

Private Television Channels in Algeria: Between Media Market Logic, Societal Specificity Stakes, and Freedom of Expression -A Critical Analytical Study-

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Abstract:

The Algerian media system has undergone a significant transformation from a state-dominated monopolistic model to a liberalized audiovisual landscape following the enactment of the 2012 Media Law, which opened the sector to private television channels. This shift has led to a rapid expansion of private broadcasters with diverse programming formats. However, the growth of the private audiovisual sector has been accompanied by persistent regulatory ambiguity, declining professional standards, and recurrent ethical violations. Many private channels operate under market-driven logics that prioritize audience ratings and sensationalism, often at the expense of societal values, individual privacy, and public morality, while invoking freedom of expression as justification. This study critically examines the practices of private television channels in Algeria through the lens of media market dynamics, analyzing their impact on societal privacy and the boundaries of freedom of expression. It seeks to highlight the tensions between commercial imperatives, ethical responsibility, and regulatory frameworks within the contemporary Algerian media environment.

Key words: private media; private television channels; ethics; professional ethics and codes of conduct; television broadcasting; audiovisual broadcasting services.

i. Methodological framework:

1. Introduction

With the rise of private Algerian satellite channels in early 2012, the media landscape in Algeria experienced a noticeable development in performance, content, and even programming schedules, marked by boldness in addressing and discussing certain issues under the banner of freedom of expression and the non-restriction of journalists and media professionals. However, this does not align with the principles outlined in codes of honor and the ethics and professional conduct of media and journalism, as violating

individuals' privacy and undermining the public taste of society cannot be considered boldness or service. Rather, it constitutes an infringement upon a sacred human right: personal freedom.

In Algeria, beyond matters of performance and content, certain violations and transgressions have been recorded by some private Algerian satellite channels under the guise of freedom of expression and media freedom. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine this issue through analysis and critique.

2. study objectives

- To attempt a diagnosis of the private media landscape in Algeria.
- To evaluate the experience of Algerian private satellite channels in terms of media performance and the content provided.
- To offer a critical and analytical reading of Algerian private satellite channels.
- To attempt to propose solutions and recommendations for the development of the private audiovisual sector in Algeria.

3. significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in the importance of the subject itself, as it addresses two essential variables: the private media landscape in Algeria and the ethics and morals of media performance. Media without ethics serves neither the individual nor society. Before being a profession or news, media is a noble message that contributes to the development of society and the enlightenment of public opinion. Media is also one of the main pillars upon which nations are evaluated. Given the great importance of media, especially in the form of satellite television broadcasting, it is necessary to study it analytically and critically in order to keep pace with the developments occurring worldwide in this sector.

4. type and method of study

This study belongs to the category of descriptive research, which aims to describe the phenomenon or event in a precise, comprehensive, and adequate manner to extract meanings and conclusions in order to arrive at generalizations about the phenomenon or situation under study for future benefit. In this study, the researcher relied on the descriptive method, in addition to personal observation due to her specialization, as well as the review and reading of the theoretical literature available on the subject.

5. definition of key concepts

5.1 Professional Ethics:

Ethics refer to the ideal standards of a profession adopted by a professional group or institution to guide its members in fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Each profession is governed by general ethical codes and principles, which are defined by international and national laws and regulations.

According to Niazi Al-Sayfi “Professional ethics are a set of agreed-upon rules and principles among members of a single profession, where adhering to them preserves the integrity and honor of the profession.” (Niazi Al-Sayfi 2009, p. 7)

5.2 Television Broadcasting Service:

As stated in Law No. 14-04 “It is any communication service directed to the public by electronic means, simultaneously received by the general public or a segment thereof, with its main programming consisting of a continuous sequence of segments containing images and sounds.” (Law No. 14-04 ,2014, p. 8),

5.3 Public Audiovisual Service:

Defined in Law No. 14-04 “It is an audiovisual communication activity of public interest, provided by any legal entity operating an audiovisual communication service, and carried out in accordance with the principles of equality, objectivity, continuity, and adaptability.” (Law No. 14-04, 2014, p. 8).

ii. a critical analytical view of the private media landscape in algeria

Before talking about the manifestations of private Algerian satellite channels’ violation of the privacy of Algerian society under the banner of freedom of expression and boldness in analysis and discussion which is the current situation it is necessary to talk about what should be. This is done by clarifying the articles contained in the Algerian media laws that stipulate respect for the ethics and professional conduct of media work, by adhering to various rules and provisions. This will facilitate the analysis of the private media landscape in Algeria.

We referred to the 2012 Algerian Media Law, which was the first initiative that gave the green light to private entities to practice audiovisual activity. In addition, we examined the 2014 Algerian Media Law, which detailed the provisions related to private media in Algeria. We focused on the most important articles whose content aligns with the topic of the current study in terms of discussion and analysis.

As stated in the Organic Law on Information in Chapter Two titled Ethics and Professional Conduct, Article (Organic Law 12-05, 2012, p. 24)

“It is prohibited to violate the private life, honor, and reputation of individuals. It is also prohibited to violate the private life of public figures, whether directly or indirectly.”

Also, as stated in Law No. 14-04 (Organic Law, pp. 12, 14), Article 48 of the General Terms and Conditions for Radio and Television Broadcasting includes the following obligations:

- Commitment to the national religious reference and respect for other religious references, and avoidance of offending sacred matters and other religions.
- Respect for the foundations and principles of society.
- Respect for national values and the symbols of the state as defined in the Constitution.
- Promotion of the spirit of citizenship and a culture of dialogue.
- Respect for public morals and public order requirements.
- Providing diverse and high-quality programs.
- Development and promotion of national audiovisual and cinematographic production and creativity through incentive mechanisms.
- Promotion of the two national languages, social cohesion, national heritage, and national culture in all its forms in the broadcasted programs.
- Compliance with professional rules and ethics in the practice of audiovisual activity, regardless of its nature, means, or method of broadcasting.
- Refraining from broadcasting misleading media or advertising content.
- Establishment of mechanisms and technical means to protect children and adolescents in broadcasted programs.
- Production and broadcasting of content of public interest.
- Preferential use of the two national languages in advertising segments and messages, regardless of the method of broadcasting or distribution, except for cinematographic and audiovisual works in their original version and musical works whose lyrics are written entirely or partially in a foreign language.

- Commitment to neutrality and objectivity, and refraining from serving the interests and agendas of specific groups, whether political, ethnic, economic, financial, religious, or ideological.

- Refraining from using religion for partisan purposes or for goals contrary to the values of tolerance.

- Refraining from glorifying violence or inciting racial discrimination, terrorism, or violence against any person due to their origin, gender, race, ethnicity, or religion.

- Avoiding content that encourages behavior harmful to health, personal safety, or environmental protection.

- Avoiding harm to children's rights as defined in international conventions.

- Avoiding violation of individuals' private life, honor, and reputation.

- Avoiding violation of the private life of public figures.

iii. ***Manifestations of Private Algerian Satellite Channels' Violation of Algerian Society's Privacy Under the Pretext of Freedom of Expression and Boldness in Analysis and Discussion***

The researcher in this study focused on the main manifestations in addition to what is observed in Algerian private satellite channels and their programming schedules, by referring to the literature on the subject, along with the researcher's efforts in critique and analysis due to her specialization in media and communication and her close connection to the topic, using observation as the primary tool. Based on the above, the manifestations of private Algerian satellite channels' violation of Algerian society's privacy under the pretext of freedom of expression and boldness in analysis and discussion are evident in the following:

- ***Lack of accuracy and objectivity:***

This is evident through publishing fragmented or suspicious information, bias in reporting and focusing on one point of view, not distinguishing between opinion and news, and not publishing replies or corrections. This misleads public opinion and violates the right of the viewer and recipient to obtain and access true and accurate information.

- ***Departure from the public morals and values of Algerian society:***

This appears in the exaggeration of trivial details, the use of inappropriate language and vulgar expressions (in some talk shows, the performance and content descend to street language), the broadcasting of images contrary to public morals and general taste, inciting crimes and justifying them, insults, slander, and defamation.

▪ ***Boldness in analysis and discussion and violation of privacy under the pretext of freedom:***

This is evident through the intrusion into individuals' private lives and making them public something that was in the past considered a red line or taboo in Algerian society, which is governed by a set of values, customs, and traditions, and before all of that, is an Arab Islamic society. However, due to the significant development in the field of media and communication as a result of advancements in information and communication technologies, Algerian private satellite channels have become a platform and space for violating and breaching individuals' privacy under the pretext of freedom and the right to freedom of expression and non-restriction of media and journalism, in addition to boldness in analysis and discussion.

As a result, the Algerian family today can no longer gather to watch a family program or show due to the violations and transgressions that occur within them. This has negatively affected family relations in Algerian society, shifting from the extended family to the nuclear family. The television has turned from a device that unites the family into one that disperses it and reinforces a spirit of narcissism and individualism, as most studies agree that the television has become a personal device like a phone or computer, instead of being a family- and participation-oriented medium.

In this particular point, we stand before two cases of privacy violation in the programming schedules of Algerian private satellite channels:

1. Addressing sensitive and private topics with the consent of the individuals concerned to disclose their personal information:

In addition to discussing their personal details. A clear example of this is hosting people on television programs without any concealment of their image or modification of their voice, and discussing sensitive topics with boldness and without deleting parts that violate professional media performance and its ethics. Examples of programs that witness such violations include Ma Waraa Al-Jodran, Khatt Ahmar, Khaliha Ala Rabbi, Ehki Hikaytak, Asht W Shaft, Iftah Qalbak, and many others mentioned here as examples, not exclusively.

2. Addressing sensitive and private topics without the consent of the individuals concerned or those being discussed or analyzed:

Here we refer to cases of slander, defamation, insults, and curses without granting the person concerned the right of reply and correction. A close observer of the path of Algerian private satellite channels since their inception would notice that most of them were closed or had their broadcasting stopped due to violations that had no connection to Algerian society, its values, morals, or sanctities.

- Television programs in Algerian private satellite channels are, in fact, imitations of foreign and Arab programs:

The main point here is the absence of distinction and creativity in the satellite television broadcasting of Algerian private channels. There is a noticeable weakness in the ability to produce distinguished and diverse programs, whether in form or content. A follower of the programming schedules of private satellite channels would notice that most programs are copied or their ideas imported from international and Arab programs. The largest share goes to entertainment programs at the expense of social and cultural programs.

But the problem here is not the copying or imitation of ideas the real and major problem lies in the fact that those in charge of these programs neglected an important aspect, which is the lack of consideration for the content of these copied programs when rebroadcast in Algerian context. Not every culture is compatible with the Algerian society's culture. This is a violation of the society's privacy and an infringement on public taste, public morals, and accepted norms. What is more dangerous is not the number of such programs or the number of violations and transgressions they include, but the danger lies in the fact that the receiving audience has become the one demanding such content and programs. Here we return to the saying: What does the audience do with the media? as the audience has, in some cases, begun to impose its own agenda on private satellite channels.

▪ ***Diversity of Private Satellite Channels and the Absence of Audiovisual Regulatory Authority***

There is no doubt that opening the audiovisual broadcasting sector to private entities in Algeria has revitalized satellite media in the country and provided Algerian viewers with several media options among dozens of media institutions that broadcast a wide range of programs and shows. However, this significant diversity of private satellite channels in terms of quantity and quality has generated several problems, the most important of which are:

1. The dominance of quantity over quality and content in Algerian private satellite channels.
2. The difficulty in controlling the huge number of contents and materials broadcast by Algerian private satellite channels.
3. The absence of an audiovisual regulatory authority or its delay in handling recorded violations and infractions, which in many cases has served as a major incentive for some private Algerian channels to go further in their approach and boldness in discussion.

4. The deviation of most, though not all, Algerian private satellite channels from the primary functions of the media, which include informing, guiding, educating, and enlightening... (Achach, Reghi, 2015, p. 14)

▪ *Populism in Religious Discourse on Algerian Private Satellite Channels*

Let us conduct a simple comparison between the religious programs and shows presented on Algerian public television and those presented on Algerian private satellite channels. We would find that the difference is large and significant in several aspects, summarized as follows:

- Religious programs and shows on public television are characterized by seriousness in media performance and in how topics are presented, whereas on private satellite channels, we find the opposite: there is a kind of negligence in presenting some of these programs, both in performance and content.
- In the religious programs on public television, imams and sheikhs who are knowledgeable in Islamic religion, fatwa, the prophetic biography, and hadiths are invited such as the program *Fatwas Live* presented by Mr. Haroun Berrik along with a group of esteemed sheikhs and imams. The same applies to the programs of the Quran Channel, which are no less important. In contrast, on private satellite channels and here we speak by way of diagnosis and analysis, not generalization there are, for example, valuable and excellent programs in terms of content and performance, such as *Mazameer Dawood*. However, there are also other religious programs on private channels that rely on so-called "pseudo-preachers" or "pseudo-scholars," so to speak, to deliver fatwas and religious content in a humorous and theatrical manner.

This is not necessarily wrong if the goal is to clarify and deliver the message to an audience of varied categories, characteristics, cultures, and educational levels. But it is not acceptable if done in a satirical or mocking way that strips fatwas and religion of their meaning and value. In many cases, if we turned to the target audience, we would find that they are enjoying the laughter and entertainment in these contexts at the expense of religious understanding and the noble prophetic biography neglecting the fact that religion is sacred in Algerian society, as it is an Arab Islamic society.

There is also a discrepancy in the use of Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic between public television and private satellite channels. The preferred language in public television's religious programs is Modern Standard Arabic, while private channels prefer colloquial Arabic, which in some cases declines to the level of "street language," becoming the preferred mode of communication.

The spread of populism in religious discourse is essentially rooted in social disintegration, one of its key causes being the weakening and decline of religious awareness (the binary of halal and haram), and the cancerous expansion of superficial “populist” religiosity (Baker, 2021, p. 30).

iv. Viewership Ratings or Public Service?

Television is considered one of the mass communication tools that seeks to provide a quality public service to the individual and society in more precise terms, to the audiences who receive and are exposed to the media content presented by Algerian private satellite channels. However, when highlighting the private media scene in Algeria, we find it confused between the paradox of providing quality public service and the goal of increasing viewership ratings. Nowadays, satellite channels do not compete to provide content of public benefit as much as they compete to achieve top rankings and the highest viewership through diverse programs regardless of whether their content is useful as long as it contributes to increasing ratings.

This has contributed to the absence of creativity and excellence in most programming grids of Algerian private satellite channels, where entertainment programs occupy the lion's share of the overall programming schedule.

Thus, in conclusion, as (Qara-Murza, 2012, p. 497) said: "Television has the power to manipulate consciousness. The first important feature of television is its hypnotic effect, which provides passive perception through the blending of text, music, images, and home environment allowing the brain to relax. This is the result of the skillful construction of programs. Television neither disturbs nor forces a response, but simply frees one from the need to exert even a little mental activity. The brain works in a way that obliges it to nothing,"

Qualified Human Resources for Media Work (Replacing Journalists and Media Professionals with Influencers and Content Creators)

There is no disagreement that the success of any institution depends on employing qualified human resources for work and performance. Television satellite channels are also composed of human resources such as journalists, media professionals, editors, and producers. These personnel must have high professional competence, work professionalism, and responsibility in performance.

Previously, hiring journalists and media professionals was based on their academic qualifications and professional experience. But today, everyone practices media and journalism. A quick look at some programs on Algerian private satellite channels shows a bitter reality different from what is needed. Qualified journalists and media professionals have been replaced by what are called influencers or content creators, and in some cases

even by artists and singers. This has created a major gap in professional media performance on these channels.

Today, anyone who owns content or a page on social media, along with a large fan base, is considered qualified to work in private satellite channels. The biggest paradox and what's strange is that the content of these influencers on social media is mostly trivial and holds no benefit or value for either the individual or society. This is what Elsa Godart pointed out in her book "I, or the Selfie, Therefore I Exist" (Godart, 2019, pp. 32, 33, 44):

"There are no boundaries between the virtual and the real, because the virtual is on its way to replacing reality. This confirms the importance of social networks, where we are gradually moving, within an overly communicative context, toward a transparent society where it has become difficult to hide something or keep it secret. Social networks may be a grand stage of illusion. There are real friendships, but many are fake. Information is abundant, but it is not verified. Beyond these appearances, social networks contribute in some way to the impoverishment of the social character rather than supporting it."

Colloquial Language at the Expense of Arabic and Amazigh

In the previously mentioned article of the 2014 Media Law, a clause was included regarding the preferred language in media content, which media institutions are required to adopt, support, and develop. These are the Arabic and Amazigh languages. Article 48 stated the preferential use of the two national languages in advertising segments and messages, regardless of the method of broadcast or distribution except for cinematographic and audiovisual works in their original version, and musical works whose lyrics are entirely or partially written in a foreign language. The article also called for the promotion of the two national languages, social cohesion, national heritage, and national culture in all its forms in broadcast programs.

However, reality is the complete opposite. Today, Arabic is used almost exclusively in news bulletins, while most, if not all, other programs are conducted in colloquial language, which is the language of the people. We agree that some issues are complex and difficult and need to be simplified for the receiving audience and this can be achieved through the use of colloquial language. But not all programs and shows should follow this practice. Arabic is the first national language in Algeria and is the language of the Holy Qur'an. It is not so difficult as to be completely abandoned.

The same applies to the Amazigh language, which is also a symbol of Algerian national identity and an essential component of Algeria's deep-rooted culture and identity.

Poor Selection of Guests

Most programs and shows on private satellite channels rely on the talk-show format or what is known as reality programs. The primary component of this type of programming, after the host and the topic, is the guest. Sometimes the selection is appropriate by inviting analysts, critics, or those directly related to the topic contributing to the success of the program and achieving high viewership, especially when the topic under discussion concerns the individual and society and serves the public good.

However, in some shows and programs, guests are invited who have no connection whatsoever to the topic leading, in many cases, to digressions or heated debates among attendees that may escalate to insults, arguments, and defamation, especially when guests have opposing opinions and views.

This turns talk-show studios on Algerian private satellite channels into arenas instead of platforms for enlightening public opinion and serving the public interest.

This is due to a disturbance in the criteria for success in society, including Algerian society. Success and fame are no longer linked to those who truly deserve it. Instead, the current belief is: the more trivial you are, the more famous you become and this has become the trend of our time. The situation has become alarming: the number of likes, shares, and reactions using emojis has become a quasi-universal standard for success (Hajjaj Atiya, 2023, p. 154).

Lack of Media and Economic Feasibility Studies in Audiovisual Broadcasting

That is, the lack of studies on a channel's profitability and what it adds for the Algerian viewer. The absence of such studies was a direct cause of rushed work and improvisation without calculating the consequences. The closure of some channels shortly after their launch is clear evidence of this.

From this standpoint and to improve the performance of private satellite channels in Algeria, whether in terms of media performance or programming quality it is necessary to respond and align with global standards in audiovisual production and broadcasting to achieve the set goals, and not turn these channels into arenas for competition over viewership ratings or stages for competitive advertising messages and superficial programs.

Bad News is Good News

As is well known, the value of news lies in its credibility, objectivity, and its transmission of facts and reality as they are without distortion or exaggeration. But... news in Algerian private satellite channels has lost these values except in rare cases such as news bulletins, political shows, and talk shows.

The space is now dedicated to trivial and negative news that provides no benefit to either the individual or society. We are facing a media scene, so to speak, marked by the imprint of yellow journalism resulting in populism and chaos in presentation and discussion, contributing to the decline of the viewer's general taste (Amziane Berghoul, 2015, p. 172) by directing attention toward trivial topics that increase problems rather than solve them, with the absence of professional performance from some journalists and media professionals.

Publishing Anonymous News

This is evident in the promotion of rumors that lack truth, accuracy, and objectivity; concealing or withholding the source and identity of the news; sometimes fabricating stories with no basis in fact; and not justifying accusations directed at individuals. This is due to the failure to accurately investigate and verify news and confirm its source and reality.

With the significant development witnessed in information and communication technologies and the emergence and growth of citizen journalism and mobile journalism the latter has become an indispensable source for private channels in obtaining news and preparing programs and shows. However, it still needs deep understanding, careful study, and, most importantly, regulation.

The Dominance of the “Triviality System” and the Trivial Over Algerian Society Through Private Satellite Channels

Media contributes to spreading and expanding the “triviality system” through the entertainment content it offers, aiming to attract viewers through spectacle and excitement rather than by offering true cultural or intellectual value that benefits both the individual and society. Just as social media pages became a space for triviality and the trivial, so too did media outlets provide opportunity and space for the emergence and spread of triviality and the trivial propelling them to stardom and fame, whose foundation is absurdity and triviality.

Anyone observing Algerian media will notice that it has significantly contributed to the invasion of this system into our society through the programming grids of television and radio channels most of which are entertainment shows whose content is largely trivial.

What is unfortunate is that these shows are directed toward the Algerian family, and primarily toward youth the future generation by presenting these trivial individuals as successful models in society, despite all the scandals and rumors surrounding their lives.

The biggest share in this issue belongs to private satellite channels at the expense of public television. Among the most prominent programs that served as platforms for hosting trivial figures and discussing topics that are of no benefit to the individual or society, we mention, by way of example and not limitation: Jalsa wa Nisaa, Asht wa Shaft, 60 Daqiqa Haqiqa, Ehki Hikaytak, Souq Al-Nisaa, Lammat Al-Harair, Nas wa Hikayat, Why Not, Algeria Show, For Woman, Weekend Show, Cash or Splash, and many others.

Our channels have become filled with vulgarity, indecency, and triviality (some channels not all, avoiding generalization, as the aim here is diagnosis), including nudity in clothing, bold scenes, violations in discussion, and the spread of distorted and low-level ideas.

All of this falls under what is called “soft power” that is, the ability to reach and obtain something through attraction rather than coercion. It is the ability to influence others and their behavior by habituating them to consume certain content to the point of addiction and loyalty to that content.

This is observable in our society, where producers of trivial content have become role models in society and in life, and imitating them is considered great success—even if only in clothing style, eating habits, or speech.

Indeed, society is experiencing a terrible period of decline, where the standards of success, creativity, and innovation have fallen to this level...

The deceivers and those in charge of "consciousness manipulation" believe that manipulating consciousness is more humane, as manipulation achieves the goal without physical harm or coercion. The process of manipulating consciousness consists of those in charge of communication defining how images and information circulate, supervising their processing and refinement. These images and information shape the beliefs and attitudes of the targeted groups and determine their behavior by introducing ideas and directions that do not align with the actual realities of social existence. These are ideas that deliberately aim to create false meaning and produce a form of consciousness that cannot comprehend or willingly accept or reject the actual conditions of life, personally or socially. These are nothing but disguised or misleading ideas.

CONCLUSION

Private television satellite channels reflect many values, customs, traditions, norms, and cultures; they serve as the voice of society not only because they express reality and truth, but also because they work to meet society's desires and needs and fulfill its various forms of gratification. However, we must not forget that these media outlets create their own world, one that may appear real or even turn into a perceived reality for the audience. Here, we are referring to the agenda set by these channels for

the public, an agenda that will not always align with the aspirations and tastes of the targeted audiences.

in this context, narrow professional considerations should not take precedence over general ethical considerations. likewise, the public interest must always be prioritized

over private gain. in any case, the real lesson does not always lie in the enforcement of laws and legislations, which often remain confined to drawers, but rather in the observance of ethics when practicing media work, along with a commitment to social responsibility and professionalism in media performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study concluded, after analysis and critique, with a set of recommendations summarized in the following points:

- Re-examine and review the private media landscape in Algeria.
- Ensure the implementation of media laws, which detail in their sections, chapters, and articles the operational mechanisms of the private audiovisual sector.
- The regulatory authority responsible for the audiovisual sector must fully carry out its responsibilities concerning the content broadcast on private satellite channels, and must conduct regular and continuous monitoring of their programming schedules.
- Benefit from the experiences of other countries in the field of audiovisual media.
- Establish agreements and partnerships with key players in the media landscape at both the international and Arab levels, to develop and advance the sector in line with global developments.
- Entities responsible for satellite broadcasting especially in the private sector should prioritize quality in content and form over quantity, both in terms of channels and programs.
- Always refer to international codes of ethics and the professional conduct of journalism so that media practices are of quality and beneficial to individuals and society.
- Enforce penalties on satellite channels that commit transgressions
- and violations against individuals and society, so they serve as an example to others and to prevent the recurrence of such breaches.

- Media professionals and journalists must respect the sanctity of the media profession and its functions, as media is, before being a profession or a program, a noble message.

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