

The Media and Societal Transformations in Morocco

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the role of media in Morocco as a tool for social change, highlighting the transformations in media from traditional to digital and their impact on Moroccan society. This article employs a comprehensive literature review and historical analysis to trace this evolution—from the era of oral storytelling and early radio and television to the current landscape dominated by social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube-demonstrating how media has both mirrored and influenced societal change. The findings indicate that while digital media has democratized information and empowered marginalized voices, it simultaneously faces significant challenges, including political and economic pressures, a persistent digital divide between urban and rural areas, and the rapid spread of misinformation. The discussion highlights that these challenges necessitate enhanced media literacy, improved digital infrastructure, and robust legal frameworks to foster independent journalism and balanced reporting. Ultimately, the study concludes that concerted efforts among media professionals, civil society, and educational institutions are essential to transform Moroccan media into a transparent, inclusive, and progressive force for sustainable social and economic development.

Keyword: Media transformations, digital media, social media, cultural identity, Morocco.

INTRODUCTION

The media in Morocco serves as a mirror reflecting the societal and cultural transformations the country has undergone in recent decades. It has evolved from traditional, orally transmitted forms of communication to digital platforms that have fundamentally reshaped the way information is consumed and disseminated. This technological shift is not merely a change in communication tools but also a reflection of deep structural changes within Moroccan society, particularly in education, women's rights, and migration. These transformations have given rise to new issues that require media attention. As a result, the media has become a space for showcasing cultural diversity, supporting youth movements, and encouraging civic engagement, as evidenced by the growing prominence of digital media platforms in shaping public discourse and social demands.

However, Moroccan media faces significant challenges related to credibility, independence, the digital divide, and the spread of misinformation, all of which directly impact its ability to function as a catalyst for social change and development. Addressing these challenges requires further analysis and research into how the media landscape can be improved to ensure its crucial role in promoting transparency, civic participation, and sustainable economic growth.

This article employs a qualitative analysis through a comprehensive literature review and case studies to explore the role of media as an agent of social change in Morocco. It examines how digitalization, regulatory



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frameworks, and socio-political influences shape media discourse and its impact on political engagement, economic development, and cultural identity preservation.

THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIA IN MOROCCO: FROM ORAL TRADITIONS"BERRĀH" TO DIGITALIZATION

Media in Morocco has undergone profound transformations, starting from oral traditions that once served as the primary means of transmitting information to the digital era, which has introduced multiple platforms for faster and more impactful information exchange. This evolution reflects significant technological and social shifts, as the transition from traditional to digital media unfolded within a unique historical, social, and cultural context.

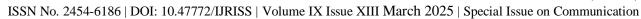
Oral Traditions: The Foundation of Information Transmission

Initially, oral traditions served as the primary source of information in traditional Moroccan communities, where news and knowledge were conveyed through storytelling, proverbs, and public gatherings. This rich oral culture allowed for the sharing of experiences and wisdom across generations, creating a vibrant tapestry of narratives that reflected the unique perspectives of various communities. Each region of Morocco developed its own distinctive methods of knowledge transmission, influenced by local customs, languages, and social dynamics, thereby reinforcing local cultural identities and fostering a sense of belonging among community members (Kadoussi et al., 2024).

Research on oral traditions in North Africa emphasizes the vital role of storytelling and communal knowledge transmission as foundational elements of pre-modern information networks. These practices facilitated not only the dissemination of news but also the preservation of cultural heritage and collective memory. Storytelling served as an educational tool, imparting moral lessons and cultural values while also providing entertainment and a sense of community. Furthermore, these oral traditions established channels for dialogue and interaction, allowing individuals to engage with one another and share insights about their lives and experiences (Kadoussi et al., 2024; El-Madkouri, 2023).

In Morocco, the "Berrāh" is considered a significant cultural heritage with deep historical roots. According to the book "Maâlim of Morocco", published by the Association marocaine de création, de traduction et d'édition in 1989, the Berrāh would roam the streets and public spaces to announce important local and national events, as well as decisions made by the state, tribal councils, or urban authorities, while also communicating the needs of families and individuals. They would announce property sales, celebrate religious holidays, invite people to perform Eid prayers at the designated times, and inform the public about drought prayers and national occasions, such as visits from the king or significant news. The profession of Berrāh was not open to just anyone; candidates were carefully selected for their loud voices, neat appearances, and pleasant demeanors. They received instructions from decision-makers, including state representatives like governors and judges, notable figures like religious leaders, and community leaders within tribes. However, these sources of announcements became regulated during the protectorate era, with the state controlling communications by requiring permits (Hajji, M. & Toufiq, A., 1989).

Understanding this historical continuity is crucial for comprehending how digital media has reconfigured information dissemination in contemporary Morocco. As the country has embraced technological advancements, the transition from oral traditions to digital platforms has transformed the way information is shared and consumed. Digital media has enabled a broader reach, allowing for instantaneous communication and the exchange of ideas across geographic boundaries. However, this shift also raises questions about the preservation of cultural identities and the potential loss of traditional storytelling practices. By examining the interplay between historical oral traditions and modern digital communication, we can gain valuable insights into the evolving landscape of information dissemination in Morocco today.cco.





The Emergence and Expansion of Print Media in Morocco (1877–1908)

The development of formal media in Morocco began in 1877 with the launch of Maghreb Al Aksa, an English-language weekly primarily intended for a foreign readership, including diplomats, expatriates, and traders with economic interests in the region. This early publication reflected the growing European presence in Morocco and catered to an audience seeking insights into local affairs from a colonial and economic perspective. However, the influence of print media remained limited during this period, as literacy rates among the Moroccan population were low, and newspapers were primarily produced by and for foreigners (Miller, 2013).

It was only after 1908 that print media began to establish a more solid presence in Moroccan urban centers, particularly in cities such as Tangier, Casablanca, and Rabat. This expansion was driven by increased foreign influence, the introduction of modern printing technologies, and a growing demand for information among Morocco's emerging intellectual and political circles. French-language newspapers, such as L'Écho du Maroc and La Vigie Marocaine, gained prominence during the early 20th century, serving both the colonial administration and segments of the Moroccan elite. At the same time, nationalist publications began to emerge, using the press as a tool for political mobilization and resistance against colonial rule. These developments laid the foundation for a more diverse and dynamic Moroccan press landscape, which continued to evolve throughout the 20th century (El Mansour, 1996).

The Protectorate Period

During the French protectorate in the early 20th century, Morocco's press landscape was significantly shaped by colonial influence. The French authorities encouraged the establishment of French-language newspapers to serve both the colonial population and local Moroccan elites who were being integrated into the French administrative and educational systems. Publications such as L'Écho du Maroc and La Vigie Marocaine became prominent sources of information, promoting the French perspective on governance and modernization while also addressing economic and social issues relevant to the local context (El Mansour, 1996). These newspapers played a crucial role in familiarizing Moroccan society with Western journalistic practices and contributed to the diversification of the media landscape.

However, as nationalist sentiments grew, Moroccan intellectuals and activists sought to create their own press outlets to counter colonial narratives and advocate for independence. Mohamed Hassan El Ouazzani, a leading nationalist figure, founded L'Action du Peuple in 1933, a French-language newspaper that openly challenged colonial policies and called for greater political rights for Moroccans. In parallel, Arabic-language newspapers such as Al Salam and Al-Hayat emerged as critical platforms for expressing nationalist aspirations and anti-colonial discourse, reaching a broader segment of the Moroccan population, including those less proficient in French (Bennouna, 1989). These publications played a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion against colonial rule, fostering political awareness, and uniting different factions of the nationalist movement. Despite strict censorship and repression by the French authorities, nationalist newspapers persisted, contributing to the broader struggle for Moroccan independence, which was ultimately achieved in 1956.

Post-Independence and Modernization

Following Morocco's independence in 1955, the country experienced significant growth in its media landscape, reflecting its transition into a sovereign nation. One of the key milestones in this development was the adoption of a press code on November 15, 1958, which marked the beginning of formal regulation of the press sector. This legal framework aimed to establish guidelines for journalism, balancing state control with press freedoms while shaping the evolving media environment (Zaid, 2016).

In the decades following independence, traditional media, particularly radio and television, became major sources of information and entertainment, reaching a wide audience across the country. State-controlled and





semi-official media outlets played a crucial role in the nation-building process, reinforcing national identity and disseminating government policies. The establishment of the Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP) agency provided an official source of news, while various newspapers in Arabic, French, and even English contributed to the diversity of the media landscape. These developments laid the foundation for Morocco's modern media sector, although press freedom remained subject to government oversight and regulation (Seddon, 2010).

With Morocco's modernization in the mid-20th century, a major transformation took place with the introduction of radio and television, which became the primary sources of information and entertainment. During this period, radio played a crucial role in educating citizens in remote areas, serving as a key channel for reaching a wide audience. Meanwhile, television emerged as a dominant source of information and entertainment in major cities (Dadouh & Aomari, 2021). This technological shift marked the beginning of modern journalism, as print media started to reflect diverse opinions and national newspapers became instrumental in the anti-colonial struggle, positioning media as a powerful tool in shaping collective awareness.

Liberalization and Contemporary Challenges

In the 1990s, media liberalization and the emergence of private television channels significantly altered the media landscape. These private broadcasters, which incorporated linguistic diversity and entertainment-focused content, reshaped the nature of Moroccan media discourse and influenced the ways information was disseminated. However, in recent decades, digital transformation has been the most defining factor of this evolution. The internet and social media have become central platforms for news production and information exchange, allowing greater public participation and a diversification of content. In this context, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have played a major role in shaping public opinion (Benchenna & Marchetti, 2021).

This shift has also led to changes in media consumption habits, as audiences increasingly prefer to follow and engage with news online at any time. Consequently, digital media has become a key player in shaping Morocco's public sphere, prompting traditional media—such as radio and television—to adapt in order to retain their audiences in the face of digital competition. Moreover, this transformation has had significant impacts on various social and economic sectors, including tourism, where the internet has facilitated rapid access to accurate information, helping consumers make more informed decisions (Bouzit, M., & Ghali, A., 2023).

However, digital media faces several challenges, including the need to enhance media literacy among the public and to combat misinformation, which can spread rapidly through digital platforms. These changes also raise questions about the role of traditional media in the digital age. At the same time, the transformation of Moroccan media has highlighted important cultural and social issues, such as the representation of minority groups in the media.

One prominent example is the representation of Amazigh culture in the media. Historically marginalized in mainstream media after independence, Amazigh communities have leveraged digital platforms to reclaim their narratives and strengthen their cultural identity (Kadoussi et al., 2024). Additionally, private media outlets now blend local and global languages—such as Moroccan Darija, French, and English—reflecting Morocco's linguistic diversity (Hassa, 2023). Despite these advances, the portrayal of migrants, particularly those from sub-Saharan Africa, in Moroccan media remains a subject of criticism, as coverage often reinforces stereotypes related to security concerns and perceived threats (Dib, 2023; Yousfi & Allame, 2024).

The evolution of Moroccan media illustrates a long journey from oral traditions to the digital era, offering new opportunities while also presenting challenges in terms of representing marginalized groups and



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addressing misinformation. Despite these shifts, traditional media remains a fundamental part of Morocco's cultural fabric, reflecting a complex interaction between modern technologies and cultural identity.

MEDIA AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATIONS

In the context of profound social transformations, Moroccan media serves as a crucial mirror, not only reflecting contemporary societal issues but also catalyzing dialogue and engagement around critical topics such as education, gender equality, and migration.

Reflection of Social Issues

Media in Morocco serves as a crucial instrument for reflecting and addressing significant societal transformations, particularly regarding education, gender equality, and migration. A prime example is the "Education for All" campaign, which has gained considerable traction through support from various newspapers and online platforms. This initiative has effectively raised awareness about the stark educational disparities that exist within the country, particularly between urban centers and rural areas. Reports and articles have consistently highlighted the pressing need for reforms in the education system to enhance access to quality education, especially for marginalized communities (Elaoumari, 2022).

In the realm of gender equality, the portrayal of women in Moroccan media has evolved, showcasing their multifaceted roles and their ability to challenge entrenched societal norms. Popular television series and sitcoms frequently depict women in empowered roles, demonstrating their successes in various fields despite facing significant social constraints. Conversely, some media narratives perpetuate traditional gender roles, presenting them as integral to national identity. This duality reflects the ongoing societal debate surrounding gender equality in Morocco, revealing both progress and persistent challenges (Zirari et al., 2022).

Moreover, media narratives surrounding migration are instrumental in shaping public perceptions. Coverage of undocumented migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean often emphasizes their struggles and vulnerabilities, while other reports highlight the significant economic and cultural contributions migrants make to Moroccan society. This multifaceted representation fosters a more inclusive dialogue on migration issues, encouraging a broader understanding of the complexities surrounding migration and its impact on both migrants and the host society (Elliot et al., 2020).

Cultural Identity and Youth Engagement

Moroccan media also plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity amid the pressures of globalization, reflecting the country's rich linguistic and cultural diversity. Television channels air programs in multiple languages—Arabic, Amazigh, Spanish, French, and English—showcasing the country's linguistic pluralism. These programs not only promote Amazigh culture through traditional music and dance but also serve to educate younger generations about their heritage. For instance, shows like Amouddou blend diverse cultural elements from across Morocco, reinforcing a sense of belonging and cultural pride among young audiences (Diouane & Amrani, 2023).

Additionally, the engagement of youth through media platforms, particularly social media and music, has become increasingly pronounced. Young Moroccans are using these platforms to articulate their aspirations, advocate for social change, and address pressing societal issues. Digital media has emerged as a powerful tool for mobilizing support and drawing attention to critical matters, exemplified by movements responding to significant events like the Al Haouz earthquake and the Ryan tragedy. These movements have not only raised awareness but also fostered a sense of solidarity among the youth, reflecting a transformative shift in civic engagement. This evolution illustrates how young people are leveraging media to shape their futures and influence public discourse amid Morocco's current political and social challenges (Diouane & Amrani, 2023; Elaoumari, 2022).





THE DUAL ROLE OF MEDIA

Media serves a complex and multifaceted role in society, particularly in Morocco, where it acts as both a catalyst for social change and a potential perpetuator of existing stereotypes and power structures. As an influential platform for communication and expression, media reflects societal transformations while simultaneously shaping public perceptions and attitudes. It addresses critical issues such as education, gender equality, and cultural identity, influencing how these topics are understood and discussed within the public sphere. However, the duality of media's role raises important questions about its impact on societal progress. While media can empower marginalized voices and foster civic engagement, it can also reinforce traditional norms and stereotypes that hinder advancement. This complexity necessitates a critical examination of media content to ensure it effectively contributes to genuine social transformation rather than maintaining the status quo.

Empowerment and Social Change

Media is often perceived as an empowering tool that reflects societal transformations, playing a pivotal role in fostering social change, shaping public opinion, and encouraging civic engagement. In Morocco, various media platforms have addressed pressing social issues such as education, gender equality, and economic development. For example, campaigns like "Education for All" have been widely promoted through television, radio, and online platforms, raising awareness about educational disparities in rural areas and advocating for policy reforms to improve access to quality education (Elaoumari, 2022).

In the political sphere, Moroccan media serves as a watchdog, holding authorities accountable and promoting transparency. Media outlets like Le360 and TelQuel provide in-depth analysis of government policies and public services, contributing to political participation by fostering civic discourse and public debate. The rise of digital media, particularly social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, has further democratized access to information, empowering Moroccan citizens to express their opinions on political issues and mobilize during events like the Hirak movement, which advocated for social justice and government reform.

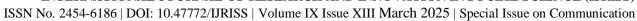
Economically, media acts as a catalyst for entrepreneurship and development by highlighting startups and expanding market reach (Stuart & Mitchell, 2022). Programs like Maghribins du Monde showcase the success stories of Moroccan entrepreneurs, such as the founder of DabaDoc, an online medical appointment platform, attracting investment and stimulating the local economy. Additionally, television shows like Entrepreneurs on 2M TV provide visibility to innovative business ideas, inspiring youth to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. By disseminating economic information through advertisements and news coverage, media contributes to market awareness and stimulates local economies.

Cultural Heritage and Challenges

In terms of cultural heritage preservation, media plays a crucial role in reshaping and transmitting cultural narratives. Programs like Taqalidouna on Moroccan television document and promote traditional cultural practices, such as Amazigh dances, folk music, and local crafts. These initiatives safeguard cultural heritage while introducing new cultural expressions that resonate with younger audiences, fostering a dynamic cultural landscape that reflects contemporary realities (Madani Alaoui, 2017). For example, the Mawazine festival showcases various music genres, blending traditional Moroccan music with contemporary styles, promoting cultural exchange and appreciation.

Moreover, participatory media, such as community radio stations like Radio Chada FM, empower local voices and strengthen cultural identity by providing marginalized communities with platforms to share their stories and traditions. These stations often broadcast programs in local dialects, allowing for a richer representation of diverse cultural perspectives in the media landscape.

However, despite its potential as a force for positive change, media can also contribute to the erosion of traditional values and cultural practices. The repetitive portrayal of stereotypes in television shows or





advertisements can reinforce harmful perceptions that threaten cultural identity. For instance, media portrayals of women may often depict them in traditional roles, hindering progress toward gender equality.

Furthermore, media can sometimes uphold existing power structures, raising concerns about its dual role in society—driving progress while simultaneously maintaining the status quo (Tasruddin et al., 2022). This complexity calls for a critical examination of media content to ensure it serves as a genuine vehicle for social transformation rather than a mechanism for perpetuating inequality. It is essential for Moroccan media consumers to engage critically with media content, questioning narratives and representations to foster a more equitable media landscape.

CHALLENGES FACING MOROCCAN MEDIA

The landscape of Moroccan media is marked by a series of challenges that significantly undermine its credibility, independence, and effectiveness in informing the public. As the media environment evolves, issues such as state influence, ownership concentration, and the digital divide have emerged as critical concerns. These factors not only hinder the media's ability to provide accurate and reliable information but also contribute to the proliferation of fake news, which poses a significant threat to public trust and informed civic engagement. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing strategies to enhance media literacy, foster independent journalism, and ultimately improve the quality of information available to Moroccan citizens.

Credibility and Independence

Moroccan media faces significant challenges that impact its credibility and independence, particularly due to the influence of state ownership and the concentration of media sources. According to the OECD (2023), less than 40% of Moroccans trust mainstream media sources. This decline in trust is largely attributed to increasing state control over media narratives and the ownership structure within the sector, where a few entities dominate the landscape. Studies by Benchenna et al. (2020) further highlight how financial dependencies on government subsidies limit editorial autonomy, creating an environment where journalists may feel pressured to conform to state narratives. This situation raises serious concerns about the integrity and objectivity of news reporting, leading to a lack of diverse viewpoints in the media.

As a result of these challenges, public trust in media institutions remains relatively low, with less than half of citizens expressing confidence in state-affiliated media sources (OECD, 2023). This lack of trust undermines the media's role as a reliable source of information, essential for informed civic engagement. Strengthening independent journalism is crucial for rebuilding this trust; however, ongoing pressures, such as censorship, harassment of journalists, and legal repercussions for dissenting voices, threaten the integrity of media reporting. Independent outlets, when they do exist, often struggle to survive financially, which further limits their ability to challenge dominant narratives and provide the critical analysis needed in a healthy democracy.

Digital Divide and Misinformation

Another key issue is the digital divide, which exacerbates the challenges faced by Moroccan media. There remains a significant disparity in technological access across different social groups, particularly in rural areas where internet infrastructure is often lacking. Limited internet access contributes to a lack of media diversity and restricts exposure to a wide range of ideas and information (Elaoumari, 2023). This situation not only affects individuals' access to credible news sources but also inhibits their ability to participate in broader societal discussions, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities.

Integrating digital literacy into educational curricula is essential for equipping individuals with the skills needed to navigate the digital landscape effectively (Kandoussi, 2023). Education systems must prioritize teaching critical thinking and media literacy skills, enabling students to assess the credibility of sources and understand the implications of misinformation.



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Additionally, the proliferation of fake news has become increasingly prevalent, particularly with the rise of social media. Misinformation spreads rapidly, especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where inaccurate information about health measures and vaccine efficacy circulated widely. Studies indicate that many university students frequently encounter fake news, highlighting a significant gap in critical media literacy skills (Er-Raid & Chouari, 2023). This underscores the urgent need to promote critical media literacy education to empower individuals to distinguish between reliable information and misleading content.

Despite these significant challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need to enhance media literacy skills among the Moroccan population. Initiatives aimed at educating the public about media consumption and critical analysis are vital. Moreover, digital platforms offer new opportunities to increase public engagement and improve access to trustworthy news sources. Efforts to promote independent journalism and diverse media outlets are essential to counter the effects of misinformation and rebuild trust in the media.

CONCLUSION

Moroccan media faces significant challenges due to political and economic influences that limit its independence and credibility, weakening public trust in media institutions. Additionally, the digital divide between urban and rural areas hinders the accessibility of information for all segments of society. With the rise of social media, the spread of fake news has become a growing concern, especially during times of crisis, leading to public misinformation.

Strengthening Moroccan media requires multi-faceted reforms. Firstly, promoting journalistic independence through legislative safeguards and economic diversification is crucial. Secondly, bridging the digital divide necessitates targeted policies improving internet infrastructure in rural areas. Finally, fostering critical media literacy through formal education and public awareness campaigns can mitigate misinformation risks. Future research should explore how emerging technologies—such as AI-driven fact-checking and blockchain-based transparency initiatives—could further support media integrity in Morocco. Expanding internet access in remote areas through adequate infrastructure is also crucial to bridging the digital divide. Furthermore, integrating media literacy education at all levels can empower individuals to distinguish between reliable information and misinformation.

Enhancing transparency in media is another key step toward encouraging civic engagement, which can be achieved through interactive digital platforms that facilitate public discussions. Finally, collaboration between media outlets, civil society organizations, and educational institutions is necessary to combat fake news and promote independent journalism through specialized training programs and workshops.

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