
Moroccans' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards radio Mohammed VI of the Holy Koran

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Abstract

In 2002, the Moroccan communication authorities laid the legal platform of the audiovisual liberalization project. Four years later, the media landscape witnessed the birth of the first generation of private radio stations which were followed by the second generation three years later. Public media did no more benefit from the monopoly privilege. Instead, the media landscape was submerged by a constellation of alternatives attempting to forge a distinctive identity that would help achieve the largest audience. The real competition occurred between not only the private stations but also the public and private ones.

This article examines the relationship between specialized media programs and the audience perceptions and attitudes. It puts under analysis the pioneering performance of radio Mohamed VI of the holy Koran as it is the only Moroccan radio station specialized in the Islamic religion. Throughout 11 years of broadcast, and with regard to the audience rate measurement bulletins, the station has consistently managed to outrun the others by realizing the highest audience rates. The study is based on field research that investigates the elements and reasons behind the station's success; it also uses the conclusions and implications as references to scrutinize the dyadic relationship between Moroccans and their Muslim identity. The study is inspired from the audience rate bulletin published by Radio CIRAD which has confirmed it as a leading media model. This finding has also been solidified by the population sample that took part in the present study.

The study adopts the mixed approach bringing together both quantitative and qualitative research instruments. The former includes CIRAD's statistical platform whereas the latter refers to semi structured interviews recorded with 50 participants. The study seeks to answer two research questions namely (i) What are Moroccans' perceptions and attitudes towards Radio M6 of the holy Koran? (ii) What are the underlying reasons behind its prevalence?

Keywords: Audiovisual Sector Liberalization, religion, audience perception and attitude, General Media, Specialized Media, Moroccan Audience Rate Bulletin.

1. Introduction

In the early 80s, the Moroccan religious media used to be limited to some specialized magazines published by the ministry of Habokus and religious affairs. they were namely Dayawati Al Hak, or SabalArrochartogether with some religious rubrics published by a number of Moroccan newspapers such as Al Aala. The media landscape was later solidified by the rise of some specialized magazines such as Amour, Al Islamin addition to some journals coming from the East namely Al Musclemman. They all attempted to bring added value contribution to the media religious field and were consequently venerated for having compensated for the vacuum Moroccan recipient scrambled with. Their contributions were mainly noticed in their capacity to bring a modern approach to some religious issues in a way that managed to restore the legitimacy of the religious approach.

In Morocco, religious programs were essentially broadcast every Fridays, and exclusively intensified during the Holy Month of Ramadan, the two religious feasts, the new Islamic year and the birth of the prophet Mohamed may peace be upon him. Nonetheless, they were essentially criticized for being monotonous and redundant; a case in point is "Ron Al Mufti" program presented by the first Moroccan channel "Al Oola" on Fridays during the 80s and early 90s. According to Rd. Taboring, «the religious predicator and presenter of a"AddingWA Al Hayat" on Med Radio, Ron Al Mufti" could have largely been developed in a way that would suit the changes that occurred in the religious media landscape since the 80s.

Other programs were broadcast on purely occasional events; the "Addourouss Al Hassania", introduced at first in the presence of His Majesty King Hassan the 2nd and Mohamed the 6th later on, were presented exclusively during the holy month of Ramadan. These lectures offered the possibility to receive Moroccan and foreign scholars pertaining to the Muslim world and whose innovative contributions were so brightening to the Moroccan religious aura.

With the rise of the 21st century, the Muslim and Arab world underwent a number of changes far beyond the political level. The reference is here made to the terrorist attacks of September the 11th 2001 which engendered abominable offences against Islam and its icons. The second change was essentially epitomized by a qualitative shift in media and communication, which coincided with the technological revolution allowing for the prosperity of digital and satellite channels. The technical revolution therefore spawned a necessity of creating Islamic media alternatives that could, or was at least supposed to resist the unprecedented waves of defamation and violation of the Islamic values and principles. Global satellite channels such as "Arrissala, Al Fajr, Arrahma, Annass, Iqraa" in the Arab world and "Al Houda" in the western, sought, and still continue to present Islam in such peaceful, moderated and modern image; they likewise attempted to defend its reputation against all types of misleading delusions ferociously launched either by non-Muslim channels or some secular Muslim activists who are strong opponents of the Islamic ruling model.

The Moroccan society, which is well known for its religious distinctiveness, was invaded by a constellation of oriental websites and satellite Islamic channels. Consequently, there was a need to think of a Moroccan religious media alternative that should cater for the local religious needs especially after the terrorists' attacks of Mai the 16th 2003 in Casablanca. Thus, Radio Mohamed VI of the Holy Koran came into being. The religious station, launched in 2004, was followed by Assadissa TV Channel soon after; both were dedicated to the religious realm up to the present time. Contrary to the controversial impact and reputation of the religious programs presented on the two public TV channels (Al Oola and 2M), Radio Mohamed VI did manage to set the example of media success story in Morocco; elements that laid behind this achievement will be discussed in this article.

The article hence introduces an academic inquiry of this rising media phenomenon in relation to the commonplace trend. The scrutinized sample: Radio Mohamed VI of the Holy Koran, referred to in this article by the label: Radio M 6, stands for the archetype of specialized media as opposed to the general, counterpart.

With regard to radio M6th religious field of interest, the study seeks to answer the following research question:

1. What are Moroccans' perceptions and attitudes towards Radio M6 of the holy Koran?
2. What are the underlying reasons behind its prevalence?

Regarding the objectives, the study aims at ascertaining the extent to which this prevalence can depict the Moroccan public as being essentially conservative.

2. Research methodology

The research design adopts the mixed approach; it makes use of both quantitative and qualitative research instruments. Quantitative data are represented by the statistical figures issued by Radio CIRAD, the accredited institution in charge of audience rate measurement; whereas the qualitative data are elicited using semi structured interviews. Such a choice is made to overcome the limitations of each instrument. The interviews offer the possibility to get qualitative data that help discover and account for informants' beliefs, preferences and inclinations. Special equipment was used to record Interviews in addition to the Skype software and What Sappapplication, which made it possible to interview respondents living in different cities. The study also uses participatory observation, which helps not only develop good relations with the respondents but also collect authentic data.

The study seeks to answer two research questions:

1. What are Moroccans' perceptions and attitudes towards Radio M6 of the holy Koran?
2. What are the underlying reasons behind its prevalence?

The interviews essentially revolved around respondents' opinions of Radio M 6 and the reasons they deemed pivotal behind its success. The language used was Moroccan Arabic or Darija. The two foreign languages namely French and English were excluded. This decision is twofold; first,

Arabic happens to be the language spoken by all informants regardless of their academic qualifications. Second, it is the communication vehicle that is essentially used by most radio stations, Radio M6 included.

The population sample includes 50 interviewees varying in terms of academic level, professional occupation and geographical location. Their ages vary between 16 and 56 years old. They belong to two categories: 40 listeners and 10 media professionals. The former comprise to any encountered listener ready to engage in a short conversation related to media performance. The latter however is concerned with journalists who were purposefully selected. They belong to different media agencies including Radio Mohamed VI of the Holy Koran.

3. Moroccans' perceptions and attitudes toward Radio M 6

The following section demonstrates the results achieved from the data related to the notoriety and impact of Radio M6 on the audience. It dwells on two platforms: the first presents the findings unravelled by Radio CIRAD (see table 1), and which investigates listeners' opinions about all national and regional radio stations. The second however dwells on participants' opinions collected in this study.

These findings serve as the platform from which a number of conclusions and recommendations are drawn.

CIRAD's Data show that Moroccans have positive perceptions vis a vis particular radio stations. Regardless of their distinctive editorial lines, findings reveal that only few stations among many have managed to gain informants' trust. On the top of the list figures the religious station together with Radio Médi 1, MFM Radio Group and Al Idaa Al Watania. Table 1 introduces the numerical figures that strengthen this conclusion.

The numerical figures, included in this section, epitomize the developmental performance of radio Mohamed the 6th of the Holy Koran. They present the audience rates achieved by the station starting from the first audience measurement wave that dates back to the first trimester of 2012 until the 16th wave corresponding to the fourth trimester of 2015. The numerical figures are established on a comparative basis as they demonstrate the audience rate related to radio M6 together with the two following ones. These findings only demonstrate the results corresponding to radio stations that are classified among the top three. The purpose is to observe the performance of Radio M6 throughout the period investigated herein.

If we scrutinize the figures of the audience rate of the four years exhibited below, we shall notice an outstanding prevalence of Radio Mohamed VI of the Holy Koran over the other radio stations. The domination of the religious station dates back to the first trimester of 2012, which corresponds to the outset of the audience measurement tradition. Its pathway developed gradually since the first wave in which it achieved 15.25% of the audience rate; its rising trend continued throughout the subsequent waves before it reached its peak in the 7th wave in which it obtained 18.77% of the investigated sample. The only exception was the 14th wave in which

Médi 1 took hold of the first rank; yet Radio Mohamed VI of the Holy Koran immediately regained the leadership in the 15th wave with 15.32% of the audience rate.

Table 1: Development of Radio M6 Audience Rates (2012/2015)

NUM. OF THE WAVE	PERIOD	FIRST RANK/ LISTENING RATE	SECOND RANK/ LISTENING RATE	THIRD RANK/ LISTENING RATE
WAVE 1	JANUARY/MARCH 2012	RADIO M VI / 15.25%	Radio Médio 1/15.7%	Al Ida Al Satanai/10.25%
WAVE 2	APRIL/JUNE 2012	RADIO M VI/16.18%	RadioMédio 1/14.7%	Al Ida Al Satanai/10.79%
WAVE 3	JULY/SEMPTEMBRE 2012	Radio M6/16.51%	Radio Médio 1/41%	Al Ida Al Satanai/10.46%
WAVE 4	OCTOBRE/DECEMBRE 2012	RADIO M VI/16.62%	Radio Médio 1/13.99%	Al Ida Al Satanai/10.19%
WAVE 5	JANUARY/MARCH 2013	RADIO M VI/17.70%	Radio Médio 1/13.11%	Al Ida Al Satanai/10.23%
WAVE 6	APRIL/JUNE 2013	RADIO M VI/16.82%	MFM Radio/14.35%	RADIO Médio 1/12.06%
WAVE 7	JULY/SEMPTEMBRE 2013	RADIO M VI/18.77%	MFM Radio/14.85%	RADIO Médio 1/11.31%
WAVE 8	OCTOBRE/DECEMBRE 2013	RADIO M VI/17.93%	MFM Radio/14.85%	RADIO Médio 1/11.04%
WAVE 9	JANUARY/MARCH 2014	RADIO M VI/17.07%	MFM Radio/16%	RADIO Médio 1/11%
WAVE 10	APRIL/JUNE 2014	RADIO M VI/16.42%	MFM Radio/14.10%	RADIO Médio 1/11.58%
WAVE 11	JULY/SEPTEMBRE 2014	RADIO M VI/16.99%	MFM Radio/14.81%	Med Radio/10.43%
WAVE 12	OCTOBRE/DECEMBRE 2014	RADIO M VI/13.69%	MFM Radio/13.44%	RADIO Médio 1/11.26%
WAVE 13	Jaguar/March 2015	RADIO M VI/16.77%	MFM Radio/11.72%	Med Radio/11.54%
Waves 14	April/June 2015	Radio Médio 1/12.42%.	MFM Radio/ 11.75%	Al Ida Al Satanai/ 10.41%
Waves 1	Octobre/Décembre 2015.	Radio M VI/15.32%	Med Radio/ 12.49%.	MFM Radio/ 10.43%

4. The underlying reasons behind the prevalence of Radio M 6 over the other stations

At the qualitative level, the findings exhibited above are also strengthened by opinions declared in the interviews; most ideas expressed by participants manifest their great satisfaction with programs broadcast by Radio M 6. Either at the level of the individual or collective Koranic readings and explanations, interactive social programs, children dedicated programs etc, participants believe that the religious station offers a large scope of authentic religious information presented by highly qualified authorities. “Thanks to the simplified linguistic style involving classical Arabic, Darija, Amazigh, French and English language, programs do contribute in rising listeners’ awareness of very important issues related to the listeners’ everyday life” declared one of the participants. The figures exhibited above are quite revelatory of an outstanding feature; they unravel the Moroccans’ respect for religious programs apart from any differentiating traits. Basing on a number of interviews, the study showed that participants tend to venerate religious symbols even though they may not be regular fans of religious programs or even practitioners. On the basis of a close look at the results that are either issued by Radio CYRAD or the present study, we may clearly notice that the Moroccan audiences are unquestionably satisfied with Radio M6, bearing in mind the readymade conception all religious icons are associated with, and with regard to Radio M6 field of interest, we may comfortably conclude that the present findings illustrate the fact that Moroccans are inherently conservative in so far as the issue is related to religion.

We can likewise confirm that this similitude between the results shown by Radio CIRAD and the ones unravelled in this study can by no means be coincidental; they are quite revelatory of an intrinsic phenomenon which rather necessitates a deep analysis attending to the causes behind the predomination of Radio M6 over the Moroccan radio phonic landscape.

5. Implications of Radio M6 Success Story

Radio M6 was inaugurated on July the 2nd, 2004 by King Mohamed the 6th. The beginning was quite modest and limited in terms of staff and equipment; yet, the performance was far from simplicity when it comes to the remarkable impact realized on the public. Few years later, its success did even reach an international fame in some Islamic and Arab countries in particular. The Moroccan religious station is now considered a reference in terms of working method, program diversity and discourse simplicity, which enable it to address the largest population scope including intellectuals, students, laymen, households and illiterate people.

The conclusion was reached on the basis of a comparison made with experiences of other Islamic countries participating in the meeting of Islamic radio stations held in Nouakchott in Mauritania. AbdessalamZian, the ex-program manager of the station, in an interview reported by Almassaa journal and published on July the 24th 2014, emphasized the exemplary characteristic of the Moroccan radio station. He pursued that its expansion did a great deal benefit from the rise of social media and technology; as a result, radio Mohamed VI of the holy Koran is now followed across borders.

According to IdrissAoulhian, the ex-top manager, the secret behind lies in the station's well-wrought strategy which aims to accompany the religious, intellectual and educational activities organized under the custody of the councils of Oulamaa throughout the national territory; besides, the religious programs are carefully designed to meet the listeners' expectations in all life aspects in addition to the importance bestowed on the survival of the antique national patrimony.

Since 2004, programs were mainly anchored on the broadcasting of the Holy Koran. With the adoption of the audience rate measurement tradition, and which allowed the religious station to achieve good results, the Moroccan audiovisual authorities did proceed to the establishment of a book of specifications stipulating the proportion of programs presented. In this, 50% of the programs schedules was devoted to the Holy Koran; this proportion was then reduced to 40% while other programs were added such as the biography of the prophet (AssounnaAnnabaouiya) and the explanation of the Holy Koran.

Mr.Zian posits that the radio strategy dwells heavily on the listeners' religious concerns; it does similarly tackle multiple issues from a purely religious perspective such as environment, traffic accidents, family and children, health etc. He reinforces that this programme diversity method is an exclusive attribute in Morocco. Programs are selected among the proposals submitted by a number of scholarly and learned authorities and journalists. Mr. Zian believes that this collaboration, solidarity and "esprit de corps" is the strong point of the radio staff.

With regard to their religious field of interest, journalists working in the station are supposed to be well versed in the field of Ashariaa (the Islamic constitution), the Holy Koran and related subjects. The station does therefore rely on the ministry of Habokus and religious affairs for the provision of qualified religious staffs graduating from the institute of the training of Imams. These human resources were then trained in the design, preparation and presentation of radio programs.

The experience of radio M6 has also strategic implications that can be noticed at the national and international level. Thanks to its close and realistic approach to the Moroccan reality, it did manage to bring added value radio services to the public. Radio M6 programming constellation offers the Moroccan recipient a variety of religious programmes treated in compliance with their expectations at the levels of language used, angles treated and selected speakers. "at least, we have the opportunity to listen to people who speak on our behalf and reflect our concerns beyond all lucrative motifs" declared one of the interviewees. In addition, the program concepts take into account the cultural appropriateness of the Moroccan context; that is: by means of a number of programs such as "Passional, KableAdhira, NahlaRumman, Sabah Said, Issoufou Alafia and Fi Riad Tabooed Alcorn Alka rim", the station seeks to rise the Moroccans' awareness of the cultural and patrimonial dimensions of such legacies as collective Koranic readings, rehearsals and Arabic calligraphy.

Diversity is also another qualitative attribute of radio M6 programming agenda. Albeit at the level of speakers, topics, languages and spiritual musical selections, this feature has strongly been highlighted by a number of citizens, workers, taxi drivers engaged spontaneously in the interviews. The diversification of scholarly speakers, as declared by Mr. AbdessalamZian a priori, is articulated via a number of recognized authorities belonging to different councils of Oulamaa covering the four parts of the national territory. Many highly qualified female speakers do also take part in a number of programs such as “Issoufou Al Aafia” specialized in health and medical issues, presented by Rd. Amina El Irakli. As far as language is concerned, radio M6 offers a variety of programs presented in different languages such as classical Arabic, Darija, Tamazight, French and English programmed with appropriated proportions though. Thus, it epitomizes the philosophy of pluralism that has long been a distinguishing attribute of the Moroccan audio-visual landscape; besides, the linguistic and cultural pluralism is one of the principles strongly recommended in the book of specifications agreed upon with the High Authority. Although programs presented in foreign languages do target a limited and intellectual category of listeners, they reflect the international and universal nature of the Islamic discourse.

Radio M6 success story has also cultural implications; it unravelled a strong attachment between the Moroccan society and its cultural appropriateness. It offers a tolerant and safe atmosphere that hosts a variety of cultural tissues coexisting in a such peaceful matrix. In his article: Morocco: Model for Islam, published by the Gate Stone Institute on November 23, 2014, Rd. Mohamed Ch tatou states that "Today, Moroccans proudly highlight their multiple and composite identity "p.3. This cultural identity mainly originated from Arab, Islamic, African, Amazi's, Andalusian, Mediterranean and Jewish sources. The luring, and most of the time frightening, notion of the other has no room in a land that has historically been confirmed as a land of coexistence and togetherness concluded Rd. Mohamed Ch tatou.

Unlike other countries of the Arab world, which are recently subjected to what is commonly called “the Arab Spring” marked by unprecedented waves of upheavals, revolutions and instabilities, the religious model presented by Morocco remains highly appreciated at transnational levels. This distinguishing attribute mainly rests upon two platforms: political and religious; the former lies the fact that the Moroccan kingdom is a constitutional monarchy in which the King is the supreme political power in addition to the state of the royal ruling system which exists for more than 12 centuries. This historical expansion stands for the umbilical cord that fastens the nation to the throne and offers a guarantee of stability and security of the country. The latter however refers to the “ImaretAluminon Institution” in which the King is at the same time the “Commander of the Believers”; besides, the religion of Islam as conceived and practiced by Moroccans is not a mere preaching ritual; rather, it is a factor of cultural belonging.

6. Conclusion

This article was devoted to the successful pathway of Radio Mohamed VI of the Holy Quran. It introduced the findings of a field study conducted on Moroccan listeners. The sample platform was twofold; it used the findings drawn from the collected data. It also considered the audience

rates yielded by Radio CIRAD; the study has issued a number of implications. To begin with, the classification bulletin rendered to the public by Radio CIRAD and which consecrates the religious radio supremacy over the Moroccan radiophonic landscape was strengthened by the sample included in this study. Besides, most interviews realized throughout the data collection operation showed that the Moroccan listeners have a strong predisposition to favour radio M 6 just because of its religious field of interest. Even though Moroccan people may not be regular fans of the station, they feel compelled to express their unconditional attachment to the station as it conceived to be the media incarnation of religion.

This inconsistent outcome manifests a kind of discordance between respondents' declared beliefs and attitudes which rather necessitates an in-depth analysis in future studies. Yet, the overall consistency of some Moroccans' perceptions and attitudes, as noticed throughout the whole data collection procedure, does undeniably imply that Moroccans are inherently conservative despite the previously mentioned contradictions. Hence, the study objective is achieved.

The success story of the religious oriented station, as confirmed in this paper, might likewise stem from its status as a public station immune to all commercial and lucrative hardships. Its achievement epitomizes the strategy adopted by the Moroccan official authorities and their view of a modern and moderated Islamic discourse and Islamic media model.

The Good performance of the religious station articulates the necessity of other Moroccan stations to develop a strong competitive model to dethrone it from its supreme position. To remain attractive, these stations are compelled to revise their programming strategies, regarding not only the schedules, but also the program content. The promising experience of radio m6 is and shall remain a remarkable achievement for its managers. An example to follow by other stations that, for a number of years now, have been grappling to make up for the delay piled up at the level of audience rates. The religious station incarnates an outstanding attribute of the Moroccan citizen in relation to the sanctity of the religious discourse, the authenticity of programs, language style and speakers' competence. All these attributes together contribute in producing good program quality, which should inevitably keep fascinating more and more listeners in Morocco.

The study has led to the conclusion that Moroccans' perceptions and attitudes toward religion, and religious media programs in particular, are not a mere reaction to a program or product being broadcast, it rather emanates from a deep attachment to an icon of sanctity and anchor of cultural belonging that has long been a source of national pride.

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