

Algerian Broadcast Media's Response to Covid-19: “El-Bahia” Radio in Oran as an Example

Dr. Ibtissem Rais Ali *

(1) University of Oran 1, Ahmed Ben Balla Laboratory for Analysis and Design of Media Models in History, Economics, Sociology and Politics, Algeria. Raisali.ibtissem@univ-oran1.dz

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Abstract:

The outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020, had led to major changes in various aspects of human life. Important sectors, including strategic ones, have been affected by the pandemic. Accordingly, broadcasting media were mobilized and was considered at that time a means ensuring security and stability for communities, as well as for the management of the social and informative crisis accompanying the sanitary and pandemic state, in particular in its beginning. This study tackles the local communication strategy adopted for the management of the crisis and the role of the proximity broadcast media in Algeria as one of the media means mobilized for that purpose, and which had a social, psychological and informative impact, consisting in the presentation of news and information about the pandemic state in the country and in raising awareness to limit the infections and their complications.

Keywords: Broadcast media, Corona virus, Covid-19, El-Bahia radio.

1. INTRODUCTION

Arguably, Covid-19 is one of the most serious global pandemics mankind survived. This is mainly because of the large number of

* Corresponding author.

casualties it caused. All world population was set into quarantine for a number of weeks and this state had its repercussions on all sectors, whether economic, media, educational, cultural, etc. The crisis is still ongoing and not yet finished, and we do not know precisely the nature of repercussions that overwhelmed all sectors.

2. Problem of the Study

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, the world is witnessing fluctuations and disorders in all strategic sectors, such as transport, education, economy, trade exchanges, etc. In fact, corona virus crisis is classified as a global crisis affecting all humanity throughout all life sectors⁽¹⁾. This sanitary crisis generated also an informative crisis⁽²⁾ which caused an informative disorder. This term was given by World Health Organization (WHO) in defining the propagation of false news and conspiracy theory. This is evident in the ambiguous declarations of some broadcasting media. Their information and news are lacking contents or ambiguous, hence creating a favorable condition for the propagation of rumors and misleading and false news, hence giving rise to disorders within communities. In such crises, and like any other crisis witnessed by the world, broadcasting media play an important role in ensuring a state of stability within the community. This can be done through accompaniment, raising awareness, enlightening and informing people about news and developments related to the crisis. Seemingly, radio is one of the most popular broadcasting media among the masses. It played and still play the role of the most effective informative mediator in the process of raising awareness and informing about the dangers of Corona pandemic since its beginning. In Algeria, and since the start of the crisis, the Algerian radio mobilized all its branches throughout its 58 provinces and all its programs were devoted for the service of the Algerian citizen and for raising his awareness about the dangers of Covid-19.

(1)- Sadek El-Hamami, how did Corona pandemic changed the media and newspapers industry ? Al-Jazeera center for studies, informative study, 2020.

(2) - Ibid.

To be more in touch with this phenomenon, we will tackle the role played by Oran radio as being one of the oldest proximity radios and the most important in western Algeria. This radio station has rich programs and its staff is known for its professionalism. The study will tackle the role played by that radio which was according to the programs network modified to cope with the pandemic agenda, and dedicated to serve the Algerian citizen, in particular those living in Oran city.

The problem is axed about the following main question: what are the procedures taken by Oran El-Bahia radio in the frame of the national program of dealing with Covid-19 crisis, within its internal public composed of employees and journalists and the external public of the establishment?

To answer this key question, we have tried to divide this study into two parts: the first tackles some theoretical notions related to the study, and the second part contains a reading and enumeration of the information gathered in the field study made in remote, through the interviews made by phone due to the restrictions of the pandemic witnessed by Algeria during the time of our study.

3. Notions of the Study

3.1. Definition of Crisis

Idiomatic definition: the crisis is defined as an extraordinary circumstance prevailing at an establishment, state or defined region, and this sudden change in the functioning of the concerned body causes disorders in all sectors overseeing its work. It is a condition in which the decision maker losses his stability and which may affect one of the following administrative entities: the state, establishment, project, etc. Events start to happen in a rush and become complicated, causes overlap with the outcomes, and the decision maker losses his control over the situation or its future trend.⁽¹⁾

(1) - The specialized institute of studies: strategy of crisis manufacturing and management, 2016, p169.

3.1.1. Stages of the Crisis

The stages of the crisis are as follow:⁽¹⁾

- Stage of the shock: it is characterized by ambiguity, confusion, disbelief, etc.
- Stage of retreat: occurrence of chaotic and messy acts
- Crisis recognition stage: rationalism of thought, absorption of the crisis, ...
- Adaptation: it is also called the stage of early warning, which is the first stage of crisis management where strategies are used, in addition to the employment of human and material resources within the organization to deal with the crisis by use of scenarios in order to limit the diffusion of fear and control the aggravation of the crisis.
- Activity recovery stage: in this stage, strategies are prepared and executed, as well as short-term and long-term programs, characterized by intense efforts to mitigate the seriousness of the crises.

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3.1.2. The procedural Definition of the Crisis

In our study crisis means the health crisis witnessed by Algeria and all countries all over the world resulting from the propagation of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in order to manage this crisis it was necessary to use the communication of the crisis at all levels and strategic sectors of the country in transferring the information related to the development of the crisis in order to take the appropriate measures.

3.2. Corona Virus

According to the definition of UNICEF, it is a respiratory illness with symptoms similar to those of the flu, caused by a corona virus

(1) - Saad Ali Rayhane El-Mohammedi, models from contemporary managements, El-Yazouri, 2020.
<https://books.google.dz/books?id=kWATEAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr#v=onepage&q&f=false>

called SARS-CoV-2. The most symptoms are fever, cough, muscle aches, etc.⁽¹⁾ This virus witnessed many transformations and mutations since the appearance of the first one, namely Wuhan virus to another virus Delta and Delta+ until present day.

3.3. Broadcast Media

The broadcast media is the kind of communication visiting the public with a set of contents which may consist in news, reporting, coverage, cultural, religious, sports and recreational programs, and other types of press production, which is done according to defined media policies serving the interests of the body in charge of communication and achieving functions to the public targeted by the news and information, with an intentional influence and recreation and informing about some products, services, etc.

The idiomatic definition: in this study, the broadcast media means the media broadcasted through the frequencies of the state radio in Algeria, in which we will highlight the radio station in Oran city namely El-Bahia radio channel.

4. Previous Studies

4.1.First Study (Aicha Bachir Ettayeb,2020) ⁽²⁾

This study aimed to observe and give a preliminary reading of the covid-19 pandemic crises management, in particular by the Arabic countries, and it presented the notions that emerged during the crisis, such as social security, and renewal of the crisis management methods and strategies. The study started from the problem of looking in the different bodies in charge of fighting the crisis, these bodies included official and non-official bodies and departments, such as social

(1)- UNICEF, N.D, Retrieved 26 December 2023, from <https://www.unicef.org/>

(2) - Aicha Teyeb, Illegal Immigration and Refuge to Europe During Covid-19 A Sociological Review of Humanitarian Relief Efforts, (2021, May). https://scholar.google.fr/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=ar&user=6yBiAKgAAAAJ&citation_for_view=6yBiAKgAAAAJ:QIV2ME_5wuYC

organizations and others. The study arrived at concluding many important outcomes, the main one consists in reinforcing the trust between the Arab peoples and security and medical staff, and moreover the importance of the social side of the countries was well noticed in the frame of applying preventive measures in order to limit the widespread of the virus in addition to the role of the broadcasting media in raising the awareness the public about the situation.

4.2. Second Study (Bouamoucha, 2020) ⁽¹⁾

This study provided information about covid-19, by giving a presentation about the different epidemics and pandemics throughout the history. This study dealt analytically with the phenomenon of covid-19 spreading in Algeria and its development, the time frame of the study was set from the advent of covid-19 as pandemic in March 2020 until April 2020. Tables were presented reflecting the pandemic status in that period. The study is then deemed a reference for defining and understanding the state of the pandemic in Algeria since its beginning. This study is also important since it gives historical background information about epidemics and their propagation and danger.

5. Reasons of Selecting the Topic and its Importance

Amongst the reasons inciting me to tackle this topic, I can state the following:

- The subject is recent and not treated abundantly, hence inciting me to tackle it and enlighten researchers with data and information about the theme of media and covid-19, in particular in Algeria.
- To be acquainted with the efforts and kind of measures taken in the frame of the national program of covid-19 crisis management in

(1) - Bouamoucha Naim, 'Corona Virus (Covid 19) in Algeria - analytical study', social ability magazine, 2.2 (2020), 113–51

Algeria, whether at the level of the ministry of Interior and local communities, ministry of health and hospital reform or the ministry of communication.

6. Methodology of Research

The methodology: in view of the kind of study, it requires adopting an analytical descriptive method, by collecting the required scientific information in view of the rareness of studies and the difficulty of collecting information in the field due to the prevailing of the pandemic. The collection of information was through documentary research or web sites concerned with the communication about the crisis and the strategy adopted by the Algerian broadcast media, moreover some phone interviews were conducted with some officials at the local radio station in Oran in order to gather information related with the implementation of the procedures set by the concerned ministries in the frame of combating covid-19 pandemic.

6.1. Tools Used for Gathering Information

Based on the kind of study and the challenges we faced during the process of fact-finding and information gathering, we have relied upon documentary research to gather information, or electronic research through websites and e-magazines in addition to the use of phone interviews with some radio journalists and officials of the radio station to gather information relevant to the study.

6.2. Limitation of the Study

Time frame: since covid-19 virus is still ongoing, this study provides information and an analysis of the stage starting from the advent of covid-19 as a pandemic in March 2020 until December 2020, and research is still ongoing regarding the impacts of this dangerous virus and its repercussions on the world health in all important life sectors.

7. Parts of the Study

7.1.Importance of the Broadcasting Media as an Element for the Management of the Crisis

The information has nowadays a important role, in particular upon the emergence of crisis, and broadcasting media is amongst the main means relied upon by the responsible authorities to take decision in view of the large amount of information they can provide through media coverage, such as informing about the concerns of citizens and phenomena which may have relation with the origin of the crisis and other matters which may assist the officials, politicians and others, to take the appropriate decisions and in due time; this is called the rationalization of decision making in different fields.⁽¹⁾

The gathering of information and facts from news can assist in making prediction and forecasts and avoid taking random decision, and this requires the availability of a developed communication and information systems to understand the causes of the crisis and its evolution.

In Algeria a media plan was set by the ministry of communication in the frame of a national strategy of covid-19 crisis management, calling for the regulation of the role of media and the citizen in information which is guaranteed by the constitution, in order to avoid the spreading of rumors and false news that cause confusion of the public opinion.⁽²⁾

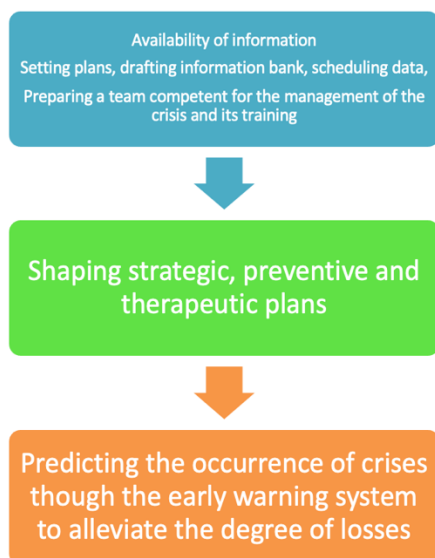
(1)- Lakrini Idris, 'Role of Information and Communication in the Management of an International Crisis', 2014, 9–24

(2)- Zine El-Abidine Bouacha, Corona in Algeria, pens of the TV, the official site of the Algerian TV. 2020

<https://www.entv.dz/%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3>

The ministry of communication reminded about the strategic aspect and the public service characterizing the broadcasting media whether belonging to the public sector or to the private sector and from different types of media: radio and TV, written press and electronic press, in addition to the operators in communication sector such as printing houses, advertising and distribution companies. Radio and TV programs were modified and adapted in the context of the new strategy of broadcasting media in the management of covid-19 crisis, and programs of awareness and informative aspect of this pandemic were broadcasted in order to go along the exceptional situation prevailing in Algeria like other world countries in consequence to this pandemic.⁽¹⁾ The local media like proximity radio stations, etc. play a key role in bringing the concerns of the Algerian citizens close to the officials, hence helping for solving some problems that are bothering the citizen.

Figure.1. A Plan Summarizing the Importance of the Information in the Management of the Crisis



Source: Lakrini Idris, 2014

(1) - Ibid.

8. Results and Discussion

8.1. Communication of the Crisis through the Algerian Broadcast Media in the Frame of Covid-19 Pandemic: El-Bahia Radio Station in Oran as a Model

Corona virus was declared as a world epidemic taking the characteristic of a pandemic when World Health Organization (WHO) so recognized it on March 11th 2020.⁽¹⁾

Since that date the daily features of the individual life changed in Algeria and in the whole world. At the beginning countries dealt with the crisis cautiously waiting for setting a policy for the management of the pandemic crisis according to the degree of its propagation in the society and as per the existing social and political systems. Broadcasting media are means influencing the public opinion in how to deal with the crisis, and there are two methods adopted by different broadcasting media in how to deal with any crisis: broadcasting media that reverberate the society existing within the crisis and therefore providing all possible information and solution needed by it, and broadcasting media orienting the community, so that they deal with the crisis as desired by the leaders managing the crisis.⁽²⁾

8.1.1. Presentation of “El-Bahia” Radio Station:

Name: El-Bahia Oran radio station

City of broadcasting: Oran

Date of first broadcasting: January 26th 1994

Frequency: 92.5

Type: public informative radio station

Targeted public: general public

(1) - Zine El-Abidine Bouacha, Op.cit .

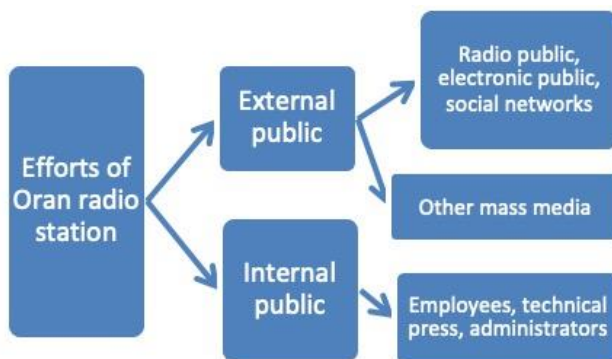
(2) Journals

nauss,
<https://journals.nauss.edu.sa/index.php/AJSS/article/view/1265/882>, vu 20 /01/2024.

8.1.2. Institutional Crisis Communication of El-Bahia Radio Station:

We will expose the communication efforts and strategies implemented by El-Bahia radio station throughout the period determined in the time frame of the above-mentioned study, at the internal⁽¹⁾ and external level of the radio station, as follows:

Figure.2. The communication efforts and strategies implemented by El-Bahia radio station during the pandemic period



8.1.3. Role of Oran Radio Station in Dealing with the Crisis at the Internal and External Level:

8.1.3.1. The Internal Level:

El-Bahia Oran radio station worked in the frame of the national strategy which mobilized all human and technical means to face the crisis at all levels. Broadcast media was an important party involved for the implementation of the instructions emanating from the ministry of communication and the audiovisual control board to face this pandemic. The top management of Oran radio took some measures, in one hand to

(1) - ibid

facilitate the duties of the journalists and the personnel in general, and on the other hand to preserve their safety, by reducing the working element in order to mitigate the human hazards. Employees were forced to implement health measures such as wearing masks and adopting social distancing, etc.

Moreover the movement of journalists in the field was controlled in order to avoid contact with the external public when there is no need to move, and information are gathered through phone interviews⁽¹⁾. Moreover journalists endeavored to present health information from credible sources in order to avoid rumors and false news circulating in social media networks, and they presented such information in coordination with the local authorities, civil protection, health department and security department⁽²⁾. A strategy was adopted for the newsroom and production unit, relying basically on awareness media and adapting some programs according to the epidemic state prevailing in the country. During confinement, mass media became a companion, relieving the isolation of citizens and radio public by broadcasting programs. Such programs were sometimes of awareness aspect, providing guidance and prevention hints against covid-19, and sometimes informative in order to be acquainted with the development of the crisis, number of infected persons, etc, and in other times recreational, funny programs, with humorous contents, music, cultural, etc.

8.1.3.2.The External Level (Communication Orienting the Public)

Since the outbreak of covid-19 in Algeria, and after setting the media plan, the mass media, and in particular the broadcast media, have demonstrated social responsibility towards the crisis society. And in the frame of the institutional communication strategy of the crisis, El-Bahia Oran radio station endeavored to broadcast simple media discourse,

(1) - Interview with the journalist Houari Assali (21-01-2021)

(2) - Zine El-Abidine Bouacha , Ibid

with clear language close to children, youth and even elderly people and analphabets. Furthermore, they worked to raise the awareness of people about some values of public cleanliness to avoid behaviors that aggravate the propagation of the virus. They also urged for social distancing in this context.

For the reception of guests in thematic programs, reception was dictated only by necessity, preferring to use phone interviews and interventions when necessary. Children were prohibited to attend the programs to preserve their safety as well as the safety of personnel.

1.1.1.1.1. At the Level of Programming

Some changes and adaptations were done on the customary programs network of Oran radio by including content going along the crisis prevailing in Algeria like other world countries. Programs broadcast introductory and awareness programs about the pandemic, carried out with the collaboration of the department of health of Oran province, and on a daily basis, such as: corner of the family doctor and medical advices programs. Some programs were made in partnership with the department of religious affairs, with religious contents that included advices and awareness about the danger of the pandemic on the community health, such as the program physical health (twice a week), corner of fatwas, interactive and awareness program. In the cultural side, cultural and recreational spaces were programmed to alleviate the social fear and panic from covid-19 pandemic, this was done by coordination with the department of culture of the province, some of these programs are: Nights of El-Bahia, gatherings through radio (interactive by phone), zapping music, in addition to some programs of newsroom, such as: citizenship space.

1.1.1.1.2. Spots of Educating and Raising Awareness Campaign

The advertising content contributed also in educating and raising the awareness from the risks of non-healthy behaviors in order to avoid

infection by covid-19 virus. Sixteen (16) awareness spots were broadcasted each half an hour; since radio has an impact on the psychic state of the citizen, and its simple language is close to reach the minds of all categories of the society.

1.1.1.1.3. Contents Guiding the Electronic Public

El-Bahia radio station took a new look recently, and importance was given to spread its contents through social network sites, in parallel to its radio broadcasting. Some of its live programs were filmed in the website of the radio station, knowing that public was accustomed only with the voices of the programs presenter and journalists of the radio station, and not their faces. Hence the radio station is brought close to the Algerian citizen and population of Oran province, in particular in the context of intense competitiveness between the radio stations in the digital era, and the large trend of the Algerian public towards the use of social networks. The website of El-Bahia radio was also used to minimize the widespread of rumors and false news, and the personnel in charge of the website management (the director of the radio in person, newsroom, production room) are watching over broadcasting news and later developments, and provide links to the bodies concerned with the provision of statistics about the evolution of the crisis such: link to civil protection, provincial assembly and department of health.

1.1.1.1.4. Relationship Between Oran Radio Station and Written Press (Al-Joumhouria Newspaper)

Oran radio station endeavored to bring close all sectors serving the public interests and have positive outcome to the radio public, in terms of health, security, culture, news, etc. The program “press cafeteria” which was adapted also, invites guests from written press, whether private or public. Since March 2020, this program is attended by Al-Joumhouria newspaper represented by Mrs. Nawal Ben Khelifa, who makes coverage of the activities of Oran radio related to covid-19 crisis, such as the coverage of the open day allocated to all radio stations by

the Algerian Radio on July 12th 2020 by programming news and sessions adapted to the day of raising awareness and enlightenment against the pandemic, in which participated actors from all sectors having relation to the prevention from the virus and representative of hospitals.

9. CONCLUSION

Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the radio sector in Algeria like in many other countries, and it was necessary to adapt the journalist work with the new prevailing situation whether in terms of the agenda of themes to which priority is given, or the method of gathering and presenting information and news. Covid-19 crisis had also repercussions on the nature of the orienting media by relying mostly on the health media, hence the media establishment are called to reconsider the structuring of their sections and the specialization of their journalists, since the health media is now a necessity in this period still prevailing in Algerian and in the whole world. Regarding the challenge imposed in the movement of personnel of the media establishment from different kinds, some western and Arabic radio and TV channels arrived at adopting new capabilities of remote working, such as home studio, as adopted by the French channel TF1 in the presentation of news from home, in addition to using social media to minimize the movement to the field. The period of confinement necessitated also to reconsider the form of radio establishments, by employing artificial intelligence technology which proved to be credible in many domains, in particular the medical field, since years ago and in particular during the pandemic crisis, there is a trend to use this technology in the field of media and production, therefore we have to reconsider the form of media establishments and the premises in which media work is practiced, such as editing rooms and studios.

The period of confinement changed our way of conceiving the form of media establishments and annulled the notion of necessary coexistence in the work place to practice it, and simplified to us the

remote working, and this will have an impact on the form of our daily activities and on the form of occupations and jobs in future.

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