

## Economic Challenges of Media Institutions in Algeria and Their Impact on the Future: Newspapers as a Model

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### Abstract:

This research paper explores the influence of economic factors on the future of the newspaper industry in Algeria, particularly examining the economic dimensions of media institutions and the business rationale within the press sector. This study focuses on the challenges confronting newspaper organizations in the wake of digital advancements and the prevailing economic conditions affecting newspapers in Algeria. It reveals that printed newspapers across various formats in Algeria are mired in an economic downturn precipitated by several factors, including diminishing revenues from commercial advertisements, escalating costs of production, distribution, and printing, as well as reduced sales due to changing consumer habits towards digital media content and fierce competition from digital platforms. This economic predicament has led to the closure and disappearance of numerous newspapers from the Algerian media landscape.

**Keywords:** Media Institutions, Newspaper Industry, Economic Factors, Economic Crisis.

### Introduction:

newspapers, often regarded as the cornerstone of the press, have long been a staple in disseminating information across numerous facets of life, acting as a pivotal mass communication medium. These publications have traditionally fulfilled a myriad of media functions such as reporting, interpreting, analyzing, educating, guiding, and advertising.

Historically, as printed newspapers proliferated and sought to broaden their distribution networks to access a wider readership, they increasingly leveraged their material and human resources to fulfill their objectives. This

expansion has necessitated annual increments in the budgets of newspaper institutions to accommodate surging production costs, encompassing wages, printing, ink supplies, paper, and other expenses.

Amid these evolutions, media institutions, and newspaper enterprises in particular, have witnessed a transformation of the media message from a mere informational tool to a valuable economic commodity that is traded. This shift has prompted the transformation of the newspaper sector into a full-fledged industry with its distinct resources and budgets, striving for a balance between income and expenditure.

In today's landscape, the printed newspaper industry in Algeria, like its global counterparts, encounters unprecedented challenges. The intense competition from various media forms—including written, audio-visual, and digital media—demands the development of innovative methods and adoption of modern communication technologies to produce media content and secure financial resources necessary to sustain operations.

For newspaper proprietors, gaining a deep understanding of the economic realities faced by newspaper institutions in Algeria and the broader difficulties besieging this sector is essential to ensure their enduring presence in the nation's media panorama.

The importance of examining the facets of the media industry in Algeria's printed newspapers arises from the need to closely monitor the economic conditions within this medium, which has historically been a significant pillar of Algeria's media landscape. The examination of the journalistic phenomenon in Algeria traces its origins back to the early days of French occupation in 1830.

During this time, a printing press was transported aboard warships, establishing the first French newspapers in Algeria, most notably the "Journal de Sidi Ferruch". From its inception, this newspaper was steeped in propaganda and political content, playing a pivotal role in the communication landscape with Algerians to this day.

This historical context underscores the relevance of studying this topic to gain a profound understanding of the economic status of printed newspapers in Algeria and to grasp the nature of the factors that have shaped this situation, along with their implications for the future of the newspaper industry in both the public and private sectors. Thus, it raises a fundamental question: To what extent do economic challenges currently affect printed newspapers in Algeria?

## 1. The Economic Dimension in Media Products:

The differentiation between a successful media institution and a less successful one transcends the mere availability of material and human resources. The achievement of desired objectives is heavily influenced by various factors that affect the performance of media institutions. These institutions produce content with a transient lifespan and incur high production costs.

In an era where competition is a critical determinant of success or failure, media institutions must develop competitive advantages to enhance or at least sustain their market position by adopting strategies suited to their specific circumstances and capabilities. (Jagrif & et, 2018, p. 176)

Newspapers, radio, television, and websites represent media institutions that not only participate in political debates and contribute to the building of democracy, but also extend their role to producing media products directed at a competitive market. (Bouzifi, 2017)

Within this context, media content is viewed as a commodity, subject to the dynamics of production, pricing conditions, product characteristics, and the marketing and promotional strategies prevalent in the commercial domain (Morsi, 2016, p. 4). The valuation of each media outlet hinges on three primary elements: the "brand" it carries, the "industry domain" within which it communicates its messages to its audience, and the quality and appeal of the content it delivers through that domain. (Aziz., 2024)

The focus on the economic dimension of media has recently intensified, marking a shift from the traditional emphases on legal, legislative, social, and cultural aspects of media performance. In the contemporary landscape, the economic factors increasingly dictate the performance and viability of media institutions through the lens of media economics. This concept encompasses production inputs, the advertising market, and the demographics of consumers, including readers and followers. (Amin, 2023)

Media economics is characterized as the financial and commercial activities carried out by media institutions through the production and sale of content across various media industries. It involves considerations about what is produced, the technology and organization used in production, and the target audience for these products. Media economics also entails applying economic principles, concepts, and theories to scrutinize both the

macro and micro-economic facets of mass media companies. (Chamir, 2015, p. 112)

In the current global context, the media industry ranks as the third-largest, trailing only the arms and chemical industries. It plays a critical role in shaping the economic, political, religious, and cultural contours of societies, subsequently re-exporting these influences to the international stage.

The emphasis on the economic viability and cost efficiency of media content has become as paramount as the content itself, spurred by the industry's transformation into a more industrialized entity alongside significant technological advancements and market expansion. This complex and dynamic evolution necessitates a thorough reevaluation of the economic systems governing visual, auditory, printed, and electronic media, not just in industrialized nations but also in many developing countries where media has transcended traditional roles of message transmission. (Al-Fariji., 2024)

The field of media economics has solidified its relevance within economic and media studies for several reasons: (Zamil, 2017, p. 25)

- Significant investments across various sectors of the media industry.
- The sustained economic growth of countries worldwide, enhancing media markets.
- Governmental interventions that have effectively spurred media investments.
- The rapid and continuous technological innovations in media and communication technologies.

## **2. The Business Logic of the Newspaper Institution:**

Media institutions function similarly to other commercial enterprises, possessing an internal structure where production roles are divided and an external structure dedicated to the markets where their products are distributed and promoted, amid competition with other institutions. Subject to market risks, these institutions aim to balance their expenses and revenues, striving for profit and growth through investments in new areas. (Jagrif & et, 2018, p. 117)

The economics of newspapers encompass all elements related to the newspaper production process. This includes revenues from newspaper distribution and advertising income, alongside government and private sector subsidies, and the revenue from journalistic services provided to

individuals and institutions. The costs associated with producing the newspaper also play a significant role, encompassing expenses for purchasing paper and ink, employee salaries, office leasing services, and subscriptions with news agencies. (Al-Dagher, 2021, p. 274)

Studying the newspaper institution from an economic perspective is crucial as it has transformed into a significant media industry. This transformation can be elucidated for several reasons: (Zamil, 2017, p. 76)

- The substantial increase in investments allocated to the media industry in newspapers, which require significant financial resources controlled by businessmen and monopolistic conglomerates that issue newspapers.
- The complexities of problems associated with newspaper production.
- Financial issues at the level of newspaper funding.

Media products include all journalistic materials produced by media outlets and presented to the public, regardless of their form. These products vary between written content such as newspapers and magazines, auditory content like radio, visual content such as television, and digital or electronic content like websites, social media, and mobile apps (Fakir., 2023, p. 10). There are two primary methods for readers to access the product of a printed newspaper: subscription distribution and single-issue sales. (Dahmar, 2024, p. 45)

The newspaper product is characterized by a set of economic properties, the most important of which are:

- A product aimed at readers that is quickly consumed and perishable, not suitable for storage.
- The newspaper product is characterized by speed in both preparation and distribution.
- The newspaper product cannot be monopolized in the markets.
- A product sold in a dual manner to both readers and advertisers.
- Workers in the printed newspapers possess extensive cultural knowledge and professional capabilities. (Salam, 2016, pp. 77-78)
- **High production costs:** The high cost of editing and all associated operations explain the high cost of the newspaper product (paper, ink, editing, printing, distribution).

- **High distribution costs:** Selling the newspaper requires it to be available at a large number of sales points to ensure it reaches the reading audience, necessitating a strong distribution network, which leads to increased financial burdens for newspapers stemming from the distribution process. (Fani, 2013, p. 130)

The preparation of the final version of the newspaper product involves several expenses called costs. (Freih & Belhadi, 2023, p. 130)

- a. **Editorial Costs:** These primarily include the salaries of journalists and subscription fees to news agencies, among other expenses.
- b. **Production Costs:** These encompass the expenses incurred during the printing process and related activities.
- c. **Commercial Activities:** These costs are associated with subscription sales campaigns and commercial advertising.
- d. **Distribution Costs:** This category summarizes all expenses required to deliver the newspaper to its readers.

### 3. The Crisis of the Newspaper Institution Amid Digital Evolution:

In recent years, the newspaper industry within media institutions has faced an economic downturn, leading to a marked decrease in revenue from the sales of printed editions. (Wagner, 2012, p. 6) The proliferation of the internet has redefined computers as multifunctional tools, offering quick, free, and immediate access to vast amounts of information. This shift has fueled a growing interest in digital media formats among audiences, precipitating significant challenges for traditional printed media. (Brodowicz, 2014)

One of the most glaring challenges is the global downturn in newspaper sales. For instance, in Britain, newspaper sales have plummeted by two-thirds over the past two decades. Notable examples include The Guardian, which experienced a 67% drop in circulation, and the Sunday People, which saw a staggering 91% decline. Furthermore, since 2005, over 200 local newspapers in Britain have shuttered. In Japan, the scenario is similarly grim, with a decline in newspaper circulation by 10 million copies since 2000. (Zadi, 2024)

The situation in the United States mirrors these trends, where major newspaper institutions have accumulated significant debts. The New York

Times, for example, saw its debt exceed one billion dollars, and its sales diminished by 55% in 2015, prompting the company to reduce most of its employees' wages by 5%. Additionally, the number of editors at The New York Times was reduced from 1,330 to 1,250, and The Washington Post discontinued its special weekly edition following a sales slump. Other publications, such as the Los Angeles Times, have been compelled to lay off a substantial number of employees due to financial strains.

In France, the narrative is no different. France Soir, for instance, halted its print publication entirely in November 2011, shifting to an online-only format after its sales dwindled to fewer than 40,000 copies per day. Several other newspapers and magazines in France have also had to resort to layoffs to remain economically viable. (Messaoud., 2016, p. 9)

The economic plight of printed newspapers, especially in terms of advertising revenue, has only worsened over time. A 2021 report by Médiasd'Info Canada, which tracks media advertising revenues, highlighted that while internet advertising generated \$12.1 billion, television \$3.1 billion, and radio \$1.0 billion, newspapers lagged significantly behind at just \$942 million. (Canada, 2024)

#### **4. The Economic Situation of Newspapers in Algeria:**

As of 2024, Algeria is home to over 150 newspaper titles and approximately 200 active online newspapers. Despite this substantial presence, many printed newspapers in Algeria do not exceed a print run of 1,000 copies. (East, 2024)

Since the media liberalization in the early 1990s, the written press sector in Algeria has been grappling with a profound economic crisis. Numerous newspapers that once boasted record distribution figures have vanished, while those remaining struggle to maintain their presence in the media landscape.

For instance, "El Khabar" newspaper experienced a significant drop in circulation from 1.2 million copies in 2000 to 465,000 in 2012, further declining to 200,000 copies by 2017 (Yahia, Printed Journalism in Algeria Tries to Persist in Vain, 2024). In April 2022, "El Khabar" raised the price of its printed edition from 30 dinars to 40 dinars, a move echoed by other newspapers such as "El Watan," which publishes in French and also increased its print edition price due to financial difficulties. (Yahia, 2024)

The distribution rates for "Echorouk" declined by 17.83%, with its sales dropping to 350,551 copies in 2014 from 603,426 copies in 2013, having reached a million copies in 2010. (Hamadi, 2020) The year 2014 also witnessed the closure of "Algeria News" and "Sawt Oran," with other publications like "elagwa" temporarily ceasing publication. According to reports from the Algerian Ministry of Communication, during the first half of 2016, only 21 out of 149 newspapers had a daily circulation exceeding 10,000 copies. (Jagrif Z. , 2017, p. 14)

The newspaper landscape in Algeria is dominated by daily newspapers, which constitute 91% of all newspaper publications. Weekly magazines have seen a noticeable decline, from 30 titles in 2012 with a weekly circulation of 762,209 copies to just seven titles in 2022 with a weekly circulation of 8,167 copies.

Newspapers published in French have also experienced a significant downturn, having dominated the publishing scene from the start of independence until the end of the first decade of this millennium. In 1991, the daily circulation of the four French newspapers: "El Watan," "El Moudjahid," "Horizon," and "Le Soir d'Algérie" was 800,000 copies, compared to 300,000 copies for seven daily newspapers in Arabic.

By 2022, the number of daily French newspapers had dropped to 78 titles with a daily circulation of 292,888 copies, while the number of daily Arabic newspapers had increased to 97 titles with a circulation of 320,697 copies. This decline in the readership of French newspapers reflects a decrease in the status of the French language in society due to the Arabization of education. (Laayadi, 2014, pp. 84-85)

Additionally, Algerian newspapers face challenges with printing presses, which are experiencing a bottleneck that could lead to bankruptcy due to accumulated debts and newspaper owners' failure to pay their dues. The presses still operate under the 1997 agreement when the price of paper was 45 dinars per kilogram, while today it has risen to 213 dinars (\$1.54) per kilogram.

This guarantees the printing of newspapers in public presses at the old price set at 5.60 centimes, while the actual printing cost is estimated between 22 and 25 Algerian dinars per newspaper. This places a significant burden on the five state-owned printing presses located in Algiers, Constantine, Oran, Ouargla, and Bechar, which print all Algerian newspapers because of the reasonable printing price, as the state subsidizes

and covers the cost of imported paper. These presses may become unable to pay their debts to the Algerian paper company. (Laayadi., 2024, pp. 84-85)

Newspapers are still awaiting the fulfillment of the Ministry of Communication's promise to open a press support fund to help them overcome the crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine and to facilitate their digital transition.

The Press Support Fund was established in 1991 under the Finance Law, providing a 50% tax exemption and support in transportation and communications worth \$22 million. However, the operation of the fund was frozen in 2015 without explanation. Newspapers like "El Khabar," "El Watan," and "Le Soird'Algérie" previously benefited from this fund, but the criteria for benefiting and the list of newspapers that received support remain unclear. (Laayadi., 2024, p. 79)

## **5. Determinants of the Crisis in the Algerian Printed Newspaper Industry:**

Researchers concur that the printed newspaper industry globally faces dire crises that threaten its very existence and its capacity to continue operating within competitive markets. (Ghali, 2019, p. 9)

The crisis within the newspaper industry typically pertains to the financial difficulties endured by newspapers, marked by challenges in advertising revenue and the escalating costs associated with publishing. These elements are the foundational pillars upon which the industry stands. (Saada., 2022, p. 142)

In Algeria, private newspapers are embroiled in a complex crisis that has resulted in the shuttering of numerous media outlets due to economic downturns, while others grapple with severe financial strains that hamper their ability to pay employee salaries. (Bessaadi, 2024)The determinants and symptoms of this crisis within the newspaper sector can be elaborated as follows:

### **A. High Newspaper Issuing Costs:**

The evolution of newspapers from simple message carriers to components of a media industry necessitates significant financial resources. Publishing has transformed into an intellectual, media, and industrial endeavor with a distinct commercial aspect, thereby escalating operational costs substantially.

### **B. Changing Reader Media Tastes and Needs:**

Societal transformations, coupled with the emergence of competing media formats, have shifted reader preferences and demands. This has necessitated a new breed of editors and administrators adept in digital and satellite journalism, technologies that are now indispensable to contemporary written press, which is increasingly pivoting towards electronic publishing.

### C. **Credibility Crisis:**

Newspapers are currently suffering from a crisis of dwindling trust and credibility among their readership.

### D. **Advertising Monopoly Issues:**

Despite Algeria's economic liberalization since the 1990s, the state remains the predominant investor and employer, commanding 75% of the advertising market, which was valued at 300 million euros in 2011. The state's control over the advertising market curtails direct dealings between companies and newspapers, utilizing advertising revenue distribution as a political leverage tool.

For instance, "El Shorouk" garnered \$18.2 million in advertising revenue from 2012 to 2015, but this figure plummeted to \$4.6 million between 2016 and 2019. Conversely, "El Nahar" received \$31 million from 2012 to 2019. Despite being the most widely distributed, "El Watan" encountered pressures, and it was noted that some newspapers that benefitted from advertising were not highly read yet accrued benefits without settling their debts to public printing presses. (Laayadi, 2014, p. 77)

Most advertisers and advertising agencies prefer dealing with broadly distributed media institutions, state-owned newspapers, or those owned by politically influential figures. In this environment, smaller media institutions find it difficult to secure advertisements from economic companies and advertising agencies. (Saada., 2022, p. 143)

For decades, Algerian media have relied on institutional advertisements facilitated by the National Publishing and Advertising Agency, which granted media access to public sector advertisements. However, with some media outlets losing government support, there has been a precipitous decline in their advertising resources. Additionally, the recent economic downturn has nearly obliterated private sector advertisers, such as car sales agents, who previously provided a significant source of advertising revenue. (Bessaadi, 2024)

### E. **Decline in Oil Prices:**

The revenue from advertisements for printed newspapers has witnessed a downturn, primarily due to the economic contraction in Algeria, largely attributed to the plummeting oil prices on the international market. (Jagrif Z. , 2017, p. 13)

Dr. Wahiba Bouzifi, a professor of media at the University of Algiers 3, highlights the critical challenges confronting journalistic institutions in Algeria, particularly in the private sector. These challenges include: (Bouzifi, 2017)

- The state monopolizes the printing market, which can be a way to pressure newspapers, except for a few newspaper titles that own their own printing presses.
- Most newspapers face the inability to secure printing expenses, which leads them to rely on the public sector for equipment procurement and updating, as well as for financial and customs support.
- There are other difficulties at the level of newspapers' inability to pay off printing debts, with the exception of "El Khabar" and "El Watan," which are unable to print their newspapers themselves. The rise in paper prices on the international market has been a major problem since the opening to private newspapers.
- Newspapers still suffer from fluctuations in distribution, mainly due to:
  - The absence of a distribution map.
  - The absence of legislation regulating this market.
  - Weak financial resources allocated for this aspect.
- The relationship between the publisher, the printer, and the distribution sector needs to be regulated by laws.
- Newspapers struggle to achieve financial balance due to high return rates.

The selling price of the newspaper covers only a small percentage of production expenses. Additional reasons that have influenced the newspaper industry in Algeria and have led many to economic crises, forcing them to cease publication, include: (Adib, 2024)

- Print newspapers face fierce competition from digital media.

- Increases in the prices of newspaper production materials like paper and ink.
- A decrease in advertising spending due to global economic crises and reductions in the budgets of major companies in the Middle East.
- A significant portion of advertisers turning to digital media as a means of advertising.
- A decline in the viewership of national traditional media in favor of international or cross-border media.

### Conclusion:

In summarizing the findings from this research on the media industry of printed newspapers in Algeria, it is evident that newspapers, particularly those in the private sector, are embroiled in significant crises and economic challenges that have markedly diminished their prominence within the Algerian media landscape. The key economic challenges and observations identified include:

- There has been a noticeable and sustained decline in the sales of newspapers in Algeria, particularly those that were previously known for their wide distribution.
- Newspapers are grappling with profound financial crises that pose a serious threat to their stability and ongoing presence within the Algerian media system.
- The ascent of digital media in Algeria has significantly undermined the visibility and viability of printed newspapers, diverting audiences and advertisers towards more dynamic digital formats.
- The pre-existing economic struggles faced by printed newspapers have been exacerbated by a decline in advertising revenue, a trend heavily influenced by the broader economic downturn, notably the sharp decrease in oil prices.
- The high costs associated with printing, editing, paper, ink, and other production-related expenses continue to strain the financial capabilities of Algerian newspapers, complicating their economic situation further.

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