

## **Confession Radio Programs: What Utility for the Moroccan Audience**

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### **Abstract**

In the era of globalization, social media seems to be the outstanding reflection of social reality and change. Social networks have become wildly used by the growing population of young urban, rural, and non-literate demographic groups in the developing world. This qualitative shift also shows a strong ability to amplify the voice of marginalised and excluded groups. It likewise contributes in the spectacular regression of the notion of privacy among people. Thus, most users of social media including journalists find no harm in probing in a number of issues that have been deemed sacred or tabooed. Journalism ethics seem to be changing and newcomers seem to be able to introduce new normative even audacious values. This development is not only concerned with social media, it also pierced the radio realm. The present paper therefore sheds light on the radio capacity to accede realities often taken as exclusively restricted and private.

Observers of the Moroccan radio landscape commonly agree that most Moroccan radio stations tend to favor social programs in comparison with, not to say to the detriment of other program types; the issue of what is now called “Confession Programs” which stand for the archetype of stations’ aura have become mostly solicited among listeners. The present study seeks to study this rising trend by unraveling the religious, psychological and sociological implications. It attempts to explore the Moroccan audience’ perceptions in relation to these programs and their impact on listeners’ behaviour. The three angles stated above find premise on a number of radio programs pretending, or at least aim to bring solution to purely psychological crises.

The research design is ethnographic; it focuses on collecting data basing on respondents’ personal views and experiences aloof from any convincing or orienting acts. In this respect, the study makes use of the semi-structured interviews as the main data collection instrument. The population sample comprises 50 respondents divided into two categories namely (i) the direct contact sample and (ii) the facebook sample. The study seeks to answer two research questions: (i) Do respondents have the same perception of confession programs. (ii) What are the religious, psychological and sociological implications of their prevalence?

**Keywords:** Confession, Catharsis, Audience Rate, Social Awareness, Media Success.

### **1. Introduction**

The audiovisual liberalization project was first introduced in 2002. The initiative spawned a positive echo among the Moroccan public who was pleased to witness the inauguration of new generation of private radio stations. The experience led to the rise of a new and unprecedented revolution in media communication. It was believed that radio programs would hence have larger horizons to tackle authentic issues regarding the listeners' chief concerns. Paradoxically enough, a close look on most programs schedules has revealed a strong tendency to present and encourage programs with social and psychological touch. Private stations indulged in a ferocious competition to attract more listeners; stations were therefore predisposed to meet the public expectations and reflect social reality with all its abnormalities instead of presenting valued programs susceptible of enhancing the recipients' levels of awareness.

Most Moroccan radio stations, either private or public, become essentially oriented toward consultation programs with socio-psychological concerns. Programs are fundamentally based on the telling of personal stories aiming to promote a sense of understanding, unity together with social awareness of important issues. Confession was hence considered as an inexpensive, safe and accessible communication medium that manages to reach all levels of listeners. Hence, its role for emotional integration and psychological sanity sounds legitimate and praise-worthy. "It is often on radio, with its ability to handle facts, issues and ideas without visual distraction, that this endeavor is most effectively performed." Starkey (2005).

### **2. Context of the Study**

The Moroccan audiovisual landscape has witnessed an outstanding rise of confession programs and reality TV programs with social touch. These new waves of social programs have managed to realize the highest audience rates. By way of exemplification, we can here state "Al Khait Lebiad, Kissat Annass and Hdeeth Ou Maghzal" presented respectively by Nassima Alhor on 2M TV, Nouhad Ben Aguida on Médi 1 TV and Sanaa Azaim on Radio Aswat. The three programs, together with other similar ones broadcast by other stations, attract the attention of large layers of Moroccans who intend to know more about human, psychological and social cases that unravel the sordid, sometimes the concealed part of the Moroccan social reality. Both TV reality programs and radio confession ones have offered the opportunity to reveal a number of touchy experiences as in cry attacks, laborious confessions, and reconciliation moments alongside with painful souvenirs, which stand traumatic, as they remain deeply rooted in the memory of those who undergo them. Family decline, violence and rape victims; an endless list of social calamities and taboos find refuge in confession in public regardless of the annoying nature of these cases and the multiple repercussions that they may engender on the public.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The study adopts the qualitative approach. It uses semi structured interviews for data collection. It investigates respondents' perceptions of the utility of social interactional programs, exemplified by Confession Programs, referred herein by the acronym (CPs), to incarnate the mating experience bringing together the media output and public expectations. It dwells on three main research questions namely (i) Do respondents have the same perception of the CP trend?

(ii) What is the psychological account for confession programs in terms of their therapeutic efficacy? (iii) What is the sociological stand point regarding the audience's reaction to Confession Programs?

The study seeks to answer two research questions namely (i) Do respondents have the same perception of confession programs? (ii) What are the religious, psychological and sociological implications of their prevalence?

The semi structured interviews, conducted in Moroccan Arabic, were essentially anchored on such questions as: What do you think of CPs presented by the Moroccan radio stations? Have you ever taken part in these programs? If so, what was the issue?

The sample covers 50 participants. Their ages vary between 18 and 56 years old. They include university students, student journalist, radio program coordinators, public and private sector employees, and housewives.

The 50 respondents were equally divided into two categories namely (i) the facebook sample and (ii) the direct contact sample. The choice of the former is twofold; Facebook, among other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and others, play preponderant roles in spreading a wide range of information, ideas, values in a considerably short time laps and with the required efficacy; These virtual spaces do by all account contribute in the mobilization of citizens to react, support or even revolt against political, economic, religious or environmental calamities. a case in point is the ferocious campaign launched in 2016 whilst the Moroccan authorities decided to import Italian waists which were entailed by national factories for the sake of energetic purposes; the project was finally prohibited thanks to the public pressure fueled by the Facebook community.

The second rationale is purely methodological; the users of this facility have the possibility to express their opinions without disclosing themselves to the interviewer; thus, benefiting from a minimum of unanimity level that enables them to divulge more authentic personal experiences and provide valuable data. The second sample is interviewed using direct contact. Subjects hosted for the interviews are selected randomly; the only criteria considered in this respect is participants' motivation to take part in the experience.

Data were collected in two main ways depending on the targeted audience type. Participants pertaining to the facebook community were solicited via social media to voice out their opinions about the above-mentioned topic. Participants interested in the topic submit their answers online together with some additional information about their ages and educational levels. The direct contact sample as the label suggests, is however contacted directly; through interviews, data was collected using a recording device.

#### **4. Respondents' Perceptions of CPs**

The direct contact sample tends to have negative opinions. 18 participants, among the 25 interviewees, see no utility behind listening to programs let alone using them as a solution seeking strategy. This conclusion essentially applies to university students who, as declared by Hanine, an 18 years old student from Casablanca, "... *The fact of telling a personal story on public and expect feedback from unknown listeners sounds implausible*". Nevertheless, 7

respondents see no harm in falling back to CPs as they offer good opportunities to listeners to exteriorize their problems, share their success and failure with the others with an attempt of enlarging the benefits threshold.

The Facebook sample however holds positive views. Respondents tend to mainly favor CPs to other program types as they contribute in unveiling a number of phenomena impacting our social tissue. A case in point is what was experienced by Mrs. Sanaa, a 35 years old housewife from Brussels, who reconciled with a family member after resorting to a confession program. Such conclusion is strengthened by 16 participants who support the use of CPs outlet to seek the way out from certain problematic situations against 9 preferring another alternative such as consulting a specialist or simply talking to a close friend. Besides, data show that 23 among the 50 participants hold positive views, which corresponds to 46% of the total sample. Many informants, with different ages and educational levels believe that the Moroccan community have long suffered from the lack of media alternatives that enable them to express themselves freely and with no constraints. Now with the rise of programs of the like, listeners can maximize their life experiences and share their knowledge about many issues no matter how embarrassing they might be.

Table 1: Respondents’ perceptions of confession programs

Sample category	Number of participants	Favorable perception	Disavowable perception
Direct contact sample	25	07	18
Facebook Sample	25	16	09

The positions of the professionals are likewise divergent. In his account for the performance of the Moroccan private stations, Mr. Mohamed Equal, the director of the Collège Académique Multimédia (CAM), holds that *“most stations present almost the same content with few exceptions though. In the evenings for instance, which represent the second radio phonic primetime, programs are mainly oriented to what is purely psychological; listeners have the opportunity to call on the phone to tell their personal stories asking for the other listeners’ help or for no declared reasons. These programs, continues Mr. Bekali, are involved in a merciless competition among different radio stations in quest of the highest audience rates. This factor might sometime lead to the presentation of stories qualified as offensive, pervasive, tabooed and sometime phoney; the purpose is to keep the listener tuned”*.

Unlike Mr. Bekali, Mr. Innani, the program coordinator of MFM Radio Group, brings forth a different, rather supportive stand point, he believes that CPs offer an interactional atmosphere in which listeners feel at ease among themselves thus incarnating the spirit of the station that bespeaks the concerns of its listeners.

In his article entitled: *“Thus turn The Nightly confession programs of Private Radios to Audio Pornography”*, published by the *“Al Akhbar”* Website, Hassan Al Khadraoui qualified

Confession Programs as mere and promiscuous pornography. This conclusion was developed on the basis of certain programs whose presenters were gratuitously indulging in highly offensive issues tarnishing the feelings of the Moroccan listeners. After the liberalization of the audiovisual sector, the Moroccan public was expecting a qualitative shift in the type of programs offered in a way that should cater for their multiple needs. Paradoxically enough, most stations have ended up being chief seekers of programs inspired from, not to say dictated by the public. Being equipped with no background enabling them to select the most appropriate for them and their children, Moroccan listeners have become the touchstone whereby program constellation is established.

Despite the critiques stated earlier, the prevalence of confession programs remains noticeable. Stations' program constellation includes at least one Confession Program. Listeners have the opportunity to intervene, tell stories, react to other stories or get feedback from a professional expert or mere listeners. Importantly, these programs are purposely presented in the evening, the primetime of radio, which realizes the highest listening rate. Table 2 shows further details about the stations, program title, the presenter, the program schedule and the time allocated. In addition, programs can be changed in form, content or schedules depending on the stations' new program priorities.

Table 2: List of confession programs

<b>Program title</b>	<b>The Presenter</b>	<b>Radio Station</b>	<b>Program Schedule</b>	<b>Time Interval</b>
Bikalb Maftooh	Ismail Aroui	Radio Aswat	Monday/Friday	10PM/12PM
Mazal Manaasinsh	Nordin Karam	Radio Mars	Monday/Friday	11PM/01 AM
Bikoul Wodouh	Mamoun Moubarak Dribi & Sanaa Kilani	Med Radio	Monday/Thursday	6PM/8PM
Nwadah Lik	Shorok Gharib	Atlantic Radio	Mon/Fri	2PM/4PM
Hkili	Yahya Belahssan	Cap-Radio	Mon/Fri	10PM/12PM
Samir Allail	Moustapha Lharda	MFM Radio	Mon/Fri	2PM/3AM
Minka Wa Ilaika	Mohamed Amoura	Alidaa Alwatania	Sunday	6PM/7PM
Maa Rachid	Rachid El Iddrissi	Radio Aswat	Monday/Friday	9PM/11PM
Bissaraha, Ftah Kalbek	Adib Salaki	Radio Plus	Monday/Friday	10PM/12PM

### **5. The Religious Account for Confession:**

According to the religious perspective, Confession can best be analyzed in the light of two basic readings: Confession of one's beliefs and confession of one's sins. The former implies the declaration of one's ideas, opinions and creeds aloof from all misconceptions, prejudices or stereotypes that are susceptible of tarnishing the image of the believer. The latter however refers to the state of estrangement from God that result from transgressing his commandments. This situation, added to the embarrassment it brings to the sinful, is usually attributed to fame, defamation and scorn.

As far as participants are concerned, the findings show that the rejection of the reaction characterizing the directly interviewed sample has religious implications; the religious account does not provide room for listeners to tell stories taken as offensive and intimate. This prohibition finds its premises in a number of prophetic sayings; it also mainly emanates from the fact that these adventurous stories might provide bad examples for some inexperienced listeners to follow. As a result, many interviewees hold that listeners willing to tell their stories on air use pseudonyms, which enables them to conceal their identities, they find it easier and safer to express their support either as listeners or as alleged participants in certain radio programs.

### **6. The psychological benefits of Confession:**

The psychological approach associates confession with an act of acknowledgement of who we are and what we believe and what we have done. These components may consequently be conducive to one of the three outcomes: personal validation, self-flagellation or a plea for forgiveness. The act of confessing hence requires a state of awareness from the person undertaking the act; we cannot confess to something unless we are aware of it. Confession in this sense is the condition sine qua non of self-awareness, which has been highly emphasized by participants.

Most participants agree upon the contribution of confession in enhancing and strengthening social solidarity and compactness. Nevertheless, it entails a psychological cost and braveness as it makes the individual more vulnerable to any idea or opinion susceptible of giving him/her help.

### **7. The Sociological implications of Confession.**

Confession programs, despite their divergent professional and analytical levels, unravel some deep changes that occur in the Moroccan social tissue beside discarding the silence language and bringing in the confession alternative instead. Dr. Abderrahim Al Atri, professor of sociology at the university Mohamed Ibn Abdillah in Fes declared that confession programs can be placed in a general context which aims at increasing the audience rate of media institutions. The media needs of the Moroccan citizen are in constant change and find refuge in confession programs. Dr. Al Atri, in an interview published by the CNN website, declared that the Moroccan citizen has long suffered from the traditional and classical image of politicians speaking an alien language far from his chief and urgent concerns. These new programs however meet the needs of the layman who has now the precious chance of entering its studios and divulging what deeply

lurks inside one's heart. By the same token, continues Dr. Al Atri, these programs contribute in appeasing the individuals' agonies by presenting more miserable and tragic cases related to incurable diseases and handicaps. As a result, people may be more predisposed to put up with their inextricable situations as they take themselves luckier in comparison with the cases presented on air.

The noticeable rise of CPs, alongside with the deep moral change undertaken by the Moroccan society articulate a close attachment bringing together the Moroccan media and the public. In many conflictual cases, CPs were highly decisive in peace building and conflict resolution; in this, they may be construed as having useful, rather providential impacts on the Moroccan audience.

The wide proliferation of confession programs, as representative of reality programs, is also strengthened by the audience rejection of the boring and futile nature of political programs for example which do not echo an authentic reality; these programs are mostly criticized for using language beyond the layman reach. The widespread successful program: "Kissat Annass" broadcast by Médi 1 TV 8 years ago, with the popular ravage created by some of its editions manifests an urgent need of such services to fill certain gaps in our society. Simple people have at least the opportunity to share their experiences and agonies thus benefiting from programs becoming the refuge for those who have no refuge. In her declaration to the CNN website, Nouhad Bagdad, the presenter of "Kissat Annass", stated that "these programs do by no means seek to defame and interfere in the intimacy of the Moroccan families; they rather aim at shedding the light on issues that have long been placed in the dark recesses of the collective unconscious of the Moroccan society.

The study has shown that these programs are highly useful at two levels: the first is primarily psychological as CPs enables the caller to get delivered and supported by the other listeners let alone their contribution to solve the problem at stake. The second utility is purely mercantile; thanks to their capacity to obtain the highest audience rate, CPs enable TV channels and radio stations to realize the highest lucrative gains mainly imbibe from the sponsorship tap.

## **8. Conclusion.**

This study was devoted to the investigation of the image and utility of confession programs for the Moroccan Public. It presented the psychological backbones and outcomes of confession regarding the personal development and equilibrium of the individual or listener. We also tackled the confession behaviour from a sociological perspective which revealed that confession is not a mere act of acknowledging one's experiences or sins; it is a ritual that noticeably contributed in strengthening social solidarity and compactness among people. As held by Dr. Abderrahim Elaterid, confession programs manifest a deep social need for collective therapies to appease social agonies. The study also revealed the commercial dimension of the CPs trend. Thanks to their capacity to obtain the highest audience rate, CPs enable TV channels and radio stations to realize the considerable financial incomes imbibe from the publicity tap.

The study confirmed that confession programs can by no means be taken as an arbitrary phenomenon; rather, it has become an increasing trend that, as demoed in this paper, entails more deepened academic scrutiny. The choice of confession programs was but a specimen among other rising media issues that are no less worth studying and which therefore necessitate due academic accounts.

Bearing in mind the proliferation of the social issues discussed above, the contribution of local media via such programs as CPs is likely to be a growing trend. What is needed is qualified academic institutions that can supervise research that investigate the impact of media on peace building situations. The study introduced in the present article suggests to bring an impetus to further academic inquiries. These studies should shed light not only on the public perceptions and/or attitudes toward particular issues; the focus should also be laid on the extent to which media can be an integral part of conflict resolution.

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