collect at once both factual and in-depth information and opinions of the participants on the topics and questions covered during the interviews. Moreover, this form of interview is particularly adapted to small sample because it provides valid and abundant data, especially about the participant's experiences, opinions and the meaning behind them (Halperin, 2012, p. 258). Hence, face-to-face semi-structured interviews appeared to be the best format for the interviews considering the type of information needed for this research.

In addition, this data collection method leads to build interview guides to increase the potential for comparisons between the participant's interviews. This was particularly tricky because every participant had very different experiences and definitions of the topics covered during the interviews. Hence, I designed, prior to the field trip, two different interview guides: a first one for online activists and bloggers that was more focused on their

personal experience of ICT's and their activism experience, and a second one for experts focusing on contextual elements in order to confirm elements that were collected through the other interviews. While these two guides evolved through the interview process – some questions disappeared because they were unhelpful while the wording of others slightly changed to be more understandable – using two different set of questions helped to gather a maximum of data close to the area of expertise of the two groups of participants.

The questions' sequence also helped to create a more enjoyable environment for the interviews and allowed the researcher to be flexible through the process. As described by Halperin and Heath (2012, pp. 264-266), each interview started with an *introductory phase* during which the researcher explained the purpose of the research and the participants' rights, followed by a *warm-up phase*, with more factual and impersonal questions, and then continued with the *main body of the interview phase*, during which more detailed information was expected. A *cool-off* and the *closure phase*, with broader and summarizing questions were asked, finally ending the interview. That sequence, adapted to semi-structured interviews, was successful and allowed to gather an impressive quantity of data about the personal experiences of the participants, but also concerning the political and media contexts in Tunisia for at least the last fifteen years. Moreover, each question had several probing and follow-up questions to ensure that every topic was fully covered. In practice, these questions were particularly useful for less-talkative participants. Nevertheless, this sequence and this type of interview had unexpected outcomes. Indeed, while some participants were less inclined to discuss some topics, others, on the opposite, were extremely enthusiastic and even drifted from the initial topic. This made it harder to separate the insightful from the purely trivial data. In sum, even if the impressive quantity

of data could have been a negative outcome of the data collection technique chosen, it has proven to be a perfectly adapted method to gather precise and valid information that was essential to understand online activists' adaptation to the new media and political environment.

3.3.2 *Coding and Data Analysis*

Once enough data was collected, covering the different types of profiles among bloggers, the interview recordings were transcribed on computer. Through that process, we already highlighted emerging and crossing themes within the data. However, a rigorous coding of the material was essential to assess the data and produce a qualitative analysis.

We chose *Nvivo – QSR International* as the coding software to process the data. Using this software for manual coding ensured a rigorous classification of the codes (the equivalent of “nodes” for *Nvivo*), hence ruling out human mistakes. Moreover, *Nvivo* allowed quick and comparative overviews of the coding units, their relevance and their frequencies through all the data (Welsh, 2002). As for the coding *per se*, the method was based on Saldaña's recommendations (2013). Indeed, two cycles of coding were necessary to achieve a satisfying coding process for the content analysis that followed (see **Appendix 1** for a complete list of the coding nodes used). We used the descriptive coding technique during the first cycle of coding. This technique popularized by Wolcotts (1994), “[...] summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88) and was highly appropriate for the first round of coding. Specifically, 28 nodes were created. Some of them refer to very specific elements (eg. *Defining blogging* or *Blogging Examples*) while some are more horizontal categories

(eg. *Censorship* or *Political Context*). In fact, this process allowed to divide the data into relatively small and precise codes that appeared to be similar from one transcript to another. Moreover, this first cycle of coding help to confirm the three exploratory categories of analysis, as three trends – profiles, platforms used, and audiences – started to emerge.

Then, in order to shrink the number of coding units, we conducted a second cycle of coding using the subcoding technique, which is basically “a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry [...]” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 77). Using what Gibbs (2007) refers to “parent” (top-level) and “children” (sub-level) codes, this process categorized the codes created during the first round of coding and helped to build links with the literature’s themes and the exploratory categories. This second round of coding was essential to standardize the coding throughout the data material and to see emerging trends and themes in the data. Specifically, we regrouped the 28 nodes (child-codes) under four parent-codes: *Audience & Society*, *Cyberdissident’s Profile*, *Use & Adaptation*, and *Political Context & Media*. Precisely, by comparing the child-codes under each parent-code, we were able to find similar elements crossing the transcripts and to see where the participants diverged one from another. For instance, we found interesting elements of convergence and divergence using the child-code *Motivations to blog* that contrast with the other child-code *Trigger to blog*. Hence, this coding method maximized the data collected and allowed to conduct a full content analysis with coherent categories of analysis. That analysis, combined with the contextual elements, provided the necessary insights to come up with the original findings.

In sum, this section showed the relevance of the Tunisian political and media environment as the case of study of this thesis paper. Indeed, this case nicely fits into the theoretical framework – especially on democratic transition and digital politics – and had all the essential characteristics (temporal and spatial) to achieve a conclusive fieldwork data collection. Furthermore, the method chosen for data collection – individual, face-to-face and semi-structured elite interviews – was highly effective to gather abundant and in-depth data from the participants recruited, even if the pool of potential participants was limited. Finally, two cycles of coding contributed to rigorously code the data and, consequently, to highlight the emerging themes and trends discussed in the following sections.

Section 2: Data and Analysis

Chapter I – Adaptation to a New Era: Change in Profiles

As explained in the previous chapters, bloggers' adaptation to their new surrounding environment seemed to have occurred within three spheres of their activities: 1) their profile; 2) the platform chosen and its use; and 3) the audience targeted and its perception. This chapter focusses on the first category of analysis by offering an in-depth exploration of bloggers individual characteristics through the style and the content they consciously choose to bring forward. Hence, by comparing bloggers' experiences of the past two decades, especially since 2005, three main findings emerged. First, post-Revolution dynamics force them to re-question their style and the content shared in order to determine what are their priorities. The data revealed that their style did not evolved much but the content displayed tend to be more moderate overtime, as bloggers step out of the shadows of censorship. Second, the rapid changes within the public sphere revealed how different bloggers are (were), which push them to reconsider their own role within the blogosphere. In fact, their attitude towards blogging and digital technologies' potentials for expression guide their reflexion towards their adaptation processes Third, while they share similar motives triggering them to start blogging, their individual motivation to blog significantly diverge after the Revolution for personal and structural reasons. As motivations indubitably played a vital role in determining bloggers' adaptation, we observe that personal motivations pushed blogger to adapt and diversify their practices while structural motivations were less solid to cope with change. This last finding on motivations is particularly relevant for understanding the next section on platform choices and personal use of ICTs.

1.1 Style and Content: What Bloggers Words Reveal About Their Behaviours

Before covering bloggers' content and the way they deliver their message, a quick overview of the characteristics of the sample gathered provide interesting insights about the blogging population (refer to **appendix 3**). Indeed, despite their ideological differences and individual preferences, the participants interviewed have several characteristics in common. Indeed, no participant is younger than 25 years old, as most of them discovered the internet while growing up and consciously chose to use that type of communication technology for expressing themselves. Moreover, all participants obtained academic degrees, which attest to an above-average level of education. We can also observe that two participants specifically develop their technological skills throughout their academic formation (engineering and computer engineering), while the rest of them studied communication-related fields (marketing and journalism) or language or literature studies. Hence, this supposes that they all had a background that eases their use of ICTs (regarding the structure of the technological tool or the communication aspect of its use) prior to their first blogging activities. Furthermore, these characteristics appear to be closely linked to the issues they prioritized and the style they decided to adopt.

In fact, most participants started to blog or, at least, to be active on the internet before the Revolution and the content they have decided to spread online is incredibly diverse. Although most participants published online content concerning human rights and individual freedoms issues (P02, P03, P06, P08, and P10), some decided to explore other paths. It is the case of Azyz Amami (P03), a notorious blogger imprisoned during the turmoil of the Revolution. In fact, he did not only criticize Ben Ali's authoritarian regime

and human rights conditions during the pre-Revolutionary era, he has also blogged to put into practice what he calls an “applied philosophy experiment”:

[...] pour pouvoir avancer dans mes propres quêtes philosophiques, philosophico-politiques, parce que pour moi, personnellement, tout ce que je fais, c’est de la philosophie appliquée. Révolution politique. Manifestations. Textes sarcastiques. Études historiques. Tout ça pour moi, c’est la même chose, tu vois. Je suis parti d’une question anodine, c’est la question de laquelle part tout le monde, c’est la question du sens... et puis je suis arrivé à un stade où je me disais que le sens n’existait pas en soi, et puis je suis arrivé à un stade où le sens est une forme de protocole dynamique qui se redéfinit toujours par rapport à des systémiques, jusqu’à ce que maintenant, je suis parti sur une autre chose.

Azyz Amami, Transcript P03, 08/21/2017

In his quest for meaning-seeking, he has also tried to break taboos and to deconstruct socially constructed words and ideas. In fact, by covering many eclectic topics and issues, Azyz has tried over the year to achieve political and social change from what he calls “the margins”, which correspond to non-traditional channels of influence. The internet, according to him, is the best way to foster changes within the system:

[...] la théorie que j’essaie de peaufiner, c’est de faire de l’union la somme des marges [...]. Donc, actuellement, par exemple, avec cette logique, il m’est inconcevable d’entrer un jour dans l’arène des courses politiques et des compétitions politiques, les élections, les institutions, tout ça, parce que je sais très très bien qu’en unifiant les marges, je pourrais obliger le politicien à écrire la loi que je demande.

Azyz Amami, Transcript P03, 08/21/2017

Azyz’s case is unique in the sample gathered during the fieldtrip. In fact, although he has frequently changed his focus according to his personal quest, most of the people interviewed focused on one specific topic or issue – such as cultural news reviews (P09), satirical political news reviews (P05), or, as stated before, human rights and freedoms. However, even if we can observe a certain coherence in the content spread online, the data gathered indicate an evolution of bloggers’ focus from a more radical and active product to a more moderate and widespread content.

Put aside the platform now used by bloggers (or former bloggers) and activists, we can observe a certain moderation in the opinions and the general information shared with the audience. Haythem El Mekki (P05), an ex-blogger who now host a radio show on *Mosaïque FM*, clearly explains the evolution of the content he had shared with his audience, from politically engaged and mobilizing to a more politically informed content:

Avant je partageais des infos et des opinions, globalement, des appels à la mobilisation. Maintenant, c'est toujours des infos, des opinions, très rarement des appels à manifestations, des infos, beaucoup plus rarement qu'avant par exemple, parce qu'avant, il n'y avait que quelques personnes qui partageaient les infos. Aujourd'hui, ça passe à la télé, tu vois? Donc, une grande partie du cyberactivisme a perdu son utilité. [...] Donc voilà, je ne passe plus l'information parce que tout le monde la passe, mais les opinions, oui, toujours, les appels à mobilisations, si je suis convaincu de la légitimité de la cause, voilà.

Haythem El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

Not only the rehabilitation of a non-regime-controlled media system contributed to the modification of bloggers' style and content, but the advent of a transitional democratic regime has also shuffled the deck. Ben Trad (pseudonym of participant 06), a blogger who now works in a humanitarian NGO, described this reality as a blogger and a NGO worker:

[Before the Revolution] On est obligé de se faire travailler les méninges, on est obligé d'être un peu créatif, on est obligé de dire les choses autrement. C'est un peu comme si... enfin... on n'ira pas dire que c'est un État policier, mais on trouvera le moyen de trouver des images, des métaphores, et cetera. Plus maintenant, on est maintenant une démocratie, donc on peut dire tout ce qu'on veut, du coup, on dit moins les choses puisque si tout le monde commence à parler, donc, finalement, ce n'est plus que les blogueurs qui parlent aujourd'hui.

Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017

This except – which describes how she had to be creative to circumvent censorship while, now, the relevance of even blogging is challenged by expansion of online expression – attests a shared feeling among bloggers that they are not the only ones carrying contention and mobilization. Hence, that explains why many bloggers decided to

focus on a specific topic (in her case, minorities' rights). However, the media and the political environments are not the only factors impacting on the content shared by online activists. In fact, those who moved to traditional or alternative media after the Revolution seemed to care more about the expectations of the audience than they previously did, as alternative media normalize within the media sphere. Thameur Mekki (P09), a cultural columnist for the collective and alternative media platform *Nawaat*, explains that it has been necessary – in order to cope with competition – to provide to the public mainstream news, despite the *Nawaat*'s mission to cover not only mainstream, but also under-investigated or taboo topics. Thus, the issues covered by online activists has evolved through the years, from a more “advocacy focus” to a widespread and moderate coverage.

Nevertheless, it is curious to note that participants' style of expression has not evolved much since they first started to express online. In fact, all participants (except for P08 and P09, who work at *Nawaat*) adopt a straightforward and a crude language register. Moreover, most participants commonly use dialectal Tunisian Arabic to express online. These linguistic choices are justified by the need to feel close to the people, as explained by Haythem El Mekki:

Je parle dans des termes simples, en dialecte tunisien, sans trop me la péter. [...]. Donc, je parle en des termes simples que... le sociologue peut comprendre, mais que le serveur du café peut comprendre, que le coiffeur peut comprendre aussi, et c'est pour ça que les gens accrochent.

Haythem El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

In fact, they generally kept the same writing style in order to preserve their own personal touch. Indeed, since they became known for their own style, they have never wanted to change their style, apart from the two participants working on an alternative

media platform, who both adopt a more traditional writing style. In fact, this is, according to them, largely due to their academic background in journalism and the fact that they only started to express online not long before the Revolution. Thus, bloggers' practices have followed the structural changes crossing the political and the media spheres over the years. While their style and the topics covered have not significantly changed, their scope and the information displayed slightly change from a more provocative writing to more moderated stances.

1.2 What "Blogger" Means and What It Tells Us About Bloggers' Disputes

The word "blogger" has been abundantly used throughout this paper. In fact, the literature on the blogosphere and bloggers remains vague about that term. For instance, Radsch (2011) underlines the diversity of the blogosphere in terms of content, style, and scope and insists on the possibility for every citizen to become a "citizen-journalist" without being bound to journalistic norms and rules. Although this useful conceptualization remains vague, Josiane Jöuet nicely completes the gaps by defining citizen blogs:

"Citizen blogs" form a heterogeneous category that encompasses blogs created by ordinary citizens, journalists, and experts who all aspire to self-publish their opinions. Their commonality resides in their affirmation of a personal judgment about political events and public policies, which is opened to discussion and controversy. While pseudonyms are used, many contributors identify themselves by their personal names and do not address intimate matters, unlike many blogs on social networks. Furthermore, bloggers assume the responsibility for the expression of facts and personal opinions, which is a regular practice in the electronic public debate. (2009, p. 64)

Several elements from this definition appear vital for this paper. First, it underlines the inherent differences and divergences between bloggers' works and bloggers themselves. Second, the definition insists on the desire of expression as a major fuel for bloggers. Third,

the active and personal involvement of bloggers in their publications attests a desire for accountability and recognition, which would be important later on.

Nevertheless, although this definition encompasses many elements, one precision needs to be made. In fact, Romain Lecomte rightly stresses that online activists prior to Ben Ali's fall should be identified as "cyber-dissidents". While it seems to be only a matter of word, this distinction is vital for understanding blogosphere's dynamics. For Lecomte, cyber-dissidents are "[...] *des internautes tunisiens qui, d'une part, contestent de façon très ouverte, directe, le régime politique tunisien [...] et, d'autre part, n'appartiennent pas à des organisations politiques ou militantes, du moins n'y jouent pas un rôle de premier plan.*" (2009, pp. 201-202) In fact, this definition stresses the importance for that group of individuals to fight for a common cause – the end of Ben Ali's authoritarian regime, without using traditional channels of contention such as political organizations. Hence, while Jöuet's definition focuses more on the action of content producing and online expression, Lecomte points the cyber-dissidents' motivation as the core of online activism.

This clash in defining bloggers is also empirically sensible and has been emphasized since the Revolution. In fact, while the media system unlocked, cyber-activists realized how different they were beside their common will for a free Tunisia. This reality is particularly salient when comparing how they define themselves and, broadly, the blogosphere. Among the sample gathered during the fieldwork, participants can be divided into three different categories according to their self-identification to the denomination "blogger". First, two participants (P03 and P09) completely reject to be labeled as so for very different reasons. As described by Azyz Amami, the word is completely irrelevant and

meaningless, as “writing” is a sufficient word describing his work, which he perceived as a job like any other:

Pour moi le mot, en soit, il est vidé de sens parce qu’il y a eu pas mal de fois où je me suis retrouvé, au nom du blogging, où je me suis trouvé dans un ensemble, dans un set, avec des éléments avec qui je ne partage rien, totalement rien. Le fait d’écrire sur internet, qui pour moi n’est que, disons, c’est un peu le cahier qui ne finira jamais et le stylo qui ne finira jamais. L’écriture, c’est un métier parmi d’autres.

Azyz Amami, Transcript P03, 08/21/2017

Reflective of his journalistic studies, Thameur Mekki, on the contrary, does not consider what he did before working at *Nawaat* sufficient to be embedded into blogger’s label. In fact, while he acknowledged the important role played by the blogosphere in Tunisia, he also dissociates from bloggers, considering that, in a way, everybody can be called a blogger nowadays:

[...] personnellement, je ne pense pas que j’accède à un autre statut qui est celui de blogueur ou quoique ce soit. Et puis, on voit encore plus que ce statut perd de son sens quand on est des centaines de milliers à avoir des profils sur Facebook avant la Révolution et aujourd’hui, il y a plus de quatre millions de profils Facebook en Tunisie, cinq millions d’utilisateurs tunisiens de Facebook. C’est-à-dire... que c’est une nation de blogueurs? Absolument pas.

Thameur Mekki, Transcript P09, 09/08/2017

Thameur’s attitude of rejection towards the label “blogger” and what it implies is shared by many other participants. Hamadi Kaloutcha (P07), Bent Trad (P06), and Henda Chennaoui (P08) both assumed to be or at least to have been bloggers, but remains highly critical of the blogosphere. The comparison between Bent Trad’s and Henda’s response is particularly revealing of the struggle faced by bloggers. On the one hand, Bent Trad stressed out that bloggers have become a very heterogeneous group on almost every aspect of their work and that, fundamentally, “*un blogueur reste, je dirais, un journaliste amateur*” (Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017). On the other hand, Henda considers that the

blogosphere – and, consequently, bloggers – does not exist in Tunisia anymore because ICTs drastically evolved. For her, while blogging, prior to the Revolution, was a personal and solitary way to express online, social media real-time characteristics substantially changed the way content producers spread content by pushing them to publish shorter and less polished posts. Consequently, almost nobody can identify her/himself a blogger nowadays. Thus, both conceptions of the etiquette “blogger” reveal an in-depth reflexion about the implications of being a blogger.

Finally, only two participants, Haythem El Mekki (P05) and Lina Ben Mhenni (P10) fully assume to be called bloggers. Although Haythem quit blogging many years ago, his attitude towards blogging is generally positive. Indeed, he has been active on several internet platforms (chat rooms, blogs, Facebook, etc.) since the beginning of internet in Tunisia (late 1990s) and enjoyed his blogging experience. However, for him, the end of censorship in the media system was a sufficient reason to move to traditional media platforms, as blogging was not a goal, but a mean for expression. For Lina, blogging is literally a component of her identity as she first introduced herself as follows:

Donc, c'est Lina Ben Mhenni, je suis une citoyenne tunisienne, tout d'abord.
Donc je suis bloggeuse et défenseur des droits de l'Homme, je suis activiste.

Lina Ben Mhenni, Transcript P10, 09/11/2017

Hence, put aside bloggers' differences, the importance they put on the label “blogger” reveals important insights structuring their post-Revolution adaptation. Indeed, by discovering how different they were one from another and the opportunities offered by the transitional democratic system, most bloggers question the relevance of the blogosphere and their place within it.

This finding echoes the *sociologie des usages* literature and especially the idea of appropriation as explored by Josiane Jöuet. Following the fact that the appropriation of an ICT by an internet user is the process of self-definition (Jouët, 2000, p. 502), she describes how internet users tend to form small and heterogeneous communities aiming various goals incompatible with a shared feeling of unity (2000, p. 505). This has been observed among the participants interviewed, as many of them have an ambiguous sense of belonging to the blogging community. Indeed, as explained by Zayani, Tunisian bloggers and activists convey an image of unity against Ben Ali's authoritarian regime but it was the only unifying element between them (2015, p. 196). Indeed, the participants expressed various definition of 'blogging' which tend to exclude themselves from the so-call homogenous blogosphere. It shows that the tension between the individual act of blogging and the belonging to the larger community of bloggers is more complex and encompasses various motivations justifying their presence in the cyberspace.

In fact, the sense of belonging to the blogging community particularly predisposed their adaptation process as it expresses different attitudes towards digital technologies' potentials. Indeed, those critical of the blogosphere (P06, P07, P08) all move to another medium or significantly reduce their blogging activities. The others appear to be at crossroads, as the the two participants who rejected the "blogger label" (P03 and P09) and those who embraced it (P05 and P10), all took very different decisions concerning their blogging activities. Yet, their motivations were also very different, which, combined with background and their sense of belonging to the blogosphere, determine to their adaptation processes. In sum, the different visions of blogging that emerged after Revolution

significantly modeled the participants' self-perception of their place within the blogosphere, which conditioned their adaptation to the Tunisia's new environment.

1.3 Motivations in the Blogosphere: A Complex Web

A third layer of analysis completes our investigation of the participants' profiles and provide interesting insights on bloggers' adaptation. Despite all their differences, the individuals interviewed share similar reasons that first led them to blog but diverge concerning their motivation encouraging them to continue to blog. In fact, the participants can be associated with three types of "triggers" to blog: 1) the spontaneous desire to express themselves, 2) the extension of a natural writing habit, and 3) the need to find and share information.

Three participants – Bent Trad (P06), Hamadi Kaloutcha (P07) and Henda Chennaoui (P08) – affirmed that blogging supplies the necessary catalyzer to express themselves at a time they needed the most. For instance, Bent Trad's first steps into the blogosphere, in 2010, represent a shared-attitude among youth at that time: rage and despair of the youth *vis-à-vis* the authoritarian regime. The possibilities for employment were limited, as well as the mobilization opportunities. Thus, it led many young people to join blogging platforms to let the steam out and share common grievances, as expressed by Bent Trad during our interview:

C'était ça, c'était plutôt, voilà, le ras-le-bol général, le fait que je n'ai pas eu mon CAPES³ qui a fait que j'avais envie de gueuler un peu ma rage, je n'avais pas d'autres moyens de le faire. À l'époque, c'était complètement barricadé,

³ The CAPES (*Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement du Second degré*) is necessary certificate to access teaching position in public colleges in Tunisia.

c'était Ben Ali, c'était les années de plans, alors du coup, c'était ça. Pour respirer un air, un peu d'air frais voilà, je dirais que c'était ça.

Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017

Bent Trad's situation was perfectly reflective of the Tunisian youth on the eve of the Revolution. Indeed, she had a high-level education, she was active in her students' union during college, and she faced problems when it comes to express herself in the public sphere. Hence, the internet has been a mean to escape regime's censorship and "freely" express themselves, even if it was dangerous (Diamond, 2010). Henda Chennaoui first encounters blogging in similar circumstances. However, her experiences slightly diverge from Bent Trad's, mainly because of the initial reasons triggering her to blog. In fact, face to the impossibility to practice journalism after her studies at the *Institut de presse et des sciences de l'information* (IPSI), she spontaneously decided in 2007 to be active on social media and blogging platforms as a freelance journalist to satisfy her desire to write on individual freedoms and gender equality:

En fait, j'étais journaliste donc... et il y avait ce besoin d'écrire et de s'exprimer. C'était très facile, c'était aussi accessible de s'exprimer à travers un blogue, et donc, j'ai pensé à créer un blogue, c'est tout. [...] J'ai fait partie, j'ai participé au mouvement *Ammar 404*, et cetera, mais comme plusieurs autres blogueurs, l'objectif c'était d'échanger parce qu'il y avait plusieurs blogueurs et... c'était comme un réseau et on échangeait les idées, on écrivait. En fait, c'était aussi un peu la mode, d'avoir un blogue, d'écrire sur son blogue ce qu'on voulait dire. Surtout que les médias n'étaient pas accessibles, il n'y avait pas Facebook, les modes de communication n'étaient pas aisés, et faciles, et instantanés.

Henda Chennaoui, Transcript P08, 09/06/2017

Several elements can be drawn from this statement. In fact, Henda underlines, like Bent Trad, the desire for expression as her first motivation to blog. However, she also insists that it was a "default choice" considering media's censorship before 2011. Also, even if she participated to structural events of recent Tunisian activism such as the *Ammar 404 movement*, she points the fact that her blogging activity was mainly due to the

bandwagon effect of blogging. Thus, even if Henda had a spontaneous need to express online, she remains, afterwards, critical of the reasons motivating her to blog. Nevertheless, for others, blogging followed a more thoughtful process. For instance, Hamadi Kaloutcha – a pseudonym used by Sofiene Benadj online – used to republish online information and videos on Facebook groups or collaborative websites about events that the regime wanted to go unnoticed. In fact, his activism’s main goal was to make people realize the strong hold of the regime on Tunisians’ lives and to push further the limits – or as he calls them, the “red lines” – of what people were allowed to think and to say. Hence, Kaloutcha also followed an intrinsic instinct to express and to foster social and political change in his first steps into the digital world.

Another category of participants followed a similar path, but, for them, blogging was more accidentally due to a natural habit of writing that only transferred into the cyberspace. Azyz Amami affirmed that it was only natural for him to write online and that online platforms such as blogs and social media were the natural extension of his already-existing writing activities. Moreover, although he tried to publish in official or clandestine media platforms, the absence of space for marginal opinion (or, as he called it, of freedom of tone) has pushed him towards online platforms since 2005:

Entre-temps, je n’avais pas pu m’exprimer à ma guise, ni dans les circuits officiels, ni dans les circuits clandestins. C’est à partir de ce moment que je me suis dit que c’était un problème de liberté de ton, T-O-N, et non pas un problème de liberté d’expression. Et depuis, j’écris sur internet, je publie quasi-exclusivement sur internet.

Azyz Amami, Transcript P03, 08/21/2017

Haythem El Mekki’s experience with blogs is similar to Azyz’s. Indeed, as an early-adopter of internet platforms in Tunisia, he has always been active online and created a

formal blog in 2010 about marketing and culture. However, as explained in the next excerpt, he seized the opportunity to first join the blogosphere in 2008 during Gafsa's protests. For him, it was only natural to share information about the what was going on there considering the media blackout on the events:

Donc après, tu te trouves entraîné. Tu as des potes qui partagent, qui parlent, qui essaient de sensibiliser les gens et, en fait, la période de pic, si tu veux, c'était la révolte du bassin minier, Gafsa, 2008, voilà. Là, je ne fais presque que ça... [...] De relayer ce qui se passe, d'en parler, de raconter aux gens ce qui se passait, parce que les gens ne savaient pas. [...] Donc, les gens ne savaient pas ce qui se passait. Gafsa était carrément sous embargo, et personne ne le savait. Donc voilà, on a commencé à en parler, à diffuser ce qui se passait et après, bien sûr, tu passes à d'autres sujets, d'autres militants, d'autres qui sont en grèves de la faim, d'autres qui sont emprisonnées, qui se sont fait torturé, et après, une fois que ça a commencé, ça n'arrête plus.

Haytehm El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

Lina Ben Mhenni's experience also reaffirms the attitude shared by Azyz and Haythem. Growing up with a family of activists, she has always been critical about the Ben Ali's regime and has been writing about it for a long time. For her, blogging appeared to be the ideal tool to transfer her writing habit from her private offline sphere to the public sphere:

Donc, petit à petit, j'ai commencé à comprendre qu'il y avait un problème et un grand gap entre le discours officiel et la réalité du pays. Donc, j'ai commencé à écrire à propos de ça et je gardais le tout pour moi, jusqu'à ce que je découvre le concept du blogging et voilà, j'ai décidé de partager mes textes avec une audience.

Lina Ben Mhenni, Transcript P10, 09/11/2017

Hence, Azyz's, Haythem's, and Lina's first experiences of blogging shows that blogging was only the logical step of their use of ICTs and of their writing activity.

Finally, a last trigger to blog is also salient when observing Thameur's experience. Indeed, although he never claimed to be a blogger, he went online to find and share the

information that regime-controlled media were withholding, especially when the Gafsa protests started:

Le blogging, c'était très éphémère. C'est surtout un usage de Facebook, c'était le boom en Tunisie et ce qui m'a poussé le plus à créer ce compte, c'était, ça coïncidait avec ce qu'on appelle ici la révolte du bassin minier, 2008, voilà. Donc, je cherchais des infos là-dessus, je suivais ce qui se passait, je lisais les sites censurés de l'opposition via proxys parce que c'était censuré en Tunisie, donc il y avait ce besoin d'information.

Thameur Mekki, Transcript P09, 09/08/2017

As explained above, although he had short experiences of blogging and was more active on Facebook, Gafsa's turmoil pushed Thameur to enter the blogosphere and, broadly, the online activist sphere, by following a desire to get information and to share this content.

While these three types of triggers to blogging are closely linked one to another, participants then diverge regarding their motivation to express online, which could be incredibly diverse, from self-expression to information-seeking (Huang, Shen, Lin, & Chang, 2007). In fact, personal and structural reasons justify their blogging activities (or the end of it) afterwards. Azyz Amami and Lina Ben Mhenni are typical examples of bloggers motivated by very personal reasons. Indeed, as explained in the previous subsection, Azyz decided to blog in order to achieve his real-life experiment of meaning-making and continued, after considering his options, to blog following that goal:

Donc, en y pensant, je me suis dit que, pour ma quête philosophique du moins, il serait mieux que je reste sur mon territoire, qui est internet [...]

Azyz Amami, Transcript P03, 08/21/2017

As for Lina, the desire to express online is so strong that she could not imagine her life without blogging. Indeed, her intimate love for her country and its issues fuel her to continue to blog, as an intrinsic part of her identity:

Bon, je n'y ai jamais réfléchi... c'est l'amour pour ce pays, c'est la passion. J'aime l'écriture et j'aime le pays, [...] j'ai toujours grandi dans cette atmosphère où l'on parlait des droits humains de tout ça, donc c'est venu naturellement.

Lina Ben Mhenni, Transcript P10, 11/09/2017

Another personal motive for blogging is the resistance against the remains of Ben Ali's Tunisia and the desire for social and political change. Bent Trad and Hamadi Kaloutcha exemplify this attitude through their online activities. Although her blogging activities have substantially declined over time, Bent Trad continues to be active and focuses her activities on “calls for action” rather than only criticizing inequalities. For Hamadi Kaloutcha, his job in a diplomatic organization now prevents him to be as active online than before, but he still expresses online to criticize the political life following a “watchdog” attitude.

For other participants, structural opportunities highly impacted on their motivation to blog. In fact, Azyz and Thameur are both cyber-optimistic regarding the opportunities offered by the internet, and especially social media platforms and blogs. For both of them, these “new” tools are literally the extent of people's ability to express in the public sphere. However, other participants seized other structural opportunities leading to opposite outcomes. Haythem, Henda, and Thameur all quit blogging after the Revolution following the same reason: blogging was not necessary anymore. Indeed, they all lost the motivation to blog when they realized that the opportunities to express in the “formal” media system – which was nearly impossible under Ben Ali's regime – were now available in the new media system, either in alternative or traditional media platforms:

Tout d'un coup en 2010, fin 2010, la Révolution est là, et tout d'un coup, la liberté d'expression, et tous les sujets que j'ai envie de traiter, de travailler, de faire le terrain – les droits de l'Homme, politiques, et cetera – étaient possibles.

Et donc, du coup, je me suis lancé dans ce que je sais faire, dans ce que j'ai appris à faire à partir de 2010, et ce que j'aimerais et ce que j'aime bien faire. Et donc, c'est bon, je n'avais pas, je n'avais plus... je n'ai même pas fait la réflexion parce que l'objectif, c'était d'être journaliste et d'écrire et d'avoir le maximum du nombre de lus, de personnes, d'interaction avec les gens et tout.

Henda Chennaoui, Transcript P08, 09/06/2017

Henda exemplifies the new reality faced by bloggers at the turning point of the Revolution. Indeed, the diversity of platforms available incredibly increased, which makes them question the relevance of blogging. Hence, personal and structural elements launched a reflexion in the bloggers' community about the reasons justifying their blogging activities and their place within the public sphere. More importantly, as underlined through Haythem's and Henda's interviews, it appears that the availability of platforms to express and their characteristics impact bloggers' reflexion about their own place within the blogosphere and, consequently, the way they have adapted to the post-Revolution environment.

1.4 Chapter's Findings and Conclusion

In short, bloggers' profiles reveal several elements concerning their adaptation to the changing political and media environments following the Revolution in 2011. By looking at the type of content they produced, we observed an evolution of the intensity, which was salient through moderation of the content displayed online by all participants. Moreover, most participants, except those who moved to an alternative media platform, kept the same communication style, as it has always been their online "signature".

Another level of complexity appears when we focus on the variation of the sense of belonging to the blogosphere. Indeed, the Revolution unveiled differences between

bloggers, particularly in their very own conception of what it means to be a blogger. We observe that bloggers who have been more critical of the relevance of blogging (Bent Trad, Hamadi Kaloutcha, and Henda) transferred their online activities on another medium or, at least, considerably reduced their blogging practices. At both ends, those who accept and those who reject the etiquette of bloggers, Azyz, Haythem, Thameur, and Lina all took different directions after the Revolution, from continuing to blog joining traditional media platform. While being eclectic, this realization follows a process of self-definition taking its roots in the individuals' motivations to blog and her/his personal background.

This is where change in profiles becomes even more salient. While they were motivated by similar reasons when they first started to blog, this motivation evolved due to personal and structural elements that influenced their perception of blogging. In fact, we observe, on the one hand, that personal motivations appeared to be stronger face to change, as bloggers were more willing to adapt and diversify their online practices to Tunisia's changing dynamics. On the other, structural motivations seem to rather provide opportunities for bloggers to transfer their online practices on another medium (traditional or alternative) and rejecting the blogging practices. These two types of motivations are, in fact, closely linked to their attitudes towards digital technologies potentials for expression and to their personal background, as participants with an activist background (such as Bent Trad or Lina) tend to keep blogging while Henda and Thameur, with an academic background in journalism, move away from blogging as the structural opportunities shifted. More importantly, this analysis of bloggers' profile revealed the vital place of bloggers' specific use of ICTs for their adaptation process. The next section provides an in-depth analysis of this specific perspective.

Chapter II – Adaptation to a New Era: Platform Choice and Bloggers’ Use of ICTs

The previous chapter has shown several aspects of bloggers’ profiles justifying their adaptation to the post-Revolution order in Tunisia. Although these findings are insightful, this analysis would be incomplete without a thorough examination of the participants’ use of ICTs. This chapter provides an overview of the various strategies taken by the participants to adapt to the changing media system by focusing on the different paths they took after the Revolution. Four different paths are described throughout this chapter, which are the following: 1) *Continuing to blog*, 2) *Moving to an alternative media platform*, 3) *Moving to a traditional media platform*, 4) *Stopping to blog*. These paths are non-exclusive categories, as bloggers might have diversified their activities or might have followed more than one paths through the years. Yet, by contrasting these different, while related choices, it becomes salient that these patterns appear to be tightly connected to a personal decision to use a specific platform regarding its characteristics and its advantages, as described by Proulx and Breton, and Jöuet, concerning the concept of use and appropriation. Thus, we observe that the level of appropriation conditions the path chosen by bloggers, as the ones who decided to diversify and maximize their use of ICTs through transplatform practices, as underlined by Millette, succeeded to sustain their online activities, while the ones who reject the innovation opportunities provided by digital technologies present low level of appropriation and transfer their online practices out of the cybersphere.

2.1 Four Paths of Adaptation: A Walk Through

Not all bloggers remained active within the blogosphere after the Revolution. Nonetheless, many of them certainly grasped this historical opportunity to re-evaluate their place in the media sphere. The question here is not to measure to what extent bloggers

stopped to blog but rather to assess their adaptation process to the post-Revolution era regarding their online practices. This is where the *sociologie des usages* literature, in addition with the literature on digital politics, comes in handy. Indeed, the segmentation of every participant's path of adaptation in regards of her/his use of digital technologies reveal important insights about appropriation processes and the adoption of transplatform practices. Four different paths of adaptation are explored through the experience of seven of the ten participants to this research. As for the remaining participants, they offer external complementary perspectives helping to get a more accurate picture of the adaption phenomenon.

2.1.1 Continuing to Blog: How the Captain Stay the Course Through Waves and Tides

From all the participants interviewed, three have continued, to different extents, to blog after the Revolution. However, it would be reductionist to understand this as a linear extension of their initial blogging practices. In fact, we observe a diversification of the platforms used following various goals and objectives which attest for an enhancement of the use of ICTs by the participants.

Azyz Amami's experience is particularly insightful. Indeed, as it has been explained in the previous chapter, his philosophical quest is his main source of motivation to express himself online. He explains that even if there are obstacles undermining the quality of online interactions, it remains an ideal space to spread an alternative discourse confronting mainstream ideas, which is essential for the vitality of public debates (*Azyz Amami, Transcript P03, 08/21/2017*). Hence, rather than switching to media platforms that have the potential to provide a broader visibility (e.g. radio or television networks), Azyz

consciously chose, as a cyber-optimist, to only communicate online following his ethical commitment to open source platforms like *WordPress*:

Dès que j'ai commencé à faire de l'informatique, j'ai fait le choix consciencieux de défendre l'*open-source*, en tant qu'idée, en tant que pratique, et *WordPress*, c'est une plateforme open-source.

Azyz Amami, Transcript P03, 08/21/2017

Azyz's background gave him a precise knowledge in web-design and internet infrastructures allowing him to consciously choose open-source format platforms for his blog. Further than that, as a tech-savvy internet content producer, he has also integrated other online communications platforms to his daily practices according to various needs. His use of Facebook, in contrast with his blog, perfectly exemplifies his relationship with ICTs:

J'écris sur Facebook parce que c'est facile. Je suis paresseux et Facebook, je le considère sincèrement comme un agora politique, c'est un outil politique. À chaque fois que j'ai besoin de renforcer ma présence parce que je sais que dans deux semaines, je vais poster un truc assez lourd, pour inciter les gens à suivre et tout, je fais des publications par-ci, par-là, ou je m'exerce dans les blagues, dans l'humour, dans une critique acerbe ou je présente quelque chose d'intéressant, pour tenir la tension [ou l'attention] et donner le factuel. Ça, c'est une des utilisations de Facebook.

L'autre utilisation, c'est pour mobiliser. Facebook est un très bon moyen pour mobiliser parce qu'il est simple, il est facile à utiliser... Mais moi, je préfère écrire sur mon site, j'ai mon propre site, *azyzamami.tn*, c'est du *WordPress*, j'adore *WordPress*. J'ai fait partie des développeurs de test, en 2006... Je préfère, quand il s'agit d'écrire, je préfère écrire sur mon blogue. Quand il s'agit de travailler, au sens politique du terme, c'est Facebook. Quand il s'agit de travailler, au sens culturel du terme aussi – parce que je fais aussi beaucoup de vulgarisation, de simplification, je fais beaucoup du didactique [...]

Azyz Amami, Transcript P03, 08/21/2017

Several elements can be drawn from this excerpt. First, Azyz devotes different purposes to the different platforms he used. While he prefers to use his blog for writing, exploring and creating, he uses Facebook as a tool for contention, political mobilization,

popularization. This choice emerges from the structural advantages of the social networking platform, which allows him to easily reach a potentially large audience and enhance his online visibility. As for his blog, the *open-source* format of *WordPress* gives the necessary flexibility to be creative in his writing activities and share ideas in a very dynamic way (Ding, 2017, p. 17). Therefore, Azyz's knowledge of ICTs characteristics guides him towards a transplatform use of digital technologies, which encompasses a maximization of every single platform, as defended by Mélanie Millette. Indeed, having fully appropriated his favorite platform (his blog), Azyz multiplies his online presence by dividing and "purpose-assignating" his online content production, which corresponds to Millette's transplatform concepts of declining and relaying.

Moreover, despite his claim for pursuing a philosophical experimentation, this adaptation strategy seems to fit into a larger scheme dedicated to enhancing his notoriety and visibility. According to the journalist interviewed (participant #01), who wants to remain unnamed, a lot of bloggers used the notoriety they gain through the Revolution to boost their own career and capitalized on that to remain important figures of the public sphere. As for Azyz Amami, P01 underlines that he used the credibility he gained during the revolution on social media to extend online his objectives fostering political and social change, as described in the following excerpt:

[...] un type comme Azyz Amami par exemple, lui est resté dans l'activisme, lui il mène très bien, il se sert très bien des réseaux sociaux, qu'il manipule des fois un peu...pour arriver à ces fins [...] c'est un de ceux qu'il y a de plus conséquent [...] dans le prolongement de la cyber-dissidence, c'est-à-dire qu'il est resté sur des questions... taboues, enfin, difficiles à traiter, et il a essayé de se servir de sa notoriété et de ses réseaux sociaux, et de ses réseaux... sociaux, au sens concret... pour pousser des questions, voilà. On va dire que c'est, à mon sens, celui qui a su le mieux prolonger la... notion de cyber-dissidence.

Participant #01, Transcript P01, 08/11/2017

In fact, P01's external perspective provides a complementary view of Azyz's online behavior. Indeed, the interview with Azyz reveal personal reasons motivating his blogging practices. Moreover, his in-depth understanding of ICTs characteristics allowed him to dispatch his online content between several platforms, and thus maximizing his online presence. This last point is, in fact, confirmed by the Participant #01, who considers his practices to be optimal to pursue his objectives. Therefore, Azyz's adaptation process highly confirms Proulx and Breton conceptualization of the appropriation process. Indeed, his use of ICTs attests for a full appropriation of the platforms he used, as he possesses the required skills to comprehend and maximize his interaction with digital technologies, his use of these technologies is highly integrated to his personal and professional activities, and his presence on several platforms at once shows a sufficient understanding of the technologies to evaluate their potential and use them accordingly in innovative matters (2002, p. 256). In fact, this very last element also echoes Millette's concept of transplatform practices, especially because of his attempt to maximize his visibility according to the very characteristics (particularly through sharing tools) of the platform used. Thus, not only Azyz never stop blogging, which could be perceived as a minimal adaptation to post-Revolution Tunisia, he has, in fact, maximized his online presence on multiple platforms to cope with the evolution of the blooming cybersphere.

Lina Ben Mhenni's experience is, in fact, similar to Azyz's. Indeed, she transferred her writing habit online and integrated blogging into her daily practices. However, as she deepens her technical skills by publishing text, videos, and other types of content on her blog (as described in the following excerpt), she also simultaneously diversified her content

on several platforms. In fact, although she confesses that blogs are less relevant than before, she is still committed to this platform that allows her to produce more in-depth content:

[...] je continue à utiliser le blogue, les réseaux sociaux et le tout. Donc, je n'ai pas changé de méthode, je n'ai pas abandonné le blogue. J'y écrit encore parce que certains pensent que, voilà, le blogging, c'est dépassé maintenant avec les réseaux sociaux comme Twitter et Facebook et tout ça, mais moi, je garde toujours mon blogue, j'y partage des textes en arabe, anglais et français. Donc, ça dépend de mon humeur. Je ne décide pas la langue, ça vient tout seul.

[...] maintenant, par exemple, quand il y a, je ne sais pas, un sit-in, une manifestation, j'y vais. Soit je fais des « directs » - donc, maintenant, cette nouvelle option de Facebook, c'est très important – et puis, je fais aussi des photos et j'enregistre des vidéos avec mon appareil photo et puis, quand je rentre, je republie tout ça avec un texte bien écrit, et tout ça.

Lina Ben Mhenni, Transcript P10, 11/09/2017

The resemblance between Azyz's practices and Lina's increases when we look at the reasons motivating their transplatform practices. Indeed, Lina has expanded her content production on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter according to the structural opportunities for innovation that these platforms offer. While she still produces in-depth posts on her blog (which is more suited for that kind of publication), she maximized her visibility by using Facebook and Twitter – on which she has respectively more than 100 000 and 338 000 followers (as of April 2018) – to promote her content or to grasp the audience attention, especially media agencies:

Bon, quand c'est quelque chose d'urgent, quand il faut vraiment passer une information urgente, je partage sur Twitter parce que, voilà, les médias, la majorité des médias se trouve sur Twitter, et c'est direct. Il ne faut pas de *friend request*, c'est direct, quoi. Tout le monde peut te suivre et... Bon, sinon, quand je vais écrire un texte, comment dire, bien profond et tout ça, je l'écris sur le blogue ou comme article sur Facebook et je partage le lien sur Twitter. Donc, ça dépend du contenu. Quand c'est une vidéo, c'est Facebook. Un « Direct », c'est Facebook.

Lina Ben Mhenni, Transcript P10, 11/09/2017

This excerpt particularly confirms Millette's idea of transplatform practices. In fact, Lina maximizes her online presence with Twitter (more instantaneous than other platforms

and easily relied by media organizations) and the *Facebook Live* tool (more accessible and less editing needed) using both strategies described by Millette (2013, pp. 50-51) – relaying the same content on several platforms and declining related content differently depending on the platform used. Moreover, this transplatform use of ICTs, which benefits from the interconnection between social media platforms, attests for a deep appropriation of communication technologies confirming the three criteria presented by Proulx and Breton (2002, p. 256) (technical skills, daily integration of practices, innovation opportunities). However, Lina’s transplatform practices also impedes her blogging activities, as she had to slow the pace to which she publishes online due to a lack of time:

[...] il faut dire que le nombre de billets sur mon blogue a diminué quand je vois le nombre en 2008, 2009... j’écrivais un peu plus. Ça m’arrivait de publier deux posts par jour. Là, ce n’est plus le cas : un post par semaine, je suis plutôt sur les réseaux sociaux [...] en fait, non, mais je n’ai plus le temps pour écrire de longs textes, malheureusement.

Lina Ben Mhenni, Transcript P10, 11/09/2017

Thus, Lina’s online practices confirm Azyz’s: while blogging practices have never stopped, they decided to keep up with the new platforms available due to the unlocking of the media system and, consequently, expand the potential of content diffusion.

Azyz’s and Lina’s practices, however, slightly diverge from Bent Trad’s adaptation process. In fact, she continues to publish content on her blog, but the number of blog posts drastically decreased in the recent years. The transition towards social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, has changed not only the audience practices, but bloggers’ as well, who leans more towards easily consumable content:

Aujourd’hui, je crois, une bonne partie s’est convertie aux réseaux sociaux, à savoir Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, on est plus dans l’instantanéité, on est plus dans l’échange direct. On n’est plus, justement, dans cette urgence et cette ponctualité. On est plus « réseaux sociaux » actuellement que blogues comme

en 2010 et bien avant, où les gens, comme je le disais, avaient ces blogues où ils écrivaient de très longs articles et prenaient le temps de lire les articles, d'interagir.

Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017

This excerpt underlines two essential elements. First, it confirms bloggers' and former bloggers' tendency to expand their practices on more interactive platforms. Second, it highlights a clear distinction between practices on social networking platforms versus blogging platforms. Indeed, blog posts are time-consuming while posts on Facebook and Twitter, for instance, are quicker and less time-consuming. Nevertheless, Bent Trad still blogs but, according to her, the experience is far from being as satisfying than before because she felt that her blog's visibility (10 times less than Facebook) cannot compete with social media anymore:

[...] j'utilise encore mon blogue... mais... je n'écris plus aussi souvent, au niveau de la quantité, parce que, justement, je ne prends plus le temps d'écrire, déjà, ce n'est plus pareil. [...] J'écris des articles, mais quand je les mets sur mon blogue, il n'y a pas d'entrées. Quand je les mets sur Facebook, c'est dix fois plus d'entrées, c'est dix fois plus de vues, de lus. Même si les gens entrent après, même s'ils rentrent sur le blogue, ils rentrent via Facebook, mais ils n'entrent pas directement sur le blogue. C'est pour ça qu'aujourd'hui, la majorité a décidé de se mettre sur Facebook.

Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017

Although Bent Trad's blogging practices have decreased over the years, it has been compensated by a more active and interconnected use of Facebook. Indeed, she uses sharing tools available through Facebook to make connection between her Facebook account and her blog in order to reach her audience. However, her transplatform practices remain less important than Azyz's or Lina's, as she has significantly decreased her online presence. This, in fact, is mainly due to the decision to get more involved in the offline world, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Several elements have emerged through this section. Indeed, bloggers continuing to blog have not limited themselves to that platform only. In fact, they all expand their online practices to other communication platforms while keeping blogging (at different levels of intensity). These transplatform practices also attest for a high level of appropriation of ICTs, as all three participants analysed possess the minimum technical skills to successfully engage on several platforms at the same time while finding new opportunities to express online. Hence, their experiences attest for a clever and smooth adaptation to the new media system without compromise with their initial goal to express online.

2.1.2 Moving Towards Alternative Media: The Logical Getaway

As the post-Revolution environment created new opportunities for bloggers, some of them quit on blogging to move to alternative media platforms, such as *Inkyfada* or *Nawaat*, two of the most well-known alternative platforms in Tunisia. Henda Chennaoui and Thameur Mekki both decided to work for *Nawaat* after the Revolution. Through this section, their professional background and the media platform's characteristics are highlighted in order to demonstrate that these specific elements determined their choice of platform. In fact, it demonstrates a partial appropriation of ICTs by these two participants, which is coherent with the participants' evaluation of the potential of digital technologies for democratic vitality.

Two main reasons guided Henda and Thameur to move towards alternative media such as *Nawaat*. First, they were shocked by the decreasing quality of the information online by the dangerous slope on which Facebook is slipping concerning sponsor ads. Thameur and Henda nicely summarize this concern as follows:

On voit bien que Facebook aujourd’hui, par exemple, qu’il accorde beaucoup plus d’importance à la monétisation de Facebook. Par conséquent, la question de la visibilité et de la portée des publications dépend beaucoup plus de qui va poster un lien sponsorisé et qui va poster un lien à portée organique simple.

Thameur Mekki, Transcript P09, 09/08/2017

[...] je pense que ça ne sert absolument à rien. Facebook n’est plus, en fait, l’espace adéquat pour échanger des avis politiques ou mobiliser des gens.

Henda Chennaoui, Transcript P08, 09/06/2017

Indeed, by monetizing the visibility of a sponsor’s publications and by making even easier than before to subjectively downvote posts, they believe that Facebook jeopardizes the core of the internet, which is supposed to be neutral and equal for all. Moreover, Thameur stresses here how online and offline world have incredibly intertwined in the recent years, which is salient in the reproduction of offline dynamics online:

Cet aspect virtuel magique est en train de disparaître progressivement, et c’est plus que jamais signe – à la première question, je t’ai répondu que c’est tout simplement l’extension de son activité dans l’espace réel, l’espace cybernétique représente une espèce de refuge à l’époque – et bien aujourd’hui, l’espace cybernétique et l’espace réel se ressemblent beaucoup.

Thameur Mekki, Transcript P09, 09/08/2017

Thus, both participants have developed a very cyber-skeptical opinion of the benefits from using social networking platforms that convinced them to stop their blogging (or at least *freelance*) activities. Nevertheless, they underline that social networking platforms have forever changed media and political landscapes and remain essential for their professional activities, even if it is challenging to keep up with the flow of information:

Les réseaux sociaux ont changé tout le paysage médiatique, notre rapport à l’actualité, aussi à l’actualité de proximité, aussi à la politique en général, tout. Et c’est un défi parce que c’est un perpétuel changement, donc c’est un défi, en fait, continu, et on essaie de comprendre comment aujourd’hui on conçoit le journalisme et comment on conçoit ce métier, comment on conçoit un média. Je pense que, oui, aujourd’hui, on ne peut pas nier l’importance et l’influence des réseaux sociaux sur notre métier, le journalisme professionnel ou le journalisme citoyen [...]

Henda Chennaoui, Transcript P08, 09/06/2017

Hence, Henda and Thameur carry an odd relationship with digital technologies, which remain essential tools in their lives. Indeed, although they recognize a dramatic loss of in the quality of the information available, they also admit how indispensable social media platforms are, justifying the choice of platform flirting between offline and online practices.

Second, not only the online environment has been compromised, but the advantages of staying online do not stand any longer. Indeed, Henda underlined that it was a necessity to remain anonymous under the authoritarian regime, and blogs provided an appropriate mean to express under such conditions. Nowadays, it would be absurd to still withhold our own identity online, especially now that mainstream and alternative media platforms are freely available. Therefore, moving to an alternative media like *Nawaat* was only coherent with Thameur's and Henda's academic and professional background:

Moi, je n'ai jamais voulu être une bloggeuse. Moi, j'ai fait du journalisme, même si c'était l'école... être à l'IPSI, ce n'était pas vraiment intéressant, mais je voulais faire du journalisme, et je voulais être journaliste. Ce n'était pas possible immédiatement, sur des sujets en particulier [...] Mais, l'évolution est venue d'elle-même. Tout d'un coup en 2010, fin 2010, la Révolution est là, et tout d'un coup, la liberté d'expression, et tous les sujets que j'ai envie de traiter, de travailler, de faire le terrain – les droits de l'Homme, politiques, et cetera – étaient possibles. Et donc, du coup, je me suis lancé dans ce que je sais faire, dans ce que j'ai appris à faire à partir de 2010, et ce que j'aimerais et ce que j'aime bien faire.

Henda Chennaoui, Transcript P08, 09/06/2017

Hence, trained as journalists, it was only logical for Thameur and Henda to move to a media platform allowing them to produce thorough articles that respect journalistic guidelines and editorial directives.

However, they decided to stay on an online platform instead of choosing a mainstream media organization. This choice can be justified by *Nawaat*'s characteristics allowing a reasonable compromise between a mainstream news platform and a purely internet-based platform. Indeed, the platform is divided into two main types of content: 1) journalistic articles reviewed by the editorial committee and written by hired journalists, and 2) blog posts from citizens and regular contributors free from editorial guidelines (but coherent with *Nawaat*'s values). This tension between 'classical' journalism and citizen journalism emerged through the professionalization of the organization through the past five years, which was necessary to improve the organization's credibility:

Après la Révolution, il y a eu plusieurs tentatives de professionnalisation, d'avoir la rubrique des opinions, et une rubrique, si on veut, de magazine professionnel journalistique. Ils ont multiplié les tentatives jusqu'à une crise en 2013, qui a mis en exergue certains échecs à la professionnalisation, et à partir de ce moment-là, il y a eu une autre série de tentatives qui s'est amorcée, qui ont trouvé un certain équilibre à partir de 2014, qui se sont mis sur les rails de la professionnalisation en 2014. En 2015, ça a été renforcé pour être définitivement professionnel, quoi, et aujourd'hui, nous sommes depuis deux années dans un stade de perfectionnement, de développement de ce qu'on fait dans cette voie professionnelle

Thameur Mekki, Transcript P09, 09/08/2017

Faced to the difficulties of blogging and being heard on cacophonous platforms such as Facebook, *Nawaat* has offered to Henda and Thameur, after the Revolution, an ideal environment in which they practice journalism with the flexibility that can only be provided by online-based media platforms. Indeed, this flexibility allows them to cover issues that are salient for the society while not necessarily covered by mainstream media. Therefore, *Nawaat* kept a "watchdog" identity that first motivated many bloggers and activists prior to the Revolution.

Moreover, Henda's and Thameur's attitudes also echo a change of perception in the content production sphere. Indeed, as more instantaneous platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) have increased their popularity among people, the information produced intrinsically changed at its very core from a highly documented information to more light and "sharing-friendly" information, as described here by Thameur:

[...] les gens, ceux qui bloguaient avant, partagent de moins en moins de matière, [de moins en moins de matière sur Facebook, euh pardon], sur leur propre blogue, ils produisent très peu de contenu et *la logique du partage est en train de tuer la logique de la création de contenu* et que le côté éphémère de Facebook fait qu'il y a beaucoup plus de contenu, mais court et peu riche, alors que sur les blogues, les gens développaient plus leur contenu, que ce soit rédactionnel ou multimédia. Mais je pense que l'essentiel est d'intervenir dans un espace libre où chacun peut partager ce qu'il a.

Thameur Mekki, Transcript P09, 09/08/2017

This particular excerpt reveals vital elements concerning Henda's and Thameur's post-Revolution adaptation. Indeed, regarding the *sociologie des usages* literature, their pattern of appropriation diverges from the one experienced by Azyz, Lina, or Bent Trad. Indeed, Henda and Thameur have not fully appropriated social media platforms characteristics towards transplatform practices. In fact, they both use these platforms essentially for trivial purposes rather than maximizing their visibility. Nevertheless, their use of ICTs (at first, blogs, and then *Nawaat's* platform) respects Jöuet's scope for appropriation. Indeed, even if they have not completely mastered blogging platforms or maximized their use of other social networking platforms, their appropriation process reveals cycles of evaluation and re-evaluation of ICTs' potential (2000, pp. 502-503). Moreover, both participants were unsatisfied faced to social networking platforms' characteristics ("*logique de partage*") and wanted to continue to produce quality and in-depth content online ("*logique de création de contenu*"). Unfortunately, this could not be done on blogging or social networking platforms. Therefore, by evaluating the possibilities

for innovation and self-fulfillment, they consciously decided to move towards alternative media platforms, which provide the necessary conditions for them to express online according to their personal and professional objectives.

2.1.3 Moving Towards Traditional Media: The Revival

This third path of adaptation looks similar to the one took by Henda and Thameur. Indeed, it starts with the same premise but has completely different implications. This section presents Haythem El Mekki's experience of adaptation and migration to an offline mainstream media, *Mosaïque FM*, one of the most popular radio broadcaster in Tunisia. By examining his attitude towards digital technologies and the way he appropriated them, we observe that Haythem did adapt to the new media system not by migrating or trans-using other internet platforms but by benefiting from the media unlocking to engage with mainstream media. This decision was mainly due to his pessimism towards digital technologies, a disgust for alternative media platforms, and a newfound trust for traditional media's role of public information broadcaster.

It is important to recall that Haythem was an early-adopter of digital technologies. As a strong believer of the incredible potential of digital technologies, he has been active on chat rooms, blogs, and social networking platforms since the 1990's, as Tunisia was one of the most connected country in Africa, while having only 100 000 internet users in 2000 (Renaud, 2007, pp. 55-60; Wheeler, 2017, p. 21). However, the multiplication of platforms and the increasing number of online users (especially the presence of *haters*) after the Revolution make him lost hope in the transformative power of digital technologies fostering democratic spaces for intellectual debates among citizens:

[...] franchement, moi je suis un des plus grands déçus dans le monde, un des plus grands déçus des médias sociaux, voilà. Je pensais que ça allait favoriser un dialogue, créer un échange, permettre aux gens de se comprendre, de donner leur avis. Tu ne vois que des gens s'insulter à longueur de journée. Très rares sont les espaces de discussion. Les gens s'insultent, les gens ne lisent pas : ils lisent uniquement le titre de l'article, et ils insultent le sujet, le journaliste, le média, ils insultent, ils ne lisent pas. Donc, c'est devenu des... lieux de rassemblements d'abrutis et de haineux. C'est malheureux, mais c'est ce qu'on voit.

Haythem El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

This transformation – from a cyber-optimistic to a cyber-pessimistic perspective – particularly shaped his adaptation to the post-Revolution environment. In 2011, he worked for several mainstream media organizations (*Tunivision, NesmaTV, Mosaique FM*) and finally chose to stay at *Mosaique FM* as the host of a political satire show.

Although this choice seems odd for such an internet believer, his decision was, in fact, very coherent with his perception of digital technologies and the structural opportunities available. Although he was an active and tech-savvy internet user, Haythem strongly believes in the mission of traditional media of providing quality information to the audience, especially when this media system is free from the Ben Ali's control:

En fait, moi, j'ai toujours pensé que si j'utilisais Facebook et le Net en général, c'est surtout parce que les *mass media* sont verrouillés. Alors, à partir du moment où les *mass media* sont accessibles, pourquoi continuer à parler à ses 5000 amis sur Facebook? [...] Et ça, c'était le point de discorde avec beaucoup de mes amis qui pensaient que les mass media sont corrompus, que c'est le diable, qu'il ne faut pas, non, les mass media, il ne faut pas y mettre les pieds. Bon, donc, six en après, ils parlent toujours à leurs 2000 amis sur Facebook et moi je parle à des millions.

Haythem El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

As described above, moving his online practices to the offline world was logical, as bloggers do not have to play the journalist's role anymore. Moreover, the very characteristics of the radio as a communication technology correspond to Haythem's

despise of digital technologies excesses. While, on the one hand, digital technologies – and especially social networking platforms – allow interaction between the information producers and the audience, radio broadcasts, on the other hand, only spread a unidirectional content without the real-time retroaction characterizing digital technologies.

The following excerpt particularly stresses the importance of this for Haythem:

La télé et la radio, c'est vertical: tu envoies ton message, tu n'as pas de retour. Perso, au point où j'en suis, je pense que c'est plutôt une bonne chose qu'il n'y ait pas de feedback [...] parce qu'il n'y a pas de commentaire à la con, il n'y a pas de *trolls*, il n'y a pas de *haters* [...]

Haythem El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

Haythem's migration from the online to the offline world came from a disillusion of the potentialities offered by digital technologies and a positive evaluation of the new mainstream media system, as compared to alternative media platforms, which are, according to him, highly influenced by political parties and interest groups:

Les médias alternatifs, avant la Révolution, c'était un poignée d'irréductibles. Après la Révolution, c'est devenu tout le monde. Je ne sais pas toi, mais moi, je n'ai pas une très haute opinion de tout le monde. Voilà. En plus, les médias alternatifs se sont faits infiltrés jusqu'à se faire complètement inonder et noyauter par les partis politiques, notamment les islamistes. Ils ont acheté des pages Facebook avec des millions de fans...

Haythem El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

Consequently, Haythem decided to host a radio show after the Revolution. Indeed, his negative perception of the perks of expressing online, doubled with a disgust towards alternative media platforms made it simple for him to choose a traditional media platform, especially when this platform restricts retroaction from the audience. Therefore, in conjunction with the literature on *sociologie des usages* and digital technologies, Haythem adapted to his new environment by re-evaluating the potential of digital technologies, but decided to partially reject them (at least for his professional activities). This is particularly salient using Proulx's and Breton's framework for appropriation. In fact, Haythem's case

has two of the three conditions necessary to witness a complete appropriation of ICTs. Indeed, as an early-user of digital technologies, he possesses all the necessary skills to maximize his use of ICTs and has always integrated them in his daily practices. However, he was not able to see innovation opportunities within the use of these technologies. This occurs through an evaluation of digital technologies' potential and was highly influenced by Haythem new pessimist evaluation of the cyberspace. Thus, escaping the digital world has been Haythem's way to adapt to the new structural opportunities offered by Tunisia post-Revolution media environment.

2.1.4 Stopping to Blog: From Disenchantment to Hope

Slightly different from the three previous ones, this path of adaptation must be considered as complementary to the others, as it is often combined to one of the previous patterns described. Indeed, at different levels, many participants have stopped to blog or at least considerably reduced their blogging activities over the years. Nevertheless, this section focusses on cases in which the participant stopped (or partly stopped) to blog to pursue completely different activities. Hamadi Kaloutcha's and Bent Trad's experiences reveal interesting insights about the reasons motivating to put aside digital technologies for activism. Indeed, even if they continue to be in touch with digital technologies, they are still convinced that activism is now a matter of real-life and offline engagement, as online expression is not enough anymore to make change happens.

Hamadi Kaloutcha strongly believes that the age of bloggers, in a way, is now over. Indeed, he was active online many years before the uprisings, posting and reposting regime-censored videos and content. At that time, as he revealed during our interview, a

single noise online had massive reverberations because people were afraid to talk. Therefore, it was essential that activists such as bloggers to relay information online in order to make people aware of the regime's abuses. Now that mainstream and alternative media platforms are free from censorship, he believes that it is not bloggers' role anymore to act as citizen journalists. Thus, he felt that his goal as an activist has been accomplished, so he quit on blogging, while being an active Facebook user (more for personal purposes). Moreover, he underlines that activists should benefit from the political and media unlocking to commit to offline organizations, such as civil society organizations, to take real measures, on the ground, fostering change. As for himself, he started to work in a diplomatic organization, providing news reports and analyses. According to him, this job allows him to be more grounded in Tunisia's day-to-day reality and to follow carefully emerging issues. Hence, this involvement on the ground corresponds to a new perspective for online activists, who need to be more active in the offline world.

This attitude is largely shared by another participant, Bent Trad. While she has never stopped to blog completely, she has considerably reduced her blogging activities over the years. Several reasons explain this slow retreat from this platform for expression. First, like many other bloggers, she got caught up by personal and professional commitments that have reduced the time available to practice online activities. In fact, for Bent Trad, her motivation to blog has declined as it is not as fulfilling as before, as the goal and the priorities changed over time.

This was not often mention explicitly by the participants, but a lot of them have felt tired to blog online. One participant, a former tech-engineer for an alternative media,

described how meaningless discussions on Facebook often discourage bloggers, even if they are committed to social networking platforms, to pursue activities online because managing them is simply too exhausting:

Je connais des blogueurs qui, de temps en temps, ils ferment leur Facebook, etc., et ils disent « plus jamais », et après ils reviennent parce que c'est devenu une addiction. Mais aussi, ça les draine de devoir se faire insulté, de devoir être... faire un débat stérile avec des gens, tu vois.

Participant #02, Transcript P02, 08/16/2017

This has motivated many bloggers and online activists to quit the cybersphere and get involved in the field with civil society organizations, political parties, and other various organizations. For them, the general objective of getting rid of Ben Ali has been accomplished but the rest of the job has to be done on the ground (Zayani, 2015, p. 196). As recently employed by a humanitarian NGO, Ben Trad stresses how vital fieldwork is important considering that bloggers now compete with journalists, civil society organisations and political parties in the public sphere:

On est maintenant une démocratie, donc on peut dire tout ce qu'on veut, du coup, on dit moins les choses puisque si tout le monde commence à parler, donc, finalement, ce n'est plus que les blogueurs qui parlent aujourd'hui. Il y a des journalistes qui parlent ; il y a des éditorialistes qui parlent ; il y a des analystes politiques qui parlent ; il y a les partis qui reprennent, qui ont repris leurs droits, eux aussi parlent ; il y a les syndicats. Et donc, du coup, on n'est plus obligé, en tout cas, on ne parle plus autant parce que je pense que, justement il est temps d'arrêter de parler et peut-être d'agir, agir autrement.

[...] on avait peut-être un rôle capital lors des événements qui ont eu lieu, mais qu'après, il fallait absolument passer le flambeau à des organisations beaucoup plus ancrées sur le terrain et dans la réalité sociopolitique du pays.

Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017

As underlined above by Bent Trad and along with other bloggers, many felt that it was urgent to act in order to put Tunisia back on tracks. In their case, the adaptation to new means of communications was not a valid option. In fact, they decided to quit, at least partially, the cybersphere to get involved directly on the field. This appears to be link to a

re-evaluation of their *raison d'être* as activists that was incompatible with an appropriation of digital technologies. Indeed, even if they had the minimum required skills to push further their use of ICTs, they decided to remove them from their daily practices and did not see innovation opportunities interesting enough to keep them blogging, or at least to diversify their activities through transplatform practices. Hence, this path appears to be the one in which the bloggers' adaptation has been the more radical and diametrically opposed to their blogging practices.

2.2 Chapters' Findings and Conclusion

So far, we have analyzed through this paper our participant's profiles, their style and the motivations behind their desire to express in the public sphere. Indeed, the changing dynamics of the media and the political systems force them to modify the content they share and to question their place as bloggers within this public sphere. Moreover, they also realize that their motivations to express online were significantly different and depend on many reasons, both personal and practical reasons, which is tightly connected with the platform they decided to use and the path they took following this reflexion.

Therefore, our analysis tackles in this chapter the different paths taken by our participants, ranging from a continuation (perhaps an enhancement) of existing online practices without any major disruption to a rejection of this mean for expression for the benefit of a more offline grounded activism. These paths revealed different choices of platforms and, consequently, different levels of appropriation of ICTs (highly linked with a transplatform use of digital technologies) which was closely linked to their personal experience and their communication goals. Indeed, with the diversification of

communication tools online, many bloggers were at crossroads and decided to adapt to this new environment by adopting transplatform practices, which contributed to boost their use of digital technologies and then maximize their visibility and their content diffusion.

As a result, we observe bloggers' adaptation is highly linked to their appropriation of digital technologies, as the more they appropriated the communication technologies, the more they efficiently adapted their online practices to emerging trends, as they integrated transplatform practices to their daily communication activities. In fact, a high level of appropriation allowed bloggers to absorb the massive changes shaking the cybersphere and maximize their online practices. Regarding this, the first and the second paths attest for a higher level of appropriation, as most participants who chose these paths had the necessary background (minimum required skills) and integrated digital technologies and transplatform practices in their daily practices. However, for those who moved to an alternative media platform, they failed to fully appropriate the use of ICTs, as their critical attitude towards digital technologies prevented them to capture the innovation opportunities. Nevertheless, they found a reasonable compromise for their online practices through alternative media platforms.

Other participants had a more pessimistic vision of digital technologies, which push them to traditional media, or to radically quit the cybersphere to get their feet in the field. Indeed, those who left the blogosphere or moved to a traditional media platform, it was clear that they adopted negative attitudes towards digital technologies or the importance of the blogosphere and followed structural opportunities to express through traditional channels of communication like radio broadcasters or civil society organizations. Hence,

these participants did not sustain their online practices through a deeper appropriation of digital technologies but rather take the opportunity to leave them behind. Consequently, these two last paths of adaptation reveal low levels of ICTs' appropriation, as they did not diversify the platform they use but rather transfer their online activities off the cyberspace.

These findings can be synthesized through **Figure 3**. Indeed, this figure shows how the level of appropriation of communication technologies – here, digital technologies – impacts on the choice of adaptation made by individuals. While this diagram only applies to our case of study, it might be relevant to analyze online content producers' adaptation when they are faced to evolving political environments through the scope of adaptation.

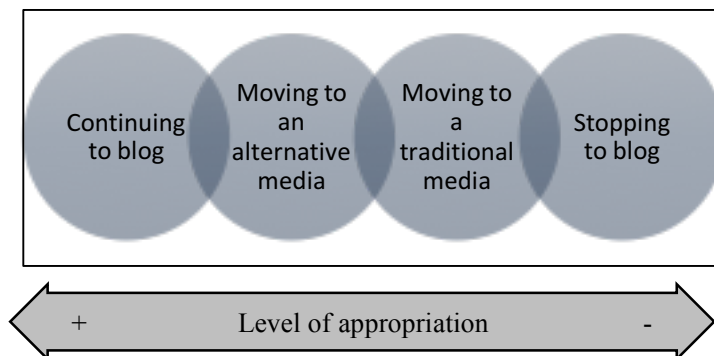


Figure 3 – Synthesis of The Four Paths of Adaptation and Their Level of Appropriation

Yet, all these paths of adaptation put on the radar that writing necessarily comes with the expectations of reaching an audience, which is nicely summarized by Azyz Amami: *“Quand tu écris, quand tu pratiques l’acte d’écriture, c’est pour être lu”* (Transcript P03, 08/21/2017). Hence, every path taken by the participants attests for a desire to adapt, no matter what, to a rapidly changing environment. But it seems that their adaptation, through a deepening of their use of ICTs, transplatform practices, or a complete change of platform, is closely linked to the desire to reach out, to communicate to an audience. This specific scope is, in fact, tackled in the following chapter.

Chapter III – Adaptation to a New Era: Audience and Society

Our third and last category of analysis concerns audience considerations as a component of the bloggers' adaptation to their new political and media environment. Yet, this scope encompasses an interesting paradox: although bloggers and former bloggers claim to remain close to their audience, the interviews reveal a profound disconnection between them (the producers) and the audience (the consumers). This paradox leads us to the main finding of this chapter: in the evolution of their practices, bloggers do not consider audience's needs as an important parameter regulating their practices as they chose the content and the online platform for their *potential* for diffusion rather than targeting a real audience. This finding appears to be the result of two main trends. First, the characteristics of the Tunisian audience, which is socially segmented, have important repercussions on bloggers by widening the gap between them and their audience. Second, the post-Revolution public sphere rapidly becomes saturated by the increasing presence of media, social, and political actors, which undermines the possibilities for bloggers to connect with their audience. Hence, these findings confirm, in a way, the normalization hypothesis as presented by Margolis and Resnick (2000) but fail to provide satisfying responses to our research question. Indeed, our hypothesis cannot be fully confirmed through this category of analysis, but it gives interesting insights about the relationship between internet content producers and the consumers.

3.1 Talking to the Wall: The Paradox of Bloggers/Audience Relationship

As noted by Azyz Amami, writing necessarily comes with the expectation of being read. Consequently, it is logical to believe that content producers such as bloggers (or former bloggers) maintain close ties with their audience, which is supposed to nourish them

through feedback and inspiration. For instance, many participants interviewed claimed that they have plenty of fans adoring them (P05) or that people from their audience – who are now their friends – help them as informants for their professional and personal publications (P06, P08, and P09). Nevertheless, it appears that the participants interviewed have a hard time to determine precisely who is their audience. As for Azyz Amami, his audience is mainly restricted to marginalized people without exactly knowing or targeting a specific group. In fact, his writing follows more his own interest to explore new and different topics than pleasing a specific audience. On the other hand, Haythem's radio show, a satirical news review, although designed for youth by using a crude language register, hooks, unexpectedly, the elders and repulse some young people, perceiving him as a rival:

Ce sont les vieux qui m'adorent. [...] Donc, les jeunes, il y en a qui s'identifient à moi, évidemment, mais il y en a qui te perçoivent comme un concurrent, il y en a qui te perçoivent comme un ennemi quand tu es contre leur point de vue. Mais les vieux voient en toi leurs enfants, leur fils qu'ils n'ont pas eu.

Haythem El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

However, despite that, Haythem do not precisely know exactly who precisely listen to his show. The same trend applies to Ben Trad, who, in fact, supposes that the progressive ideas she spreads online necessarily catch the interest of progressive people. As for our two *Nawaat* collaborators, they claim to have a very diversified audience, ranging from businessmen to scholars, but it appears that, in fact, they have no precise idea of who their audience is. Finally, rather than targeting a specific group, Lina Ben Mhenni prefers to choose the online platform according to the more appropriate scale of diffusion for a specific content. For instance, when she wants to reach diplomats or government officials, she uses Twitter because she can easily catch the interest of journalists and have the support of a lot of fans, hence forcing officials to react. Thus, bloggers broadly know who

consumes their content, but fail to tailor their content to them because they do not have the necessary information on them.

Yet, by consulting participants external to the blogosphere, we quickly realize an important disconnection between bloggers and the Tunisian society. Not that they do not have their own audience, but it appears that their targeted group is far from being as broad as they claim (or would like) it to be. A journalist who wants to remain unnamed provides a stunning example of how bloggers failed to reach an extended audience across Tunisia, as many people he interviewed never heard of a well-known blogger, Lina Ben Mhenni :

[...] j'ai écrit à des amis de Sidi Bouzid... de Kasserine, je ne sais plus, je leur ai dit « Qu'est-ce que vous pensez du prix Nobel... du fait que Lina [Ben Mhenni] puisse avoir le prix Nobel? » Bah leur réponse, ça a été « C'est qui Lina? »

Participant #01, Transcript P01, 08/11/2017

Although this is only one example among all, it gives an idea of the limited pool of people bloggers have been able to reach over the years. In fact, Zayani (2015) reinforces this finding by underlining that hopes started to fade away in the post-Revolution era and, in fact, this disappointment has been often put on bloggers for their “[...] unevenness and lack of credibility, particularly as the country started to experience intense political polarization” (2015, p. 198). Empirically, this trend is confirmed by some participants, admitting that their credibility has suffered through the years. In this excerpt, Bent Trad, is clearheaded about the audience’s disillusion, and even disregard, towards bloggers:

Et donc, du coup, quand il y a eu cette désillusion je dirais, quand il y a eu cette déception quant à la Révolution, les gens avaient beaucoup d’espoirs et les espoirs ont été très vite déçus, sont tombés à l’eau, surtout quand les islamistes étaient au pouvoir. Il y a eu ce mouvement, je dirais, de mépris à l’égard des blogueurs.

Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017

Considering these two excerpts, bloggers' relationship with their audience appears to be paradoxical. In fact, while they undoubtedly interact with some people from their audience, these interactions are not spread to a lot of individuals. Nevertheless, this relationship, although inconsistent, can be de-complexified and explained considering two characteristics of the audience and the public sphere.

3.2 The Tunisian Society: A Complicated Audience

Bloggers' disconnection with their audience emerges from an incomprehension of some characteristics of the Tunisian population. Indeed, although the participants interviewed try to reach a large range of people when expressing online, they face an audience that is, in fact, very socially and politically segmented. These divisions make it harder for bloggers to simultaneously draw the attention of a large number of different groups, which already have their supporters and their platforms to spread their ideas, as described by Participant #02. Consequently, face to a variety of political and religious affiliations, it is difficult to produce content crossing groups and ideologies. Moreover, as noted by Participant #01, bloggers also create barriers (social, linguistic, or geographic) preventing them to reach some audiences:

Les blogueurs sont quand même très segmentés socialement, et sociologiquement. [...] surtout quand ils écrivent en français, déjà, ils sont lus par des lecteurs francophones, donc beaucoup plus à l'extérieur et dans des milieux sociologiques beaucoup plus situés qu'à l'intérieur du pays, et ce sur quoi ils s'expriment sont des préoccupations aussi sociologiquement très situées. Et... par exemple, des blogueurs ... il n'y a pas de blogueurs connus de l'intérieur du pays... or eux étaient aux premières loges. Ils s'expriment d'abord en arabe, donc ça leur fermait un espace francophone, qui est une forme de résonance énorme, à cause de tout ce qui peut se dire à Tunis, sans la résonance des médias francophones en Tunisie... on a moins d'impact [...]

Participant #01, Transcript P01, 08/11/2017

By pointing this out, Participant #01 adds another layer of complexity to the relationship between bloggers and the audience. In fact, the way bloggers are perceived by the population has never been stable. Laryssa Chomiack (P04), head-researcher of the Centre d'Études Maghrébines à Tunis (CEMAT), worked on the activism of the last two decades in Tunisia. According to her, bloggers received different kind of support following socioeconomic and geographic divisions. On the one hand, wealthy Tunisians – who are mainly concentrated in the capital city area and other economic hubs on the coast – have not been particularly receptive to bloggers' content, which is mainly due to their preoccupation to maintain *status quo* in Tunisia. On the other hand, rural area people, mainly from Southern regions, historically poorer, were often close to activists and protesters and have been highly supportive of bloggers' activities. Consequently, it becomes salient that geographical and social characteristics of the population complicate bloggers relationship with their audience, as they have to deal with various concerns and priorities (Hussain & Howard, 2012).

In addition to that, the Tunisian society has specific online habits that, indirectly, harden bloggers' attempts to reach them. According to many participants, Tunisians are addicted to social media platforms, precisely, Facebook. Not that this fact is unique to Tunisian online users, but this intense presence online creates noise saturating the cybersphere. Our Participant #02 nicely summarizes this aspect by pointing that people frantically skim information on Facebook only to increase their social capital through their conversations online and offline, as people now have the possibility to freely talk about public issues:

Les gens sont *addicted* à Facebook [...] ils vont juste lire le titre et passer à l'information suivante, passer à l'information suivante, etc. Juste pour avoir une conversation avec leur collègue au travail, avec des gens du café, des trucs comme ça. Il y a comme une compétition qu'il y a aujourd'hui entre les Tunisiens qui n'avaient pas du tout la chance de parler de la chose publique, à une... possibilité infinie de parler de la chose publique, de n'importe quelle façon, le plus rapide possible, le plus superficiellement possible.

Participant #02, Transcript P02, 08/16/2017

Consequently, this high level of activity makes online noise and creates an environment where people talk without listening to each other. That leads to another habit hardening bloggers' goal of being read: by only reading online information superficially without questioning its validity, online users are poorly receptive to bloggers' content, which requires a minimum of focus and attention. As Bent Trad underlines, as people lean towards easy-consumable information on Facebook, bloggers face real difficulties to connect with the Tunisian audience:

Les gens aussi ne s'engagent plus, enfin, ne s'abonnent plus aux blogues. Donc, du coup, tu peux écrire, toujours écrire, tu peux toujours mettre des trucs sur ton blogue, mais ça ne sera pas aussi lu, aussi vu, et aussi commenté que sur Facebook, et du coup c'est un petit, enfin, c'est comme si c'était des espaces presque morts, tu vois?

Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017

As a direct impact of this new reality, bloggers have had to adapt the information displayed to make it more appealing to their audience. Videos (live or not) or short and light posts have been privileged by many participants such as Henda or Lina as a way to hook people, as internet users tend to only skim information rather than read it thoroughly (Ding, 2017, p. 82). Nevertheless, even by using such strategies, bloggers face another problem: Tunisians fail to be critical faced to online news and tend to believe everything online:

Les gens, en Tunisie, par exemple, les gens ne sont pas avertis, ils n'ont pas... un sens critique envers les médias et les réseaux sociaux. Ils reçoivent... ils

considèrent une information, un statut de Facebook comme crédible, comme une agence de presse

Henda Chennaoui, Transcript P08, 09/06/2017

In fact, all participants agree that an incredible number of rumors or fake news spreads online which makes it difficult to evaluate the validity of the information. As a matter of fact, the journalist interviewed affirms that his organization only has one motto concerning online content: “Beware: In Tunisia, everything [found online] is fake until proven otherwise!” (translated from *Transcript P01, 08/11/2017*).

Thus, Tunisian online users’ cocktail of characteristics represents a real challenge for bloggers when it comes to reaching them. In fact, even if they maximize their chances to connect with this audience, they are not guaranteed to effectively connect with them. Indeed, the incredible segmentation of the audience (and within bloggers), coupled with superficial consumption habits, contribute to harden the interaction between bloggers (or former bloggers) with their audience.

3.3 Being Packed like Sardines: The Saturation of Tunisia’s Public Sphere

The audience’s behavior contributes to depersonalize online dialogues and only build light connections between people and content producers such as bloggers. Consequently, it creates an unsuitable environment for online interaction, especially considering that online users, in addition, are incredibly harsh with each other. As noted by Haythem, this negative attitude compromises the possibility to engage in real quality dialogues, especially since Tunisian skim superficially information online:

Très rares sont les espaces de discussion. Les gens s’insultent, les gens ne lisent pas : ils lisent uniquement le titre de l’article, et ils insultent le sujet, le

journaliste, le média, ils insultent, ils ne lisent pas. Donc, c'est devenu des lieux de rassemblements d'abrutis et de haineux.

Haythem El Mekki, Transcript P05, 08/28/2017

By being uncritical of the information they read online and, at the same time, by not really read anything at all, the Tunisian audience complicates bloggers task when they try to reach to them, especially considering that a lot of online users are aggressive or stubborn. These characteristics of the Tunisian audience leads us to a second category explaining bloggers disconnection with their audience: a saturation of the public sphere.

This saturation is, in fact, largely due to the sudden freedom of speech and of the press. Indeed, the abolition between 2011 and 2012 of the Ministry of Communications and the *Agence tunisienne de communication extérieure* (ATCE), both responsible for the censorship under Ben Ali's authoritarian regime, creates a void of ethical and legal guidelines for journalists, political parties, and other interest groups or individuals, which leads to a completely free, yet chaotic media system (Chouikha, 2015, p. 69; Haugbølle & Cavatorta, 2012):

[...] on est maintenant une démocratie, donc on peut dire tout ce qu'on veut, du coup, on dit moins les choses puisque si tout le monde commence à parler, donc, finalement, ce n'est plus que les blogueurs qui parlent aujourd'hui. Il y a des journalistes qui parlent; il y a des éditorialistes qui parlent; il y a des analystes politiques qui parlent; il y a les partis qui reprennent, qui ont repris leurs droits, eux aussi parlent; il y a les syndicats.

Bent Trad, Transcript P06, 08/28/2017

As described in this excerpt, while the media system, by its apparent openness, allow anybody to express online, it creates, at the same time, an environment in which bloggers competition against a lot of new actors. Consequently, they cannot have the monopoly of their audience's attention anymore because lost the power of attraction they had before the Revolution. Indeed, it becomes more and more difficult to spread content that will become

salient among all the information diffused online by the plethora of actors and organizations.

This phenomenon, yet undermining bloggers' ability to effectively connect with an audience, is not out of the ordinary. In fact, it confirms the normalization hypothesis proposed by Margolis and Resnick (2000) and reaffirmed by other academics (Chadwick, 2013; Douai et al., 2013; Vaccari, 2013). Indeed, the tight control held by the authoritarian regime only postponed the advent of a plural cyberspace replicating existing norms on online platforms, a process observed by Margolis and Resnick concerning the United States in the early 2000s. In fact, they rightfully note that multiplication of online users, coupled with an increasing intensity of online activities, contributes to normalizing the online world as actors traditionally from the offline world push their own interests on online platforms (2000, pp. 19, 21). Hence, their analysis, although a little old, is still extremely relevant when it comes to the Tunisian context. Indeed, the rapid normalization of the cybersphere they described is quite similar to the one experienced by Tunisia right after the Revolution. More recently, Vaccari (2013) finds a similar observation, as stated earlier in this paper:

“The data show that, as the internet becomes integrated with the everyday lives of large parts of the population, it should become less of a niche channel for the politically interested and more similar, in terms of the level of engagement of its audience, to other media.” (p. 157)

Thus, the problem faced by the participants interviewed is not unique to Tunisia, but corresponds to the same trend faced by Western countries a decade before. Nevertheless, bloggers not only have to face this challenge, but they also have to deal with a misunderstanding of the Tunisian audience who is not necessarily receptive to their content.

3.4 Chapters' Findings and Conclusion

Through this chapter, we analyzed bloggers' relationship with the audience and how it has impacted the evolution of their online practices. In fact, we realized that this category of analysis is inconclusive to assess bloggers' adaptation following the Revolution. Indeed, we observe that while the choice to express on a given platform is connected to different kinds of audience, this choice was made more according to the platform *potential* of information diffusion than according to the audience's *characteristics* associated to this platform *per se*. Hence, knowing the audience was not a necessary condition to express online, as content producers can circumvent this obstacle by only having a broad idea of the audience itself (Heaton, 2013). At first sight, changes of the audiences appeared to be a relevant category of analysis by itself but, in fact, bloggers' style and content and the platforms they use appear to condition who is going to be their audience. Our participants do not seem to scrutinize their audience to follow its needs but rather express on the topics they personally prioritize and on the most convenient platforms in terms of the tools accessible and the potential for diffusion, no matter who receive the message. As for the content itself, it has changed over time but the audience needs were not the priority. Rather, bloggers follow often their own interests when it comes to picking a topic to talk about.

This main finding is mainly drawn from the fact that bloggers do not know specifically who their audience is. This distance between bloggers and the public comes from the difficulty to reach audiences because of the geographical and social segmentization of the audience and the characteristics of the Tunisian population. Indeed, the audience's characteristics constitute a serious obstacle in the attempt to establish real communication. Many concerns and interests divide the population and, in addition, their

online habits – being uncritical to new information, only skimming information, insulting each other, etc. – undermine the possibility for bloggers to interact with them. Moreover, the saturation of the public sphere by many new actors reduced bloggers’ efficiency to draw attention on their content. Consequently, bloggers do not seem to have substantially adapted their practices according to the “audience” parameter, due to its complexity to get to know them.

Concluding Chapter – Overall Results and Contributions

This paper attempted to solve a gap in the literature about bloggers' adaptation to the new political and media order in Tunisia. Precisely, it questions the extent to which Tunisian bloggers have adapted their communication practices to the changing context due to the democratic transition. Indeed, the end of the authoritarian regime provided new opportunities for expression to online content producers such as bloggers. Yet, this puzzle has never been solved in the literature, at least, not using the scope of the evolution of bloggers' online practices and behaviours.

Until this research, the literature broadly tackling our research question was diffused through two main bodies of literature, on digital politics and on *sociologie des usages*. Both fields of research provide interesting, yet, not complete answers to this research's core question. Indeed, the literature on digital politics gives the necessary tools to understand the potential of digital technologies for politics and how it can make structural changes in the public sphere. Three main perspectives are opposed in this field: first, cyber-optimists propose the idea that the internet provides the necessary tools and opportunities to equalize people within the political arena and even fosters change by empowering individuals. This is particularly true in non-democratic political systems, in which online users have proven to play a substantial role in political upheavals and reforms. This perspective considering digital technologies as "liberation technologies" is particularly salient among scholars focusing on the internet's role during the Arab Spring. At the other end of the spectrum, two other perspectives (cyber-skeptical and cyber-pessimistic) defend the idea that digital technologies do not give extraordinary powers to individuals, but rather reproduce offline social norms in the cybersphere and, even worst, corrupt and atomize individuals behind

their screen, creating echo-chambers of like-minded individuals that are far from fostering social and political change. These perspectives here supposed a normalization of the cybersphere that might be harmful to democracies' vitality. Together, these perspectives sum up the debate within digital politics' academia but fail to provide elements to sink our teeth into.

This is where *sociologie des usages*' literature comes in handy. Indeed, this field of research, by taking a close look at the interactions between individuals and the communication technologies used, adds a layer of precision to our understanding of bloggers' adaptation process. Indeed, this literature takes a deep look to the appropriation of ICTs by individuals and how their use of these condition their own identity building process by being integrated, for instance, into their daily practices and by fostering an innovational use of technologies. Moreover, the research on transplatform practices, which implies a selective use of online platforms following their interactive potentials for relying and declining information, have proven through this paper to be particularly useful to comprehend bloggers' migration towards new platforms for expression. This approach is, in fact, particularly important to understand the human behind the machine and how its use of such technologies depends, in fact, on its potential for expression.

By merging these two bodies of literature, we already solved a part of the research puzzle. On the one hand, digital politics' literature indeed focuses on the relationship between political systems and digital technologies, which is essential for understanding Tunisia's post-Revolution dynamics but fails to understand the mechanisms behind individuals' behaviors that led them to change their practices as an adaptation to Tunisia's

new media and political context. On the other hand, *sociologie des usages*' scholars provide useful tools to understand online users' practices and uses of digital technologies but unfortunately link their findings to the question of changing political environments such as democratic transitions. The reunion of these two bodies of literature constitutes, in fact, a real contribution to our understanding of ICTs' users adaptation in context of political change such as democratic transition, especially when it has an impact on the organization of media and the freedom of expression and of the press.

Hence, by having a nuanced understanding of digital technologies implications for politics while keeping in mind the processes in action behind individuals' appropriation and use of digital technologies, we have been able to tackle our research question and to postulate this research overarching argument. In fact, depending on the opportunities available to them, bloggers might change their practices and their behaviors after a re-evaluation of their motivation behind their use of communication technologies, which became necessary for their adaptation to such a changing media and political system. The adaptation, in fact, followed the degree to which they have appropriated the use of a technology and their familiarity with transplatform practices.

This literature leads us to create an original theoretical framework using the most salient elements from the literature. Indeed, the concepts of appropriation, identity building and transplatform practices, described by Proulx, Breton, Jöuet and Millette, and the three perspectives of digital politics provide the necessary parameters to assess the extent to which bloggers have adapted their practices following the Revolution. In order to empirically confronts our exploratory framework, we established an inductive and

exploratory methodology. Indeed, a comparison between bloggers' practices before and after the Tunisian Revolution (precisely between 2005 and 2017) has been prioritized and three exploratory categories of analysis were drawn from our framework. These categories focus on changes in bloggers' profile, changes of the platforms they use, and changes in the audience aimed.

In fact, these categories and the Tunisian case, more broadly, were clever choices to answer our research question because the recent episode of democratic transition created an ideal context to observe and comprehend mechanisms of adaptation used by bloggers in the recent years. In fact, the three categories of analysis allowed us to capture on many angles these processes of appropriation and the changes in bloggers' practices.

To conduct this research, semi-structured face-to-face elite interviews with bloggers and specialists close to the blogosphere were prioritized to gather the most appropriate qualitative data possible. Using the snowball sampling method, 10 participants have been interviewed and a sampling matrix helped to balance this small sample to be representative. The size of the simple is, by far, the most important limitation of this research. Indeed, by being mainly located in Tunis and only having eight online content producers interviewed, it could have compromised the validity of the data gathered. This limitation bloggers were often not available or declined invitations to participate, as many of them were already solicited for other studies concerning the Revolution outbreak. However, the sampling matrix ensures a diversity of profiles in terms of gender, the period of activity, the background, and the paths taken after the Revolution. Hence, the small sample reached a point of saturation where the content shared by participants was confirmed by one another.

The data was then analyzed with *Nvivo – QSR International* through two cycles of coding – first, descriptive and then, using the subcoding technique – and provided rich qualitative data on bloggers’ experiences, concerns, and motivations. Thus, it gives us with the necessary empirical data to confront it with our literature and confirm our main argument.

Each category of analysis has been covered in a dedicated chapter. Indeed, the first chapter focuses on the participants’ profiles and attempted to determine if they adapted their style and content after the Revolution and if their motivation behind the act of blogging has evolved. On this matter, we observed that their style remains the same while the content produced tend moderate as democratic transition created new dynamics for expression. Moreover, as expected, they questioned their belonging to blogging itself, which predisposed them to adapt differently. In addition, we discovered that personal motivations to blog were more effective in diversifying bloggers practices than structural motivations, who tend to push them to transfer their blogging habits offline. Hence, these findings of the first category of analysis confirm our argument concerning the adaptation of their *raison d’être* and practices after the Revolution.

The second chapter focuses on our second category of analysis and is, by far, the most conclusive for our argument. Indeed, by exploring the different paths taken by bloggers after the Revolution – (1) *Continuing to blog*, 2) *Moving to an alternative media platform*, 3) *Moving to a traditional media platform*, 4) *Stopping to blog* – we observe various degrees of appropriation of the digital technologies which directly attest for their adaptation to the post-Revolution dynamics. Indeed, the participants who continued to blog tend to diversify their online activities through transplatform practices to maximize their

online presence and to cope with change while people who left (totally or partially) their blogging activities showed less flexibility to adapt to the new dynamics of the public sphere. These findings are incredibly interesting for further research. Indeed, it would be extremely relevant to confront this model for another democratic transition context to test if online content producers such as bloggers adapt their practices the same way in terms of appropriation of communication technologies.

Finally, our last chapter tackles the changes in the audience targeted by our participants. Surprisingly, we discovered that bloggers are not very aware of their audience's characteristics and its needs, even if they sometimes maintain close ties with specific individuals from their audience. In fact, this misunderstanding of the audience is also doubled with the fact that the audience is not as receptive as before to bloggers and former bloggers' in-depth content because they are now fond of instantaneous and easy-consumable information. Moreover, bloggers face a saturation of the public sphere in which they have lost the monopoly of the audience's attention after the Revolution. As a result, we found that bloggers, indeed, adapted their practices and behaviors after the Revolution but not according to audience considerations. Indeed, their profiles changed because their personal interests and motivations evolved and they switched to different platforms because of their potential for diffusion rather than adapting their practices to please the audience. Hence, this category of analysis revealed to be less conclusive than the two others.

Although this research gives interesting findings and provide a real contribution by merging two different bodies of literature and by providing an original exploratory framework to analyze bloggers processes of adaptation and appropriation of

communication technologies, further research should complement this one by conducting a thorough content analysis of the content diffused by bloggers online over the years to establish how it has precisely evolved over the time. To do so, it would require a lot of resources to collect a corpus of representative texts written by bloggers (likely in French, Arab, and English) and to produce text mining analyses.

What does bloggers' adaptation to the post-Revolution dynamics reveal to us? Well, it brings to light hidden (and sometimes, forgotten) figures that have been crucial for the Revolution and the complexity for these one-time heroes to innovate and to survive in the jungle of the cybersphere. For sure, motivating and hopes have evolved over time and competition for attention has become fierce. Yet, the desire to express will continue to drive bloggers as the rules of the game will continue to evolve. Nothing is ever cast in stone; everything is continually changing. So are bloggers.

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Appendix Section

Appendix 1: Coding Nodes – First & Second Cycles of Coding

Name	^	Sources	References
● Age of Blogging		8	17
● Audience & Perception		8	39
● Background		9	21
● Bloggers' Adaptation		8	41
● Blogging Examples		6	20
● Blogging style; Content		8	52
● Censorship		8	27
● Continue to blog		7	20
● Criticism of Cyberspace		8	31
● Cyber-Optimism		5	10
● Defining blogging		5	13
● Divergence among blogg...		2	8
● Examples of Alternative...		3	16
● Implication in CSOs & on...		3	11
● Information Processing		7	22
● Media System		8	31
● Memorable Quotes		7	21
● Motivation to blog		8	36
● Moving to Alternative me...		5	15
● Moving to Traditional media		5	12
● Online Dialogues		5	16
● Personal philosophy		1	13
● Platform choice		9	46
● Political context		6	14
● Public Sphere		8	23
● Stop blogging		7	18
● Trigger to blog		6	18
● Use of ICTs		6	16

A_{1.1} Nodes used for the first cycle of coding (Descriptive coding) in *Nvivo* – *QSR International*

Name	Sources	References
▼ Audience & Society	9	78
Audience & Perception	8	39
Online Dialogues	5	16
Public Sphere	8	23
▼ Cyberdissident's Profile	9	163
Background	9	21
Defining blogging	5	13
Divergence among blo...	2	8
Motivation to blog	8	37
Personal philosophy	1	13
Style and Content	8	53
Trigger to blog	6	18
Memorable Quotes	7	23
▼ Political Context & Media	9	147
Age of Blogging	8	17
Blogging Examples	6	20
Censorship	8	27
Examples of Alternativ...	3	16
Information Processing	7	22
Media System	8	31
Political context	6	14
▼ Use & Adaptation	9	219
Bloggers' Adaptation	8	41
Continue to blog	7	20
Criticism of Cyberspace	8	31
Cyber-Optimism	5	9
Implication in CSOs &...	3	11
Moving to Alternative...	6	16
Moving to Traditional...	4	11
Platform choice	9	46
Stop blogging	7	18
Use of ICTs	6	16

A_{1.2} Nodes used for the second cycle of coding (Subcoding) in *Nvivo* – *QSR International*

Appendix 2: Interview Guides

Interview Grid A | Bloggers⁴

1. J'aimerais apprendre à mieux vous connaître. Pouvez-vous me parler de votre parcours professionnel ou académique?
 - (Probe) Avez-vous toujours vécu à Tunis?
 - (Probe) Dans quel domaine avez-vous effectué vos études?

Body of the interview

2. Comment êtes-vous devenu un blogueur / une bloggeuse?
 - (Probe) Étiez-vous déjà familier avec le travail journalistique avant de devenir blogueur / bloggeuse?
 - (Probe) Quel fut l'élément déclencheur vous ayant poussé à devenir blogueur / bloggeuse?
3. Travaillez-vous au sein d'une organisation médiatique, quelle qu'elle soit? Si oui, êtes-vous soumis-e à certaines règles, objectifs ou contraintes éthiques?
 - (Probe) Est-ce que cela affecte votre façon de bloguer? Comment?
4. Au mieux de votre connaissance, comment c'était être un blogueur / bloggeuse avant le départ de Ben Ali?
 - (Probe) Pouvez-vous me parler de la censure? Du traitement de l'information?
5. Comment décrivez-vous l'impact de la liberté d'expression et de la liberté de presse sur vos pratiques?
 - (Probe) Pouvez-vous me donner de plus amples informations sur le *blogging* dans contexte de la Révolution?
 - (Probe) Pouvez-vous me donner de plus amples informations sur la période suivant la Révolution?
 - (Probe) Est-ce que le contrôle sur le traitement de l'information est toujours une réalité en 2017?
6. Observez-vous une différence entre les médias traditionnels et les médias reliés aux nouvelles technologies? Si oui, quelle est-elle?
 - (Probe) Si oui, avez-vous constaté une évolution ou un changement entre la période révolutionnaire et la période actuelle? Décrivez.

[Mid-interview Break]

7. Quelle est la principale motivation des blogueurs/ bloggeuses selon vous?
 - (Probe) Y a-t-il une différence entre les motivations sur le plan théorique et sur le plan pratique?

⁴ The questions are written in French to ease the interaction with the participants.

8. Qu'est-ce qui vous distingue des autres blogueurs / bloggeuses, en termes de contenu, de format ou des technologies utilisées?
 - (Probe) Y a-t-il eu des changements à ces égards depuis que vous avez commencé à bloguer? Si oui, quels sont-ils?
9. Avez-vous l'impression d'avoir dû changer votre manière de bloguer au cours des dernières années?
 - (Probe) Qu'est-ce qui explique ce changement? Y a-t-il eu un élément déclencheur?
10. Selon vous, quelle est la perception du grand public à votre égard?
 - (Probe) Avez-vous senti un changement dans cette perception?
 - (Probe) Cette perception, qu'elle soit positive ou négative, a-t-elle un impact sur le système politique actuel?
11. Quelle relation entretenez-vous avec votre audience?
 - (Probe) Avez-vous une idée de votre audience (en termes de taille, de tranche d'âge, etc.)?
 - (Probe) Avez-vous vu un changement dans cette relation dans les dernières années par rapport au temps de la Révolution?
12. Avez-vous eu à adapter vos pratiques afin de répondre aux attentes de votre audience?
 - (Probe) Si oui, est-ce un changement positif ou négatif pour votre travail? Pour votre société?

Cool-off

13. Aimez-vous toujours être blogueur / bloggeuse en 2017?
14. Quels défis, selon vous, les blogueurs et bloggeuses de demain devront-ils/ elles relever?

Closure

15. Désirez-vous revenir sur une question posée précédemment?
16. Avez-vous d'autres questions sur la recherche que j'effectue présentement?
17. Auriez-vous des suggestions de potentiel participants pour cette recherche?

Interview Grid B | Public Figures

1. J'aimerais apprendre à mieux vous connaître. Pouvez-vous me parler de votre parcours professionnel ou académique?
 - (Probe) Avez-vous toujours vécu à Tunis?
 - (Probe) Avez-vous effectué des études supérieures? Dans quel domaine?
2. Êtes-vous actif/active sur les réseaux sociaux?
 - (Probe) Tenez-vous, vous-même, un blogue?

Body of the interview

3. Comment en êtes-vous venu à interagir avec des blogueurs / bloggeuses?
 - (Alternative) Comment en êtes-vous venu à développer une expertise quant au travail des blogueurs / bloggeuses?
4. Comment décrivez-vous l'impact de la liberté d'expression et de la liberté de presse sur les médias sociaux?
 - (Probe) Pouvez-vous me donner de plus amples informations sur la période suivant la Révolution?
 - (Probe) Est-ce que le contrôle sur le traitement de l'information est toujours une réalité en 2017?

5. Quelle est la principale motivation des blogueurs/ bloggeuses selon vous?
 - (Probe) Y a-t-il une différence entre les motivations sur le plan théorique et sur le plan pratique?
6. Avez-vous l'impression que les blogueurs/ bloggeuses ont eu à changer leur manière de bloguer au cours des dernières années?
 - (Probe) Qu'est-ce qui explique ce changement? Y a-t-il eu un élément déclencheur?
7. Selon votre expertise, comment les blogueurs sont-ils perçus dans la société?
 - (Probe) Avez-vous senti un changement dans cette perception?
 - (Probe) Cette perception, qu'elle soit positive ou négative, a-t-elle un impact sur le système politique actuel?
8. Qui constitue, selon vous, l'audience principale des blogueurs? Pourquoi?
 - (Probe) Avez-vous le sentiment que cette audience a changé? Si oui, de quelle façon?

Cool-off

9. Selon vous, quels défis les blogueurs et bloggeuses de demain devront relever?

Closure

10. Désirez-vous revenir sur une question posée précédemment?
11. Avez-vous d'autres questions sur la recherche que j'effectue présentement?
12. Auriez-vous des suggestions de potentiel participants pour cette recherche?

Interview Grid C | Context on Activism

1. I would like to get to know you better. Please, can you tell me about your professional or academic background?

Body of the interview

2. How did you get to interact with activists?
 - (Alternative) How did you develop your expertise on activism in Tunisia?
3. How would you describe the impact of the freedom of speech and/or the freedom of activism?
 - (Probe) How does that impacted on Tunisian activism?
4. What were the main issues pushed by activists? Why?
 - (Probe) Are the issues promoted considered *taboo* in the public sphere?
 - (Probe) What is the population's reaction to the issues pushed by activists?
5. What would you say were the main contention tools used by activists to get their voice heard?
 - (Probe) According to you, what is the main motivation pushing activists to be active online?

[Mid-interview Break]

6. Do you believe that activists have changed their repertoire of collective action since the Revolution? In other words, have they changed the way they communicate on the issues they defend? How so?
 - (Probe) Is there a specific reason? A turning point?
7. According to you, how are these activists perceived by the population?
 - (Probe) Did you noticed an evolution of this perception? Explain.
 - (Probe) Is this perception a positive or a negative force in the actual political environment?

Cool-off

8. Based on your opinion, what would you say are the challenges activists will have to face in the future?

Closure

9. Would you like to come back to a previous question?
10. Do you have any questions about my research project?
11. Do you have any suggestion of potential participants who might be interested to be interviewed?

Appendix 3 : List of the participants

Participant Number	Participant Name and/or pseudonym	Current Occupation	Main Platforms Used
#01	Anonym	Journalist	Newspaper
#02	Anonym	Tech engineer	N/A
#03	Azyz Amami	Blogger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal blog: https://www.azyzamami.tn/ • Twitter • Facebook
#04	Laryssa Chomiak	Head researcher at CEMAT	N/A
#05	Haythem El Mekki (Pseudo. : ByLasko)	Radio Host of a political satire show	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal blog (before 2011): http://bylasko.blogspot.com/ • <i>Mosaïque FM</i> (radio broadcaster) • Twitter
#06	Bent Trad	Blogger and NGO worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal blog: http://bent-trad.blogspot.ca/
#07	Sofiene Benadj (Pseudo : Hamadi Kaloutcha)	Cyberactivist and diplomatic employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal websites and Facebook pages (N/A)
#08	Henda Chennaoui (Pseudo : henda hendoud)	Freelance journalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal blog (before 2011): http://hendoudfree.blogspot.ca/ • <i>Nawaat</i> (alternative media platform) • Facebook and Twitter (for personal or work related purposes)
#09	Thameur Mekki	Rédacteur en chef à <i>Nawaat</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal blog (before 2011) • Traditional newspaper (before 2011) • <i>Nawaat</i> (alternative media platform) • Facebook and Twitter (for personal or work related purposes)
#10	Lina Ben Mhenni	Blogger and activist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal blog: http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.ca/ • Facebook • Twitter