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# OPINION-FORMING TV STATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

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## Abstract

This article concerns the problem of relationship between TV stations on the Middle East and their role in presenting terrorism among Arab public opinion. The objective of this paper is to answer the following questions: How do the major TV stations in the Middle East cover terrorism issues and are they related to Islam or do they have other conditions? What are the political and religious conditions of their creation and current activities? Does the development of new media pose a threat to the media as a tool for shaping public opinion in the Middle East? The article touches upon issues related to scientific disciplines such as Political science, Communication and media studies, and Religion and culture studies.

*Keywords:* security, mass media, studies, journalism, religions

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## 1. Introduction

The article touches upon issues related to scientific disciplines such as security studies, communication and media studies, religion and culture studies. The objective of this paper is to answer the following questions: What has the television market in the Middle East been shaped and looks like today? How do the major TV stations in the Middle East cover terrorism issues and are they related to Islam or do they have other conditions? What are the political and religious conditions of their creation and current activities? Does the development of new media pose a threat to the media as a tool for shaping public opinion in the Middle East?

The research problems discussed above have already been the subject of many scientific publications. The added value of this text, however, is the holistic and interdisciplinary approach. The authors will base on both the literature on the subject, a critical analysis of the Arab media discourse, as well as on available reports and their own reflections. The attention of the authors of

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this article focuses on television stations. This is primarily due to the huge and multifaceted power of this medium. According to J. Skorus, television as a medium of influence can be studied from four main perspectives [1]. The first is the technology and possibilities that it offers: live broadcasts, recording, satellite broadcasts, creative and manipulation possibilities regarding image and sound. The second channel is a way of organizing television broadcasts: agenda setting, priming, framing, personalization of communication, genres and formats. The third channel is the ritual of participation in the reception of television: on the one hand, the paradox of loneliness among millions of viewers, on the other, a sense of participation (a para-social relationship). The fourth channel is the political economy of television, i.e. advertising and audience [1]; however, this channel is less important for television stations in the Middle East.

The geographical name 'Middle East' is used to describe a vast area located at the interface of Europe, Asia and Africa. This region is very diverse in many respects: ethnic, religious, political, economic. It is inhabited by approximately 331 million people, constituting a mosaic of various ethnic, national, religious and language groups. However, the area is inseparably associated with Islam. This religion is important not only on a spiritual level, but also shapes social attitudes and regulates interpersonal relationships in the Middle East. It also strongly influences the shape of media systems in that region, as well as the content broadcasted by the media [2]. However, please note that „the Arab media are ideologically and politically polarised” [3]. One cannot, therefore, speak of a single, generally binding editorial line for all Arab media. Yes, they are strongly conditioned by culture, Islam and the authorities of individual countries, but they differ in their approach to many issues, including terrorism. Just as there is no single common interpretation of Islam, it is also difficult to find a common practical implementation of the principles of Islam in the media. The journalism in Muslim countries depends to a large extent on the political system and the political and religious power relations, its shape will also be determined by the culture and historical past of the country. In Islam, one cannot speak of theology in a Christian sense. However, there are numerous discussions and scientific concepts about God and man's relationship towards God. This approach can be seen as theology in the European meaning. In the Muslim tradition, this thought has been described as *calamas*, which means speech, speaking as discussion.

## **2. Analysis**

### ***2.1. Arab media system and its specificity***

The situation on the Arab television market is influenced by various factors. Undoubtedly, the media are perceived as powerful instruments in political activity. Mass media have been used in revolutions, enabling the takeover of power of a particular party. Not without significance is the fact that the intensive development of radio and television took place after the end of

World War II, i.e. at the time when Arabic nationalism and clear anti-colonial attitudes of the Middle East community were taking shape. For this reason, the governments of individual countries made every effort to ensure that the devices used for broadcasting were properly secured. Only state services provided such protection. Another, extremely important aspect of the state broadcasting authority is controlling the content of published information, and thus shaping it in a manner consistent with applicable political and religious norms.

Over the past fifty years, the Arab media mass ecosystem has been shaped by the policy of authoritarian regimes. Arab states are monopolists on the media market and use the media as a propaganda tool whose main task is to provide the public with information about the successes of governments [4]. The power of Arab regimes maintains thanks to the extensive security apparatus that strictly controls citizens. The slightest change in the mood of society can cause that a given regime will have huge problems in maintaining stability, which is why the media should, according to power, maintain the status quo [4].

Arab media have always been closely associated with politics. The first Arab newspaper that appeared in the eighteenth century (published by Napoleon) was the official government publication in which the authorities said what they expected from citizens. Even then, the newspapers were subsidized by their patrons to promote their particular interests.

The specificity of media discourse in the Arab world is also affected by Islam, whose taboos cannot be discussed in the media, as well as some issues in the field of Arab culture, such as the social position of women, the issue of equality, etc. Islam is a religion that strongly influences the identity and formation of its believers and therefore also has a very strong influence on the shape of the media system and the professional attitudes of journalists. The specificity of Arab culture also gives a privileged role to the electronic media, because the spoken word is more esteemed than the written one.

According to the assumptions of four press theories, the media systems of the Arab world are authoritarian systems in which the media are completely subordinated to power. Political and media structures in Arab states are closely connected. This state is to some extent due to the specifics of the Arab world, which almost entirely has a colonial past. Independent Arab states arose until the 1960s and chose the authoritarian system of government as a way to strengthen new national identities. The media, which became dependent on power, was also subordinated to the national-forming role. The press and electronic media have been subject to strict censorship and never cross the border set by a regime. Most of the media is state-owned, only a few are in private hands, which, however, does not result in their independence, as their owners are people closely associated with the authorities.

William A. Rugh makes an interesting classification of Arab media systems by dividing them into four categories [5]. The first is the so-called mobilization media, which are present in countries where significant political changes took place, such as Syria, Libya, Iraq (until 2003), Sudan. All of these countries experienced European colonialism, and their media systems developed

in times of intense political change - growing nationalism and anti-imperial sentiment, often with the party's leading role in politics. The development of the media went through subsequent stages, which ended in a sense of appropriation by the authorities. Governments directly control mass media legally and illegally, giving them direct clues as to the interpretation of reality they desire.

The second category of media systems are loyalist media that are present in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman and Palestine. These countries have experienced a steady, linear growth of the authoritarian system, although there were times when freedom of speech was slightly greater than usual in this type of political regime. Political parties played very little or no role in the development of the media system. The press is in private hands, while the radio and television are owned by the government. The authorities interfere in the media, although they do it in a relatively subtle way, and the media in interpreting events assume a loyalist position in relation to their patrons.

The third category of Arab media systems is the least authoritarian among others, and the media enjoys its unprecedented freedom of speech in the Arab world. The government's influence on the media is limited and is done only using legal tools. Such a media system exists in Lebanon, where journalists enjoy the greatest freedom in the Arab world. The press in Kuwait and Morocco also enjoys quite a lot of independence.

The fourth category of media systems has recently emerged as a result of political and social changes in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Algeria. In these countries, the main issues of newspapers and newspapers are controlled by the state, but there are relatively small titles that are owned by parties or private owners. The government influences the media, but often uses legal coercive measures, e.g. court judgments. There is an open debate about freedom of expression in these countries, but journalists often use self-censorship. This category is still undergoing change and it is currently difficult to predict the direction of its development [5].

## ***2.2. The development of television in the Middle East***

All upgrades that entered the Muslim world were received with great caution because of their foreign, usually Latin, origin. Imams, who performed the function of religious spiritual guides, feared the incompatibility of technical innovations with the Quranic tradition. Telegraph application [6] in the Middle East revolutionized communication in the region, because not only geographical distance but also physical boundaries were broken. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the press began to develop, but due to a significant percentage of illiteracy in the Middle East, which despite changes still exists (according to UNESCO data, 27% of the population is affected by illiteracy in the Middle East) [UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Literacy Rates Continue to Rise from One Generation to the Next. Fact Sheet No. 45*, September 2017, FS/2017/LIT/45], its development was limited. Currently, the press market in the

Middle East has almost completely stopped, due to easily available television and the Internet.

The biggest breakthrough in digitization of the region occurred with the development of media communication in the Middle East. Widespread broadcasting of the radio signal in the 1920s and television at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s initiated a new stage in the region. It should be emphasized, however, that at the beginning radio and television were loudly and intensely criticized, especially by clergy, but over time they were accepted and even used for religious and political purposes [7]. The availability of television broadcasting, as well as the speed at which information is delivered to recipients, have caused the great popularity of this medium in Middle Eastern societies. Television outstripped the press, because reading is not needed to receive its message, thus overcoming the problem of illiteracy.

This state of affairs changed with the appearance on the Arab media market of Pan-Arab TV stations, which upset the current state control of information and became a platform for exchanging views and opinions. The Qatari station Al-Jazeera was a pioneer in this field, which thanks to its program offer and the presentation of taboos (which include religion, politics and sex in the Arab world) initiated the development of a rich and diverse public sphere. However, the history of television in the region does not begin with the appearance of this station and is much richer.

The first local television programs began to be produced in the late 1950s in Iraq and Lebanon. However, it was only the 1960s that contributed to the intensive development of television that was created in every country of the region. Only Northern Yemen created his own television station only in 1975, as the last state of the region.

Lebanon had the greatest freedom in building television, as it has been the only government in the region since the 1950s to grant licenses to private broadcasters. As a result of subsequent armed conflicts in Lebanon, the establishment of private television stations became extremely popular, which translated into the presentation of unauthorized and therefore often incompatible with government policy, information. Therefore, in the 1990s, the Lebanese government limited private television activities to four, so each represents one of the main Lebanese political and religious groups.

In addition to state media, residents of the region had access to foreign broadcasting stations, depending on where they lived. Inhabitants of the Mediterranean coast, that is Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, who speak French, could watch TV broadcast from France. In contrast, the population living in the vicinity of US military bases, even in Libya, received a television signal broadcast by Americans. The same happened in conservative Saudi Arabia. Living near Arabian American Oil Company - ARAMCO, they could watch American television programs.

However, Arab satellite television, present since the 1990s, has gained the most popularity in the Middle East. The ease in acquiring and installing a satellite television set has become a real window to the world and a feeling of

unrestricted freedom. Despite political and, above all, technological changes, Arabic satellite television is still the most powerful media instrument in the region today. The impetus for the construction of the Arab media centre was the First Gulf War, which lasted in 1990-1991, referred to as Operation Desert Storm. The reports of its course were transmitted by the American CNN and although it was possible to receive its signal in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the information was transmitted in English, as well as in the American narrative. That is why in 1991 Saudi investors, modelled on media empires from overseas, formed Middle East Broadcasting (MBC) the first private Arab satellite television station addressed to the whole Arab audience. The broadcaster's offer included information and entertainment programs. MBC was an uncoded broadcaster that introduced advertising to cover part of the cost of television production. However, it should be emphasized that advertising in the Islamic environment is very limited, for cultural and religious reasons, which generate many restrictions on the broadcast of content and the image of advertising spots. Many services, such as loans and bank loans are incompatible with the Muslim tradition, and thus there are no recipients for such products. Probably for financial reasons, more Arab TV companies emerging in the Middle East offered paid access to their channels. Among the broadcasters using encrypted television access was Saudi Arabian Radio and Television Network (ART) established in 1993. The network was based in Jeddah and the Orbit Communications Company founded in 1994. Private television pioneers - Lebanese - did not lag behind their Saudi industry colleagues. They launched two large satellite stations: Future and Lebanese Broadcasting Company, while Syrians - Arab News Network, the satellite program is broadcast from London. The station belongs to Siwar al-Assad - cousin of the president of Syria. The creators of the Arab News Network emphasized the value of democracy and free market as well as freedom of speech, thanks to which the era of Arab culture will be revived [8].

The problem of freedom of speech in Syria was extremely important. Despite the guarantees regarding freedom of the press and speech, enshrined in article 43 of the constitution [*Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic*, art. 43], and the media law of 2011 prohibits monopolizing the media, guaranteeing the right of access to information on public matters, and prohibits the arrests, interrogations and search of journalists. In practice, however, these rights are not respected, especially in those regions of Syria where governmental authorities perform their functions. Pursuant to the state of emergency law, it is permissible to control press and book content as well as television programs, including commercials, because media law prohibits the publication of information detrimental to national unity and national security. In addition, it is prohibited in Syria to make public information inciting religious conflict or hate crime. In addition, it is forbidden to inform about the activities of the armed forces. Therefore, in the Syrian constitution, in addition to the provisions on freedom of the press, there is a provision in which we read: the media must respect freedom of expression, practicing it with awareness and responsibility [9]. It should be

noted here that Syria, Yemen and Bahrain occupy the worst places in the ranking World Press Freedom Index.

### **3. Opinion-forming Middle East television stations**

Television has also become an important element in popularizing radical Islam. Preaching anti-Western and anti-Israeli content promotes the media of Iran, Syria, Palestine and the Gulf countries. The most important stations presenting extreme views, supported on religious and political foundations include: Qatari Al-Jazeera, Lebanese Al-Manar and Saudis Iqra and al-Arabiya [10].

#### **3.1. Al-Jazeera**

Al-Jazeera, which in Arabic means island, is the most popular Middle Eastern television station, based in the capital of Qatar - Doha. The initiator and originator of the creation of modern television was the progressive ruler of Qatar Hamad ibn Khalifa as-Sani, who donated USD 150 million to start operations. Financing Al-Jazeera is still dependent on the generosity of the ruler, as the revenues from advertising and announcements as well as the sale of broadcasts and subscriptions are insufficient. The beginning of activity is dated November 1996. Al-Jazeera's popularity was brought about by reckless reports of important events taking place in the Middle East: an operation of Western troops in Iraq codenamed Desert Fox in Desert in 1998, Intifada Al-Aqsa in 2000 and the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. The first editorial team was made up of journalists previously working on the BBC World Service channel. In addition, a modern dynamics of information transfer was developed, based on Western standards. Among the presenters working in the station equality prevails, the faces of men and women are widely known. However, the television broadcast shows a typically Muslim mentality, because the world of war is based on male shoulders. The Al-Jazeera program is based on the publication of politically controversial topics, which allows the lack of censorship, and thus the station is proud of its freedom of speech. Openness to modernity is also positively received by viewers [11].

Al-Jazeera breaks Arab-Muslim taboos that were not previously talked about in public. TV discussions often raise issues related to criticism of regional policy, as well as specific individuals who occupy significant positions in Arab governments. The programs also take up religious topics, including the place and importance of gender in Arab-Muslim culture. Such activities are the cause of numerous controversies related to the television station [12].

Television gained international significance as a result of the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 and the war in Afghanistan. She became famous not only for war reports broadcast live from the Kabul editorial office, but also for the publication of statements by Al-Qaeda and Usama ibn Ladin himself, who

was also interviewed on October 11, 2001 by correspondent of Tayser Allouni station.

The significant importance of Al-Jazeera in the Arab world was emphasized in 2017. At that time, the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt and the Maldives denounced diplomatic relations with Qatar on charges of financing terrorist organizations by Qatar. These countries made thirteen demands to the Doha authorities to implement them to overcome the crisis. Among them was a request to liquidate Al-Jazeera television [M. Dwornik, *Historia telewizji Al-Dżazira, bezkompromisowej stacji z Kataru (The story of Al-Jazeera TV, an uncompromising Qatar station)*, <https://reporterzy.info/3473,historia-telewizji-al-dzazira-bezkompromisowej-stacji-z-kataru.html>, accessed on 11.12.2019].

Similarly to European TV stations, Al-Jazeera also started creating thematic channels; Al-Jazeera Sport, Al-Jazeera Live, Al-Jazeera Children and Al-Jazeera English were created.

It is also worth paying attention to the symbolism present in the television station. The name itself has a symbolic depth. As previously mentioned, Al-Jazeera means an island, but the word in the Arabic mentality is associated with the Arabic name of the Arabian Peninsula, and therefore Jazirat al-Arab. Thus, the name itself becomes an element integrating the Arab community, giving a sense of community, an extremely important element in the Islamic world. The other important symbol is the television logo. The stylized inscription 'Al-Jazeera' took the shape of a tughra, a Sultan's seal. Considering these two symbolic elements together, the following references to the history of Islam in Arabia can be seen: the old indigenous culture of the peninsula strengthened by a common religion, while the Sultan seal refers to the achievements of Muslim civilization [13]. Al-Jazeera also has a website in Arabic and English since 2001 (<http://www.aljazeera.net/portal>).

### **3.2. al-Arabiya**

In 2003, the television station al-Arabiya belonging to Saudi Arabia began operating. Al-Arabiya initially received a \$300 million grant from the Middle Broadcasting Network, the Lebanese Hariri Group and investors from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Gulf States [H. Brown, E. Guskin and A. Mitchell, *Arab Satellite News*, Pew Research Center, November 28, 2012, <https://www.journalism.org/2012/11/28/arab-satellite-news/>, accessed on 1.12.2019]. This news channel, based in the United Arab Emirates, was created to compete with Al Jazeera belonging to Qatar. This competition can be seen mainly in the way information is presented, including those related to the terrorism.

As has already been mentioned, the Arab media system is dependent on power; this can also be seen from reports of terrorist attacks. Close links with politics can be clearly seen in the materials of al-Arabiya, which more often refers to official sources of information than its competing Al-Jazeera, which, according to its motto, tries to present all parties to the conflict. In addition, al-

Arabyia refers to terrorists as jihadists, extremists, and Salafists when Al-Jazeera tries to use more neutral terms, such as a fighter. Surprisingly, both stations do not emphasize in their accounts of the attacks of the civilian population nor did they impose responsibility for the attacks on any entities. Such behaviour reflects their political culture, value system and ideological and commercial interests. Therefore, the question arises whether the stations can be objective in relations regarding important issues of the Arab world and whether they are able to cut off their own Arab perspective in such relations [M. el-Nawawy, *Terrorist or Freedom Fighter? The Arab Media Coverage of 'Terrorism' or 'So-Called Terrorism'*, Global Media Journal, 2004, <http://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/terrorist-or-freedom-fighter-the-arab-media-coverage-of-terrorism-or-socalled-terrorism.pdf>, accessed on 10.12.2019]. From the Western recipient's point of view, attacks on American troops in Iraq or the State of Israel are terrorist attacks, while for the Arab viewer they are actions against the occupation forces and the fight for freedom.

### **3.3. Al-Manar**

The name of the Lebanese television Al-Manar means lighthouse. The medium is dependent on the radical Muslim organization Hezbollah, which is recognized by some states, including Israel and the United States as a terrorist organization. The television station focuses its media message on spreading content about hatred of Israel. At the same time, Al-Manar belongs to the group of the most popular TV stations with over ten million viewers. In rankings, it ranks second, after the Qatari Al-Jazeera, among Arabian TVs [14]. Officially, in the European satellite system, receiving Al-Manar is forbidden, but at the same time it is possible through the Arab satellites: Arabsat and Nilesat, and these remain outside the control of the European Union [7].

The station was established in 1991 in Beirut, which from a small, local station, developed quickly, achieving the status of the Lebanese Media Group, employing several hundred employees. Currently, its content is broadcast round the clock, thanks to Iran's financial support and Muslim donations from around the world [15]. The station's main goal is to support and promote Hezbollah's views, which is why it broadcasts official speeches by the Secretary General of the Party of God Hassan Nasrallah. Probably because of this, al-Manar has repeatedly been accused of spreading terrorism and Muslim fundamentalism, because it often airs songs with the popular chorus: 'death to Israel and America'. The television content also includes religious programs, general news from the world and entertainment. However, in many broadcasts, Jews and Americans remain a negative hero [10].

Americans view Al-Manar as a global terrorist structure and the media arm of Hezbollah, an Islamic fundamentalist organization operating in Lebanon, thus recognizing television as a terrorist organization. Despite the bombing of the headquarters in Beirut, during the war versus Israel in 2006, television did not stop broadcasting, making it from a hidden studio [16, 17].

### 3.4. *Iqra*

*Iqra* Arab TV, whose name means *recite, read* is a religious medium whose content is directed to Muslims and followers of other religions in order to show true, moderate Islam. The initiator of the creation of television in 1998 was the Saudi millionaire Saleh Abdullah Kamel. His television is advertised as a safe, Muslim family haven. Recipients are offered a social and religious program. In social programs, current problems of everyday life, culture, and economic issues are addressed from an Islamic perspective, but also the possibilities of combining them and reconciling with a modern vision in force in the world. However, in religious programs, *Iqra* seeks to clear up the misunderstandings that have arisen around Islam, wanting to show its true depth and content. These programs are designed to deepen the religious knowledge of Muslims themselves, but are also intended to disseminate knowledge about Islam among non-Muslim viewers [<http://iqraa.com/en/Aboutus.aspx>].

Already in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, eight more private Arab satellite television stations have been created, of which: two are owned by Lebanese, three Egyptians and one belongs to Tunisians, Algerians and Saudis. It should be emphasized, however, that often private broadcasting companies remain strongly dependent on political influence. First of all, for financial reasons, as mentioned above, advertising revenues do not cover production costs, and also because of personal connections between broadcasting station owners and government officials [Radio and Television: Arab Countries, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/radio-and-television-arab-countries>, accessed on 12.12.2019].

The emergence of private television stations in the Arab world was accompanied by the emergence of corporate feudalism, in which the main role is played by members of royal families, national leaders, etc. In this way, the media market is still shaped by the authorities. The MBC media group based in Dubai is a clear example of that. It is headed by the son-in-law of the previous king of Saudi Arabia, and includes the most popular entertainment programs and *Al-Arabiya*. Panarabic media, which have their headquarters in Egypt until recently, were in the hands of businessmen closely associated with the former president of the country Hosni Mubarak. The son of the Libyan president, in turn, was a monopolist on the Libyan television market [18].

## 4. Content of television programs in the Middle East

The subject of Muslim television programs is vast, also in terms of ideology. Television in the Middle East has a twofold meaning in the life of society: it is a carrier of political propaganda built on religious grounds and is an easily accessible source of mass entertainment. The popularity of satellite TV has enabled Arabs to learn about the way of life of residents of other parts of the world. At the same time, the Middle East has become an addressee and recipient of the same television formats present in Euro-American mass culture: series,

reality shows and game shows. The media market of the Arabian Peninsula is dominated by private owners and broadcasters. Despite the cultural differences and significant differences in the way of life of the inhabitants of East and West, popular among Muslim viewers are gaining titles well known in Europe and the United States, such as the series: *Hannah Montana*, *24* (TV series), *Lost*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Desperate Housewives* [19]. Thus, international blue screen stars are gaining popularity among the Arab-Muslim community. Various reality show programs are also popular with Middle Eastern viewers. Undoubtedly, the biggest sensation, and also a manifestation of the courage of the TV station management, was the production of the Big Brother Arabia program. As in the Latin world, the main principle of the program was to confuse different, previously unknown people under one roof. The participants of the Arabic version of the program were representatives of the Middle East society, and so the following lived in the Big Brother house: Saudi, Lebanese, Jordanian, actress from Bahrain, Iraqi, semi-Egyptian. However, the outrage of the conservative society was too great and after two weeks of broadcasting, the television station withdrew the program from the schedule.

Programs that enable or facilitate media career are extremely popular among Arabs. That is why media companies, mainly British ones, willingly produced and broadcast worldwide formats in their channels, addressed to Muslims. Among them were such programs as: *Star Academy*, *X-Factor Arabia*, *Arab Idol* and *Master Chef*. They have gained popularity among Muslim audiences. Probably for this reason, these programs are being increasingly implemented by the media market, concentrated in Dubai. Programs targeted at young people and in this group of viewers achieved the highest viewership. Research shows that young people in the 15-25 age group made up 80% of viewers of these programs. Watching the next episodes of the production became almost a ritual, and the people participating in the survey stated that the daily schedule was subordinated to the broadcasting hours of the program.

TV station owners, in the struggle for the viewer, compete in programming ideas. In addition to world-famous programs, local entertainment formats are produced, such as the competition for the best poet of the Persian Gulf, the finalist was selected by viewers via text messaging voting, as well as a belly dance competition in which twelve women from different countries competed, including a French, an Ukrainian and a Brazilian. The Arabs also broadcast the Gulf Star program. The purpose of the format was to search for vocal talents, but the condition was singing in an Arabic dialect. The main prize is fame, career and money [19].

The biggest problem of orthodox Islam, in view of the intensively developing media industry, concerns television and programs targeted at young people. The Middle Eastern response to Latin MTV is the youth television 4Shbab, based in Egypt, which broadcasts its program also from Bahrain. The creator of the channel Ahmed Abu Haiba, wanted to show that Muslims can be the creators of modern trends in culture, and at the same time be in harmony with religion. The television was established in 2009, and its goal was to

promote the idea that Islam is cool, while television broadcasting is not limited to broadcasting Quran recitations. At the same time, using Euro-American trends does not necessarily mean vulgarity. Increasingly, women are the host of the broadcast and for many religious followers of Islam the mere appearance of a woman on the screen is a scandal. The talk show host in 4Shbab was the Egyptian model Yasmine Mohsen, whose motto is 'better to controversy with a hijab than a bikini'. And yet, opponents of women on the screen still believe that a woman's place is at home. The opposition was so great that as a result of controversy, the strategic sponsor withdrew.

In addition to music, Middle Eastern television shows are also reluctant to include comedies and cabarets. Only in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, satirical and cabaret programs are not censored. Fears of making fun of the authorities are too great, which is why the rule is not to provoke.

In addition to purely entertainment content, preacher television programs are also extremely popular in which religious teachings are presented and explained. These programs are also becoming an element of propaganda in which radical and extreme views are disseminated, such as calls for terrorist attacks in various parts of the world, especially in Europe. Does this mean, however, that all Islam can be equated with supporting terrorism as a way of acting and of the terrorists themselves? The answer is complicated and ambiguous. When explaining it, account should also be taken of the definition of terrorism as well as reflection on the interdependence between terrorism and the media.

## **5. Conclusions**

By the end of the 1990s, Arab media could be referred to as 'tribal' media operating within specific territories. The regime, through its policy, blocked the transmission of information from outside the system. In this way, the recipients of the media had no chance to familiarize themselves with a presentation of reality other than government interpretation. In addition, in the absence of the dissemination of common content for different societies, the prospect of mutual exchange of views and views was very limited, if not impossible. The consequence of this policy was the lack of a public sphere, because the media acted as one-way information carriers - messages were passed from power to society, without any kind of feedback.

Only the emergence of transnational Arab satellite television changed Arab media policy. The widespread use of satellite antennas in Arab countries has resulted in the Panarabic news television signal reaching every corner of this region of the world, even to the poorest Palestinian refugees. It has become impossible to maintain the current tribal media system. Arab news stations upset the current state control of information, have become a platform for the exchange of views and opinions, questioned the existing status quo through open debate on topics such as Iraq, Palestine, Islamism, Arab identity or by raising other important social and political issues. The discourse conducted on their

antennas redefined the issue of what it means to be an Arab and transformed the sphere of political possibilities [20].

The enormous popularity of Al-Jazeera, which since 2000 has been watched almost universally throughout the region, creating a kind of common knowledge and opinion platform, forced competitors to adapt to its standards. Saudi Arabia, other Arab states and external political powers such as the United States have launched transnational television stations. National media have also evolved and had to change their programming offer and broadcasting style in order to keep their audience with them. Thus, the Al-Jazeera revolution initiated the development of a rich and diverse public sphere [M. Lynch, *The Rise and Fall of the New Arab Public Sphere*, Current History, December 2015].

Secondly, the transnational Arab media have wiped out all efforts by Arab regimes to create fenced off, fully controlled national media systems. With such an extensive segment of satellite TV stations, it has become impossible to control all TV programs broadcast from outside the borders of a given country. Arab states have chosen various options to deal with this problem. For example, 'mildly' authoritarian countries such as Egypt encouraged liberalization and privatization in the broadcasting sector in order to be able to deal with pan-Arab Al-Jazeera news stations. Hard authoritarianisms such as Syria, for example, had to tolerate the side effects of the spread of satellite antennas, and thus other Arab TV stations, while not making any significant diversification in their own media system.

Classical pan-Arabism in the period from World War II through the 1970s boiled down to joining the Arabs in the fight against Israel and the West. Currently, Arabic news TVs represent a new dimension of pan-Arabism, including by offering completely new programs in both form and content, and providing better political information to their viewers [K. Hafez, *Arab Satellite Broadcasting: Democracy without Political Parties?*, Transnational Broadcasting Studies, 15(1) (2006)].

Given the role that Pan-Arab TV news stations have started to play, the question arises: how big is their role in forming Arab public opinion on particularly sensitive issues such as terrorism? Is it possible to maintain objectivity towards events that directly affect Middle Eastern societies or are related to Islamic principles? Is it possible to report events without applying a 'filter' of religion or culture?

The question also arises to what extent the TV content presented influences viewers with extremist tendencies. This message may be conducive to the use of fundamental religious principles for their own, often selfish purposes, and thus become a significant threat to the security not only of the region, but also of other parts of the world, especially Europe. It should also not be forgotten that these televisions, as well as materials available on websites, are also becoming an inspiration for Muslims who do not speak Arabic. It should be remembered at this point that the most dynamic radicalization movements are currently operating in the Muslim regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

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