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It is a daunting task to say something worthwhile about the media landscape of an entire region of the world in just a few minutes. So I decided the best way to pinpoint a few key issues is to draw a contrast between what is new in this media landscape and what is not new. "New" is an elastic term. What determines whether something is new or OLD? Given that the current Arab media landscape started to take shape more than ten years ago, should we consider it old or new?

We can answer this by saying that the new element in Arab media is competition. The effects of competition began to be felt in the late 1990s, when an increasing number of new channels entered the scene. These were "new" in the sense that they introduced new forms of content. New content came from stations such as Al Jazeera, Abu Dhabi TV, Al-Manar, Dream TV and others.

We can highlight two aspects of content that brought renewal to the media landscape. One is the incorporation of dissent. This is summed up in the title of one of the most famous programmes, "The Opposite Direction". It is now possible to turn on the TV screen and watch Arabic language programmes that express opinions and counter-opinions. The second is to do with Arab identity. Thanks to the most popular Arab satellite channels, people at opposite ends of the Arab world are becoming more familiar with other forms of Arabic, other modes of expression, and the politics of other Arab states.

But in this supposedly new landscape, many old features remain. I will quickly list three. First, it is still very rare for the people who pay for the new media to really concern themselves with what audiences want. There is a disconnection between the motives of satellite broadcasters on one hand and viewer satisfaction on the other. Secondly, the fact that the Arab media are so politicised makes it very hard for individual outlets to be commercially viable and therefore financially independent. The lack of commercially viable outlets restricts the development of new journalism. That is why some people argue that training for middle managers is even more urgent than training for journalists, because managers should first know how to read a spreadsheet and make a media outlet stand on its own feet financially, thereby making it independent of grants that come with political strings attached. Thirdly, in the days when there was only terrestrial television, controlled by governments, coverage of local problems and issues was very limited. That remains the case today. Satellite channels are aimed at the widest possible audience. They cannot do what the national terrestrial media should be doing.

To sum up: the Arab media landscape has been revitalised but some more new elements, which are essential to free expression, have yet to emerge.