

MEDIA IN MOROCCO AND THE WAY TO FACE THE DILEMMA OF REACHING THE AUDIENCE “MADAR 21” AS A MODEL

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Abstract

In the age of internet disruptions which caused radical changes in Media at the level of consuming and producing content, “media was no longer a one-to-one way deal, from top-down to mass markets. It was networked, allowing many-to-many conversations . It did not have to be centrally produced. Users, readers and/or viewers all had highly individualized choices”(bill kovarik,p344.2016).

That being said, reaching audience represents a great challenge to media outlets, amid the appearance of new terms that revolutionize media traditional equation: citizen-journalism and user-generated content. Within this article, I try to shed light on the way Media in Morocco tend to face this dilemma by focusing on “**MADAR 21**” as a model.

KETWORDS: Media Ecology, Audience, Internet disruptions, Citizen Journalism, Audience Metrics, Digital Journalism

I- Introduction :

In his book “the fourth industrial revolution”, Klaus Schwab invited us to “consider the unlimited possibilities of having billions of people connected by mobile devices, giving rise to unprecedented processing power storage capabilities and knowledge access” (K. Schwab, 2016) . It is not too much of an exaggeration to state that many persons in any area in this planet are not connected to a mobile device, and social media has been swallowing audience since almost 12½ trillion hours spent online in 2022, a new milestone in internet adoption, and new records (global digital report 2022). According to the same report, there were 4.95 billion internet users almost 62% of the population, there were also 4.62 social media active users. And here is where media ecology is best introduced as long as it is ” a branch of media theory that aims at understanding the effects that mediated technologies have on communication and social interactions”(Victor Wiard, 2019).

All these facts affect the way how traditional and new media are competing to reach the audience amid the different changes caused by new technology of communication. Morocco is no exception as there were 31.59 internet users (84.1 % of the total population in January 2022) (digital report 2022). Beside that, there were 32.80 social media users in the same period. Needless to say that Media in Morocco strives to search for innovative

strategies to better face this dilemma even state –owned Maghreb Arab news Agency (MAP) has started a revolutionary innovation policy a decade ago to keep up with the digital age. James Madison already warned that democracy is at stake “if citizens and individuals are ill-informed and media outlets are unable to reach them”. (bill kovarik, p , 2016) .

Since its first launch in July 2021, Madar 21 tends to make a difference by relying on an innovative tools and methods to reach the audience, and provide it with reliable and accurate information.

II -online journalism in Morocco

By the moment Tim Berners-Lee designed a network that has been called “World Wide Web “ in 1990, humanity have been introduced to new horizons, which will be later enhanced when Marc Andreessen introduced his “Browser” (Mosaic) , and “it was as if { he } distributed free eyeglasses to help read books , and then threw in a printing press as well”(Bill Kovarik, 2016, p375). A kind of “mediamorphosis “ (Roger Fiddler) happened at that moment by the boom of a new form of journalism where editorial content is distributed via the Internet as opposed to publishing via print or broadcast. Many experts referred to San Jose Mercury News as the first newspaper that had a news site in 1994 - and by early 1995, the following in the US were the Washington Post, the Raleigh News, Observer and many others, but “however, most of them did not do much more than shovel the same news from the paper or broadcast onto their pages. ”(Bill Kovarik, 2016, p394).

Online journalism in Morocco dated back to the beginning of the 21st century with the first attempts by “La Gazette Du Maroc “ and “Maroc Hebdo “ which were mere online version of the printing newspaper or what is called by Pierre-Jean Benghozi and Lyubareva : “pro forma digitality “(Abdelfettah Benchenna and Dominique Marchetti.2020) . In 2007 , and by the creation of news website “Hespress “ which is still one of pioneer and mostly visited websites in Morocco, online journalism in the country entered a new phase , and by 2010 /2011 , another phase ushered with the development of Moroccan online media from content- reproduction to aggregation to pure play outlets” (A. Benchenna,D. Marchetti, 2020).

By 2016 with the adoption of new revised press code 88.13, online journalism has been lastly given a special interest by the organization of this field like print journalism. Thus, that period witnessed the decreasing number of websites in the country under the umbrella of press business and entrepreneurs because.All information websites must be run exclusively by professional accredited journalists with an official press card, According to statistics from the Ministry of Culture and Communication, of the 4,000 to 5,000 information websites that existed in 2016, only 372 sites conformed to the revised code by 2019. (Morocco media landscape,2022,p18).

Though there is still a harsh criticism of the way online journalism functions in Morocco, mainly the criticism is directed to the content"with no distinction in terms of{ it}, the foggy aspect of the editorial line and race towards being the first to publish news with no adherence to the basic ethics of journalism”(Abderahim Belshakar .2021) , Moroccan citizens depend on online websites as a source of information as there is only one 24/7 news channel in

Morocco (MEDI1 TV) , and that is why Moroccans rely on online newspapers and social media to reach updated news.

III- audience: the best currency to flourish?

According the National Press Council in 2021, the committees of press cards delivering submitted 3394 press Cards to Moroccan journalists in accordance with the regulations of the press code. Nearly, one third of this number (1360 press cards) was delivered to online media journalists. Online newspapers in Morocco have been always challenged by funding and searching the best way to maintain sustainability -albeit the government financial help through the program-contract of the ministry of culture, youth and communication.

The first program 2013/2017 that was signed by the then- ministry of communication and the national federation of newspapers publishers sought to create a viable economic model of online newspapers based on legislative solid foundations . Frankly speaking, these measures succeeded but only in terms of the increase of online websites with a minimum viable economic model – without to mention a small exception of some websites which turned out to be (web-entrepreneurs) , whereas , the majority were relying on traditional methods to seek funding like advertisement and government support .”(Abderahim Belshakar ,2021) . But it is necessary to state that some other media online projects managed to begin a new experience by searching the audience through “subscription “ as a mostly best-tested economic model adopted by many western media outlets .

As long as advertisers look to reach as huge an audience as possible , “audience size has been the currency by which advertisers evaluate the quality of news sitecurrencies have been defined as a class of metrics that quantify the audience attributes of value to advertisers “(Jacob Nelson,2019). Even in the local advertisement market , Moroccan online newspapers strive to catch their share amid a very changing competition where the Big Tech /GAFAM / dominate the lion share of the whole market –more than 80% of the digital advertisement market in Morocco due to the possession of data and easy-to-reach and use platforms . . ”. (Abderahim Belshakar .2021)

In spite of all these challenges, MADAR 21 as a new online newspaper, managed to enter the market with a clear vision that is based on giving the chance to a young team to enrich local media landscape with a news website whose editorial line is open to all Moroccan political hues and sensibilities.

Since the outset , the team of MADAR 21 decided to reach the audience through social media platforms as Facebook, Instagram , Twitter and Tiktok .A big interest is given to politics, as the main focus of local audience, but there are also various and rich programs dedicated to different topics and social classes especially young people .

BELKACEM Mohamed, the editor-in-chief of Madar 21, emphasized that there will be never an online journalism without audience as the best currency to flourish and remain sustainable , but , the greatest dilemma that has been facing Moroccan media , according to him , is the misleading affinities between professional online journalists and social media activists and influencers . Unfair competition and the search for “clicks” are the main challenges that are augmenting the crises of online journalism in relation to audience –Belkacem ruefully concluded (interviewed by the author through E-mail :2023).

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In order to start a very convincing and encouraging beginning with local audience , Madar 21 put at the outset an insightful plan that gave much more interest to quench the thirst of followers and watchers for accurate news and rich content, amid the current crisis of public media in Morocco which is the direct result of Moroccan public media company failure to keep up with the digital age and the absence of a real strategy to respond to the different needs and gratifications of the local audience , according to many experts and professionals (Jamal Mouhafid ,p 35, 2022).

Madaer 21 is hugely presented in all social media platforms especially Facebook , youtube and instagram . The editorial board of this outlet has given more focus to video productions as the best way to reach Moroccans from all hues and walks of life as long as visual productions are so interesting to all of them .According to its statistics , Madar 21 page views per month exceeds 8 M , meanwhile , page visitors per month are 4 M (140000 visitors per day) , whereas , video views per month are so interesting : 30 M (Facebook) , 3 M (youtube) and 2 M (instagram).



Source : MADAR 21 Editorial board

With Such programs that are open to different generations and orientations , Madar yearns to reach as wide audience as possible .”with Youssef Alhissi “مع يوسف الهيسي” is an interview show program with a political background . “Memories “مذكرات” is an autobiography program that is dedicated to shed light on the life process of a famous figure . “أبعاد القضية” is one of the main programs

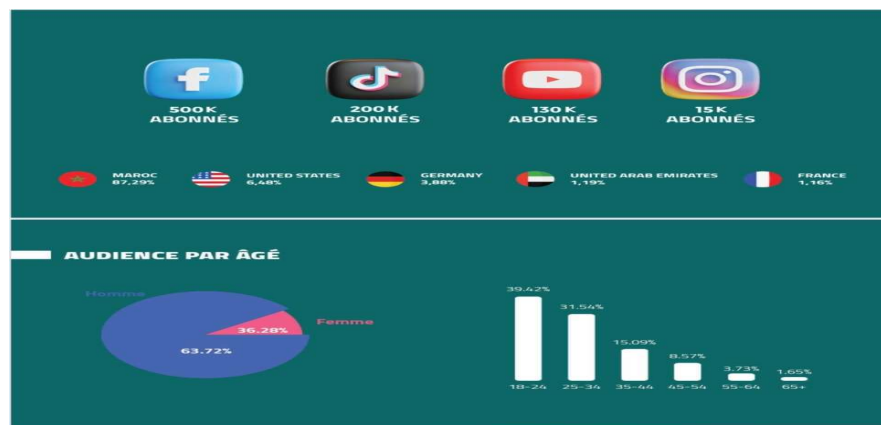
that focus on the different aspects of a sensitive case, its repercussions, and how should Moroccans tackle with .

All these programs, and many more, are presented via social platforms .There are other programs that are created for young people in Morocco.

V-, Digital and social natives as the main audience

Many recent studies have showed that young people have their own habits in getting into news and information. News, for them, is not just digital but social “as they have grown up with the social, participatory web, which has conditioned their consumption behaviors, brand perceptions, and attitudes towards information”. In social environments, news is ubiquitous and ambient. In addition to that , According to a new study “Internet use among Moroccan secondary school students: An exploratory study -2022” , results showed that Moroccan students utilized the Internet more for socializing and entertainment than for educative purposes .

Nearly one third of the population in Morocco is young people. Thus , it is no coincidence to state that more than half of Madar 21 audience belong to young people age between 18 and 34 (39% age 18-24) , and its presence on social platforms (500k subscribers in Facebook).



Source: MADAR 21 Editorial board

VI -Conclusion:

Media landscape is fast changing both globally and locally. Media outlets are no longer at ease because of the harsh competition and the emergence of new players in the media market .the main currency by which these outlets may resist the dire circumstances of this market is audience as the best gate towards advertisers. Many studies have been digging deeper into the effects of online audience metrics such as audience clicks on journalistic decision-making (welbers, kleinnijenhuis, van atteveldt ,ruigork) , and throughout the history of media and communication research “ they(audience) have been portrayed as masses that are manipulated , citizens that are informed , consumers that select, products that are sold , individuals that seek or avoid , networks that form , {.....} users that interact. But never, they have been out of the whole equation of media industry.

It is imperative to state that the onus upon online journalism has become so intense, and the search for audience is not a rosy road as long as there are many competitors in media market , and they (audience) is the king as they have many options , and ,even , turn out to be both

producers and consumers (user-generated content as a concept refers to the content that is produced by citizens- citizen journalism).

Innovation and viable strategy are the best tools to confront this dilemma by adopting the ways to exactly find the needs and gratifications of the targeted audience, and know how to satisfy their own habits and right to access to a true , accurate information and valuable content .

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