Algerian Media Crisis Coverage in Light of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic

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Abstract:

A crisis represents a major challenge to media outlets in its different stages (pre-crisis, mid-crisis, and post-crisis). This paper attempts to troubleshoot both the scientific challenges—on the basis of academic theory on media crisis and disaster coverage—and the professional challenges in terms of objectivity, professionalism, and media ethics of Algerian media during the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper deals with the standards of crisis coverage and their presence in Algerian outlets, crisis coverage between practice and assessment objectivity in Algeria, and scientific and professional practices of Algerian media crisis coverage.

Keywords: Media; Crisis Coverage; Algerian Media; Coronavirus (Covid-19).

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of Coronavirus, Algerian media outlets found themselves in an uphill battle, at the level of professional and scientific practices, against a virus-caused crisis. Perhaps, the virus even brought back into light the scientific and professional discussion on crisis media coverage and specialized media in Algeria.

Media outlets in Algeria have had several experiences in crisis response, but the Covid-19 surge with its spread rate and transformation from an epidemic into a pandemic posed a scientific challenge by raising the issue of specialized media (as the pandemic was related to public health specialized media). Furthermore, the role of the media, in the world in general and in Algeria in particular, became even more difficult; especially at the level of the professional handling of the crisis.

Research Problem:

This work explores some of the scientific and professional standards on which the coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic by Algerian media outlets is based. We observed that the media processing of the pandemic throughout these outlets was mainly quantitative at the expense of any analytical aspect; as if their role is limited to being an executive body for news and information publishing without the analysis or interpretation warranted by the gravity of the crisis. This, we believe, is largely counterintuitive and goes against the foundational principles of crisis media coverage.

The problem, therefore, lies in inquiring about some professional and scientific specifics in relation to Algerian media's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Each of the following points deals with a significant scientific and professional aspect:

1.　　　Standards of crisis coverage and the extent to which they are present in Algerian media outlets.

2.　　　Crisis coverage between practice and assessment objectivity in Algeria

3.　　　The status of scientific and professional practices of Algerian media crisis coverage.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this work stems from the spread and exacerbation of Covid-19 which had impacted life and its many aspects in all countries of the world. The subject of media and crisis, as result, headlined the discussion list since crisis media coverage, with its many levels and forms—new and old alike—is a fundamental part of crisis response and containment.

Aim of the Study:

This study aims to:

- Define Crisis Coverage, and objectivity as the main element in crisis media processing.

- Observe and explore Algerian media outlets' handling of the Coronavirus pandemic.

- Troubleshoot the standards of Algerian media outlets' handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Determine the state of crisis coverage in Algeria through the case of traditional media outlets.

Research Method:

This study is qualitative exploratory research that looks into the professional and scientific problems imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic on Algerian media outlets and the way these outlets handled the crisis.

Qualitative research is defined as "the approach that includes the study of current realities relating to a phenomenon, an attitude, a group of people, a group of events, or a set of situations" (Abu Djebara et al, 2011; 33). This approach, also known as descriptive, is related to works that rely on qualitative data, which comes in the form of remarks or audible and written observations or points of view.

Exploratory research is defined as research used to investigate a problem which is not clearly defined. It is conducted to have a better understanding of the existing problem, but will not provide conclusive results. For such research, a researcher starts with a general idea and uses this research as a medium to identify issues, that can be the focus for future research (The Arab Journal for Sciences and Research Publishing, Exploratory Research, https://ajsrp.com/?p=7538, dated 20/01/2020).

We rely in this study on an observation grid as the main data gathering and data analysis tool, since observation is one of the most important and reliable tools in exploratory and qualitative research. Our observation grid consists of the following:

- Crisis coverage; its role and phases in Algerian media during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Algerian media's standards for crisis coverage during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Types of media processing of Algerian outlets during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Objectivity in the media's crisis coverage in Algeria amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The position of professional and scientific practices in Algerian crisis coverage during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Population and Sampling:

The Coronavirus pandemic forced itself upon media outlets in Algeria as much as the rest of the world. This study sought to explore how Algerian media dealt with the crisis, and the standards of objective media processing it deployed.

The observed sample consisted of examining the Third National Channel A3 as one of the major national TV outlets in Algeria, Ennahar Tv and El-Bilad as private channels, and the regional radio channel of Relizane, which had its broadcasting program altered by the pandemic. Additionally, there's the private radio Gen FM which was characterized by a lower hourly coverage rate compared to other radio channels. We also dealt with several electronic issues of the newspapers El-Chourouk and El-Khabar.

Time and Setting:

This study was conducted and the observation grid constructed during the midst of the spread of Covid-19 in Algeria——known as the emergence phase of Covid-19 in Blida, Algeria——and the crisis coverage of the pandemic by Algerian media from the beginning of March up to the start of July.

With the spread of the virus, the official response by the local authorities shortly followed. Outlets changed their news agenda and began dealing with the virus as an unknown unintelligible concept, but then, these outlets gradually adapted to the demands of changes imposed by the pandemic.

2. Crisis coverage standards as present in Algerian media outlets:

2.1 Crisis and crisis coverage:

A crisis is a difficult and complex situation that comprises of multiple overlapping and intertwined components. Confronting this situation necessitates an objective diagnosis of the nature of its reality. This diagnosis depends on the collection of facts, data, and information related to various aspects of the situation, and then a comprehensive analysis that determines the response's approach, strategy, and objectives (Kheddour, 1999; p.16).

The causes of crises are several and of a renewed nature; each crisis possesses a cause: It could be a disease or an epidemic, an ethnic or religious difference, political tension, and even a new government/regime that fails to impose its authority (Al-Hammam, 2000, p. 208). Thus, we emphasize the Coronavirus epidemic as a global health crisis that has simply bypassed and overpowered states and their medical capacities, and impacted politics, the economy and the social, psychological and cultural structures of societies.

The media and communication aspect of crisis management, therefore, is of a growing importance. It has become a key component in several crisis study related disciplines. The collective of these disciplines presumes that every single crisis involves complex and overlapping relationships of both individual and social dimensions——be it internal or

external.

Crisis coverage is defined as the sum of media operations, covering and following certain events, and conducted by the differing media outlets before, mid, and after the occurrence of a crisis. The effects of crisis coverage come in two forms (Al-Khudhairi, 2003, p. 67):

- Positive: This comes in the form of deploying intensive media campaigns that transmit substantial information on the crisis to the audience.

- Negative: This is done through media blackouts and the complete disregard of information and news, thus leaving the audience uninformed of the crisis. This concealment comes in two ways: A full media backout that simply isolates the audience or anyone interested in the crisis from events and developments in order to keep them fully ignorant, prompting total indifference and inaction. Second is a partial media backout where one side of the story is covered whilst the other is neglected. It could come in the form of focusing on one side and phrasing the news in a certain way and employing generalizations, blurring of truths, and disregarding the other side.

One of the media-related definitions of crisis reads as follows: Crisis is an unexpected negative form of news publishing. The concept of crisis in media deals not with what had occurred but with what people believe had occurred. It is vital when studying crises to understand that what people conceptualize through their personal choices or vulnerability to media narratives becomes, to them, factual and unquestionable. Therefore, the journalist or communicator must be aware of the intricacies of addressing people's interest via their understanding of things (Makkawi, 2005, p.23).

2.2 The role of Media in crisis management:

Media is a major tool of crisis management both locally and globally. Media outlets assume different roles during crisis times: Objective media, investigative media, and opinion

media (Abdel Fattah Ismail, 1999, p. 37). Furthermore, media coverage goes through three phases with each phase warranting a different function:

A.   Information dissemination phase: This phase comes with the start of a crisis; the media plays a vital role in identifying the situation and providing the audience with data and information, keeping pace with the populace's desire to know more about the crisis and its dimensions.

B.   Information interpretation phase: At this stage, the elements of the crisis are analyzed and its roots and causes researched and compared to similar crises. Media outlets, at this point, seek to facilitate the flow of all that could help unravel and clarify facts; be it explanatory materials, analyses, or views given by pundits and experts. Furthermore, these outlets also provide insight on the stance of decision-makers and officials on the crisis and how to handle it.

C.   Prevention phase: This refers to the post-crisis stage where the role of media outlets is not limited to only explaining the crisis and dealing with its components and developments, but also involves educating the audience on preventing measures and ways to deal with similar situations (Hoida Mustafa, 2008, p. 31)

Based on that, we can note that the media's role in crisis comprises of two aspects:

A news/coverage aspect: It comes in the form of reporting on crisis-related news and updates, as well as publishing the outcomes of crisis response strategies and the extent of their success. Simply stated, this aspect is performed via disseminating earnest, quick, and credible information to the public.

An instructional aspect: A highly important factor in influencing the audience—be it positive or negative. Through planned knowledge, influence on the culture of the individual and society, and raising awareness of the dangers and proportions of the crisis, convictions—about the crisis and its factors and actors—are formulated among individuals (Khadija Hamouda, 2000, p. 167).

2.3 Crisis coverage standards and principles and the media in Algeria:

The functions and roles of media during the different stages of crisis warrant abiding by certain standards and regulations that allow for a better communication of the media mission. These standards are as follows (Hoida Mustafa, previous reference, 2000, p. 27-35):

- Accuracy in providing the public with detailed facts about the crisis, as well as focusing on official and political statements that shape public opinion.

- Admitting mistakes in order to gain credibility, and the ability to handle events objectively without emotional investment as well as covering events live as they happen and being in the location. Not to mention, focusing on video materials.

- Paying attention to reports, analysis, and news commentary related to the crisis and its developments.

- Attentiveness to documentary material that explains the causes and dimensions of the crisis and how it can be managed, whilst simultaneously avoiding information censoring and concealment.

- Being in event locations and conducting interviews that could help the public formulate an opinion on the situation; all whilst providing complete information by dealing with the different takes and views.

- Committing to the uncontrolled and uncensored flow of information which warrants from the journalists themselves to self-monitor the way they handle unfolding events. At the same time, citizens safety and homeland security must remain top priority.

- Making sure that date and information reach the audience in appropriate amounts without bias and preconceived opinions. The latter warrants a balanced approach towards presenting the differing viewpoints and allowing for fair dialogues and discussions.

Based on that, and through observing and following the content of Algerian media outlets, research on media coverage of Covid-19, and its standards and regulations in the context of

Algeria is based on professional and scientific knowledge of specialized nature of media. The latter is dependent on its specialized types (Printed, audible, visual, and digital), as well as government type (Democratic or undemocratic) and even knowing the target audience and their reception of said media and its mission.

The follow-up and coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic by media outlets in Algeria is compatible with the work environments present in the country, and is not much different than its counterparts in the Arab world. The Audio media scene, however, was predominantly focused on news and statistics only, neglecting any sort of structuring a media strategy to deal with the crisis, or making use of it in future events. The same can be said about written media outlets, which limited themselves to headlines, and entirely neglected analysis and swaying public opinion; not to mention, voicing its own opinions concerning the pandemic.

Algerian media outlets, up to when this article was finished, could not move past the publishing and explaining phase, and is yet to reach a preventive phase of crisis coverage. More on that, these outlets seem to be largely limited to publishing information and news, and to a lesser extent, provide interpretations. We note that information and news delivery at this stage of our study is dominant, and shows with an analytical nature are barely present, and if, indeed, they are, we see them in Newsletters airing on private channels. As for state-owned media, interpretation and analysis is relatively more present in programs dedicated specifically for the Covid-19 pandemic; which also seem to echo the viewpoints of the regime and the measures taken in order to deal with the crisis.

At the level of written press during the duration of the study, we came to the same aforementioned conclusions. News reporting was predominant at the expense of opinion journalism; A tremendous amount of news, information, pictures, but not enough analytical articles or columns, and an absence of reports and other types of journalistic activities.

On the subject of the role of Algerian media in facing the crisis we say the following: The role

was limited to news and interpretation: Outlets opted to keep track of crisis-related new events and present the repercussions of fighting against said crisis, as well as report on the efforts of the regime, and the extent of their success. Simply put, Algerian outlets chose to report official statements issues by the crisis cell and by the authorities to the masses.

Going back to the standards and principles of crisis coverage, and even though we do not claim to have followed and kept track of all Algerian media outlets, we, due to our academic and professional interest in media and communication, were able to analyze and study a decent portion of them. And based on that, and our observation of what Algerian media outlets air and report, we conclude that most of the principles and standards of crisis coverage are absent in Algerian media. Our most important remarks are as follows:

•   Documentary content explaining the causes of the crisis and ways in each it can be tackled is neglected, even though it is highly important to refer to the historical context and to the documents that could allow the public opinion to have a clearer image, and by extension, achieve a positive audience impact.

•   Information censorship and shortage, confirmed a decision made by Algerian authorities that prohibited the publication of information on the pandemic. This prevents media outlets from serving as the link between the decision-makers and government officials and the public opinion.

•   Negligence of completeness when it comes to information on the pandemic; the political aspect dominates the way Algerian media outlets dealt with the crisis, especially since Algeria was going through a phase of major political changes. Consequently, other aspects like the economic, social, psychological, and cultural aspects were disregarded.

•   Not presenting different viewpoints on the crisis, nor allowing dialogue and discussion, as well as decisions concerned with media and their coverage of the pandemic made by the regime, i.e., self-censorship, caused a severe lack of balance when it comes to

allowing differing points of view, as only official statements and views issued by the authorities were reported.

We mention, on the other hand, the properties that we believe are at least partially present:

•   The focus on official statements with a political nature on the crisis in Algeria. The authorities prevented the publishing and broadcasting of pandemic-related information except for the daily conference of the crisis committee—the latter is allowed to publish data and information on daily basis at 5 P.M. This prevention, despite having a positive impact on fighting the spread of rumors and fake news, had caused the drying out of information sources, and prevented the broadcasting of different opinions. We believe it to mean, whether directly or indirectly, full control of information flow by the authorities, as well as a restriction of press freedom.

•   The immediate coverage of events from their location, being present, and focusing on filmed material, were evident during the Covid-19 pandemic at the level of the audiovisual, and lacking in written press due to the nature of the newspaper and its publication. This emphasized the importance of the electronic press, and the renovation of Algerian news websites in order to achieve instant event coverage.

•   The focus on the continuous coverage of the crisis and its repercussions through different phases was present. Despite Algerian media lagging behind when it comes to the Covid-19 pandemic, it has tried to catch up in similar fashion to other Arab media outlets, as they were forced to change their agendas and programs in order to broadcast information as well as national and international news and updates.

We do admit that it is difficult to confirm or deny the whether the requirement of preserving internal stability and peace, citizen safety and their vital needs, is present or not. Such requirement needs a substantial level of democracy and freedom of speech being present; these matters are related to government type and the legislative aspect of media in Algeria. This requires a more in-depth study.

3. Crisis Coverage Media in Algeria: Between the Properties of Media Treatment and Objectivity:

3.1 Crisis Media Treatment:

The word "treatment" derives from the verb "to treat"; when we say he or she treated the matter, it means fixed it (El Abed.A et al., p. 858), practiced and healed it (Elzaoui. T, 1959, p.291). Treatment also means the management of someone or something (Elzaoui. T, 1959, p.291).

Media treatment (of a subject) in its simplest definition is the "process of uncovering all trends and strategies of the coverage conducted by a certain party of a certain case" (Wahib.F.I., 2009, p.10). It is the work of journalism, the way in which news are dealt with and how events are presented.

Mohsen Kashkol (Journalism, Study and Analysis Problem, House of Wisdom Foundation website, 2020) views journalism treatment means "the attempt to discover the motifs of media outlets in their handling of a particular event or dealing with a case; these motifs could lead to adding or distorting information in a way that reflects the institution's policy and its orientations, which govern whether certain aspects will be emphasized and others ignored."

There are several elements that constitute the process of media treatment; some of which are:

1.   Accuracy: Confirming the legitimacy of information and the news covered.

2.   Focusing on the linguistic structures of content: Language is the tool of reaching out and influencing; many ways of expression or styles can be used to convey the idea to the audience.

3.   Commitment to the standards of social responsibility: Refraining from denigration and defamation and deploying constructive dialogue between outlets and audiences.

4.   Strengthening credibility and allowing audience feedback.

5.   Diagnosis of media functions and the nature of their role in serving the community.

6.   Strengthening Press freedom by ensuring justice, improving media performance, and protecting it from government censorship.

Considering that the Covid-19 pandemic is a global crisis with an impact beyond local and regional levels, and that it altered the daily lives of individuals, societies, and enterprises, handling it requires abiding by the principles of crisis media treatment. In the same context, studies dealing with ways which the media treats different crises showed that there are two types of media treatment; these types were derived from the role of media outlets in crisis management, and they are (Khadour. A., 1999, p.72-73):

1.   Provocative Treatment: This type tends to cover events in a superficial manner that relies on outrage and baits; its interest is depleted as soon as the event wanes. It is a limited approach that leads to the misleading and damaging of audience awareness. Furthermore, such type of treatment comes as response to certain necessities imposed by certain regimes or by the media market, which focuses on marketing journalism at the expense of its educational responsibilities.

2.   Integrative Treatment: Touches upon the different aspects of a crisis (the stances of concerned parties, causes, context, developments, prospect). It is characterized by depth, broadness of scope, and accuracy. And to attain that, one of these two methods is used:

a)   The rational method: It is based on the principle of providing documented and accurate information, and it starts from rational understanding and the awareness of audiences, as well as linking how it treats the subject with the interests of the audience.

b)   Providing the full picture: It is characterized by clarity, uniformity, and thorough coverage of the many aspects of a crisis. It presents the history and the context of the crisis, as well as the prospects of its possible development, and by doing that, it takes into account the differences in education levels among the audience.

3.2 Subjectivity in Media Outlets:

Mohamed Hussam Al-Din sees that subjectivity differs from honesty, accuracy, and comprehensiveness, since a subjectivity that includes balance, referencing, and separating opinion from news, and yet the information provided may still be inaccurate. Furthermore, the circumstances play a major role in limiting the comprehensiveness or completeness of a piece of media content; and that does not mean in any way that its subjectivity is impacted. (Hussam Al-Din, 2003, p.121).

Journalistic subjectivity can be defined as the mental state of the editor or journalist that involves a conscious effort of not passing pre-judgments on what he or she sees, and not allowing his personal views and biases to interfere. He or she also must not be infatuated by the language of news event participants, and always assumes that there is another side to news coverage. Effort must be made in order to allow this other side to emerge (Hussam Al-Din, 2003, p.127).

Theorists in general have agreed on certain properties that define subjectivity in news coverage, and certain features that represent the exact opposite of subjectivity; Bradley illustrates those practices tarnishing subjectivity are deletion of important details, the addition of unimportant details at the expense of vital facts, and even deceiving or cheating the reader or the audience in whether on purpose or not, not to mention, concealing bias (Hussam Al-Din, 2003, p.128).

Westley, on the other hand, claims that subjectivity in journalism is attained through some conscious journalistic decisions, some of which are as follows:

-       Balance: It has to do with making sure that all opposing opinions on the subject matter are given the chance to reach the audience.

-       Referencing: It means having every opinion or information on the subject matter (story, report, simple news update) be attributed to a living or non-living source.

-       Separating opinions from news: Respecting the simple rule of news is divine, opinions are free, and giving the information the necessary background that elucidates the event (Hussam Al-din, 2003, 128). The absence of any of the aforementioned properties could greatly tarnish the subjectivity of the journalistic endeavor.

We point out that subjectivity is an important criterion for all fields of work and knowledge, and the researcher must always abide by the condition of subjectivity. Following on that, we do not claim subjectivity as much as we say that we attempt to present a subjective and unbiased scientific take on the subject matter.

To follow up on that, let us assume that there is a general agreement on the properties of media treatment (journalism) and crisis coverage media. Subjectivity is still a very complex subject that is yet to witness an agreement between researchers, journalists, or people in the field for that matter. We present differing opinions on the subject of subjectivity; they can be divided into two trends:

The first simply rejects the idea of subjectivity and deems it fiction unattainable on a practical level in media outlets. Mohammed Kirat explains: "Speaking about Subjectivity is camouflage and justification for a practice, no matter how well-intentioned and devoid of any biases, it is still, in fact, a practice that cannot be fully separated from the self; notably, when he or she prefers a side in the story or even when organizing the different elements of news. This organization occurs in accordance with priorities that are specified by himself or herself or by professional standards that may not be subjective. Not to mention, context, background, and private and public frameworks through which news and events are delivered." (Mohammed Kirat, 2020).

The second view is in support of subjectivity and the possibility of it being achievable throughout different media outlets, and that is what Mohamed Hussam Al-Din explained: "Subjectivity is not impossible, for it should not be looked at as something pure and perfect, but more of a scientific concept. It is a goal that can be attained, and the journalist must

always be striving to achieve, and even if he or she might not attain entirely, he/she can reach a level where the concept is not without meaning, where it is not a mere myth. Furthermore, the journalist (or the outlet) not being entirely and fully subjective does not mean that subjectivity as a goal should be abandoned" (Mohamed Hussam Al-Din, 2003, p.149).

Here we say that if we reject the standard of subjectivity in media outlets, then we are simply rejecting a major principle of the professional and ethical values of journalism. As a result, the latter might lose its position and role in the community; even the legitimacy of such work is put into question. We also believe that this view is generally related to the question of ideology and the idea of the self, which contradicts the definition of subjectivity that is based on balance, referencing and separating the news from the opinion.

Additionally, due our interest in the field of media and communication, as well as our practicing of journalism for years, we opt to agree with the second point of view which claims that subjectivity can be achieved in different degrees and must be strived for in all media outlets. This point of view allows most of the time for constructive criticism to occur, and assists in correcting the mistakes of journalists, and guiding institutions if they show bias and drift away from the values of journalism.

Secondly, in seeking to see the extent to which subjectivity, as a professional and academic standard, is present in Algerian crisis media during the Covid-19 pandemic?

We cannot say for certain that the complete answer to such a complex and intricate question is within reach. However, studying and observing what some Algerian outlets broadcast and how they handled the Corona pandemic, we pen the following remarks:

1)   The majority of Algerian media outlets treated the Coronavirus pandemic as per what characterizes provocative treatment; in a shallow way since the spread of the virus. The coverage generally improved as the crisis got worse and its effects became more severe on

Algerian society.

Media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic became the focal point of Algerian media, especially when it comes to TV networks (private or state-owned), and to a lesser extent, also in audio outlets as national and regional radio stations showed different degrees of success on the subject of how they treated the crisis. Most communicated messages focused on raising awareness and providing advice and preventive measures. Written outlets, on the other hand, focused on reporting news and providing photos, as the virus dominated the headlines. Yet, and due to the nature of written newspapers, the way they dealt with the subject lacked clarity compared to other outlets.

Such treatment of the subject matter was a response to what the Algerian authorities imposed in the form of measures that prevent the broadcasting or publication of any information on the virus outside state-owned TV channels. These channels issue their data and numbers on daily basis at 5 P.M, and anything besides that came with major repercussions.

It is important to note the strong warning statement issued by the ministry of communication and addressed to the newspaper Liberté (published in French). The statement points out that Liberté was the sole newspaper on its issue of Saturday 11/07/2020 to dedicate its entire front page and three more pages to the rising numbers of Covid-19 cases in many wilayas in the country. The statement argues that such methods were used to cause panic in the midst of the public and to demoralize the citizens.

It also accused the newspaper of using expressions and terror-inducing terms that defame and claim the government responsible for the rapid increase of Covid-19 cases. Not to mention, publishing death counts without references. (Algerian Ministry of Communication, 11/07/2020).

Algerian authorities justify their complete control of the Covid-19 media coverage as a way of rumor and fake news prevention, and to ensure that the crisis is not exaggeration to create

panic and fear in society.

We believe that the aforementioned goal used by the authorities to justify their decision may be important but it is still an infringement of freedom of speech, and a prevention of showing opinions and critiques directed towards the approaches and decisions of the regime in their way of handling the Covid-19 pandemic in Algeria.

2)   Algerian Media outlets in their treatment of the Covid-19 pandemic seem to overall lack subjectivity (professional or scientific), due to the following:

a)   The lack of multiple and diverse sources, due to the authorities' decision to prevent the publication of everything crisis-related except for what is broadcast by the designated crisis cell.

b)   Outlets generally do not separate between news and opinions; in many cases the news are mixed with the opinion of the outlet, which is always in support of the decisions made by the government. This means that Algerian media is biased and impartial in their handling of the crisis, mainly through the conveyed message, which provoked the audience, and created distrust between them and the media. Consequently, the audience relied on Western outlets to attain correct information with differing points of view, in order to structure an opinion on the crisis and its repercussions.

c)   The lack of balance in the treatment process; in many cases, the media fails to tackle the crisis from its many aspects. Balance is barely felt in content, which ought to be present through the choosing and organization of facts in order to provide a fairly decent viewpoint of events and occurrences.

Such rules were absent even in discussions and the public meetings of Algerian decision-making circles or crisis management bodies, thus preventing the presentation of conflicting or opposing views.

4. The state of the scientific and professional practice of crisis coverage in Algeria?

The study of crisis is challenging due to the scarcity of the scientific background responsible for shaping the features and characteristics of the study, mainly from a media perspective. Houaida Mustapha points out on this matter: "Despite the important role of media in crisis management, the field is still relatively new and does not possess a heritage that enables it to be a self-contained discipline. It is noted that the study of crisis from media perspective has been shaped in the context of media coverage of political and military crises where the studies focused on incidents of violence, terrorism, internal political crises and civil wars. These studies continue to rely on American legacy and experience in media management to harmonize between strategic media objectives and political objectives to ensure compatibility between the concept of national security and the preservation of civil liberty. As a result, the media strategy may serve the goals of the political and military strategy without violating the public opinion's rights in obtaining information and facts" (Houaida Mustapha, ibid, p.8)

There are a number of reasons that make the relationship between media and crisis a critical one, exposing it to blame and accusations of laxity. The most prominent are the following: (Musa, Aljazeera Center for Studies Website):

1.   The media inclination to the political on the expense of the scientific.

2.   The absence of the historical dimension in events coverage.

3.   The domination of media news that restricts media discourse to the past without consideration of the future coupled with the past and the present.

Building on the abovementioned crisis of the media crisis coverage, we are given a picture, a fragmented one, yet we believe it opens a gate to quest the different possible answers and not just a single answer to this question.

We believe that no one can provide a single answer that classifies the media as either a culprit or a victim and settle the matter, nor do we accuse the media but we condemn the laxity, recession and degeneration of the media work in general and during the Covid pandemic in particular.

Following up and conducting this study within the limits of its research questions, we noticed that many discontented voices both from the elite and the common people point fingers at, blame and feel disgruntled with the Algerian media, while media professionals and media institutions defend and justify themselves and their profession for being victims, not culprits. In this regard, we say that the Algerian media and media professionals are accused of failure in regard to the absence of social responsibility and the functional role they must play in the lives of individuals and communities. Yet, it is the product of an eroded structure, and the victim of a media and communication system that encompasses the various actors and components of the media profession and institutions with its various types and sectors (private and public). We are determined to dissect this view as follows:

• The Corona crisis has exposed the absence and brittleness of specialized media in Algeria, as we note through the difficulties encountered by Algerian media in dealing with the crisis related health news and the absence of qualified professionals in health and media knowledge together. This underscores the importance of founding a niche for specialized (health, environment, and education) media in continuous rather than events media.

• The scarcity of well-known and qualified media personnel contributed to the poor performance and it has the Algerian media put on either the hook or accused of Failure. Crisis Coverage necessitates trained media professionals and journalists qualified to handle crises, which is unavailable in the Algerian media institutions.

• The lack of a clear approach by the authority in handling the Corona crisis, as well as the lack of a clear communication and media strategy, sparked a wave of criticism towards crisis management specialists and professionals, particularly because crisis media coverage is dysfunctional without a comprehensive communication system and a suitable constructed strategy for the crisis. We believe these criteria were not available during the Corona crisis and it adversely affected the Algerian media handling of the crisis.

• The incompetency and unprofessionalism of the Algerian media outlets in dealing with the Corona crisis and the journalists and media professionals' subjugation to media bureaucracy has held the media accountable and accused of failure. We noticed that the Algerian media dealt with the crisis as an emergency that would abate soon without taking into consideration the corollary repercussions and the lessons that could be learned on the professional level to predict imminent potential crises.

• Lack of clarity about the crisis and the authorities' failure to deal with it, especially given the abrupt nature of the decisions. The media's handling and content have been hampered by a lack of resources and coordination among the various parties involved in the crisis, making the media reluctant to deal with the Corona crisis, and leading to the weakness of the content provided to the receiving public.

5. CONCLUSION

The Corona pandemic (Covid 19) has revealed the significance of crisis coverage media and the necessity to reconsider training qualified human resources in the field of Crisis Management and Communication at the level of government and media institutions. The authorities must also opt for freedom of information, openness and revise its crisis communication strategy.

The Algerian media outlets poor performance during the corona pandemic is due to the obstacles encountered by these institutions on both the institutional and human resources level. There is an imperative need to: reconsider their information approach – focused on politics and neglecting among others, health, environmental and educational issues; reinforce their workforce with human resources qualified to deal with crises, and grow the expenditure on the continuous formation of their professionals.

The Corona crisis highlighted the vitality of specialized media in (health, environment, education... etc) that occupies a significant niche in Arab and Western media processing. This means the exigency of taking care of scientific and professional formation in specialized media to train scientific and media professionals that are qualified in the aforementioned field.

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6. Appendices

An appendix of the study's fundamental observation grid:

Observation	Test	Available	Non-Available
Crisis Coverage, its phases and role in Algerian Media during Covid 19	Crisis availability: Covid 19 Media availability: news and explanation	available	
Determiners of crisis coverage in Algerian media	The unavailability of most theoretical determinants of media crisis in the Algerian media		
Types of Algerian media coverage amidst Covid 19	Controversial coverage	available	
	Integrated coverage		Unavailable
Objectivity in Algerian Crises Media amidst Covid 19			Unavailable
The Position of Algerian Media Crises amidst Covid 19	Specialized Media		Unavailable
	Professionalism of Media Outlets during Covid 19		Unavailable