

Associate Professor
Laeed Zaghلامي
Faculty of Politics and Information Sciences
Algiers University
P O Box 149 El Biar 16606 Algiers Algeria
Tel & Fax 213 21 443290
Tel 213 21 691878 Cell Number 213 773 102369
E-mail: lzaghlami@yahoo.fr

Social Media as Alternative to Public Service Media' Failure

Actually, the idea of the title of my paper came after I saw different match between Algeria and Egypt on the grounds especially on the 14th and 18th of November and also the second one which was a sum of commentaries on written and electronic media spaces. Though Algeria won on the pitch as you knew by one nil in Oum Doorman, Sudan, Egypt had easily and unequivocally beaten Algeria on the waves space, it inundated satellites TV with images and comments. Algerian viewers were almost harassed by Egypt domination of so many Arab Satellite TV channels, wherever, they switch to satellites Arabic speaking channels, they are faced with Egyptian monopolistic presence.

Indeed, compared to Algeria, Egypt has a long experience in the audio visual industry. Since 1980s, the country was providing most Arab TV channels with various programs; soaps series, films, comedies and entertainment. It has played leading roles in promoting local culture and production notably with the creation the media city of 6th October dedicated exclusively to media production of different genres and formats, as well as hiring premises to numerous audio visual companies for multiple services. Also, Egypt adopts a free media zone to attract investors. So, it has advocated positive even aggressive media policies by enabling so many private sector to invest all segments (Radio, TV, Press, Internet, Telephone etc...). The country

enjoys a comfortable position with media diversity and pluralism.

In Algeria, however, the situation is totally different, the absence of audio visual industry can clearly be noticed. Although, the country enjoys a relative free written press, audio visual media is still in the public hands. Thus, the state exercises a monopoly on transmission and broadcasting, in spite of the existence of 54 audio visual private cooperatives which nurture national public TV programs. Presently, there are 5 national TV channels; ENTV (terrestrial national channel) Canal Algérie (French speaking satellite TV channel dedicated to Algerians living in Europe and notably in France) Channel 3 in Arabic oriented to Arab World, Channel 4 in Tamazight language and Quran TV channel. All of them belong to same enterprise (Algerian National Public Enterprise). Besides, there is a plan to launch shortly 5 new channels (sports, leisure, economy business, regional TV station and news and current affairs).

So far, there is no regulatory bodies, but the state exercises its control through codes of program charges, which enumerates all tasks and responsibilities to be met by public TV and Radio enterprises against financial contribution. Presently, a secretariat of communication is the appointed ministerial department in charge but with limited attributions. It is clearly admitted that Algeria remains one the few countries in the world which still oppose the creation of private radio and TV stations.. By contrast, the country is almost the first country with high satellite TV channels penetration. Around 18 millions parabolic dishes mushroom on roofs of houses and buildings throughout the country. This heavy presence of foreign TV and high penetration rate explain that most Algerians are addicted to watching them with disregard to national TV channels programs.

. So, written press with 79 dailies is contributing largely to meet readers's requirements and needs. It compensates somehow Algerian public service channels ' failure to attract more

viewers.. Thus, currently, 3 millions copies are in circulation daily with some leading papers; in Arabic; Chourrouk (sunrise) ; El Khabbar (piece of news) in French; we have El Watan, Liberté, Quotidien d'Oran etc... Besides the written press (paper edition), most of newspapers have their electronic edition, but few only have initiated papers on line version such as; chourouk online, El Khabbar .and El Watan are about to launch on line version. However, the main obstacles behind the lack of growth of on line press are the low rate of ICT penetration, shortage of bandwidth, slow speed of digital lines. Nevertheless, social media initiators and bloggers are active to compensate what is lacking in the public service broadcasting. So, social media are alternative not only to PSB but also to traditional media, blogs which are mushrooming on the Net, offer new important forms of expression and space to communicate and relay crucial news to the rest of society. It is practiced with a great margin of liberty, bloggers are being active to provide wide range of news, articles and original comments that are not published elsewhere.

Social media is considered in different manners and for different reasons. It is the results of inconsistent and heterogeneous civil society, high level of illiterism, absence of genuine political opposition, independent media pluralism, weak information and communication technologies rate penetration and Internet poor quality services.

Ideatic Med&Com Study

However, to have a broad picture of Internet penetration, perceptions and usages in Algeria as far as social media is concerned, it is worth to refer to findings of Ideatic and Med&Com company which carried out a research through submitting questionnaire to several web sites and supported par e-mailing campaign. Thus, main results show that 5944 replied to the questionnaire, 4,5% millions are Internet users (this represent 12.8% of the population. 75% of responses mention that Internet is an indispensable tool, 90% find

Internet as part of their life, they connect for an average of two hours on daily basis. For the gender category, men represent 74.2%, and 25.8 % for women. In age category 9% have less than 19 years, 29.2% for the category 20-29 years, 23.3% for the category 30-39 years, 21.7% for 40-49 years category and finally 16.7% for the age 50 years and above. With regard to education category, 66.2% are graduated, 20.1% from secondary school, also 8.1% have professional degree, 7% are from colleges and 0.7% have a primary degree.

Main Findings

For Internet usages and implementations, the study shows that 82.6% send and receive emails, 42.5% use as MSN, Yahoo Messenger, 33.8% use as chat and forums, 33% as telephone via Skype, 9.9% for visioconference use. Also, 80.7% use research engines, 22.9% look for business contacts, 80.8% read the online press, 19.9% listen to radio and 11.4% watch TV programmes. However, most websites visited are related to general information with 69%, 55.3% ICT, 46.2% Health and well being, 42.5% sports, 42.5% music, 32% economy and business news, 31.9% travels, 31.3% cars, 27.9 cooking and food, 24.2% women, beauty and fashion.

Other services are Google and Yahoo with 95.3% games and music 67.7%, sites for employment 31.7%, weather forecast 25.7%, short announcements for houses and cars sale, meetings 19.1%, online games 19%, shopping with 10.7%. For Internet usages, Algerians appear to be less active, 82.2% affirm to share online video (Youtube, Daily motion, Flickr etc...) only 23.2% actively contribute to publish pictures and video, 40.6% declare to have their own webpage, blog or site. 57.9% are members of social networks, in which 44% are connected to Facebook, 7.9% to Myspace, 7.8% Copains d'avant (Old friends) 2.8% twitter, 14.8% Skyblog, 7.5% Viadoc, 2.1% LinkedIn, 0.7% Xing.

According to sources of Algerian ministry of posts and ICT, 65% surf from homes, 24.6% from work, 6.5% from cybercafes, 1.6% from schools, colleges and universities and 1.2% from relatives and friends's houses. Finally for the services quality of Internet usages, 72.1% are not satisfied and 79.7% complain for frequent cut off internet connections. So, these results indicate that despite some progress, namely telephone mobile with 28 millions subscribers, though Internet infrastructures still need to be reinforced in terms of bandwidth, speed access and services quality. Thus, some consider it as the press on line (and at this point, it is worth to mention that most written press has its own electronic version on the net, only few titles have a separate online version; [Chourrouk online](#), as already mentioned 'Tout sur l'Algerie; in English everything about Algeria, is an electronic daily paper based in France, and exists under French law (www.tsa-algerie.com), others see blogs as parts of social media, whereas a third category of bloggers use sites and blogs as tribunes for political opposition and means to promote freedom of expression and press. The barriers between online journalism, electronic press, press for associations and members of the civil society and blogs deserve to be clearly underlined. There is sort of ambiguity and even confusion about these genres'. Social media seem to have a long way to be grasped, comprehended. In spite of this, there are some temptations to build up common spaces on the Net for new forms of expression.

Active Social Media Initiators

Thus, some web sites like www.agirpoualgerie.com; act for Algeria, is initiated by a former Algerian security officer living in France, also website www.haddarblog.com, is a weblog of an active political opponent Yazid Haddar. As we notice, these are examples of online press practices, conceived by either former journalists or political opponents based in Europe namely in France. Also, several webs and blogs exist, such as Algerie Decouverte (Discover history, nature and geography of the country), Algerie Femme (a blog dedicated to

women), Hoggar Infos (about historical patrimony in Algerian Sahara) kherdja is a blog dedicated to outings, food and shoppings in the country and finally Lekra3 is for satires and gossips. Statistics from Algerian ministry of posts and ICT indicate that there are 6000 Algerian websites, but most of them are based outside Algeria. At this point the tendency is that Algerians are heavy consumers of products and services, instead of producing themselves books, articles and documents. Also, they tend to decline the usage of the national domain name (DZ) and opt for domains that exist abroad.

Social Media and Democracy

It can be assumed, however, that the practice and the acknowledgment of social media requires a political system that is basically founded on core democratic values, media pluralism principles and power alternatives.. In the absence of these criteria, it will be quite difficult to admit its formal existence of it. In Algeria case, since 1990s, the country has embarked on political and economic reforms. Still in transition, the democracy is in a search of its way to meet their own needs and citizens's wishes, ambitions and expectations. Thus, Algerians who suffered from the French colonisation, then disillusioned by socialist regime and unique party system, asked for legitimate aspirations and better life after the adoption in 1990 of a constitution in favour of multiparty political system and a move to democracy. For Algerians, democracy means equal opportunities to have access to jobs, education, housing, health, rights for freedom of expression, opinion and press, freedom to create political parties and associations etc... Also, they ask for an independent judiciary system, state of order and law and a political alternatives through fair electoral system.

Private Press: Key Actors in Democracy

However, to achieve these goals, the media ought to be part of the democratic processes which is still not the case, journalists consider themselves actors of the move. Insofar, their

actions are not vain, those working in private press and opted in 1990s for 'the intellectual adventure', are today proud of the achievements but without having paid their lives and health's (for some of them). Indeed, they succeed to secure spaces of liberty of expression and opinions. So, it can be assumed that conventional media and namely private press has still important roles to play in promoting and safeguarding democracy in Algeria. It will not be easily possible to bypass its contribution to strengthening democratic values and principles, by offering spaces for debates to politicians, scholars and to citizens for debates, discussions and contacts. In fact, some papers dedicated pages to specialists and experts's critical contribution and citizens's letters and reports on wrongdoings, corruption and cases of miscarriage of justice. Thus, social media appears to be marginally practiced if only used as political tribunes and forums from journalists scholars, political opponents and ordinary citizens who intervene, react and make opinions and comments.

Technology and Social Media

Undoubtedly, technology has enabled citizens to have access to different news sources by means and ways of satellite channels, Internet, computer and mobile telephones. Hence, regardless of education level, age category, social and work conditions, users feel free to exercise their talents, hobbies and wishes. Also, they implement technology as tools to explore opportunities for friendship, jobs and travels. But, more importantly, as far as citizen journalism is concerned, they express themselves in politically incorrect manner by creating blogs and producing articles that are not accepted in conventional journalism. So, as stated Algerians users tend to be passive social net workers, but some of them publish pictures and video and only few serve for research and blogs. Facebook is the most social network applied to friendship and contacts.

Technological Convergence

As noticed, social media in Algeria, has still a long way to really exist and admitted as

an alternative to conventional media. Nevertheless, technologies enable journalists to have more opportunities to become multi-skilling and multi-tasking. They can easily and rapidly switch from a written press to audiovisual then to electronic one, and perform in perfect way by using multiple technological tools that leads to technological convergence between audio visual, telecommunications and computing. However, when they catch up with latest technologies, then they can acquire more skills and independently carry out multiple tasks and with different tools. So with digital technologies, they ensure paces for credibility, equity, independence and authority and secure freedom of press and opinion. ICT penetration with emphasis on Internet and mobile telephony.

Compensatory Role

But, in the absence of audiovisual media pluralism, social media play a compensatory role, it enables ordinary citizens, bloggers and journalists to express themselves, speak out their minds without restrictions. As public media does not afford them to do. In fact, Algerian PSB is more interested in focussing on official authorities activities rather than on real life of Citizens, notably on their hardships and concerns. There is a gap of mistrust between PSB and its viewers, as PSB does not reflect their concerns and problems in news and current affairs programmes. In the case of the series of match between Algeria and Egypt and the big row on dramatic events that followed, Algerian TV did not bother at all to report on the events. Thus, on the very day of Thursday 12th of November 2009, the bus of Algerian national football team, on its way from Cairo airport to the hotel, was attacked by local Egyptian supporters. Luckily, a reporter from French TV Canal Plus was present and shoot the scenes. Also, members of the national team, use their mobile phones to record events as proof of what really happened. At the main news bulletin of 20h 00 Algerian TV ignored completely the event, instead it carried out live interview with Algerian minister of sports who was

following the bus, but no images were shown on the 'mob attack'. Whereas, and in parallel, most social media and networks exploded with pictures of the attack considered as outrage to Algeria and its people.

Conclusion

Viewers were very upset for not having watched scenes on their own national TV channel. The latter argued that Algerian PSB could not broadcast pictures of the attack as that might spark off acts of violence and endanger lives of Egyptians workers present in Algeria. This is the actual argument of PSB behind the decision to refrain from showing pictures but viewers were critical and shift to other foreign satellites TV channels, if not to different social networks. The move is considered as a clear response to PSB failure to meet their needs and expectations. So, while Egyptians TV commentators launched their rant, Algerian viewers boycotted local PSB programmes and started internet media campaign, all social media actors were active to react to Egyptian media campaign. Commentaries, criticisms, gossips and stigmatisation were parts of the package. It looks as Algerians have discovered new free but unlimited spaces of expression. Without restriction nor limitations Algerian bloggers diverse their unhappiness and anger to the new 'enemy of Egypt'. In sum, social media has undoubtedly become the unique and reliable sources of information as alternative to present failing PSB in Algeria. Presumably, official authorities have closely followed public' shift to the new media, expressing its mistrust and disappointment at the bad performance of the Algerian PSB. What happened during Algeria Egypt match illustrates how large and profound was the divide between viewers and its television channels. Results are that public is almost disconnected with the reality as shown on public channels. It looks for something reliable that reflects his everyday life. Also, public tendencies are that great deal of time is dedicated to watching foreign TV channels, if not surfing on Internet, connecting people and producing articles to nurture their blogs. In other words, public looks for media sources that fit into his

interests and meet his needs. It will be quite difficult for the government to restate and regain confidence on public unless audio visual media changes are operate to allow a genuine media pluralism and freedom of press and expression. In the meantime, the number of younger who shifts and uses social media is growing very fast and it will be then even too late for the authorities to gain minds and hears of the public, should they have opened up the audio visual media to private initiatives, as new media consumption practices are being deeply rooted.

Professor Laeed Zaghلامي

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