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# **TERRORISM, POLITICS, RELIGION CHALLENGES FOR NEWS MEDIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

**Aldona Piwko<sup>1</sup>, Zofia Sawicka<sup>2</sup> and Andrzej Adamski<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *Vistula University, ul. Stokłosy 3, 02-787, Warsaw, Poland*

<sup>2</sup> *University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, ul. Sucharskiego 2, 35-225, Rzeszów, Poland*

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## **Abstract**

This article focuses on the role of TV stations in Muslim countries on the Middle East in the coverage of terrorism among Arab public opinion. The main goal of the article is to answer the following questions: (1) How important is the role of TV stations in forming Arab public opinion on particularly sensitive issues such as terrorism? (2) Is it possible to maintain objectivity towards events that directly affect Middle Eastern societies or are related to Islamic principles? (3) Is it possible to cover events without applying a ‘filter’ of religion or culture? (4) What is the contribution of new media? Key findings of the research: at present, the power of new media to fully shape Arab public opinion is not important when compared to the overwhelming role played by pan-Arab TV stations. In the Muslim world, there is a lack of a single, common position defining the relation between religion and terrorism. The highest state authorities of individual Muslim countries condemn terrorism and expressing compassion for the victims. There is a need for research that explains the correlation between religious beliefs, and aggression perpetrated in religion’s name.

*Keywords:* communication, political studies, security, journalism, Islam

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## **1. Introduction**

In present times, media is affected by the worldwide and almost instantaneous expansion of information and this global trend is cynically and skilfully exploited by terrorists. However, with the development of new media, terrorists have become increasingly independent of traditional media: they post their films on the Internet. On the other hand, Western societies are often confronted with an abusive stereotype that identifies Islamists with terrorists. This article will address these issues. We will define the notion of terrorism and then analyse the relationship between Islam and terrorism and terrorism and media. Then we will discuss the attitude of Arab TV stations towards terrorism

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\*Corresponding author, e-mail: [aadamski@wsiz.edu.pl](mailto:aadamski@wsiz.edu.pl), tel.: +48 178661463

and address the question whether the dynamic development of new media is a threat to the position of TV stations in the Middle East and to what extent the Internet can influence the attitude of Islamic societies towards terrorism.

## **2. Research**

### ***2.1. Definition of terrorism***

The first official proposal of an international, legal definition of terrorism appeared in 1937 [1]. Today, terrorism does not have one definition that would be recognized by all subjects of international relations; similarly, the global media have not created a universal definition of this phenomenon, therefore, media relations in this area are largely dependent on politics, value systems and ideologies that represent individual systems media. As G.K. Bruce states, “There is an assortment of collectives and individuals with a vested interest in terrorism and they have defined the term in the form that suits their bias or perspective. They include organizations and alliances of nations, academics and researchers, the legal profession, the health profession, counterterrorist and law enforcement agencies, governments that wish to protect their citizens, governments that wish to repress their citizens, terrorist groups and the media. They have different agenda, even within their groups (...)” [2] In 1988, 109 definitions of terrorism were identified elaboration ‘The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research’ from 2011 contains over 250 such definitions [1]. However, most definitions contain common elements that most often include: violence, force, political, fear, terror, threat, psychological effects [2].

In this article, we have adopted the following understanding of terrorism: “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents” [3].

### ***2.2. Islam and terrorism***

After the 9/11 attacks, non-Islamic media have intensified the existence of a stereotype that equates Islam with terrorism and portraying these relationships in a way that suggests that the Muslim world and Islamic culture as monolithic and homogeneous [4]. For this reason, the Arab community accuses Western media of “the lack of balance, the bias, the lack of depth, the lack of historicity, and therefore the non-objectivity” [5]. So how does the issue of Islamic religion relate to terrorism?

Islam does not separate the religion from the state, which is why, in the name of religion, tasks specific to the state (in terms of European tradition) are often carried out [6]. For this reason, in some regions of the Muslim world and among certain religious groups, there are beliefs about the need for a just war, which usually serves the goals of selected groups. Terrorist groups are formed on such foundations, often supported by the clergy of Islam, such as Iranian Hezbollah or Palestinian Hamas. Muslims, under the ideological influence of

religious leaders, believe in the possibility of reforming the world. This reformability will be feasible only if one true religion is introduced, which is Islam. The inseparable connection between politics and religion is the basis for assessing state actions in the context of religious goals. Achieving them may result in the need to reject non-Muslim customs and introduce stringent rights and obligations for Muslims. Such activities may become a source of religious fanaticism as well as aggression [7].

There are two theories about terrorism based on religious motives formulated in the question: can religion be a source of terrorism? There are two answers: no and yes. The first is clearly negative, because it is assumed that religions as systems of beliefs and practices focused on the relationship of man to the Absolute, understood differently, who can be a personal God, deity, object, idea, is by definition oriented on the sacred, holiness and goodness. Thus, there is no place for evil in religions, because it contradicts their tasks, and thus cannot be a source of terrorism. In the opinion of K. Szocik & J. Wisła-Płonka, correlation between religious beliefs and conflicts can be explained on different fields of research: by religious studies, sociology, criminology, phenomenology or neuroscience. But any research does not explain sufficiently the correlation between religious beliefs/religion, and aggression perpetrated in religion's name [8].

However, the second answer to the above question indicates religion as the source of all evil [9]. Religions in themselves were not a source of conflicts, wars and terror, but they were often used to justify the behaviour of groups of people: fanatics, integrist, and fundamentalists convinced of faithful behaviour. In this way, religious doctrine was over-interpreted. Currently, this phenomenon can be observed in the context of Islam. The lack of superior religious authority in a world dominated by Islam, as well as the lack of a common, single teaching arising from the Qu'ran, contribute to the creation of many interpretations of the inspired text [10].

It should be emphasized that Islam is not a homogeneous belief system. In the history of religion, there have been internal divisions and splits, often due to differences in the interpretation of the word of God contained in the Quran. Holy Book of Islam, lists at least 38 fragments [11], containing texts on the justification for using violence against aggressors, described by the words: fight them, kill them. However, the majority of terrorists forget about the fundamental Quranic text: "Fight those who fight you on the path of God, but do not be invaders. Indeed, God does not love invaders!" (2, 190) [12]. He clearly states that the fight in the name of defending religion and its principles can be fought on its own territory and cannot be extended beyond the borders of a Muslim state.

Official positions of Muslim leaders clearly condemn terrorist attacks by Islamists in various parts of the world. It should be emphasized at this point that fratricidal terrorist attacks in the Middle East are carried out much more often and with more deaths than in European cities. Thus, acts of violence affect not only Christians, but also Muslims themselves.

Research carried out by the Pew Research Center among the inhabitants of the Middle East shows that a significant proportion of Muslims declare a negative attitude towards the activities of so-called fighters. Islamic State, i.e. to an organization identified with current terrorist activities in Europe and in the MENA area: 100% Lebanese, 94% Jordanians, 84% Palestinians and a significant proportion of Muslims outside the Middle East 79% Indonesians and 73% Turks.

However, the Qatar Research Institute Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), conducted public opinion polls, the subject of which was the support of Middle Eastern residents for the activities of the so-called Islamic State. Citizens from Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Iraq as well as Syrian refugees in the camps of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey took part in the trial. An interesting question addressed to the respondents was: How do you assess ISIS activities positively or negatively? The respondents' response was overwhelming for leaders of the so-called Islamic State, because as many as 85% of respondents assessed the activity negatively, and 11% of respondents gave a positive assessment, 4% refused to give an answer [13]. Interestingly, these studies showed no correlation between support or criticism of the so-called Islamic State and the religious commitment of respondents. The terrorist organization also received favourable opinions among non-religious people and those who support the separation of religion and state.

An interesting survey was conducted by Al-Jazeera TV on its Arabic-language website in May 2015. The question was asked: Is the development of ISIS beneficial for the region? On May 22-28, 2015, nearly 57,000 Internet users took part in the survey, of which 81% responded in the affirmative. The results of the survey are interesting because they are not covered by official surveys conducted among the Muslim community.

Undoubtedly, the most opinion-forming university in the Muslim world is the Egyptian University of Al-Azhar. Shortly after the terrorist attacks in Paris, the university rector, one of Islam's highest religious dignitaries, Sheikh Ahmad at-Tajjeb, laid flowers in front of the Bataclan Theater, in which jihadists killed 90 people. Ahmad at-Tajjeb appealed to the public that the West should not confuse the Deviants with Muslims. These words seem to be a clear statement regarding the perception of terrorists in the Muslim world. Similar actions were also undertaken by the Great Mufti of Egypt, Szawki Alam, who, after the terrorist attacks in 2016, carried out in Nice, Wuerzburg and Munich, issued statements condemning the terrorist attacks. Theologians and Muslim clergy clearly condemn violence against civilians, and even issue fatwas prohibiting joining the ranks of militants of Daesh. Muslim governments, such as Egypt, Algeria and even Saudi Arabia, control religion by imposing the subject of Friday sermons at mosques. In addition, only imams of Al-Azhar alumni can preach in Egypt. However, this prevention does not apply to all religious groups. Muslim states express tacit consents to the free operation of radical non-violent organizations, and Salafists are included in this group. Salafi organizations do

not carry out terrorist attacks, but their radical teaching and promoting a return to the roots of Islam is often at the heart of terrorist activities. Forcing young, often frustrated and disappointed with the present, heads of the followers of Islam, information about the exploitation of the Middle East by the West and the need to take away goods owed to Islam, becoming an inspiration to undertake acts of aggression, often being suicide terrorist attacks.

At the other extreme, strong peaceful positions calling for institutional reform of Islam (e.g. teaching imam Mohamed Tawhidi of Australian Adelaide, called 'the imam of peace' should be placed. His main postulate is Tawhidi's rejection or, at best, repeated critical analysis of the collection of hadiths made by Al-Bukhari, from which he derives most of the later Quranic comments. According to the imam, it is these types of books that inspire terrorists and promote the aggressive, violent version of Islam and the false image of Muhammad. However, in general opinion, Muslim governments and societies do not share the gentle position of the imam of peace, and the fight against the government in Tel Aviv and the defence of the Palestinian brothers is, at least nominally, one of their main goals [14].

To sum up, in the Muslim world there is lack of a single, common position defining the relation between religion and terrorism. International agreements, as well as mutual economic and trade relations between Muslim countries and the Euro-American world, require diplomatic action. That is why the official actions of the highest state authorities of individual Muslim countries condemn terrorism, often publishing relevant statements condemning shameful actions and expressing sympathy for the victims. After the terrorist attacks carried out in Europe in recent years, the governments of many Muslim countries strongly condemned the attacks. After the aggression on the editors of the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, a march against terrorism was organized, in which some Muslim leaders, including Jordan's King Abd Allah II, as well as Turkish Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu and Mahmud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, took part.

### ***2.3. Mass media and terrorism***

According to the doctrine of media system, media freedom should be balanced by the responsibility to society. Media institutions are free and independent, but at the same time they are treated as one of the institutions of trust, which are endowed with certain obligations related to activities and choice in this respect before moral and legal social responsibility. They should therefore provide a true, comprehensive and understandable account of events in a context that gives them the appropriate meaning. Meanwhile researchers agree that media have shown examples of irresponsible reporting and coverage that have caused several and various kinds of damages in history and these examples cannot be overlooked [15]. Walter Laqueur, specialist in the field of terrorism, even said that journalists and television operators are the best colleagues of terrorists [16]. In this shocking statement, however, there is some truth,

especially when you look at the manner and content of the information provided. One of the important features of modern terrorism is publicity, which is widely facilitated by the media, especially TV stations. Reporting, more and more often almost live from the scene of the destruction caused by terrorist activities, shows the public the scale of damage and damage affecting ordinary citizens as a result of aggressors.

The media may also become a propaganda channel for terrorists. The irresponsibility of broadcasters and journalists themselves chasing news can cause media people - more or less consciously - to become allies of terrorists and tools in their hands. The media can be used by terrorists - directly as a tool of communication, or indirectly - by publishing information about attacks calls public opinion against the government. The war on terrorism is so-called 'asymmetric warfare'. In the asymmetric conflict, one party of the confrontation is unable to oppose the enemy using the same or similar means of warfare. Therefore, it chooses such a field of confrontation that can be frequently characterized by the low expenditure in comparison to the social and political effects. Then, terrorism is a kind of a theater, whose message is directed not so much at the victims of the attacks, but at public opinion. Anonymity and lack of promotion in the media 'kills' terror and takes out its meaning. Terror and acts of destruction represent the attractive topic - terrible news sell well [17]. Therefore, the terrorists cynically and skilfully use the logic of the media. They are able to establish and create their own media, but also effectively (although occasionally) use the mechanisms of mass media operation. However, with the development of new media, terrorists have begun to become more independent of traditional media: they post their films on the Internet. They are often movies containing drastic content (e.g. execution scenes), which means that they could not be broadcast in traditional media. However, this does not mean complete abandonment of the communication channel, which are traditional TV stations. On the other hand, the international community and governments recognize that journalists often face dilemmas about displaying and commenting on terrorist attacks; these are ethical, legal and professional dilemmas. For this reason, a number of studies are created that regulate the behaviour of media people in similar situations, e.g. a UNESCO handbook for journalists. Moreover, the phenomenon of fake news affects negatively the perception of terrorism. Not even journalists can easily identify the truth about the events depicted on social media [18, 19].

#### ***2.4. Arab TV stations against terrorism***

Undoubtedly, the Qatari Al-Jazeera is an example of a station that provides its antenna to jihad fighters. Already at the beginning of Al-Jazeera's activity, she became famous for interviewing Usama bin Ladin, and also broadcast his message in 1998, when the Al-Qaeda leader was the main suspect in organizing the attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed over 200 people. In this message, Usama bin Ladin called for the

killing of Americans, British and Jews. Such rhetoric and consent of television station representatives to its dissemination significantly influenced the internal policy of the countries of the region, as well as the perception of the owners of the station. An open call to conduct actions against the United States was against the political and diplomatic interests of Saudi Arabia, but it also threatened to maintain the security of the region. Al-Jazeera's actions were recognized by the Muslim clergy so harmful that they issued fatwas, prohibiting watching its programs.

The content published by the station has a large impact on the public opinion of the Arabian Peninsula, because Al-Jazeera is broadcast in the region by means of terrestrial transmitters, and in Qatar, despite numerous liberalization of media law, it is still prohibited to install and possess large satellite antennas [20]. Similar solutions apply throughout the region, and this significantly limits access to other, mainly Euro-American TV channels.

Al-Jazeera TV is perceived in the Gulf countries as an extremely influential and, above all, rich television network, which, modelling on modern Western media, criticizes regional authorities, mainly Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Among the thirteen postulates addressed to Qatar, in connection with the diplomatic crisis of 2017, there was also a request to close all Al-Jazeera programs and offices. The Qatarists assured that they would not bow to the liquidation of Al-Jazeera, but that the consequences of difficult diplomatic relations in the region would also be great for the broadcaster. The possibility of journalists working in countries that have terminated Qatar's diplomatic relations will be limited, and programs bearing the Al-Jazeera logo will be excluded from TV platforms, cable networks and set-top boxes.

The Saudis believe that the Qatari media empire, in its messages, incites extremism and supports jihadist militant groups, as well as interferes with the affairs of the countries of the region. However, the threat to security in the region that Saudi opponents see in Al-Jazeera has a completely different foundation. In the internal policy of the Middle East, one of the most important elements is the political survival of Arab regimes. The effects of the collapse of some of them can be seen to this day, the long-standing lack of political order in Libya and the nearly nine-year civil war in Syria, as well as the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, caused by the military intervention of Saudi Arabia. These events underpin the serious concerns of the Saudi authorities about maintaining a religious and state regime. It is made up of current demographic and economic factors. The society of Saudi Arabia is very young, nearly 2/3 of the population of the kingdom is less than 30 years old and this means a significant demographic boom in the coming years. This is caused by high unemployment and falling oil prices, the main wealth of the state. Social pressure caused by property inequalities will increase along with opposition to harsh Wahhabi rule. And this is a simple way to a powerful social conflict inspired by representatives of various jihadist groups. In turn, Qatar is a very prosperous country, with an extremely low number of citizens - only 300,000 that Islamist groups are not able to threaten. That is why Qataris with significant influence of Al-Jazeera

television may interfere in the political order of the region. Positive media relations implemented by the station enabled the Ennahda party in Tunisia to gain power and the Muslim brothers in Egypt. History has shown, however, that the political system designed by the media was too weak to survive, which is why a military coup in Egypt was successfully carried out, removing Muslim Brothers from power.

### ***2.5. The role of new media and television in shaping public opinion in the Middle East***

Contemporary Arab public opinion seems to be further largely shaped primarily by Pan-Arab TV stations, which is clearly seen by the activities of Al-Jazeera television and the rival Al-Arabiya. However, one can notice the growing influence of the Internet, which appeared in Arab countries for good at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and immediately gained great popularity, especially among young people, which on average accounts for 60% of the population of Arab societies. It has contributed to the development of the Arab public sphere. As in the whole world, the Internet is not only an alternative source of information and communication tool for its users, but also influences traditional media (also television), causing changes in the way they function and access them.

Undoubtedly, the Internet has caused changes in the functioning of television as a medium, in the very understanding of television, in the construction of its program and the way it is received. However, this evolution has occurred before and is referred to by U. Eco, and then by Odin and Cassetti as the transition from paleo- to neo-television. Paleotelevision accepted the rhetoric of the teacher and master. Its task was to instruct the masses and perform a pedagogical function based on the principle of distance. Neotelevision broke with the instructive model, rather becomes a space for joint feasting (the *edutainment* formula). It focuses on itself and on its own means of expression, it talks about itself, not about the world. It also breaks with the traditionally understood model of the television schedule.

Carlos A. Scolari was tempted to sum up the differences between paleo- and neotelevision. As a characteristic of paleotelevision, he mentions: one channel, the philosophy of public service (and at the same time a public monopoly) and a clear diversity of programs (there are three basic categories: educational, information and entertainment). Cameras are permanently installed in the studio, and the TV is a kind of home totem in the living room. Television is a representation of reality. It is watched carefully by the viewer; the viewer focuses on this activity and does not combine it with others. Viewers form large groups. A pedagogical relationship (transfer of knowledge) is established between television and viewers. The programs are arranged in a rigid, regular schedule [21]. We are dealing with a phenomenon of star system, which also does not exclude religious authorities.



On the other hand, the characteristic features of neotelevision are: commercial philosophy (coexistence of public and private media) multiplication of channels and reception technology [22]. We can also say about flexibility of production and genre hybridization and mutation [23]. When it comes to the issues of genera and species, here comes the genre syncretism and pollution, and blurring the boundaries between truth and fiction, while these two realities in some genres can also interpenetrate. The camera in the studio is mobile, and TV sets are in the whole house, in different rooms (and there are more than one). Television does not show what constructs reality. The viewer is a consumer who uses the program offer selectively, inconsistently, simply zapping the channels most of time [22].

Interestingly, however, notes Scolari, the evolution of television is ongoing and we can now observe in it many products and features that do not fall under the concept of 'neo-television'. Scolari proposes a concept of hyper-television, which is closely related to the phenomenon of convergence and mixing of television with the world of Internet [21]. It is important that the Internet and the key tool for using the so-called large network - the smartphone - have become more and more extensive [24]. According to 'TV and Media 2017' report, around 70% of consumers watched TV and video on a smartphone in 2017 - twice as many as in 2012. Thus, smartphones make up a fifth of total viewing, with approximately six hours per week spent watching TV and video on the device. Tablets and smartphones can both browse the web and show TV or films. Non-static TV sets are no longer the primary entertainment display. All devices have equal currency, thus content needs to be available anytime, anywhere, any device (ATAWAD). This in turn will affect our reality on many fields: the style of content, the ability to access content, levels of personalization, hyper-localization, advertising and business models and cost of delivery per consumer. The take up of new display types will have a major impact on both content creation and consumer expectations.

What is the situation in this respect in Arab countries? According to a report from the University of Qatar, television is more popular among Arab recipients than the Internet. Almost nine out of 10 citizens of this region in all age groups watch TV programs, but younger respondents watch television less often every day, respectively: 44% of people aged 18-24, 48% of people aged 25-34, 54% 35-44 years, 61% 45+ years. Undoubtedly, this is influenced by the possibility of access to each of these media, as long as the TV set is in almost every Arab home, now 180 million Arabs have access to the Internet, which is over 67% of the general population.

However, what are the trends in media consumption in the Arab world? According to the report *Media use in the Middle East, 2019*, conducted by the University of Qatar in seven countries of the region (Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates), first of all there are large differences in access to the Internet and manner of consumption of individual media. For example, as far as preferred sources of information are concerned, in the United Arab Emirates 57% declared media owned by the

government, while in Lebanon only such a declaration was made by only 7%. As for information sources due to the medium, the whole survey shows two clear trends: a decrease in television use (68% in 2019 compared to 78% in 2017) and an increase in Internet use (67% in 2019 compared to 62% in 2017). Separately from the 'Internet' category, social media has been classified, but as for them, the level is stable and remains within 61-62%. As far as the use of online and offline media is concerned, the study authors note that compared to 2013, much more Arab nationals in 2019 use the Internet while use of traditional media has declined in all surveyed countries. The percentage of people who watch TV fell most sharply in Qatar and Jordan from 2013 to 2019 (down 26 and 22 percentage points, respectively). In total, one can see a decrease in offline TV viewing from 98 to 86% and an increase in Internet use from 55 to 86%. The smartphone most frequently used for Internet use is an increase from 93% in 2015 to 96% in 2019. Young and more highly-educated nationals are more likely to own a smartphone, but even seven in 10 of the oldest nationals (45+) and four in 10 of the least educated (primary or less) own one. Arab inhabitants own smartphones in all Arab countries at levels similar to or higher than in the U.S. The only exception is Tunisia where smartphone penetration nonetheless increased to 72% by 2019. As can be seen, there is a clear upward trend in the Middle East in relation to Internet use (especially when using mobile devices) and a downward trend in TV and other media.

In addition, the phenomenon, which was once limited only to wealthy urban youth, quickly have become ubiquitous. The Arab print press moved to the online sphere, which allowed it to largely free itself from censorship and overcome the high costs of printing, which significantly limited its reach. Similarly, TV stations have developed their own online platforms and often set up their channel on YouTube, ensuring the wider dissemination of their programs.

### **3. Discussion**

The example of Al-Jazeera television clearly shows the possibility of a significant impact of the media and their messages on the internal security of individual countries, and in a broader perspective also on international security. The message may reach a significant number of recipients, shaping their thinking and views on contemporary problems in the region, often distorting reality.

However, writing about Arabic satellite channels cannot be reduced only to the most popular and known in the world Al-Jazeera. One cannot forget about the conditions in which they operate. Arab news stations are in fact maintained by both states and their proxies, ethnic or religious groups. For example, Al-Jazeera's biggest rival, Al-Arabiya, is owned by the Saudi home, while the Lebanese Al-Manar station belongs to Hezbollah, a group that is listed by the US on the list of terrorist groups. The extent to which these stations reflect the

political beliefs of their patrons clearly shows the fact that even if the station is not owned by the state; this does not automatically mean its independence.

Similarly to the rest of the world, the Internet and mobile media play an increasingly important role in communication in the Middle East. The new media have changed the expectations of its users regarding the right to reliable information, thus leading to a significant change in the current paradigm of the Arab public sphere, both through the creation of a new media discourse in the Arab world and through a change in the cultural dimension.

However, it can be said that the role in shaping Arab public opinion is different with regard to the Internet and television. The message of new media is rather limited in scope to young people who in Arabic culture do not have much clout. Arab culture, which according to Geert Hofstede's classification [25] is characterized by a large power distance and a high degree avoidance of uncertainty, does not provide for the possibility for young people to play an important large role, the final decision will always belong to the elders. However, the Arab world is a world of young people, where young people constitute 2/3 of the societies of countries. In Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and Egypt, 50% of the population is under the age of 25, while in the other Arab countries the young generation accounts for 35% to 47% of the population. It seems therefore likely that in the near future their potential for influencing public opinion will grow. For now, this potential is used by radical Islamist organizations, who used the new media as a tool for proclaiming their ideology and of manipulation of young people (who became radical followers of the values and were ready to put them into action - the phenomenon of 'cool jihad') [26]. Another often-cited example of the power of new media is the so-called 'Arab spring' [27].

The Internet is quickly gaining an advantage over traditional media because it has managed to overcome both the limitations of traditional media and the restrictive norms of Arab culture. Despite censorship, Internet users have access to information that has until now been consistently overlooked by mainstream media. In addition, messages transmitted on the network enjoy a much greater degree of trust among their recipients than those transmitted using traditional media [28, 29]. The new media have slowly become a mechanism for mobilizing young people to participate in online social movements that combine different, so far dispersed ideological tendencies. Thanks to social media, an alternative public sphere may arise in the Arab world, in which every participant has freedom of expression and whose voice is equally important regardless of gender, age or income. It was a peculiar novelty in Arab culture, where gender, age and assets play a significant role in the possibilities of participation in social and political life. In addition, the language of the new media is spoken, making us of dialects and youth varieties of Arab-English. The information provided through it is considered reliable [30], the more so because often the entire chain of recipients can be seen in social media, so the principles of trusted communication in the Islamic world are somewhat fulfilled. In addition, the use of dialects (Arabic: 'ammiyya) means that educational barriers no longer play

such a large role as in the case of traditional media, where the formal Arabic language is present. Moreover, the culture of participation present on the Internet corresponds to a high degree of collectivism of Arab culture, while breaking the hierarchy of Arab societies and related social inequalities [31].

On these circumstances, the influence of traditional TV stations is decreasing. This is also relevant in relation to the issue of terrorism. Terrorists will need less and less of the power of traditional media. The digital technologies expanded the communicative possibilities of terrorists. By using the global network as their main communication infrastructure, terrorist organizations profit from the fact that the world of mass communication is evolving into a world of networked mediated mass communication, where different media are connected through interpersonal devices such as mobile phones. The greater the violent audacity and the larger the scale of the cold-blooded brutality of the terrorist acts, the more coverage it usually receives in the new media [32].

Today, terrorists use Web as the means of communication with the world including numerous user-friendly features and applications. Users can download files, join discussions, contact the media department of the organization, and train to be insurgents. Terrorist Web sites aim to reach potential sympathizers and future recruits. By disseminating information about their mission and beliefs, and by theological rationalizing for their actions, they are seeking prospective members. Purpose of those Web sites is to establish the organization's presence and to instill fear in the public. Shaping international public opinion by influencing journalists' work is yet another purpose [33].

As already mentioned in this paper, the Arab media have been closely associated with politics since its inception. At the beginning, this relationship was justified by the struggle of regional governments for independence from Western colonial powers. The media - above all the press - have become a tool in the fight against foreign authorities, serving native political goals by mobilizing societies to fight for independence. In the second half of the twentieth century, Arab governments tightened control over the media under the guise of protecting national unity, including by not being able to publicly object to government policy. In the name of preserving national interests and supporting official governmental activities, the Arab media were dedicated to politics. That is why, according to Marwan Kraidy, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Arab regional governments "had the last word as to the content of electronic media, thus significantly influencing the content heard and viewed by their own societies" [M. Kraidy *Arab Media and US Policy: A Public Diplomacy Reset*, Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis, Brief, January 2008, 3]. In addition, thanks to the 'crossing borders' radio and later television were used by Arab regimes as a weapon to fight regional rivals while strengthening their national position. At the end of the 1990s, the only critical voices about the ruling Arab regimes were heard by Arab audiences via BBC Arabic, the French radio Monte Carlo or from propaganda programs of neighbouring, hostile governments. This situation changed with the advent of Pan-Arab TV stations.

A distinctive feature of Arab regimes was the skilful combination of certain civil liberties and a system of repression. On the one hand, the constitutions of the Arab states contained provisions on freedom of speech, the authorities allowed the media to operate, on the other, the arrests of citizens for political reasons were widely used. This situation was and is possible due to a different understanding of the role and function of the state than in the West, and the principles adopted at the beginning of the formation of Arab statehood. The essence of the relationship between the state and its citizens is their total subordination to power (largely based on the principles of Arab culture and Islam).

In the political systems understood and implemented in this way, the media play a pre-assigned role, and even despite the increasingly pluralistic media environment and the increase in the limits of freedom of expression, the media are still serving narrowly understood political interests. On the one hand, the Arab media have been experiencing rapid development, on the other - governments continue to use repression against journalists and develop the censorship system. The development of the media has led to a gap between the vibrant Arab media sector and the stagnation of Arab politics. The expansion of media discourse awakens the aspirations of Arab societies, which are quickly quenched by authoritarian regimes. This paradox has created and is still creating ground for all kinds of extremism, violence and instability.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In the complicated landscape of the Arab media, television is trying to find its own place, which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was forced to compete for the attention of the audience with new media. As it was shown in the article in the race for the Arab recipient, it still remains at the forefront, but its position in shaping Arab public opinion has been threatened. New media are still a medium of youth, which is a great target of terrorist propaganda, and young people as representatives of the generation of 'digital natives' are becoming an easy target for radicalization. However, it seems that at present the power of new media to fully shape Arab public opinion is not yet great. This role definitely belongs to pan-Arab TV stations, because the news services of the station are shaped by a clear prism of Arab identity, which is evident in the issues, problems or promotion of appropriate attitudes that are common to every inhabitant of the Arab world. Regional issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the war in Iraq were naturally treated as such that affect all Arabs. A new entry was the coverage of citizens' speeches against authoritarian governments, which combined protests in both Morocco and Yemen, giving viewers a sense of unity.

On the other hand, if one looks at the content of Arab news programs, it will turn out that the viewer can get information from around the world, but rather it will be difficult for him/her to find out what is happening in his/her own country. This state of affairs looks like a media-power arrangement, discrediting in the eyes of observers from Western countries, but it is hardly surprising to be

grateful and loyal to the authorities, because it really allows stations to exist. It would be pointless to expect total objectivity from Al-Jazeera or other Arab news channels. A more realistic expectation in relation to Arabic media is rather contextual objectivity. The context allows preserving some message features that are important for the environment in which the station broadcasts, so it seems natural to present events important for the Arab world from an Arab rather than a Western perspective [34].

When writing about Arab TV stations, one should not forget about the conditions in which they operate. Their action is a result of the political, cultural and social environment, which is why their message cannot be interpreted in isolation from these circumstances. However, it cannot be denied that the increasingly sophisticated message of the Arab media will require journalists, audiences and governments to establish a new operating framework that will cover all interested parties.

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