

# **Tunisian Media and Information Literacy Project**

## **Part II/ A Digital Media Literacy Action Plan**

This is the second part of multi-disciplinary project that will cover several issues and activities related to Media and Information Literacy in Tunisia.

The first part, published a month ago, introduced our project, outlined a preliminary Plan of Action to implement it in the Tunisian reality and unveiled a first version of an English-Arabic Media Literacy Glossary.

Part II of the project, the present one, covers Digital Media, an issue we believe is of extreme importance to Tunisia, Tunisian media, the Tunisian education sector and Tunisian consumers of all types of media.

**Digital Literacy** is often defined as the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.

### **The Tunisian digital media background**

Despite the major role played during Tunisia's 2011 Revolution and in the democratic process that has followed, the extreme popularity of Social Media as well as its multiple, diversified uses today raise many concerns.

Tunisia is one of the world's leading countries in terms of the number of people who have joined jihadi armed groups in Syria, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere since 2011.

Researchers, governments of many countries and the international Intelligence community have often identified Social and Digital media as the primary recruiting ground for jihadi groups, including in Tunisia.

A lot of cases have shown the role played by the Internet in the radicalization process of Tunisian youth.

The lack of parental control and of a public awareness, the new-found freedoms in the country after 2011, the high mobile and Internet penetration rates in Tunisia and the absence of an adequate legislation are among the factors that make access to Digital and Social media very easy in Tunisia. And this has been well exploited by radical groups and individuals of all orientations to publicize their hate speech and to attract a vulnerable population to their terrorist ideologies.

In an attempt to tackle Internet-driven terrorist recruiting, cyber-crime and money laundering, the Tunisian authorities expressed a will to reinforce the

relevant legislative background. The government has recently considered a new so-called *cybercrime law* to face jihadi and other dangerous content in the Internet. But this draft law, expected to be debated and voted by Parliament very soon, has been already slammed by Human Rights defenders as a “threat” to the country’s “major achievements” in the field of liberties in general and Internet freedom in particular.

Likewise, many Tunisians and international observers and activists are suspicious about the expected new law on privacy protection. They warn against a possible contradiction between this and other legislative privacy protection frameworks and the country’s nascent Constitution, famous for promoting and defending personal and public liberties.

According to experts, the privacy protection draft and other measures could even clash with the spirit and activities of the newly-created Independent Committee of Access to Information (INAITN), stipulated by the 2014 Constitution and voted by Parliament in March 2016.

In 2011, Tunisia has inherited a chaotic and primitive media landscape. The same media owners and funders are still in control since decades now. Despite legislative and Civil Society endeavors, the Revolution has failed so far to guarantee a professional, ethical and sustainable media.

Big corruption, professional weaknesses and ethical issues remained high. In the case of online media, they have reached alarming levels.

The blind rejection of any kind of government intervention in the media sector, the media hegemony of the corrupt (and in many cases criminal) political and business cohort who survived the 2011 Revolution, and the absence of a media self-regulation culture in the country all produced a chaotic situation in Tunisia’s digital media and mainly in social media whose biggest audience and consumer is the young, inexperienced, violent and ignorant generation of Tunisians.

Raising awareness about the opportunities offered by the Internet while, at the same time, warning against the risks and challenges it poses becomes even more important when we know that the youth and youth education are an important issue in Tunisia.

According to the 2014 National Census in Tunisia, the number of people between the ages of 15 and 24 is 1.8 million, or 17%, of a population of about 12 millions. If we add the 25-29 years range, they are 25% of the country’s population.

Due to a high Internet penetration rate in the country (about 60% in 2017), the majority of this young population has a more or less easy access to digital and social media.

The number of pupils in different stages of primary and secondary education is nearly 2.9 millions.

Of these, about 100.000 pupils leave school at an early age every year. This figure has even increased during the school year 2014-2015 to 110.000 school-dropping kids who fail to find the necessary and adequate assistance, thus becoming even more to delinquency, radicalization and temptation to irregularly migrate to Europe through the Mediterranean.

Suicide and drug addiction are also high among the young, especially in the poor border towns.

The risks of radicalization, suicide, migration, delinquency and addiction are increased by both the difficult economic situation in Tunisia and the influence of the bad security situation in neighboring Libya and Algeria.

### **Tunisian Social Media facts**

With a population of about 12 million people, Tunisia has the second biggest number of social media users in Africa.

In December 2017, 55% of Tunisians are on one or more social networks.

In Tunisia, Facebook tops the list of the most popular social media. It is so widely and regularly used that it makes of Tunisia the 47th biggest country in the world in terms of the number of Facebook users.

Mobile technology has an important role in this leader position to Facebook among the other social media.

Tunisia's Digital Media landscape is vibrant and open.

Besides its classic uses (connectivity, education, giving and asking for help, promotion...), Tunisian social media had a big influence in the overthrow of former president Ben Ali and his regime, and the kick-off of the so-called Arab Spring end of 2010-beginning of 2011.

Since the 2011 Revolution, numerous online sources of information have been launched alongside newspapers, radio stations and TV channels.

Facebook users turn to the social networking platform for different reasons.

Common daily activities include reading or updating Facebook, visiting companies' Facebook pages as well as social or cultural pages.

Teenagers and adult users in Tunisia mainly access the platform to see stories from people they know, or to chat with them.

But let us not forget the political uses of Facebook. Since the 2011 Revolution, with a much bigger extent of freedom, Facebook in Tunisia is being more and

more used by politicians as a tool, sometimes the *only* tool, to influence public opinion. This is the reason why this social media has kept booming.

Some users might still avoid crossing certain red lines on certain topics and sensitive issues such as religion and the military, but Tunisian youth and Civil Society organizations have continued to use digital media for initiatives relating to political and social issues.

A number of experts in Communication and Media have agreed that digital media in Tunisia has become a reality and imposed itself as a new form of Media, although it still suffers from some weaknesses such as legal and ethical challenges.

Decree 115/2011 on Press and Publishing provides protection to journalists against imprisonment. However, Tunisia's Press Code does not provide bloggers and citizen journalists with the same protections afforded to traditional journalists.

### **Project objectives**

We believe that Any Digital Media Literacy (DML) training or actions in Tunisia are supposed to achieve the following objectives:

- to be able to critically consume and creatively produce multimedia contents using digital technologies.
- to develop the ability to understand, access, evaluate, and analyze types information created online or with available software and hardware to communicate and participate in civic life as competent media consumer, contributor, and creator of media in the online community.
- to navigate, listen, assess and ask pertinent and focused questions to understand and make meaning of content leveraged in the digital world.

### **About Maghreb Media Forum**

Maghreb Media Forum (MMF) is an NGO based and legally registered in Tunis, Tunisia.

Its roles and activities include producing and publishing content (surveys, features, analyses, interviews, reports) on a few media issues: Media Regulation, Media and Information Literacy, Journalism Ethics etc.

It also offers some training for journalists in Investigative Journalism, MIL and Financial Reporting.

### **About the authors**

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She previously worked as a Media Analyst at the Tunisian Independent Broadcast Regulation Authority (HAICA) before joining the Communications Department of Tunisian Parliament.

In the Civil Society sector, she was in charge of the Arabic version of the *Jamaity.org* platform.

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He has been working for the print, online and broadcast industry for 18 years now, and has covered issues ranging from politics, economy and conflicts to culture, humanities and media.

He has been covering Media Literacy issues since 2011.

He has worked for several Tunisian and international media companies, in English, French and Arabic.