

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND THEIR STRATEGIES IN SUPPORTING THE CULTURE OF BELONGING AND CITIZENSHIP: A DESCRIPTIVE CRITICAL APPROACH

Selami Saidani¹, Leila Feguri²

¹Professor Lecturer A, University of M'sila (Algeria) *, salami.saidani@univ-msila.dz



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8624-3104>

²Professor Lecturer A, University of M'sila (Algeria), leila.feguri@univ-msila.dz



<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2698-9846>

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Abstract

The rapid and unprecedented changes in contemporary societies, especially in the Arab world, have led to some social and economic problems. These negative effects have particularly influenced the youth, resulting in a weakening of their sense of belonging to their country among various segments of society.

Today, the importance of belonging and citizenship is highlighted in order to preserve the identity of each community in the face of threats. However, this does not mean that the solution lies in isolation or detachment from the world, which has become, as Marshall McLuhan put it, a "global village". Rather, it means equipping individuals with immunity through a national upbringing that focuses on providing them with knowledge, values, principles, and skills to interact with the contemporary world without compromising their national identity.

Introduction

Media has become an integral part of people's lives, and these means, including radio, television, internet, press, satellite channels, and others, have a strong influence in shaping individuals' personalities. They have become the primary guide for individuals' thoughts and beliefs, especially in the case of children in their various stages of development. Unfortunately, most media outlets today are not up to the responsibility required for the educational process.

We can imagine the extent of the danger facing our children when we realize that a child spends five to six hours daily in front of a television screen. This means that media influence on children constitutes about forty percent, with nearly four-fifths of educational, moral, behavioural, and belief concepts coming from media sources, while the rest come from the home, school, neighbours, community, and others.

Hence, the media bears a trust and responsibility similar to educational institutions in terms of its impact on shaping the structure of societies and outlining their features. The influence of the media may even surpass that of educational institutions due to various factors, including the nature of the content provided by each and its suitability to the recipients' desires. The diversity of media institutions, and their presence with individuals in

different times and places, unlike educational institutions, necessitates investing in the media to guide our children and youth towards citizenship and belonging to their homeland, which ultimately benefits their societies.

2- Introduction to Belonging and Citizenship:

2-1- Concept of Belonging:

Differences in defining belonging arise according to what is mentioned in dictionaries of various languages. Mukhtar Al-Sahih traces belonging back to the root verb "belong", meaning to attribute or ascribe to someone and elevate them. A person is said to "belong" to their father, meaning to be attributed or related to him. This meaning is consistent with the interpretation provided by Lisan al-Arab, which refers to "belong" as a verb indicating increase, attribution, or affiliation. For instance, it is said that someone "belong" to their grandfather, meaning their lineage was elevated to him.¹

In the field of social sciences terminology, belonging is defined as an individual's connection to a group, aiming to establish a strong bond with the group, where the individual identifies with it and finds themselves within it, such as in a family, club, company, etc. This definition is in line with the understanding presented in the field of psychology, where the term "autism" is taken to signify the individual's representation of their group and their belonging to it, provided they feel a sense of security, satisfaction, pride, and pride in it.

As a term, belonging encompasses psychological, social, and philosophical aspects, stemming from the dialectical interactive process between the individual and the society or group they prefer. Belonging supports identity as the individual's internal self-awareness, defined by external factors supported by the community. Belonging is the feeling of these factors, expressed through actions and behaviours characterized by loyalty to the group of belonging or the community.

2-2- Concept of Citizenship:

Citizenship is the conceptual framework of the governing principles regulating the individual's relationship with the democratic system in society. It instills in the national achievement a spirit of social consciousness and belonging, urging individuals to manage national work beyond the call of duty, with a sense of responsibility to achieve symbols of efficiency and status for their society in the world of tomorrow.

It is commonly agreed that patriotism is a sentiment, while citizenship is a practice. Patriotism entails love and loyalty, whereas citizenship involves acceptance (either willingly or obligatorily). Patriotism is characterized by emotional warmth, passion, and sentimentality, whereas citizenship entails behaviours and actions. Patriotism is an emotional attachment to the land and the community, while citizenship is a practical attachment. Patriotism is a heartfelt, conscience-driven internal sense, while citizenship is outward, visible behaviour.

Patriotism is not subject to plurality or alteration, whereas citizenship involves adaptation and flexibility. Patriotism is a result of reality, while citizenship is a means to an end. It is also universally agreed that patriotism is a culmination of citizenship. Without good citizenship, there is no good patriotism. However, citizenship can be achieved without patriotism, as patriotism is related to history and identity, while citizenship is harmony and rhythmic daily life.

The Arab International Encyclopaedia defines patriotism as a valid expression signifying an individual's love and dedication to their homeland, which includes belonging to the land, the people, the customs, traditions, pride in history, and dedication to serving the homeland. Patriotism conveys feelings of love and loyalty inherent in belonging to the homeland, love for the country, its land, its people, and pride in its heritage and civilization. Its manifestations include commitment to rights and duties, respect for the prevailing laws in the country, unity with it, and working to protect it and defend it in times of crises, out of a keenness to maintain its cohesion, unity, continuity, safety, and to contribute to its growth and progress.

As for citizenship, the researcher sees that it encompasses a relationship between the homeland and the citizen and is based on the social and political competence of the individual. Active citizenship requires the presence of essential qualities in citizens that make them influential personalities in public life, capable of participating in decision-making. It can be said that the quality of patriotism is deeper than that of citizenship, or that it represents the highest degrees of citizenship. An individual acquires citizenship by merely affiliating with a group or a specific country, but they only acquire patriotism by acting and working for the benefit of this group or country, where the public interest becomes more important than their private interests.²

3- Introduction to Media: Definitional Framework

The concept of media encompasses a variety of means and tools aimed at conveying specific information to a targeted audience. Media has evolved from being a method of expressing the ruler's will to a means of rebellion and opposition. Some define media as the objective expression of the mentality, spirit, or inclinations of the masses at the same time. This was articulated by the German scholar "Adorno".

3-1- Concept of Media:

There are numerous definitions of media. "Redfield" defines it as the broad field for the exchange of facts and opinions among humans. While "Reeves" defines it as including all forms of expression suitable for mutual understanding.

Media (or communication media) encompasses various forms that have historically accumulated over time. Although the discussion of media did not begin until the twentieth century, interest in such media dates back much further, starting with the art of rhetoric practiced by ancient Greeks and Romans, oral and visual communication, and others. Humanity has gone through what is called the "era of the press," "era of radio," "era of television," and "era of symbolic, imaginary, or virtual space."³

3-2- Why Media Exactly?

Simply because media holds great importance at the individual, family, societal, national, and global levels, in all aspects of human life: educational, cultural, social, health, economic, political, and others:

- Media is an essential part of our daily lives.
- It is one of the most powerful modern communication tools that enable individuals to engage with and interact with the era.
- It is one of the most important modern tools for addressing human societies.

- It translates social trends in various intellectual directions and activates political movements, cultural scenes, intellectual and creative output.
- It explains issues and presents them to the public to prepare them for them.
- It builds countries economically, socially, politically, culturally, and intellectually.
- It influences political, economic, cultural, and intellectual issues.
- It informs about world news, events, and developments and interacts with them.
- It facilitates cultural, civilizational, and intellectual exchange between countries and peoples and interaction between them.
- It shapes the convictions, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals and groups.

In the twenty-first century, media has become the primary voice in the age of communication and information revolution.⁴

4- Media between Citizenship and Belonging:

The current reality of Arab youth media and citizenship is not at a level that enables it to fulfil its role in educating, preparing, developing, and educating Arab youth. The danger of the shortcomings in Arab media lies in opening the door to Western media and culture, which invade the field of Arab youth media, with the worst impact on shaping the personalities, values, and beliefs of Arab children.⁵

4-1-Media and Its Impact on Youth:

Media influences children based on four factors:

Firstly, the type and strength of the medium and the extent of the youth's attraction to it, ranked according to its impact ratio as follows:

- Audio-visual (television, cinema, video), representing the highest weight (60-70%)
- Interactive (computer games), representing a medium weight (20-30%)
- Auditory (radio, cassette), representing a medium weight (10-20%)
- Visual (written) (magazines, books, stories), representing a medium weight (10-20%)

Secondly, the age of the youth, their cultural background, and their social environment: Does the youth have cultural immunity? Is the environment encouraging? Is the medium prevalent?⁶

Thirdly, the quality of the message received by the youth through the media content presented: This is the most important issue for youth - collectively - as a good future for everything sent to them, especially if the content is captivating and exciting for the recipient youth.

Fourthly, the time spent with media: The distribution of youth's time can be estimated as follows:

1. Sleep: 8-10 hours
2. School: 6-7 hours
3. Play / meals / free activities: 4-5 hours
4. Media: 5-6 hours

By a simple mathematical analysis, we can confirm that the educational impact of media on youth constitutes approximately 35-40%.

4-2- Different Media Outlets, Youth Citizenship, and Fostering Belonging

First. Radio:

The importance of radio is evident through the programs it broadcasts, providing youth with information, facts, traditions, and societal norms that contribute to shaping their personalities and fostering their patriotism.

Impact of radio on the social upbringing of children:

- Stimulating the mental activity of youth
- Increasing individual's cultural knowledge and linguistic abilities
- Developing positive inclinations and attitudes
- Enhancing artistic taste, expanding imagination, and broadening life perspectives.⁷

Current situation of youth concerning radio:

- Scarcity of youth-oriented programs on Arab radio stations
- Lack of specialized program presenters
- Low quality of individual programs
- Programs often rely heavily on music
- Ineffective timing for program broadcasts
- Limited variety in the content of cassette productions, predominantly featuring singing and entertainment.

Second. Television:

When discussing television as a significant media outlet influencing youth, the impact can sometimes be profound, reaching addictive levels. Youth engage in various activities while watching television, including eating, playing, and even completing essential tasks. The danger of this viewing habit lies in the fact that the world is currently witnessing an explosion of satellite channels, whose sources and objectives remain unclear, yet they carry cultures far removed from our society and values.

Approximately fifty youth television channels exist in Europe compared to only five in the Arab world. One of these is entirely Western, another is primarily promotional (often dubbed), a third offers shallow entertainment, a fourth showcases high-quality content but lacks educational substance, and a fifth is conservative (encrypted) but artistically and professionally modest.

Some argue that discussing the negative effects of Arab satellite channels on Arab youth is exaggerated and fear mongering, but they are mistaken. The tangible effects of television broadcasting on shaping the Arab youth are undeniable and leave no room for doubt.

Attempting to address the situation by banning satellite channels and shutting ourselves off from them may have been a successful remedy for some, but it is a limited solution because those capable of implementing it are few and will face numerous obstacles. As time passes, such a remedy becomes futile because technologies evolve to circumvent restrictions, and the floodgates gradually open, rendering the barriers ineffective. This is an undeniable reality that we may not accept, but we must deal with it to improve our response and minimize the negative impact on our children.⁸

From the reality of youth programs on Arab channels:

- Scarcity of purposeful cartoon content suitable for youth in a new phase.
- Scarcity of purposeful and educational plays and variety shows.
- Limited number of hours dedicated to such programs.
- Dependence on imported programs (more than 50%).
- Predominance of direct guidance.
- Lack of excitement and reliance on stereotypes.
- Extensive reliance on cartoon movies, as if there is a specific equation for this aspect: Television + Youth = Combat and Westernization movies.
- Many Western films contain scenes unsuitable for youth upbringing that affect their behaviour.
- Some Western action and thriller movies contain doctrinal deviations.
- Absence of moral dimension in all Western films, with widespread violence and culture prevalent in most media products.

Thirdly, cinema:

There is almost a complete absence of recipient cinema (for adults and children), with limited production in the form of cartoons presented as television episodes. Additionally, there is a lack of theatres dedicated to children's cinema and upbringing as well.⁹

The discussion here is not about movies as some might think, but rather about narrative cinema specifically for Arab youth, children who are bombarded daily with thousands of television images, commercials, news, cartoons, and more. These images have become the subconscious awareness and feed their distinctive personalities in our present era with violence, both in behaviour, movement, and speech. Additionally, there is sometimes a lack of ethics due to what the child watches daily on the television screen, whether it is animated cartoons focusing on physical violence or movies and series, especially those dubbed into colloquial language, where we hear inappropriate language. Even some comedy shows, songs, and mocking of national values and language. Therefore, what is presented on television today is considered a crime against youth.¹⁰

The important and fundamental question in this discourse is:

How can we make the media (radio and television) keep pace with the rapid transformations our societies are undergoing and foster individual citizenship and national belonging?

1. Aligning with comprehensive development goals and plans in a prudent and dynamic manner.
2. Ensuring that communication policies target educational and citizenship reforms, requiring the development of self-knowledge, scientific thinking, adaptability, creativity, problem understanding, and facing, transitioning from mere instruction to personality development, from limited education to comprehensive national education, and from consumptive education to productive education, thereby enhancing the audience's ability to control.

3. Strengthening the sense of citizenship and belonging, fostering a desire to participate in nation building and contribute to shaping national identity, and attempting to create public awareness of the importance of self-sufficiency and self-reliance.
4. Preserving and enhancing national cultural values while preventing cultural invasion and the imposition of social trends and behavioural models that may hinder development, perpetuating social injustice and subjugation. However, this does not preclude openness to other cultures without relying on cultural production and accepting it uncritically.
5. Building a media model based on participation rather than imposing beliefs, avoiding reliance on the vertical communication model, providing opportunities for popular participation in communication, achieving its democracy, thus eliminating the one-way direction characteristic of the communication system and realizing the idea of communication as a fundamental right, viewing the audience as participants rather than mere receivers or consumers.
6. Committing to a clear concept of freedom that respects the identity of each people and human rights, including freedom of expression.
7. Reinforcing spiritual values, especially given the impact of the technological revolution on humanity and the failure of attempts to immerse in Western civilization.
8. Adopting Standard Arabic, understood by all members of society.

5- Conclusion

The media plays an immensely important role in human development by enhancing national belonging, educating individuals, and familiarizing them with their rights and responsibilities in all fields. Moreover, it contributes to building society by elevating perspectives and concepts that help people become added value in the development process and integrate into the national community. The media represents the largest mass platform for expressing citizens' opinions, concerns, issues, and complaints. In fact, modern media, in the era of free flow of information and open skies, have become the most prominent tools for the transmission of cultures and the exchange of experiences among citizens of different countries across the globe.

At the local level, media in some countries perform a role that surpasses that of political parties and interest groups, and thus, they are relied upon to enhance citizenship. The concept of citizenship, which the media is intended to promote, is based on several principles, foremost among them being the equality of individuals in rights and duties regardless of race, religion, dialect, gender, or socioeconomic status. This process begins with equal treatment before the law, in a "civil citizenship" protected by the judiciary, giving individuals immunity against arbitrary arrest and granting them the right to freedom of expression and property ownership.

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