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21 Sep 2023

DEEPENING THE ACHIEVEMENTS

TO GUARANTEE CITIZENS' RIGHT

TO A TRUSTED INFORMATION



During their plenary session of September 21st 2023, the Supreme Council for Audiovisual Communication (CSCA) decided to bring to the attention of the public a number of observations concerning the media coverage given by national radio and television stations, both public and private, of the earthquake that struck the region of Al-Haouz on Friday September 8th, 2023. These findings and observations are based on the specific audiovisual program monitoring process set up by the HACA to monitor both the mobilization of 21 radio stations and 5 television channels in this crisis and the characteristics of the radio and television content devoted to the various dimensions of this

tragic event.

The CSCA noted several significant elements, including:

A diligent adaptation of the general radio and television programs and an exceptional mobilization of the human and logistical resources.

- Despite some time differences between media, there was a general immediate response and adaptation of the programs of the various audiovisual services, firstly to announce the earthquake and then to report on the evolution of the on-site events. Some private radio stations that were broadcasting live at the time of the earthquake immediately announced the news and focused on the emergency situation by opening up their airwaves to receive the public first-hand accounts and initial reactions.

- Through a total or partial adaptation of the programs and an exceptional mobilization of the human and logistical resources, radio and television stations subsequently provided an exhaustive and detailed coverage of the event.

- In this regard, the CSCA noted the significant effort made by the various public service channels to share their resources in order to optimize their capacity in the field and meet the requirements of journalistic work in emergency situations. The quest for a certain complementarity between both the channels and the different special programs set up in this context, was also illustrated by the combination of reports from the field and the continuous news, debates and interviews, offering interactivity, factual information and a popular approach.

- Radio and television stations have also helped display and symbolize the period of national mourning by broadcasting programs adapted to this sequence.

HACA Monitoring teams noted that between the time of the earthquake and the end of the period of national mourning, public and private radio and television stations adapted their programs up to 75% and 95%, this variation could be explained by the vocation differences among audiovisual services.

Radio and television have helped to counter fake news and misleading images by providing citizens with reliable information.

Thanks to the on-site significant number of correspondents, special envoys and the use of reliable, authorized, expert sources, etc.; public and private radio and television stations, , have ensured, relatively in terms of form and content-, the public opinion access to accurate, verified information delivered by representatives of the medical field, specialists in rescue operations, including international teams working in the disaster areas, representatives of the authorities in charge of public safety, government officials and representatives of local authorities. ...

- In this respect, the Supreme Council for Audiovisual Communication considered that national radio and television stations had contributed, in the challenging context of a devastating natural disaster, to ensure citizens' right to trusted information. This contribution is all the more significant because the right to information has a constitutional and ethical value that is often undermined in similar contexts and emergencies. Indeed, the strong psychological burden inherent to tragic events such as disasters of all kinds, often causes a proliferation of contradictory, approximate and biased media narratives.

- Furthermore, the CSCA considered that the mobilization of audiovisual media to broadcast reliable information is likely to contribute in reducing fear and anxiety caused by the psychological trauma linked to the human and material losses. In times of crisis, catastrophe and collective fear, it is usually recommended that the media broadcast a content to reassure the public without prejudice to the veracity of the facts and the duty to inform ethically.

Several reports on the various aspects of the gradual return to normal life (accommodation solutions, children's schooling, medical care, purchase of basic necessities, repair of roads and mountain paths, etc.) are likely to alleviate the effects of collective and individual fear and anxiety.

- Radio and television stations have tried to adopt a journalistic register that favors simplicity, rational explanation, scientific expertise and human experience. The «rational» approach of this public communication was served in particular by the effort to solicit expert sources in various fields: geophysics, psychology, education, law and social sciences, public health, architecture, heritage, etc

- The CSCA also considered that the on-site journalistic effort, in addition to the vigilance in collecting information from reliable and specialized sources, made it possible to highlight the effective and significant contribution of radio and television in achieving two major benefit for the Moroccan citizens:
- Minimizing the impact of fake news and other informational disorders that often develop in the context of tragic events. Radio and television have indeed alerted the public to numerous fake news: false weather forecasts, false alarmist predictions of tsunamis, rumors and tendentious information on the exclusion of certain areas from rescue operations, false information about dam failure in Al-Haouz region, etc.
- Promoting citizen vigilance and critical thinking to face malicious media accounts produced and propagated by foreign media, as well as harmful and toxic content circulating on social networks, some of which have presented the earthquake as divine retribution.
- At the meeting, the CSCA considered that the exceptional mobilization and commitment shown by the national media to cover all the news of Al-Haouz earthquake helps draw a very relevant lesson for the future of the national media system: the effectiveness in fighting against disinformation cannot solely depend on the denunciation and debunking of fake news. It is mainly related to the ability of professional media to produce alternative reliable content, documented and based on field data, and respecting the ethical standards of professional practice.

Radio and television have contributed to promoting the values of solidarity, togetherness and national cohesion.

- The very inclusive on-site media coverage in all the regions affected by the earthquake has illustrated the relevance of the commitment of audiovisual operators in deploying their broadcasting and the action of the regulator territorial equity of audiovisual coverage.
- The interactive coverage of the earthquake and its many repercussions enabled the voices of the victims and their families to be heard, and allowed citizens and associations to express their compassion and solidarity. This concern for interactivity, which has also highlighted the solidarity initiatives and campaigns organized in all regions of the Kingdom, enabled us to show an active and sincere national unity.
- By providing precise, illustrated, day-to-day information on the concrete possibilities and practical conditions for any contribution to national solidarity, audiovisual media has played a major role in promoting civic commitment to helping earthquake victims.
- Going beyond the call for donations, radio and television stations addressed issues related to the “know-how and soft skills” of volunteers and representatives of help and relief associations to raise awareness of the need to respect customs, the culture and traditions of the people of the affected areas.
- The CSCA also noted the importance given to the representation of diversity in the media coverage of the natural disaster in Al-Haouz region. For example, radio and television stations “Highlighted” the contributions and solidarity initiatives of all Moroccans: men and women, young and old, Moroccans inside and outside the country, Arabic and Amazigh speakers, Moroccans from all regions of the country, Muslims and members of the Jewish community, and so on. By also reflecting the contributions and solidarity expressed by foreigners living in Morocco, the media displayed the values of living together, which holds a special place in Morocco's identity and international image.
- The CSCA also noted that the monitored radio and television stations have shown great vigilance in complying with the obligations laid down in their specifications. For example, television channels have made sure not to show shocking or voyeuristic images of corpses under the rubble or the remains of victims at funerals. Precautions were taken to avoid re-exposing children and minors to the same harsh conditions they experienced during the earthquake. Overall, the images shown did not represent any violation of the dignity of the victims of the disaster. The presumption of innocence was respected in the audiovisual content devoted to information and criticism of certain alleged illegal activities committed by individuals in connection with the earthquake and its on-site consequences.
- The CSCA considered that this ethical vigilance by the audiovisual media is all the more important

given that ethical principles are increasingly overlooked in when covering crises and natural disasters, due to the rise of prejudicial communication practices based on sensationalism and the instrumentalization of emotions, fears and human suffering.

In conclusion, the CSCA considered that:

- The significant media effort made by public and private national radio and television stations to cover the tragic event of Al Haouz earthquake is a professional achievement in favor of the citizen's right to information.
- These best practices could be further consolidated and enriched to strengthen the audiovisual media's capacity to engage optimally in the national effort required to ensure the implementation of the decisions taken by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may God Assist Him, in aid of the citizens of the regions affected by the earthquake, notably: reconstruction, implementation of the future law relating to the Nation's wards, opening up of the regions, restoration of the heritage, etc.
- The Supreme Council for Audiovisual Communication also considered that this experience highlighted the centrality of the public media service, the importance of consolidating the liberalization of audiovisual communication as well as the crucial issue of building trust between media and citizens.

Links

[1] <https://www.haca.ma/en/javascript%3A%3B>