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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Manufacturing Disinformation and Deceptive Narratives in Algerian News Coverage of the Moroccan Sahara

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| ABSTRACT

This study critically analyses disinformation in journalistic discourse, exploring the Algerian government–media nexus, with a particular focus on how this relationship is strategically used to disseminate conspiracy theories, disinformation, and propaganda. This research forms part of a broader doctoral thesis project investigating disinformation discourse within Algerian media, with a primary focus on coverage related to Moroccan issues, and a particular emphasis on the national cause of the Moroccan Sahara as represented in various Algerian news outlets. Against this backdrop, and given the ongoing scholarly debate and lack of consensus over the definition of fake news, this paper adopts the terms disinformation and fake news interchangeably to refer to any news that is deliberately false or misleading—whether entirely fabricated or biased—and produced with the intent to deceive and cause harm. Detecting such falsehoods becomes significantly more challenging when disinformation is spread through official news outlets that claim professionalism and objectivity, thereby blurring the line between factual reporting and propaganda. Forensic linguistics expands this inquiry by exploring how language can be used as a tool to commit crimes. While most crimes involve a physical act with intent, many unlawful acts are committed solely through speech or writing. Disinformation—including threats, extortion, defamation, and perjury—can be seen as a form of language crimes, where language is the primary means of deception and harm. In the context of the Moroccan Sahara issue—where misleading signifiers are manipulated to distort facts and events—Algerian media systematically omit or distort information regarding the true motivations behind Algeria’s involvement and interference in Moroccan affairs, constructing narratives steeped in conspiracy and disinformation discourse. This study focuses not on what journalists write, but on how journalistic discourse is constructed—how texts function, how arguments are formed, and how they are persuasively supported. It examines the role of news discourse in agenda-setting, offering an in-depth analysis of how the Algerian government–media nexus operates—not only to influence domestic public opinion but also to project Algeria’s foreign policy on the international stage. In doing so, it frequently frames contentious issues through disinformation and propaganda, targeting Moroccan sovereignty and its core institutions, while promoting pro-separatist and secessionist narratives.

| KEYWORDS

Moroccan Sahara- Algerian Government–media nexus – Language Crimes - Disinformation - Propaganda - Media narratives - Separatism

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

**ACCEPTED:** 01 June 2025

**PUBLISHED:** 18 June 2025

**DOI:** 10.32996/jpda.2025.4.1.6

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### 1. Introduction

In today's hyper-interconnected world, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) facilitate instantaneous global access to information, bombarding individuals with messages and enabling near-continuous communication. This overwhelming influx has led to what Fuller (2010) describes as “information explosion,” a phenomenon also known as “information pollution” (Maci et al., 2024). Similarly, Stuart Allan observes in the foreword to Matheson’s (2005) work that “we live in a media-saturated

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world,” where “news and events—ranging from elections to violent incidents—reach us in real time, often before they are fully processed as news.” Information permeates every space, from airport screens to social media, and, as Fuller (2010:116) observes, “the information revolution has not produced a utopian improvement of human nature; it has done the opposite.” Today, the reliability of information and the risks posed to social stability by contested or manipulated content have become central concerns. (Miró-Llinares & Aguerri, 2023, cited in Maci et al., 2024)

Despite growing interest in disinformation and deceptive narratives, alongside various efforts to combat them—such as (semi-) automatic systems that identify users and networks known for spreading fake news, machine learning tools analysing metadata to detect false content, and fact-checking systems (Sousa-Silva, 2022: 2411)—disinformation remains a persistent and serious issue.

In response, this research contributes to the academic field by applying forensic linguistics framework to analyze deceptive narratives and explore effective methods for detecting fake news.

As Grieve and Woodfield (2023: 2) highlight, “any piece of news communicates a wide range of information, some of which can be true, some of which can be false, and all of which can be an opinion. Often, the only way to verify if news is real or fake is to conduct additional independent investigation into the events being covered.”

Building on these insights, this study aims to deepen the understanding of, and engage with, the context that fosters Algerian disinformation and the propaganda war against Morocco.

Language in news discourse, particularly in journalism, does not merely reflect social realities; it also actively constructs and reproduces them. However, when disinformation is intertextually embedded within news discourse, distorted and manipulative strategies come into play. Consequently, this leads to blurring facts, manipulating information, and distorting representations of events and opposing actors’ voices. As a result, readers processing biased news discourse not only fall victim to disinformation manipulation but also experience changes in their core knowledge and background understanding, which subsequently influence their behaviors and actions regarding the framed issues.

To better understand how news discourse distorts social realities through disinformation, it is essential to place these narratives within their specific historical and political contexts. That being said, journalism is a form of cultural production, with “journalists [as] people who are part of the shared cultural practices that readers and audiences are engaged with in society” (Kelsey, 2019: 246). As Hall (2018: 257) emphasizes, “the analysis of culture, the interconnection between societal structures and processes and formal or symbolic structures, is absolutely pivotal [to understanding] culture.” In this regard, this research paper draws on Cherkaoui’s (2007) analysis of the Moroccan Sahara controversy and Algeria’s stance. Cherkaoui highlights that independent Algeria did not simply inherit France’s expansionist colonial policies but, in fact, intensified them—disguising these ambitions under revolutionary rhetoric. His metaphor, “The pupil has gone further than the teacher” (Cherkaoui, 2007:13), brightly illustrates how Algeria, rather than merely inheriting France’s territorial ambitions, expanded them even further beyond their tolerated boundaries.

## **2. Historical and political context of the Algerian-Moroccan dispute: Territorial legacies, separatism, and disinformation**

To provide historical context, before French colonization in 1830, Algeria’s territory under Ottoman rule was limited to a coastal strip below the 32nd parallel, covering approximately 300,000 km<sup>2</sup>. By the time of independence in 1962, Algeria’s territory had dramatically expanded to nearly 2,400,000 km<sup>2</sup>. This growth resulted primarily from France’s annexation of vast Saharan territories, which had previously existed as separate colonies. Cherkaoui (2007) describes this territorial expansion as a “*historical miracle*” engineered by France’s strategy to merge French Saharan Africa with Algeria, fuelling ongoing border disputes with neighbouring states such as Morocco and Tunisia—both of which claim parts of the annexed territory as rightfully theirs.

The history of territorial expansion created deep regional tensions that continue to influence border policies after Algeria’s independence. While the early FLN leadership showed some openness to recognizing existing borders and promoting regional cooperation, Algeria’s government soon shifted to a more rigid and expansionist stance. This change was reinforced by Algeria’s increased geopolitical power following the oil boom, which enabled military buildup and a more assertive foreign policy. The border dispute with Morocco exemplifies these divergent approaches: Morocco pursued a conciliatory policy inspired by King Mohammed V’s vision of shared regional futures, whereas Algeria adopted a hardline military strategy focused on securing territorial claims over the Sahara and adjacent areas—territories historically connected to Morocco but unilaterally annexed by French colonial authorities. (See also Rézette (1975)).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Rézette (1975: 19), it is stated that “The Spanish Sahara is attached to the ‘magnetic field’ of Morocco not only by its natural and human environment but also by numerous historical ties.” Rézette (1975: 176) further affirms that “In addition to this, there are geographical, human,

Cherkaoui's socio-anthropological and ethnographic study (2007) reveals that Algeria's policies in the Moroccan Sahara conflict extend beyond territorial control; they seek to perpetuate and expand colonial-era territorial redefinitions under the guise of revolutionary legitimacy. This dynamic helps explain the persistent and deeply ingrained nature of the dispute between Morocco and Algeria, rooted in the colonial past as well as the economic and political strategies of the post-colonial era.

At the micro level, the so-called *Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic's* (SADR) governmental institutions—described as “in exile”—operate within Algerian-controlled territory, complicating claims of full sovereignty and independent governance. Algeria's delegation of administrative and security responsibilities to the *Polisario Front* further challenges the Algerian legal standing under international law, which generally requires host states to maintain direct authority over refugee populations. Moreover, a United Nations report noted that the sudden emergence of the *Polisario Front* “came as a surprise to the Spanish authorities” in the territory,<sup>2</sup> underscoring its nature as a separatist political movement rather than an established state. Collectively, these factors position the *Polisario Front* more accurately as a separatist movement with contested legal status, closely intertwined with militancy rather than functioning as an unrecognized state.<sup>3</sup>

Algeria adopts a “*the ends justify the means*” approach, employing fake news as a psychological tool to advance its agenda while discrediting opponents. The so-called *Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic* (SADR) is portrayed as a government “in exile” within Algerian-controlled territory—a simulacrum of sovereignty that conceals its structural dependence on Algeria. Caspersen's (2013) assertion that “separatism is the mother of terrorism” reflects broader debates about the *Polisario Front's* ambiguous status: despite its claims to statehood, its limited territorial control, reliance on Algerian support, and involvement in guerrilla activities characterize it as a proxy separatist movement instrumentalized by Algeria to further an expansionist agenda through disinformation and propaganda campaigns.

### 3. Statement of the Problem

Scholars have emphasized that “the problem of fake news is long-standing, pervasive, and potentially of great consequence, even leading to war” (Grieve and Woodfield, 2023: 4), thereby highlighting that “fake news is very diverse, driven by a wide range of specific political, social, economic, and individual factors.” This complexity not only renders fake news a widespread social challenge but also complicates efforts to clearly define and categorize it.

Making a clear and systematic distinction between fake and true news presents significant challenges. Richardson (2007: 1) notes that “the language of journalism, its production and consumption and the relations of journalism to social ideas and institutions — are clearly inter-related and sometimes difficult to disentangle.” Nevertheless, it is commonly argued that “fake news and real news have distinctive communicative functions, respectively to deceive and to inform” (Grieve and Woodfield, 2023: 1). This distinction reflects the difference between information that is unintentionally false and information that is deliberately fabricated.

Baud (2020) further observes:

« La recherche de la « vérité » est une entreprise complexe. Les mensonges et les omissions sont les éléments de base des « mythes fondateurs »: à tort ou à raison, ils ont souvent permis de créer une base consensuelle et d'aplanir des conflits potentiels contribuant ainsi à stabiliser des sociétés et à faciliter le vivre-ensemble. »

In fact, exposure to fake news is neither particularly problematic nor unusual when its production or transmission is unintentional, and when the content was not knowingly created as false by its producer. The real challenge arises when fake news is deliberately produced to mislead or cause harm. This focus on the producer's intention remains one of the main difficulties faced by researchers and practitioners in the field. For instance, Gelfert (2018, cited in Grieve and Woodfield, 2023: 11) notes that “people are not primarily worried about false news, as inaccuracies might be unintentional or inconsequential, but about deceptive news that is intended to manipulate readers, especially for establishing forms of political, social, and economic control.”

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historical, and diplomatic arguments, as well as numerous acts of sovereignty, that demonstrate the strength and permanence of the ties between Morocco and the *Western Sahara*.” The list of facts illustrating the multifaceted nature of the connections between the Cherifian Empire and the Sahrawi tribes is not exhaustive. It includes, among other things, the appointment of emirs, kaid, and military commanders, the levying of taxes or tributes, and acts of allegiance by tribal chiefs to the Sultan, among others. Rézette (1975)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. (1980). *Decolonization No. 17: La question du Sahara occidental à l'ONU* (Partie 1-4) [Publication]. United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

[https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/sites/www.un.org.dppa.decolonization/files/decon\\_num\\_17-2.pdf](https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/sites/www.un.org.dppa.decolonization/files/decon_num_17-2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that an unrecognized state is generally defined as an entity that has achieved de facto independence, whose leadership is actively seeking to build further state institutions and demonstrate its own legitimacy. Such an entity has sought, but not yet achieved, international recognition and has existed for at least two years. (Caspersen, 2013: 6) Following these criteria, the *Polisario Front* is more accurately categorized as a separatist movement rather than an unrecognized state, given its limited territorial control, the unique status of its institutions located in Algerian-controlled camps, and the lack of full de facto independence.

With this in mind, the study of fake news is therefore of significant theoretical and societal importance. This paper critically examines disinformation discourse, noting that the terms disinformation and the often-debated fake news are sometimes used interchangeably (Maci et al., 2024). Both terms refer to intentionally deceptive content presented as legitimate news to serve financial or ideological interests (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017, cited in Maci et al., 2024). Importantly, the term fake news has also been weaponized within conspiracy discourse, as exemplified by Algerian political and media narratives claiming that Algeria is the target of fake news and conspiracies.

The present paper is based on the assumption that the language of news discourse differs insofar as the function of the news story differs—whether to inform or to mislead and deceive. Thus, The paper focuses on how disinformation is constructed, produced, and reproduced in discourse as a key strategy of Algerian propaganda across several prominent French-language Algerian online media outlets, primarily *Algérie Presse Service (APS)*, *El Moudjahid*, *Le Courrier d'Algérie*, and *L'Expression*.

For the purpose of this research, we explicitly draw on political communication theories, which provide valuable frameworks for understanding the relationship between government and media in the context of foreign policy narratives. Two dominant approaches—hegemony and indexing—highlight the dynamics of this nexus (Entman, 2004). In the Algerian context, news discourse can be analysed through these lenses to categorize how media coverage complies with or challenges official foreign policy stances.

The first assumption of the Hegemony Model asserts that the Algerian government exercises control over the flow of information, thereby restricting the media's role to reproducing pro-government agenda on foreign policy issues. In contrast, Indexing Model proposes that when elite disagreement occurs within Algeria's political sphere, media outlets are expected to reflect this discord, allowing space for critical perspectives to emerge in news coverage.

Examining Algerian electronic news outlets based on these two models—Hegemonic versus Indexing—enables us to categorize the Algerian government–media nexus in foreign policy.

Having outlined the theoretical framework, we now turn to the empirical data, which strongly indicates the total hegemony of the Algerian media nexus, characterized by the absence of alternative or opposing narratives to the dominant discourse. This finding can be further examined and validated through additional theoretical frameworks, particularly Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), spreading activation theory and sentiment analysis tools.

The central research question to consider is the following: If news is generally produced to inform, entertain, or educate the public, to what extent can Algerian news discourse be characterized as deceptive and, consequently, as disinformation? Furthermore, what are the linguistic and discursive features of disinformation, and what are the impacts and implications of disinformation discourse and deceptive narratives for journalism's ethics and deontology, as well as for the core knowledge and behaviours of media audiences?

#### **4. Methodology**

This study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, combining forensic linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and communication theory, to investigate the construction and dissemination of disinformation in Algerian news media regarding the Moroccan Sahara. Rooted in Critical Discourse Studies, the research specifically examines how media institutions function as ideological apparatuses that manufacture and propagate disinformation. Utilizing theories of priming and spreading activation, the study analyses how particular lexical choices and narrative frames are consistently employed to embed disinformation in news coverage, shaping public perception, reinforcing dominant political agendas, and silencing alternative viewpoints. The investigation includes a longitudinal qualitative analysis of samples collected from prominent Algerian news outlets, including *Algérie Presse Service (APS)*, *El Moudjahid*, *Le Courrier d'Algérie*, and *L'Expression*, focusing on their coverage of Morocco's diplomatic actions and the Moroccan Sahara issue. Data analysis is primarily based on headlines and selected excerpts from the collected material, enabling a focused examination of the framing and linguistic strategies employed.

The theoretical frameworks were selected deductively following a preliminary exploration of the Algerian media landscape, which revealed a systematic dissemination of deceptive narratives and coordinated propaganda efforts characterized by pervasive disinformation. This methodology enables the study to uncover the complex interplay between media discourse and geopolitical events, demonstrating how news texts do not merely report events but actively participate in constructing distorted geopolitical realities. Through linguistic and discourse analytic tools, the research deciphers how Algerian media discourse manipulates language to produce a hegemonic narrative that relies heavily on disinformation to support Algeria's expansionist aims, delegitimize Moroccan sovereignty, and shape both domestic and international audiences' understanding of the conflict.

#### **5. Review of literature**

In this paper, we clearly distinguish between news discourse and media discourse. The latter is defined as “interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener, or viewer” (O’Keeffe, 2011: 441). As for news discourse, this commonly refers to reporting events, whether printed, published online, or broadcast via radio or TV. As a narrative, news discourse differentiates between firsthand and second-hand accounts, with journalists or institutions often recounting events they did not personally witness, in line with editorial constraints.

Moreover, news discourse includes spoken texts on radio and TV—both traditional and web-based—as well as written texts such as printed newspapers and their electronic counterparts, whether freely accessible or subscription-based. These texts follow formal journalistic rules and rituals, primarily employing the 5 Ws (Who, What, When, Where, Why) and the inverted pyramid technique, which presents the most relevant information first, followed by details in descending order of importance. Additionally, news discourse involves explicit or implicit source attribution through direct or indirect quotes, which are expected to come from credible and authentic sources. These characteristics set the stage for understanding how news narratives are constructed and framed, particularly in politically charged contexts.

Building on this foundational distinction, this study focuses on how news discourse, particularly in Algerian digital media, constructs and conveys narratives about the Moroccan Sahara. The research focuses on written news discourse published by various prominent Algerian electronic news platforms, all concentrating on the Moroccan Sahara; the corpus was collected from these sources.

Given the complexities and potential biases inherent in news discourse, especially on contentious issues, critical thinking skills become essential for audiences. These skills—especially when engaging with controversial issues—are invaluable, as they “come to the aid of humans, preventing them from becoming passive recipients of the orator’s argument and fully agreeing with him. Thus, critical analysis of an argument helps to question what the speaker is saying and why she is saying so, limiting her persuasive powers” (Sharma, 2019: 66).

Despite ongoing debates and varying interpretations of fake news and disinformation, this paper does not aim to provide an exhaustive definition. Instead, it adopts a definition that is pertinent to the corpus and news discourse under study. In literature, disinformation is understood as “news whose facticity is manipulated with a high intent to deceive the audience and thus obtain a financial and/or political gain” (Sousa-Silva, 2022: 2416). In other words, disinformation refers to deliberately false information crafted to mislead and cause harm.

This understanding intersects with related concepts that have emerged alongside digital communication technologies and the ‘post-truth’ era—such as alternative media, conspiracy theories, malinformation, and misinformation (Maci et al., 2024). For the purposes of this study, disinformation is defined as “false information deliberately spread with the intent to mislead or cause harm” (Maci et al., 2024: 2). Following Lazer et al.’s (2018: 1094, cited in Maci et al., 2024: 1) definition, disinformation is also “fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent.” This is acknowledged as one of the most well-established descriptions in the academic literature, shedding light upon a clear departure from journalism’s ethical standards of objective reporting—standards that are often compromised, resulting in biased news and distorted facts.

Furthermore, fake news is characterized as “a tool of psychological warfare that spreads (false) propaganda in order to promote one’s own position, cause, or candidate against that of others” (Guadagno and Guttieri, 2019: 172), accentuating its role as a deliberate strategy in information conflicts.

To uncover the linguistic strategies underlying disinformation, forensic linguistics and discourse analysis provide valuable methodological tools. Accordingly, this research aims to identify how disinformation is embedded within news discourse—specifically, how it is constructed, produced, and presented as a credible and authentic narrative—and to examine its potential impacts on recipients and news consumers.

In forensic linguistics, the analysis of linguistic patterns is employed to understand the linguistic anatomy of disinformation. Sousa-Silva (2022: 2419) notes that “linguists operating in forensic contexts are qualified to use any of the tools and resources in their ‘forensic linguist’s toolbox,’ such as appraisal analysis, to investigate the use of stance markers during cross-examination.”

Along similar lines, Grieve and Woodfield (2023: 5) argue that “understanding the language of fake news is key to understanding the problem of fake news because most cases of fake news are language.” While fake news may also involve pictures and various semiotic patterns, they emphasize that “usually an instance of fake news consists primarily of a news text—an article in a newspaper.”

If it is argued that “politics is brought into life through language” (Combei and Reggi, 2023:11), the same applies to disinformation. Thus, a linguistic account of disinformation discourse in news articles not only provides an in-depth insight into

the possible differences and nuances between the language of fake and 'true' news, but also "is important for understanding the language of the news media, and, through this language, the biases and ideologies that underlie any act of journalism" (Grieve and Woodfield, 2023:7–8).

Intertextuality and interdiscursivity form the backbone of this study's analytical framework. Intertextuality—a concept introduced by Kristeva (1966) and influenced by Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic theory and Saussure's semiotics—emphasizes that the meaning of any text arises in relation to other texts, highlighting the dialogical nature of media discourse. This concept is particularly pertinent in analyzing news discourse, where multiple sources, quotes, and references interact to construct meaning and influence interpretation. Bakhtin's (1981) influence is evident in critical discourse studies' recontextualization of intertextuality (see Fairclough, 1992), especially through his perspective on novelistic discourse as a system of ideologically infused languages that "mutually and ideologically interanimate each other," emphasizing that "it is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single, unitary language" (Bakhtin, 1981: 47). (For more discussions on intertextuality, see Worton and Still (1990) and Plett (1991).)

While intertextuality highlights textual relationships across different sources, interdiscursivity refers to "the blending and linking of diverse genres, discourses, or styles within a single text" often associated with institutional and social meanings (Wu, 2011: 96). This concept is highly recommended for news discourse study, where journalistic, political, and ideological discourses intersect and overlap, facilitating discursive hybridity that plays a crucial role in constructing and framing news narratives. Both intertextuality and interdiscursivity are essential for understanding how news texts interweave multiple voices and genres to construct persuasive narratives.

Building on Entman's (2004) distinction between script and frame, the latter "directly promotes interpretations that lead to evaluations" (2004: 26); framing theory supports understanding how news narratives guide audience perception and judgment.

Complementing qualitative discourse analysis, this study employs sentiment analysis to quantitatively assess the emotional tone of the language used in news texts. Sentiment analysis "aims to identify and understand the emotional tendencies and sentiments expressed within a text, typically by detecting sentiments such as positive, negative, and neutral."

Additionally, sentiment analysis "involves determining the opinions and private states (beliefs, feelings, and speculations) of the speaker towards a target entity" (Wiebe, 1994, as cited in Mohammad and Turney, 2013: 436)."

Finally, building on the understanding of news as socially constructed discourse, Tuchman (1978) emphasizes that news is not a mere reflection of reality but is actively 'manufactured' through organizational routines and professional rituals and practices. This is referred to as a form of "social construction of reality" which involves selecting, organizing, and presenting events in ways that align with institutional, cultural, and political norms. News is therefore a product shaped by various factors including deadlines, editorial policies, and audience expectations, which can introduce biases or distortions.

Tuchman's insight highlights that the repetitive and routinized nature of news production creates a framework within which certain narratives are privileged while others are marginalized or silenced. This is particularly pertinent in contexts where media operate under strong political influence or state control, as in the Algerian case examined here, where journalism autonomy is constrained and news narratives serve hegemonic state interests. The manufactured nature of news thus enables the embedding and normalization of disinformation and propaganda, as dominant discourses become institutionalized and widely accepted as factual by the public.

Incorporating Tuchman's theory enriches the understanding of how Algerian news discourse is not only a medium of information but also a strategic tool in political communication and control, where disinformation becomes entrenched through repetitive framing and institutional practices.

## **6. Data analysis and findings**

### **6.1 Exploration of the Algerian government–media nexus**

Richardson (2007: 2) argues that "discourse is produced in social interaction, is part of a social structure and context, and hence is socio-politically situated whether *we like it or not*." (Emphasis added) Accordingly, the analysis of the Algerian government–media nexus in foreign policy and discourse production concerning the Kingdom of Morocco and the Moroccan Sahara is closely interwoven and interconnected. Applying Entman's (2004) theoretical frameworks of hegemony, indexing, and the cascading activation model is particularly appropriate for critically examining media control and narrative construction in this context.

The article from *El Moudjahid* titled « **Rencontre régionale des journalistes professionnels des médias et de la communication institutionnelle, Mohamed Meziane à Oran: «Il faut placer le pays au-dessus de tout»** »<sup>4</sup> illustrates the state-controlled media system in Algeria, where strong government control contrasts with the assumptions of the Indexing Model. While this model assumes that the press reflects a range of elite opinions and allows for some diversity and debate, Algerian media instead operate under a centralized, consensual narrative. Minister Mohamed Meziane's call for a “**front médiatique uni**” (unified media front) effectively mobilizes both public and private media outlets, unifying efforts to defend Algeria's image against criticism.

The explicit promotion of government loyalty is illustrated by the statement:

**« La presse algérienne [...] a toujours défendu les causes justes et n'a jamais dévié des positions de l'État algérien. »**

This demonstrates the Algerian press's complete adherence to the state's official positions, presenting the media as a loyal defender of what the government deems “**just causes**.” It implies a deliberate absence of critical or dissenting viewpoints, especially on sensitive issues such as the Moroccan Sahara and Algeria's foreign policy. The article further underscores the media's duty to “**préserver la crédibilité de la presse algérienne**” and stresses journalists' role in combating “**sources suspectes**” on social media that may threaten national security. This reveals a pattern of systematic suppression and exclusion of opposing information and perspectives.

The evidence suggests that the Algerian media landscape largely functions as a hegemonic apparatus, actively reproducing and reinforcing dominant state narratives, rather than reflecting an Indexing Model characterized by a plurality of elite opinions and debate.

The top-down media control exhibits features typical of totalitarian regimes, where political figures use the media not only to promote their own agendas and consolidate power but also to suppress dissent and tightly regulate public discourse. Historical parallels can be drawn with regimes such as the USSR under Stalin and Nazi Germany (Bernecker et al., 2021). In the Algerian case, scholars affirm that the merging of political and journalistic roles is described as “governing with the news” (Bennett, 2016, p. 8).

Moreover, the directive to combat “**sources suspectes**” and maintain vigilance against potentially harmful information originating from social media illustrates not only the regime's use of conspiracy discourse to influence their audiences, but also its strict control over the flow of information and active suppression of counter-narratives:

**« Nous devons être vigilants, car nous connaissons la provenance de certaines informations qui peuvent nuire à la sécurité de l'État et à la société. »**

The use of the pronoun “*Nous*” blurs the boundaries between the media, government institutions, and political authorities, suggesting a unified effort to monitor and control information. This discursive strategy legitimizes the joint endeavour to monitor and suppress dissenting information under the guise of protecting national security. In practice, it serves to justify limiting dissenting voices and excluding opposing perspectives. This strategy of unity and control is further reinforced by the use of similar pronouns that foster the interpersonal connection between the sender and the addressee, creating a synthetic sense of unity. Fairclough (2001) describes this phenomenon as a way to “strengthen the position of the bureaucracy and the state by disguising its instrumental and manipulative relationship to the mass of the people beneath a facade of a personal and equal relationship—so long as people do not see through it!” This tactic mirrors the style of advertising, which, as Jaworska (2023: 115) notes, is “more synthetically personalized and more engaging,” allowing the addresser to speak in a voice that resonates personally with the audience (Fairclough 2001: 170).

In this context, conspiracy discourse and pervasive control thereby create an environment where state domination of the media actively favours the propagation of disinformation, reinforcing the government's geopolitical agenda without meaningful opposition—a hallmark of state media dominance. News discourse, as reflected in statements from the Minister of Communication, reveals the close relationship between the media and the Algerian government, expressed through nationalist rhetoric that simultaneously conceals the full extent of state influence over the press. This dynamic is another evidence of the hegemony of the government-media nexus.

This resonates strongly with van Dijk's (2000: 37) analysis of racism in media discourse, which argues that “when power over the most influential form of public discourse, that is, media discourse, is combined with a lack of alternative sources, when there is a near consensus, and opponents and dissident groups are weak, then the media are able to abuse such power and establish the

<sup>4</sup> El Moudjahid. (2025, May 3). *Journée internationale de la liberté de la presse, Sétif: Unis au service de la Patrie*. <https://www.elmoudjahid.dz/fr/actualite/journee-internationale-de-la-liberte-de-la-presse-setif-unis-au-service-de-la-patrie-234073>.

discursive and cognitive hegemony that is necessary for the reproduction of the new racism.” In other words, media power can be exploited to sustain dominant ideologies and silence dissenting voices.

Notably, the close intersection of disinformation and propaganda is well established in recent studies of disinformation and discourse.. For instance, Maci *et al.* (2024: 4) state: “One of the main functions for which the creation and circulation of disinformation is used is propaganda. Generally speaking, propaganda is a form of political persuasion which both manipulates and deceives its target audience.”

In this context, propaganda refers to state-produced media content designed to bolster support for the leadership while discrediting opposition voices. Censorship is widely employed to suppress dissenting or critical content and media deemed subversive. Additionally, extensive spying and surveillance systems are typical tools used to monitor public opinion and media consumption, ensuring strict control over what is produced and disseminated (Bernecker *et al.*, 2021: 162). Journalism in this context “exists to disseminate — literally to broadcast and propagate — the views of the powerful. The circulation and promotion of the views of the powerful is better described as propaganda, and journalism is shaped by the agenda of such propagandists” (Richardson, 2007: 6–7).

Journalism with agenda-setting stands in opposition to Richardson’s (2007: 7) assertion that “*journalism exists to enable citizens to better understand their lives and their position(s) in the world*” (original emphasis), while agreeing with him when he (2007: 8) points out that: “when the work journalists emphasises entertainment, or the activities and opinions of the powerful, or the pursuit of profit in themselves or above the primary function of journalism — to help citizens to understand the world and their positions within it — *it stops being journalism*” (Original emphasis).

When journalism is instrumentalized and falls under the total control of power, it undergoes a disintegration of journalistic discourse. It becomes captured by the power of institutions, as Foucault famously noted in his inaugural lecture *L’ordre du discours*:

« Et l’institution répond: « Tu n’as pas à craindre de commencer; nous sommes tous là pour te montrer que le discours est dans l’ordre des lois; qu’on veille depuis longtemps sur son apparition; qu’une place lui a été faite, qui l’honore mais le désarme; et que, s’il lui arrive d’avoir quelque pouvoir, c’est bien de nous, et de nous seulement, qu’il le tient. » »

This observation echoes Arendt’s (1968, cited in Bernecker *et al.*, 2021: 163) insight that, in complex and confusing times, mass audiences become cynical and resigned, willing to accept contradictory or absurd statements without rejecting the propagandists. Rather than abandoning leaders when confronted with evidence of falsehoods, audiences often rationalize deception as a clever strategy, thereby enabling the persistence of deceptive narratives despite their questionable veracity.

Building on this understanding of audience reception, it is clear that the Algerian media landscape, as represented by *El Moudjahid*, is one where government control is both pervasive and combined, significantly limiting the presence of diverse opinions or opposition voices. This case sharply contrasts with Entman’s definition of Indexing Model, which assumes that media coverage reflects a variety of elite political viewpoints and allows for debate. Instead, in Algeria, state-aligned discourse strongly influences how issues and their boundaries such as the Moroccan Sahara, Moroccan sovereignty, and the country’s foreign policy are discussed and understood.

Another example is the celebration of the “**Journée internationale de la liberté de la presse**” in Sétif, as reported by *El Moudjahid*,<sup>5</sup> which emphasizes the importance of a “**front médiatique uni**” (unified media front) and expresses recognition toward President Abdelmadjid Tebboune for his support of the media sector since beginning of his term. This narrative reinforces a hegemonic media model in which the media conforms closely with state authority to promote a unified national discourse.

In line with the official narrative, another Algerian authority figure, *Wali Limani Mustapha*, praised journalists for their efforts to provide objective and credible information to the public. This supports the broader discourse that positions Algerian media as dedicated to responsible journalism. Additionally, his call to confront “**provocations fondées sur l’intox et les fake news**” by reinforcing a “**front médiatique uni**” highlights the state’s strategy to centralize media control and suppress dissent, echoing the censorship mechanisms outlined by Bernecker *et al.* (2021).

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<sup>5</sup> El Moudjahid. (2025, April 18). *Rencontre régionale des journalistes professionnels des médias et de la communication institutionnelle*, Mohamed Meziane à Oran : « Il faut placer le pays au-dessus de tout ». <https://www.elmoudjahid.dz/fr/actualite/rencontre-regionale-des-journalistes-professionnels-des-medias-et-de-la-communication-institutionnelle-mohamed-meziane-a-oran-il-faut-placer-le-pays-au-dessus-de-tout-233488>



This rhetoric is supported by Richardson's (2007) claim that journalism, in such political contexts, functions less as an independent informant and more as an instrument of state propaganda, where the "views of the powerful" are disseminated to maintain political legitimacy and social order.

Furthermore, the framing of Algeria as "always standing alongside just causes" and the call for media to be "the image and reflection of the new Algeria" reveal the use of media as a tool for nationalist construction and the reinforcement of ideological hegemony, as described in Entman's Hegemony Model. This corresponds with the argument that media narratives are crafted to promote state-defined interests and suppress alternative viewpoints, consistent with findings regarding Algerian media's role in the Moroccan Sahara conflict.

The participation of academics such as '*Pr Hassen Rezag*' and '*Dr Nouisser Belkacem*,' experts in communication and sociology, addressing these challenges at the event further reflects the intellectual institutionalization of media control and discourse shaping within the Algerian context. Their involvement symbolizes how media management is embedded not only politically but also academically, reinforcing dominant narratives through scholarly legitimization.

Consequently, the evidence indicates that the Algerian media landscape is hegemonic, characterized by a strong consensus within news discourse concerning the Moroccan Sahara, Moroccan sovereignty, and the Kingdom itself. Media outlets frequently disseminate narratives that legitimize separatist claims while undermining Moroccan sovereignty—not only over the Moroccan southern provinces but also extending to other regions such as the Rif <sup>6</sup> where separatist discourse is deliberately amplified.

For instance, as reported by the *El Moudjahid* outlet,<sup>7</sup> the so-called *Sahrawi Minister of Foreign Affairs* highlighted that « **La réalité que l'Etat l'occupation ne peut nier c'est que la République sahraouie constitue un facteur de stabilité et d'équilibre dans la région du Maghreb (...)** »: a statement which firmly affirms the so-called *Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic's* legitimacy and directly counters Moroccan sovereignty rights.

Further reinforcing this narrative, he declared that the *Sahrawi* participation in international forums is « **la meilleure réponse à la propagande marocaine prétendant le contraire** », portraying Moroccan media as deceptive propaganda. Discourse also denounces Morocco's actions in terms of « **l'échec de toutes les manœuvres entreprises par le Royaume du Maroc (...) à travers l'intimidation, la corruption et les pressions exercées sur les partenaires internationaux** », describing Morocco as employing underhanded tactics to undermine *Sahrawi* status.

Similarly, Algerian media coverage often attributes to Morocco a range of negative accusations, including complicity in the Gaza-Israel conflict, frequently relying on stereotypes, hate speech and anti-Semitic discourse. This reflects an extension of the broader propaganda and disinformation campaign waged through media narratives. Concurrently, the strong emphasis on decolonization principles—illustrated by claims such as « **la présence de la RASD (...) se veut un message clair quant à l'attachement aux principes de décolonisation, conformément à la Charte et aux principes des Nations unies** »—frames the *Sahrawi* cause within an internationally recognized moral and legal framework.

Ultimately, media control not only shapes public discourse on the Moroccan Sahara in alignment with Algeria's strategic interests but also lays the groundwork for understanding how the government-media nexus transcends mere control to actively frame and construct news narratives falling "within the framework of agenda-setting aiming to implement the ideology settled by Algeria and the *Polisario Front* with the objective to disseminate chaos in Morocco" (Mliless and Larouz, 2022: 398). (*Emphasis added*)

The hegemonic media environment is deeply rooted in Algeria's single-party political system, where the FLN historically consolidated power by integrating diverse social groups and the military into a unified apparatus, establishing the foundation for complete control over political communication and narrative framing. As Tabrizi Bensalah notes in *Essai sur le parti-nation dans les pays arabes*:

<sup>6</sup> Recent studies suggest that separatism is no longer ethically justifiable; rather, it exposes the harmful consequences of fragmenting nations under the pretext of cultural or political differences. For example, as Oakley (2017) argues in *Once We Were One: The Fraud of Modern Separatism*, separatist movements risk tearing countries apart by emphasizing difference and grievance to justify division. Similarly, the *Polisario Front's* push for separation from Morocco threatens national unity and stability. What began as a political struggle has increasingly been framed in ways that serve to gain sympathy, financial support, and political leverage.

Oakley (2017) notes that such separatist agendas often reinterpret longstanding national agreements or frameworks to support division, turning them into political tools rather than unifying documents (For instance, the UN resolutions). Only those firmly committed to separatism or exclusion would view the fracturing of a nation as a positive outcome. Furthermore, these movements can politicize national issues, demanding special rights and resources that may undermine the cohesion and equitable governance of the country.

<sup>7</sup> *El Moudjahid*. (2025, May 21). *Participation de la RASD à la réunion UA-UE: La meilleure réponse à la propagande marocaine*.

<https://www.elmoudjahid.dz/fr/monde/participation-de-la-rasd-a-la-reunion-ua-ue-la-meilleure-reponse-a-la-propagande-marocaine-234991>.

« Il (FLN) n'omettra aucune catégorie sociale de la nation et, après avoir fait des organisations de masses les « structures externes du parti », il s'emploiera à faire participer l'armée à la vie politique et, parfois, s'appuiera sur elle »

The integration of all social categories—including mass organizations and the army—has reinforced a inclusive apparatus that shapes political communication and sustains hegemonic discourse.

The *El Moudjahid* coverage of the so-called *Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic's* (RASD) participation in the UA-UE ministerial meeting<sup>8</sup> exemplifies Pierre Bourdieu's (1996) concept of "*caler en montrant*"—to hide by showing. Bourdieu explains (17-18):

« J'ai mis l'accent sur le plus visible. Je voudrais aller vers des choses légèrement moins visibles en montrant comment la télévision peut, paradoxalement, cacher en montrant, en montrant autre chose que ce qu'il faudrait montrer si on faisait ce que l'on est censé faire, c'est-à-dire informer; ou encore en montrant ce qu'il faut montrer, mais de telle manière qu'on ne le montre pas ou qu'on le rend insignifiant, ou en le construisant de telle manière qu'il prend un sens qui ne correspond pas du tout à la réalité. »

In this case, the article presents the RASD's participation as an uncontested reality, emphasizing statements such as « **La réalité que l'État d'occupation ne peut nier c'est que la République sahraouie constitue un facteur de stabilité et d'équilibre dans la région du Maghreb (...)** » and « **La participation de la République sahraouie à la 3e réunion des ministres des Affaires étrangères de l'Union africaine (UA) et de l'Union européenne (UE) est la preuve qu'elle est une réalité politique et diplomatique irréversible.** » However, this overt display of legitimacy conceals the broader geopolitical complexity behind the scenes, including the opaque power dynamics in the African Union, the European Union, their member states, and the competing interests shaping this participation.<sup>9</sup>

By centring the narrative primarily on the *Sahrawi* presence and delegitimizing Moroccan efforts as "**la propagande marocaine**" or "**l'échec de toutes les manœuvres entreprises par le Royaume du Maroc (...) à travers l'intimidation, la corruption et les pressions exercées sur les partenaires internationaux,**" the media narrows the scope of the events, reducing a complex geopolitical dispute to a simplified dichotomy: the legitimacy of the so-called *Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic* (SADR) versus the illegitimacy of Moroccan actions. This selective focus not only minimizes the broader political contest but also obscures the roles of other influential actors, skewing public perception into a binary opposition where the "legitimate" *Sahrawi statehood* stands against the "illegitimate" Moroccan sovereignty.

Van Dijk's (1998, 2006a, 2013) influential framework on the ideological function of media discourse provides a useful lens to understand this phenomenon. According to him, ideology is "the interface between social structure and social cognition" and represents "the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group" (1998: 8). Ideology shapes collective beliefs about truth and falsehood, often in alignment with group interests. As he (2014) further clarifies, ideology is neither inherently "positive" nor "negative"; its connotation depends on the context in which it is employed. Ideology, therefore, functions as a structured set of beliefs that reflect social conflicts, group interests, and power struggles, often serving to legitimize or challenge dominance and address social issues (Maci *et al.*, 2024).

In the context of Algerian news discourse, ideology becomes problematic when it is used illegitimately, particularly to deceive or harm. As Van Dijk (2006b) notes, "when manipulation is illegitimate, it involves power but specifically abuse of power." In our case study, when news production deviates from accepted standards of journalistic ethics and news values (Bednarek & Caple, 2017), narratives are deliberately distorted and thus fall under disinformation. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) of disinformation thus exposes this illegitimate manipulation, highlighting how language misuse serves to manipulate and abuse of power.

Framing, in this context, transcends simple disinformation and becomes a more advanced stage of propaganda, where the manipulation lies in carefully determining what should be visible and what should be hidden. This process constructs, through discourse, a controlled reality that aligns with Algerian state interests. The emotional engagement fostered by this narrative positions the *Polisario Front* as the morally justified underdog and frames Morocco as the unequivocal aggressor. Framing, in this sense, simplifies the complexity of the geopolitical dispute into a binary opposition. Moreover, once the discourse is framed,

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<sup>8</sup> El Moudjahid, *Participation de la RASD à la réunion UA-UE*.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Kauppi and Madsen (2013) provide a nuanced and in-depth analysis of the European Union, emphasizing that "behind current developments lies a crucial but often overlooked phenomenon: the evolving social division of labor in globalizing European societies, particularly within politics, law, and economics. They argue that understanding these dynamics requires examining individuals and groups embedded in shifting national and transnational contexts. European integration and the construction of the EU serve as a case study illustrating the rise of new forms of power, conceptualized as transnational power elites. These elites exemplify broader global transformations of power, offering a framework to analyze complex interactions between institutions like the EU and the African Union, their member states, and competing interests"

it assumes the role of powerful symbolic violence, as defined by Bourdieu (1977) as “the gentle, hidden form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible.”

The discursive construction of reality is further reinforced by linguistic and ideological strategies. Drawing from Van Dijk's ideological square, the linguistic patterns of discourse reflect a positive self-presentation of the so-called SADR and Algerian officials, contrasted with a negative portrayal of Morocco—depicted as ‘*corrupt*,’ ‘*oppressive*,’ and even as an ‘*occupying colonial force*.’ This strategic construction reinforces the “**Us**” versus “**Them/Other**” dichotomy, which is perpetuated through the distortion of events, framing, and the spread of conspiracies and disinformation.

Moreover, in line with Van Dijk's (2000) analysis of media control and cognitive hegemony, the concentrated media power in Algeria effectively normalizes the Algerian/Sahrawi narrative while diminishing Morocco's rights and position. This results in a nearly monolithic discourse that obscures the multifaceted nature of the conflict and manipulates public understanding.

Together, these dynamics illustrate how media discourse can control visibility, silence opposition, and serve as a potent tool for political manipulation and public persuasion within the Algerian government–media nexus.

## 6.2 Algerian government-media nexus: from control to framing news narratives

Following Fairclough's (2003:11) emphasis that “one resource that is necessary for any account of meaning-making is the capacity to analyse texts in order to clarify their contribution to processes of meaning-making,” this process can be illustrated as follows:

Consider the following headline from the *El Moudjahid* online news platform: « **Candidature marocaine au Prix des Nations unies – Nelson Mandela: Une trahison à l'héritage de l'icône de la liberté** » (Source: *El Moudjahid*)<sup>10</sup>

This headline can be analysed using Entman's (2004) cascading activation model. Framing should also be integrated and, above all, clearly defined, as the concept means different things to different people.

Adopting Entman's (2004: 5) definition, framing can be summarized as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.” According to Entman (2004), framing can be categorized into two classes: “**Substantive**” and “**Procedural**.”

Substantive Frames involve performing at least two of the following basic functions when covering events, issues, and actors:

- **Defining effects or conditions as problematic;**
- **Identifying causes;**
- **Conveying a moral judgment; and**
- **Endorsing remedies or improvements.**

We now examine the headline from the perspective of the fundamental functions of **Substantive Frames**:

The Moroccan candidacy for the Mandela Prize is presented as **problematic**. The second substantive framing function is closely related to, and determined by, the first, where the **cause** of the problem is identified as the candidacy itself, portrayed as a “*trahison à l'héritage de l'icône de la liberté*.” The tokens ‘*trahison*’, ‘*héritage*’, and ‘*liberté*’ are not only evaluative but also serve to amplify the negative judgment of the Moroccan candidacy by representing it as an act of treason against the Mandela Prize and, by extension, against Mandela's heritage and memory.

The **moral judgment** is explicitly expressed, conveying a negative evaluation of the Moroccan candidacy. The **endorsing remedy**, according to this judgment, would then be either the voluntary withdrawal of the candidacy by Morocco—judged by the news outlet as morally wrong and guilty of treason against the UN Prize and the symbolic figure of Mandela—or the removal of the candidacy by the jury responsible for assessing candidates according to a predefined checklist established by the awarding authority.

Following Entman's model, Substantive Frames in the headline are constructed through the statement of the problem—i.e., the Moroccan candidacy for the Mandela Prize—which ‘often virtually predetermines the rest of the frame’ (Entman, 2004: 6). This includes the cause of, and the moral judgment about, the problem, as well as a remedy implicitly inferred through presupposition, i.e., « **trahison à l'héritage de l'icône de la liberté** ». This framing arguably promotes support for Algerian foreign policy opposing Morocco on its main point of contention.

<sup>10</sup> El Moudjahid. (2025, May 9). *Candidature marocaine au Prix des Nations unies – Nelson Mandela : Une trahison à l'héritage de l'icône de la liberté*. <https://www.elmoudjahid.com/fr/monde/candidature-marocaine-au-prix-des-nations-unies-nelson-mandela-une-trahison-a-l-heritage-de-l-icone-de-la-liberte-234309>.

We now turn to the second class of frames, namely **Procedural Frames**. Unlike Substantive Frames, which focus on the content or issue itself, Entman (2004: 6) explains that Procedural Frames “have a narrower focus and function.” They focus on the evaluation and legitimation of political actors and their actions—specifically highlighting their success, failure, or representativeness in political processes. In this case, frames shift attention away from substantive issues to how political actors perform, are judged, or are symbolically represented, often focusing on their legitimacy or moral standing. Entman (2004: 6) further emphasizes that “scholars of domestic politics have frequently observed that procedural framing occupies much of the news,” as it deals with narratives of political accountability and reputation.

In the news story, we read:

**« Pour le Conseil national sahraoui, la candidate marocaine est 'l'incarnation parfaite de cette façade hypocrite qu'un régime brutal, dictatorial et colonialiste cherche désespérément à s'attribuer afin de camoufler ses crimes abjects, maintes fois dénoncés' ».**

In this excerpt, the news story's lead exemplifies Procedural Framing by moving from an evaluation of the act of candidacy to a direct judgment and delegitimization of the candidate as an individual. The collocations—**façade hypocrite**, **régime brutal**, **dictatorial**, **colonialiste**, and **crimes abjects**—no longer critique the political process or the candidacy itself but serve to attack the moral and political character of the candidate. This shift highlights Procedural Framing in action, where the focus is on questioning the legitimacy, trustworthiness, and representativeness of the political actor, rather than the substantive issues involved. It marks a transition from evaluating the political event (the candidacy) to delegitimizing the individual/candidate.

Adopting Entman's dichotomy of '**Cultural Resonance**' versus '**Magnitude**,' Cultural Resonance is evident, with the news discourse overloaded with words and utterances that are highly salient within the culture of the cited source (the *Conseil national sahraoui* and the *El Moudjahid* news outlet), meaning “they are noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged.” (Entman, 2004: 6)

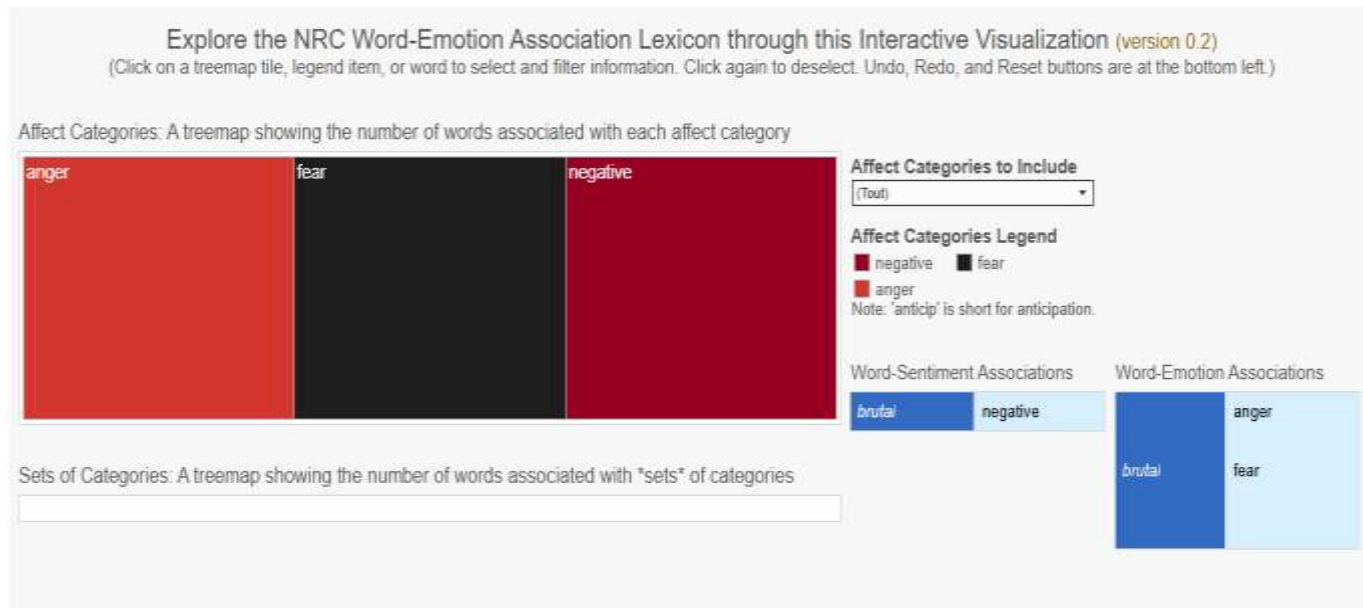
To investigate emotionally charged attitudes and opinions in news discourse, sentiment analysis—focusing on positive and negative polarity—offers various tools developed by Natural Language Processing (NLP), many of which are available as open-access resources. Examples include **Word-Level Sentiment** and **Emotion-Association Lexicons**. These tools enable analysts not only to address questions such as ‘What is being said about a certain target entity?’ (common target entities include companies, products, policies, persons, and countries), but also to go further by asking: ‘Is something good or bad being said about the target entity? Is the speaker happy with, angry at, or fearful of the target?’

At the lexicogrammatical level, the news story is overburdened with adjectives, occurring linearly and in immediate co-text, describing the candidacy as a “**façade hypocrite**” and the Moroccan regime as “**brutal, dictatorial et colonialiste**”

Given that “adjectives can be ideologically explained as an expression of blaming sometimes implicitly and other times explicitly,” the use of adjectives in news discourse production can be further classified in terms of *Words-Sentiment Associations* and *Words-Emotion Associations* (see **Figures 1, 2, and 3**), thereby identifying linguistic strategies, ideological framing, and sentiment polarity in the samples under investigation.

**Figure 1: Sentiment and Emotional Associations of “brutal”: (Negative sentiment; Emotions: Anger, Fear)**

### An Interactive Visualizer



**Figure 2: Sentiment and Emotional Associations of “hypocrite”: (Negative sentiment; Emotion: Disgust)**

### An Interactive Visualizer

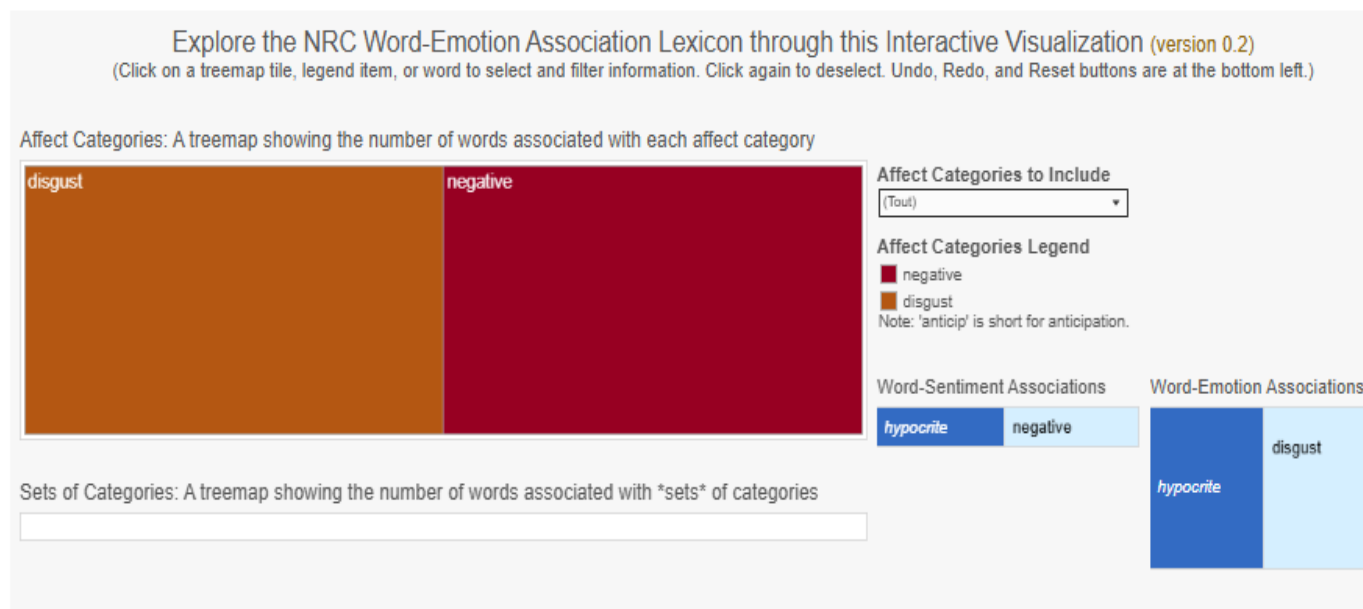
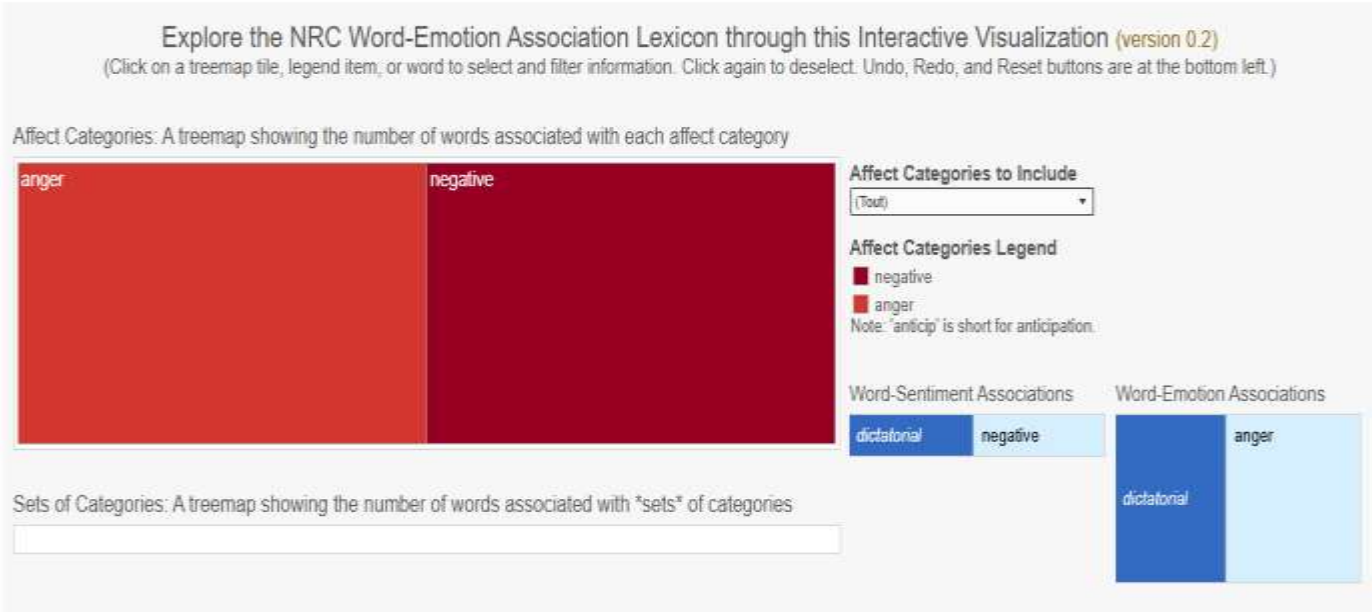


Figure 3: Sentiment and Emotional Associations of “dictatorial”: (Negative sentiment; Emotion: Anger)

An Interactive Visualizer



The adjectives ‘*brutal*’, ‘*dictatorial*’, and ‘*hypocrite*’ used in the extract from *El Moudjahid* — “*la candidate marocaine est l’incarnation parfaite de cette façade hypocrite qu’un régime brutal, dictatorial et colonialiste cherche désespérément à s’attribuer*” — exemplify the negative sentiment and emotional associations identified in the analysis. As shown in the *Words-Sentiment* and *Words-Emotion Associations* (Figures 1, 2, and 3), these adjectives carry strong negative sentiment polarity and are linked respectively to emotions such as anger, fear, and disgust. This deliberate lexical choice serves as an explicit expression of blame and delegitimization, reinforcing ideological framing against the Moroccan candidate. Such charged language functions as a linguistic strategy to not only discredit the subject but also evoke intense emotional responses from the audience, thereby shaping public perception through affective persuasion discourse.

As for **Magnitude**, which Entman (2004: 6) defines as “*the prominence and repetition of the framing words and images*” (original emphasis), this feature is clearly evident in the news discourse, as illustrated in the following text:

« Le Conseil national sahraoui a exprimé son «**indignation**» et son «**opposition**» à la **candidature** marocaine «**scandaleuse**» au Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela, la qualifiant d' « **insulte à l'héritage de cet illustre combattant contre l'oppression**». «Le Conseil national sahraoui exprime son **indignation** et son **opposition** à l'égard de la candidature d'Amina Bouayach pour le Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela», a-t-il indiqué dans un communiqué. Il qualifie, à ce titre, cette **candidature** de «**scandaleuse**» et soutient que « la personne en question est une défenseure acharnée d'un **régime** oppresseur déguisée en défenseure des droits humains ». Pour le Conseil national sahraoui, la candidate marocaine est « **l'incarnation parfaite de cette façade hypocrite qu'un régime brutal, dictatorial et colonialiste cherche désespérément à s'attribuer afin de camoufler ses crimes abjects**, maintes fois dénoncés». « Elle est une représentante officielle d'un **régime** monarchique absolu, un paravent cosmétique pour blanchir les **crimes** d'un **régime** qui règne par la terreur, l'emprisonnement arbitraire, la torture, les disparitions, les assassinats et la spoliation des richesses d'un peuple encore sous domination **coloniale**», ajoute-t-il. »

In the text, not only is an evidence to Cultural Resonance, but Magnitude is also clearly demonstrated through the repetition of certain tokens and utterances, as illustrated in **Table 1**:

<b>Tokens</b>	<b>Utterances</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Candidature		<b>03</b>
Indignation		<b>02</b>
Opposition		<b>02</b>
Scandaleuse		<b>02</b>
Régime		<b>04</b>
	L'incarnation parfaite de cette façade hypocrite qu'un régime brutal, dictatorial et colonialiste cherche désespérément à s'attribuer afin de camoufler ses crimes abjects, maintes fois dénoncés.	<b>02</b>
Crimes		<b>02</b>

### 6.3 News framing adopting Entman's (2004: 24) framework Functions and Objects of News Frames: (Table 2)

<b>Function of frame</b>	<b>Focus of frame</b>		
	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Political actors</b>
<b>Defining problematic effects/conditions</b>	The candidacy symbolizes colonial oppression and human rights abuses.	Moroccan candidacy for UN Nelson Mandela Prize is betrayal and insult.	Moroccan candidate embodies support for an oppressive, brutal, colonialist regime.
<b>Identifying cause/agent</b>	Moroccan regime's brutal repression and violations.	Morocco's attempt to legitimize through candidacy.	Candidate's complicity and active defence of oppressive regime.
<b>Endorsing remedy</b>	Rejecting the candidacy to uphold Mandela's legacy and values.	Firm rejection of the candidacy.	Call for awarding authorities to refuse the candidate to avoid dishonouring Mandela's legacy.
<b>Conveying moral judgment</b>	Betrayal of justice, dignity, freedom.	Candidacy is scandalous, indecent, morally wrong.	Candidate labelled as hypocrite, defender of oppression, unqualified for the prize.

**Table 2** serves to elucidate the framing process in the news discourse surrounding the Moroccan candidacy for the UN Nelson Mandela Prize. As Entman (2004) points out, these categories—issue, event, and political actors—are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary components of a fully developed narrative frame. Each cell in the table contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how the story is constructed to convey a particular viewpoint.

In this case, the framing operates simultaneously on three levels:

- **Event frame:** The Moroccan candidacy itself is framed as a betrayal and insult to Mandela's legacy. This event serves as the **focal point** of the narrative.
- **Issue frame:** The event is situated within broader political and moral questions concerning colonial oppression, human rights abuses, and the legitimacy of Morocco's actions in the Moroccan Sahara. This frame addresses the ethical implications of the candidacy.
- **Political actor frame:** The Moroccan candidate is personalized and depicted as a representative and active defender of an oppressive, brutal regime. In contrast, the *Sahrawi National Council* implicitly emerges as the opposing voice. This personalization concretizes the problem by attaching it to identifiable individuals and groups.

#### 6.4 Explanatory description of the relationship between Problem, Cause, and Remedy across frames

Entman's framework demonstrates how problems, causes, moral judgments, and remedies are interconnected but articulated differently depending on the frame:

- The **problem** identified in the political actor frame—a candidate supporting oppression—is a more concrete and specific manifestation of the **cause** outlined in the event and issue frames, where the Moroccan regime's actions enhance disagreement.
- The **remedy** suggested—rejection of the candidacy—appears explicitly in all frames but takes different forms. In the event frame, it is the outright rejection of the candidacy; in the issue frame, it is the moral imperative to uphold Mandela's values; and in the actor frame, it is a call for authorities to refuse complicity by denying the candidate.
- The **moral judgment** runs consistently through all frames, labelling the candidacy as "*scandalous*" and a "*betrayal*", reinforcing the narrative's ethical charge.

This interconnection of frames create a compelling narrative that moves beyond isolated facts or opinions. The event (the candidacy) cannot be separated from the issue (human rights and colonialism) or the actors (candidate and regime). Each frame supports and reinforces the others, making the story more persuasive and coherent.

##### a. Advancing the narrative frame: Extension and Elaboration

###### EVENT: Candidature marocaine au Prix des Nations Unies - Nelson Mandela

<b>Problem</b>	La candidature marocaine est une « <i>insulte à l'héritage de cet illustre combattant contre l'oppression</i> » et une « <i>trahison</i> » des valeurs de liberté, justice et dignité incarnées par Nelson Mandela.
<b>Cause</b>	« <i>Un régime brutal, dictatorial et colonialiste</i> » qui cherche « désespérément à s'attribuer cette <i>façade hypocrite</i> afin de <i>camoufler ses crimes abjects</i> , maintes fois dénoncés ».
<b>Evaluation</b>	La candidate est « <i>une défenseure acharnée d'un régime oppresseur déguisée en défenseure des droits humains</i> ».
<b>Remedy</b>	Le <i>Conseil national sahraoui</i> exhorte « les responsables du Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela à <i>rejeter avec fermeté cette candidature indécente</i> ».



**ACTOR: Amina Bouayach (candidate marocaine)**

<b>Problem</b>	Elle est « <i>l'incarnation parfaite de cette façade hypocrite</i> » du régime marocain, représentant officiel d'un <i>régime monarchique absolu</i> .
<b>Cause</b>	Elle a « <i>constamment appuyé l'occupation brutale et illégale du Sahara occidental</i> » et camoufle « <i>les graves violations des droits humains perpétrées systématiquement</i> ».
<b>Evaluation</b>	« Elle n'a cessé de camoufler les exactions contre les civils sahraouis, les Rifains, les journalistes et les défenseurs des droits de l'homme ».
<b>Remedy</b>	Rejet public de sa candidature pour éviter « un déshonneur historique » et « une insulte à l'héritage de Nelson Mandela ».

**ISSUE: Valeurs et intégrité du Prix des Nations Unies - Nelson Mandela**

<b>Problem</b>	Accepter la candidature serait « <i>un déshonneur historique</i> » et une « <i>trahison des valeurs de justice, de dignité et de liberté</i> incarnées par Nelson Mandela ».
<b>Cause</b>	La candidature « <i>à l'image du régime oppresseur et colonialiste qu'elle défend, se trouve indéniablement du mauvais côté de l'Histoire</i> ».
<b>Evaluation</b>	Refuser la candidature est nécessaire pour « <i>préserver l'intégrité du Prix et les valeurs qu'il incarne</i> ».
<b>Remedy</b>	Les responsables du Prix doivent « <i>rejeter avec fermeté cette candidature indécente</i> ».

Frames' schemes, structured according to Entman's model (2004), demonstrate their impact on discourse structure: the discursive strategy of the *Sahrawi National Council (SNC)*, as reported and amplified by the news discourse, firmly denounces the Moroccan candidacy of Amina Bouayach by positioning it as a moral and political scandal.

**- Event frame: Political and symbolic denunciation**

The news outlet quotes the SNC, presenting the candidacy not merely as an administrative or diplomatic matter but as a 'betrayal' and an 'insult' to Nelson Mandela's values. This problematization elevates the issue to a moral and historical level. The Moroccan regime is negatively evaluated and portrayed as an oppressive actor attempting to conceal its human rights violations behind a hypocritical facade, making the candidacy politically unacceptable.

**- Actor frame: Stigmatization of the candidate as complicit**

The discourse targets Amina Bouayach personally, labelling her as the "*perfect embodiment*" of this hypocrisy. She is depicted not as a genuine human rights defender but as an official agent of a repressive regime responsible for covering up abuses in Moroccan Sahara and beyond. This frame personalizes the opposition, reinforcing categorical rejection and protest.

**- Issue frame: Ethical stakes and legitimacy of the Prize**

The ultimate issue is framed as safeguarding the integrity of the United Nations Nelson Mandela Prize. The SNC is reported to warn that accepting this candidacy would constitute a "*historic dishonour*" and a "*betrayal*" of the core values Mandela embodied: "*justice*," "*dignity*," and "*freedom*." This frame mobilizes the moral responsibility of decision-makers, presenting them with a binary choice between "legitimizing oppression" or "defending a global symbolic legacy."

**- Interaction of Frames**

The frame structure emphasizes internal coherence across levels: the structural **cause** (the oppressive regime) links the **event** to the **issue**, while the public rejection (**remedy** in the actor frame) becomes the central solution in the issue frame. This creates a unified and powerful narrative aiming to influence both public opinion and decision-makers.

**- Functions of the Framing**

- **Define a clear enemy:** The Moroccan regime and its representative are personified as figures of “*oppression*”.
- **Demonstrate moral gravity:** The candidacy is presented as a serious “*threat to universal values*.”
- **Reinforce Sahrawi identity:** By denouncing the candidacy, the SNC asserts its struggle against “*colonialism*” and for “*human rights*.”

Frames here function as a deliberate and powerful strategy of contestation. By weaving together moral, political, and symbolic elements, they aim not just to attack the Moroccan candidacy but to rally widespread opposition against it. This highlights how discourse frames operate not only as political tools but also as ethical arguments to represent a complex issue.

Turning from the broader political context, the move from the general—understood as the act of candidacy—to the particular focus on the candidate herself is neither accidental nor isolated.. This shift becomes clearer when we look closely at the Algerian government’s media apparatus, where discourse is shaped through multiple framing layers involving a carefully selected group of actors across different levels of hierarchy. Applying Entman’s cascading activation model (2004) helps us understand how meaning is filtered, reshaped, and amplified as it moves through these layers.

To fully grasp this, we need to consider the complexity of the hierarchical relationships and the associated norms, rules, and institutional frameworks that govern discourse within a strongly controlled political system. At its core, this system is a dense web of power and domination, where a dominant entity exerts control over others, forming a political caste whose legitimacy is sustained by normalizing and naturalizing power.

A key part of this legitimizing process lies in the myth of revolution, independence, and the sacrifices of ‘*El Moudjahidin*’—**the revolutionary fighters**. This myth is so deeply significant, culturally and emotionally, that it even names the pro-Algerian news outlet, *El Moudjahid*. The signifier *El Moudjahid*, and the inclusive and exclusive narratives it propagates, are circulated across multiple nodes within the cascading activation system, ultimately reaching and influencing public opinion.

This abstract framework is clearly demonstrated in the carefully managed shift from discussing the candidacy in general terms to focusing on the candidate herself. This shift is tightly controlled within the hierarchical media system, ensuring that the framing process reinforces the moral and ideological narratives surrounding the candidacy, ultimately shaping public opinion.

According to Entman’s model (2004), discourse is constructed and subsequently amplified by selected actors who have access to the order of discourse, enabling them to shape political narratives. A key element of this process is the naturalization of political authority through myth-making, particularly the revolutionary sacrifice symbolized by ‘*El Moudjahidin*.’ This myth serves to legitimize the ruling political caste and is institutionalized through *El Moudjahid*, the pro-Algerian news outlet that perpetuates it.

The article published by *El Moudjahid* brightly demonstrates how this mythological framework is adapted to current political conflicts. It draws on the revered legacy of Nelson Mandela—an emblem of liberation, justice, and resistance to oppression—to frame the Moroccan candidate as a symbol of “*hypocrisy*,” “*colonial domination*,” and “*betrayal of Mandela’s values*.” By invoking Mandela’s myth, the article seeks to delegitimize the candidacy, portraying it as a direct affront to freedom and dignity, and moulding the political dispute over Moroccan sovereignty as part of a larger symbolic struggle over historical justice and moral legitimacy.

Within this contested discursive space, separatism—represented by the *Polisario Front* and the *Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic*—functions as an extension of Algerian political power. The dominant power transposes its own revolutionary mythology onto the ongoing conflict in the Moroccan Sahara, turning the region into a symbolic and political laboratory where historical narratives of resistance are continually reproduced and weaponized.

The process of framing candidacy within this polarized narrative can be seen as a deliberate form of personification, where political actors and the media portray or attack individual candidates to symbolize broader political and territorial struggles. This approach reflects the wider trend of personalized politics, driven by a diminishing public interest in traditional political institutions. By personifying candidates through symbolic myths—whether to legitimize or delegitimize them—actors transform political discourse into a personalized arena of contestation. In the specific context of the Moroccan Sahara, battles over identity, authority, and historical legitimacy are deeply intertwined with Algerian support for separatism, which seeks to extend its influence and control over Moroccan territory. As Bennett (2012, cited in Combei and Reggi, 2023: 75) notes, this focus on the individual mirrors a broader societal shift toward self-centred narratives, making the Moroccan candidacy—in our case study—a focal point not only for political debate but also for symbolic struggles tied to sovereignty and regional power dynamics.

### **6.5 Conspiracy and disinformation dilemma in Algerian Media: Ethics, Ideology, and State Control**

Quoting Elliott (1986), Ward (2019: 307), while commenting on what journalism ethics needs to address, asserts that “journalists have duties to perform and norms to honour because, as human beings, they fall under general ethical principles such as telling the truth and minimizing harm, and because, as professionals, they possess social power to frame the political agenda and

influence public opinion. With this power comes responsibility.” However, the investigation conducted into news discourse across different Algerian outlets, using Entman’s (2004) spreading activation model, reveals significant limitations in the widely accepted “mirror theory,” which assumes that events themselves determine which stories are selected, with journalists merely reflecting those events to the audience. This case study challenges that assumption, supporting media critics who argue that journalists actively shape and transform events into news, deciding which occurrences are deemed significant, in addition to priming, deliberate lexical choices, and emotionally charged adjectives that saturate the news story, suggesting that the credibility and factual truthfulness of the coverage deserve scrutiny.

Recent studies and scholars from various transdisciplinary perspectives have raised serious concerns about one of the major challenges facing both traditional and new media: the reliability and truthfulness of the stories they share. In this regard, Bernecker *et al.* (2021: 1) state that “it is quite clear that much of the news surrounding us today does not, for one reason or another, meet the standards of epistemically valuable news. Our media environments are polluted by inaccurate news and other forms of mis- and disinformation.” Similarly, Guadagno and Guttieri (2019: 167) assert that “the proliferation and viral spread of fake news—false information passed off as factual—is a global problem, accelerated by information and communications technology that enables near-instant and easily disguised messaging.”

The exponential spread and rapid transmission of information make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to fact-check every story. This situation is a key factor facilitating and accelerating the viral contamination of journalism with disinformation and its derivatives. Based on our hypothesis that Algerian news discourse concerning the Moroccan Sahara and related issues falls under unethical practice rather than purely informative reporting, the collected data reveal a disinformation discourse cleverly embedded within the familiar and conventional structure of news stories. Crucially, the analysis of these traces shows that the dissemination of disinformation is closely intertwined with conspiracy discourse.

As Guadagno and Guttieri (2019: 170) note, “conspiracies make it easier for psychological operations to manipulate theories that cannot be verified by facts or objective methods.” Algerian news outlets, through strategic rhetoric and argumentation, rely heavily on conspiracy discourse. The Algerian regime and its supporting elites—as well as populist actors who often capitalize on the fears of “the people” toward certain elites or ethnic groups—embrace conspiracy theories as central elements of their identity and group cohesion.

In the literature, conspiracy accusations have been used as a means of social control by reminding citizens of their accountability to the republic (Roisman, 2006, cited in Yablokov and Chatterjee-Doodly). Marshall McLuhan’s famous concept, “the medium is the message” (1964), explains how the evolution of media in relation to human senses has influenced conspiratorial narratives and their modes of circulation over the past two centuries (Aupers *et al.*, 2020, cited in Yablokov and Chatterjee-Doodly, 2021: 7).

In other words, conspiracy discourse functions as a form of internal communication directed at Algerian citizens, aimed at promoting state ideology and hegemony.

For instance, consider the following collected extracts from APS news outlet:

**« Bengrina a également dénoncé avec force le "vain complot" conduit par le Makhzen marocain, à travers des réseaux de trafic de drogue, ciblant, a-t-il dit, les jeunes qui forment "les bras du pays et ses élites futures" »<sup>11</sup>**

**« Les Algériens sont conscients de ce qui se trame contre leur pays à travers des plans cherchant à attenter sa paix et sa sécurité, soulignant, à cet égard, la nécessité de "préserver l'unité nationale, en vue de déjouer l'ensemble des complots visant la sécurité nationale" »<sup>12</sup>**

**« Cela se fera "en renforçant notre homogénéité, en ayant conscience des complots ourdis contre notre Patrie (publiquement ou secrètement), d'être au fait de tous les moyens et de toutes les méthodes malveillantes auxquelles ont recours les ennemis de l'Algérie pour parvenir à leurs vils objectifs, notamment la désinformation et la propagande destructrice, devenues des armes dangereuses pour saper notre sécurité et notre stabilité", ajoute-t-on.**

***Il (Saïd Chanegriha, ministre délégué auprès du ministre de la Défense nationale, Chef d'Etat-major de l'Armée nationale populaire) a affirmé l'importance de souligner "la nécessité de lutter contre l'utilisation de la propagande mensongère et***

<sup>11</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 17). *Laghout: Bengrina appelle à une mobilisation nationale générale pour faire face aux défis*. Djazairiess. <https://www.djazairiess.com/fr/apsfr/586826>.

<sup>12</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 17). *Hassani Cherif appelle depuis Timimoun à immuniser le front intérieur pour faire face à tous les défis*. Djazairiess. <https://www.djazairiess.com/fr/apsfr/586832>.

***destructrice... où la désinformation est utilisée comme une arme fatale pour atteindre des objectifs politiques douteux***." »<sup>13</sup>

These excerpts vividly illustrate the deployment of conspiracy discourse as a strategic tool to frame political and social issues within a narrative of external threats and internal unity. The repeated invocation of a *"vain complot"* (vain conspiracy) allegedly orchestrated by the Moroccan *"Makhzen"* reflects a classic scapegoating strategy that attributes domestic challenges and anxieties—especially targeting the youth—to malevolent foreign actors. By portraying young people as *"the arms of the country and its future elites,"* the discourse heightens the perceived stakes, rallying citizens to vigilance and solidarity.

The language underscores an urgent call for preserving *"national unity"* to *"foil all conspiracies aimed at national security,"* framing the Algerian populace as both a target and an active defensive force against these alleged plots. The emphasis on *"homogeneity"* and awareness of *"all means and malicious methods"* employed by enemies—including *"disinformation"* and *"destructive propaganda"*—positions conspiracy narratives not only as explanations for societal threats but also as justifications for state control and heightened security measures.

Notably, the direct reference to Saïd Chanegriha's statement highlights the official endorsement of this rhetoric, presenting disinformation as a *"fatal weapon"* wielded by adversaries to pursue *"dubious political objectives."* This legitimizes a securitized approach to media and information control under the guise of protecting national stability, while simultaneously shaping public opinion to perceive dissent or alternative narratives as hostile or foreign-inspired. As Chandler (2007: 214) explains, "There are no ideologically neutral sign-systems: signs function to persuade as well as to refer. Valentin Voloshinov declared that 'whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too' (Voloshinov 1973, 10). Sign-systems help to naturalize and reinforce particular framings of 'the way things are', although the operation of ideology in signifying practices is typically masked."

In this context, the language and symbols employed by APS, illustrated by the statements of a military figure such as Saïd Chanegriha, do more than describe events: they actively construct and reinforce a specific worldview. By labelling disinformation as an existential threat, the discourse justifies heightened state surveillance and censorship. The authority of a military leader amplifies this ideological framing, making it appear objective and urgent, while effectively masking its role in promoting government and military interests. This framing shapes public consciousness to align with state ideology, positioning dissent or alternative narratives as suspicious, illegitimate, or even foreign-inspired threats.

Interestingly, in the passage, Saïd Chanegriha, presented with his quality as *"ministre délégué auprès du ministre de la Défense nationale, Chef d'Etat-major de l'Armée nationale populaire,"* is directly quoted emphasizing the ***« nécessité de lutter contre l'utilisation de la propagande mensongère et destructrice... où la désinformation est utilisée comme une arme fatale pour atteindre des objectifs politiques douteux »***. His statement implicitly distinguishes between *"false and destructive"* propaganda and other forms of propaganda, suggesting—perhaps ironically—that Algerian state propaganda might be considered ethical, as it is ostensibly not based on lies or destructive intent. Such framing invites a critical reading: Algerian propaganda is portrayed as a righteous instrument, justified by the regime's political goals, such as supporting the *Polisario Front* and the right to self-determination.

Moreover, the public visibility of Saïd Chanegriha, a high-ranking military figure, across various media platforms—including television and press—signals a deliberate construction of a military self-image that extends beyond traditional defense and security concerns. This expanded visibility projects the military institution as actively engaged in societal and cultural spheres, particularly in the realms of propaganda and media influence.

The Algerian regime's media and propaganda strategies can be understood as *'silent weapons for quiet wars,'* employing covert information control and ideological framing to suppress dissent and maintain power. This media presence reflects more than individual visibility; it underscores the role of the military apparatus within the Algerian political system. Rather than emerging from democratic processes, the regime's stability and authority are heavily reliant on military influence, which functions as a counterweight to democratic institutions and political actors. Consequently, the military acts as a parallel core of power, competing for popular support and shaping political discourse, thereby limiting the scope of democratic competition and reinforcing authoritarian control.

Furthermore, the investigation reveals how APS discourse functions not only to justify state control but also to embed ideological meaning within the signs and narratives it disseminates. Therefore, APS discourse serves to reinforce the government-media nexus's role in shaping Algerian public consciousness through conspiracy framing, aligning citizens with state ideology, and delegitimizing perceived internal and external threats.

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<sup>13</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 11). *Commémoration des massacres du 8 mai 1945, une occasion de renforcer les valeurs de l'Algérie nouvelle victorieuse*. Djazairress. <https://www.djazairress.com/fr/apsfr/586549>.

### 6.6 Disinformation discursive strategies in Algerian news media

In our case study, the Moroccan candidacy for Mandela's Prize has been extensively covered by leading Algerian news outlets and print newspapers such as *Le Courrier d'Algérie* (see **Figure 5**), primarily through agencies like APS (Algérie Press Service), *L'Expression*, *El Moudjahid*, and others. The following **Table 3** presents selected examples of Algerian media coverage concerning the Moroccan candidacy for Mandela's Prize:

News outlets	Date of publication	Section/Column	Title of the news article
APS	09-05-2025	-----	Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela: la candidature marocaine est une "insulte à l'héritage de cet illustre combattant contre l'oppression" <sup>14</sup>
APS	13-05-2025	-----	Une organisation sahraouie exhorte le comité du Prix Nelson-Mandela à reconsidérer la candidature marocaine <sup>15</sup>
APS	12-05-2025	-----	La candidature d'une représentante du Makhzen pour le Prix Mandela, une insulte à la mémoire du militant sud-africain hors pair <sup>16</sup>
APS	10-05-2025	-----	Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela: le parti espagnol Sumar exprime son opposition à la candidature marocaine <sup>17</sup>
<i>L'Expression</i>	11-05-2025 (00.00)	International	Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela Le parti espagnol Sumar exprime son opposition à la candidature marocaine <sup>18</sup>
<i>El Moudjahid</i> (online)	18:41 09-05-2025	Monde	Candidature marocaine au Prix des Nations unies - Nelson Mandela: Une trahison à l'héritage de l'icône de la liberté <sup>19</sup>
<i>Le Courrier d'Algérie</i> (A printed version)	Vendredi 9 - samedi 10 mai 2025	Actualité	IL PRÉSENTE UNE CANDIDATE POUR LE PRIX ONUSIEN NELSON MANDELA POUR LE RESPECT DES DROITS DE L'HOMME La forfaiture du Makhzen <sup>20</sup>
<i>Le Courrier d'Algérie</i> (online)	10-05-2025	A La Une	IL PRÉSENTE UNE CANDIDATE POUR LE PRIX ONUSIEN NELSON MANDELA POUR LE RESPECT DES DROITS DE L'HOMME: La forfaiture du Makhzen

<sup>14</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 9). *Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela: la candidature marocaine est une "insulte à l'héritage de cet illustre combattant contre l'oppression"*. Djazairiess. <https://www.djazairiess.com/fr/apsfr/586464>.

<sup>15</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 13). *Une organisation sahraouie exhorte le comité du Prix Nelson-Mandela à reconsidérer la candidature marocaine*. Djazairiess. <https://www.djazairiess.com/fr/apsfr/586621>.

<sup>16</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 12). *La candidature d'une représentante du Makhzen pour le Prix Mandela, une insulte à la mémoire du militant sud-africain hors pair*. Djazairiess. <https://www.djazairiess.com/fr/apsfr/586583>.

<sup>17</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 10). *Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela: le parti espagnol Sumar exprime son opposition à la candidature marocaine*. Djazairiess. <https://www.djazairiess.com/fr/apsfr/586493>.

<sup>18</sup> L'Expression. (2025, May 11). *Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela: Le parti espagnol Sumar exprime son opposition à la candidature marocaine*. <https://www.lexpressiondz.com/internationale/le-parti-espagnol-sumar-exprime-son-opposition-a-la-candidature-marocaine-393520>.

<sup>19</sup> El Moudjahid. (2025, May 9). *Candidature marocaine au Prix des Nations unies - Nelson Mandela : Une trahison à l'héritage de l'icône de la liberté*. <https://www.elmoudjahid.dz/fr/monde/candidature-marocaine-au-prix-des-nations-unies-nelson-mandela-une-trahison-a-l-heritage-de-l-icone-de-la-liberte-234309>.

<sup>20</sup> Le Courrier d'Algérie. (2025, May 10). *IL PRÉSENTE UNE CANDIDATE POUR LE PRIX ONUSIEN NELSON MANDELA POUR LE RESPECT DES DROITS DE L'HOMME : La forfaiture du Makhzen*. <https://lecourrier-dalgerie.com/il-presente-une-candidate-pour-le-prix-onusien-nelson-mandela-pour-le-respect-des-droits-de-lhomme-la-forfaiture-du-makhzen/>.



**Figure 5: Coverage headline from *Le Courrier d'Algérie* (printed edition, May 9–10, 2025) titled: “IL PRÉSENTE UNE CANDIDATE POUR LE PRIX ONUSIEN NELSON MANDELA POUR LE RESPECT DES DROITS DE L'HOMME: La forfaiture du Makhzen”**



The demonization of the Moroccan candidacy is unmistakably evident across various Algerian news outlets, particularly within APS, which published four news stories—each expressing negative attitudes and outright rejection of both the Moroccan candidate and the candidacy itself. This pattern of coverage supports with MacLeod's (2019: 1) assertion that “the media is not your friend. The media is a weapon of the elite in the battle for your mind”

The effects of revoicing and intertextuality also serve as strategic framing devices within the news discourse, aimed at reproducing and reinforcing the same narrative along with its associated psychological impacts. The overall discourse is saturated with emotionally charged language, featuring adjectives that depict the Moroccan candidacy as a “betrayal,” concealing Moroccan “repression,” “colonialism,” and “dictatorship.” In this context, the discourse reflects “the abolition and destruction of ancestral, historical and personal memories in favour of approved cultural and social doctrine; the destruction of natural language in favour of codified forms of communication; and the denial of spontaneous feelings and love in favour of orchestrated, official rituals” (Lewis and Moss, 1983: 45).

The news stories frame discourse according to a specific social division of labour between actors involved—those producing the news and others such as NGOs, opposition groups, and their supporters who promote separatism and antagonism, if not outright hostility, toward the Kingdom. This is evident through interdiscursivity and intertextuality, achieved via revoicing and the use of direct and indirect quotes from hegemonic sources closely aligned with the Algerian government–media nexus in foreign policy.

Although each discourse is presented as independent and isolated, deeper analysis reveals that these narratives mutually reinforce one another. Diverse voices, actors, and institutions are carefully selected and foregrounded in the news coverage to boost the credibility and perceived reliability of the dominant narrative. These strategies intersect and are commonly employed in propaganda wars. In this example, although propaganda is concealed and even appears non-existent, it adheres to the insight that “one of the greatest achievements of modern propaganda is persuading us of its non-existence.” (MacLeod, 2019: 2)

Moreover, the analysis of Algerian news coverage of the Moroccan candidacy for Mandela's Prize reveals several significant patterns that highlight the strategic framing and dissemination of disinformation within the media discourse. The Algerian authorities maintain tight control over the media landscape, actively shaping and framing "what is true and what is false, what is reality and what is fantasy, what is important and what is trivial" (MacLeod, 2019: 1).

From a journalistic perspective, the coverage by Algerian news outlets of foreign events related to Moroccan sovereignty over *Western Sahara* and the collapse of separatism and related subversive plans exemplifies the decline of journalism's ethical foundations and core responsibilities. As one journalism researcher observes, "journalists seek to define their roles relative to a global public sphere increasingly polluted by disinformation and manipulative, intolerant voices. As new practitioners flood the field of journalism, a prior professional consensus on the principles of journalism is weakened." (Ward, 2019: 307).

#### a. Backgrounding and demonization

The Moroccan candidacy is consistently backgrounded across multiple Algerian outlets, particularly in *APS*, where news stories downplay or dismiss its legitimacy. This marginalization serves to weaken the perceived credibility of the candidate and delegitimize the overall candidacy. However, when the event itself is foregrounded, it is accompanied by pro-Algerian voices also prominently featured across different news outlets, as observed in the semantic and lexicogrammatical features of headlines and the reported and quoted voices.

The news discourse in these outlets provides strong evidence of whose voices are silenced and omitted, corresponding with Tannen's (1989) discussion of 'indirectness,' 'ellipsis,' and 'silence,' in which she cites Becker (1985; 1988). Tannen highlights that silence is a fundamental aspect of discourse—not only the pauses between words but also what is deliberately left unsaid. Drawing on Ortega y Gasset (1957), Becker explains that language depends on renouncing certain expressions because "each person leaves some things unsaid in order to be able to say others." (cited in Tannen, 1989: 24) In the news narratives, this principle manifests as the silencing of Moroccan voices, which are excluded to shape the dominant story while leaving crucial perspectives unheard.

#### b. Emotional lexicon in disinformation and deceptive narratives

Significantly, the news discourse is heavily charged with emotionally loaded and pejorative terms that delegitimize the Moroccan candidacy, primarily by associating it with neglect and complicity in human rights abuses.

The *L'Expression* article<sup>21</sup> uses expressions such as « **forte opposition** », « **infâme déshonneur** », and accuses the candidate of failing to defend victims of « **graves violations des droits humains** ». The repeated references to « **torture** », « **abus** », « **détention arbitraire prolongée** » intensify the negative perception, evoking strong emotional reactions that amplify the psychological impact on readers. This deliberate repetition across the article and similar outlets serves to normalize the negative framing, shaping the audience's mental representation of the candidate and Morocco as morally compromised.

This lexical repetition reflects lexical priming (Hoey, 2005), where audiences internalize these negatively charged collocations through repeated exposure, associating them cognitively with the candidate and by extension to the Kingdom of Morocco. Beyond natural priming, the article exhibits forced priming (Duguid and Partington, 2017) by deliberately saturating the discourse with these negative lexical forms, strategically 'flooding' the narrative to implant a hostile representation and increase its memorability and persuasive effect.

In this context, the relationship between the signifier—the sound pattern or word used—and the signified—the concept or meaning associated with the signifier—is distorted. Concepts that should be understood as connotative, carrying implied judgments and ideological nuances, are instead presented as natural and denotative, as objective facts. As Chandler (2007: 138) explains, "denotation can be seen as no more of a natural meaning than is connotation but rather as a process of naturalization," which "leads to the powerful illusion that denotation is a purely literal and universal meaning which is not at all ideological." (Chandler, 2007: 138)

This insight is crucial for understanding *L'Expression* discourse, where charged terms like « **torture** » or « **infâme déshonneur** » are framed as factual truths, masking their ideological role in delegitimizing the Moroccan candidacy. While theorists often distinguish between connotation (implied meaning) and denotation (literal meaning), in politically charged discourse these meanings intertwine inseparably. The ideological implications embedded in connotations shape how denotations are interpreted, making literal meanings themselves sites of ideological positioning.

<sup>21</sup> L'Expression. (2025, May 11). *Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela: Le parti espagnol Sumar exprime son opposition à la candidature marocaine*. <https://www.lexpressiondz.com/internationale/le-parti-espagnol-sumar-exprime-son-opposition-a-la-candidature-marocaine-393520>.

Moreover, Chandler (2007: 139) cites an Althusserian perspective to emphasize that “when we first learn denotations, we are also being positioned within ideology by learning dominant connotations at the same time.” This highlights how readers of politically charged media such as *L'Expression* are ideologically positioned through the complex interplay of literal and implied meanings, reinforcing dominant narratives that delegitimize the Moroccan candidacy while marginalizing alternative perspectives.

### **6.7 The function of repetition and social division of labour among political and media actors in spreading disinformation**

Pakholok's (2019) observation about written discourse being generalized and subject to editing applies here: the article systematically repeats and reinforces key negative claims. The recurrence of phrases emphasizing human rights violations and institutional silence—such as « **silence persistant du Cndh** » and « **soutien implicite à ces pratiques** »—serves to reinforce ideology, polarize the narrative, and obscure alternative viewpoints, thereby sustaining the audience's mental ‘autobiography’ as described by Van Dijk (2008).

Forced priming ensures that these lexical items do not appear incidentally but are strategically repeated to solidify negative associations and suppress counter-narratives, increasing the cognitive accessibility of these hostile meanings. Given that repetition increases belief in information—a phenomenon known as the **Illusory Truth Effect**—Udry and Barber (2024) emphasize that “one reason why exposure to online misinformation is detrimental is because simply repeating a claim makes it feel truer.” Accordingly, the article's repeated negative claims—linking the candidate and Morocco to torture and arbitrary detention—serve to enhance the perceived truthfulness of these assertions, persuading audiences to accept these frames as credible. Collocations such as « **violations documentées et reconnues internationalement** » are strategically employed to generate meaning and strengthen the narrative's credibility by invoking authoritative international validation.

This strategic use of collocations is not merely a matter of textual cohesion but taps into deeper cognitive processes. As Hoey (2005 :4) explains, “the association they refer to must therefore be a psychological one, in which words are regularly associated in the mind because of the way they are regularly encountered in similar textual contexts.” In other words, the repeated pairing of words in these collocations creates strong mental links that enhance the accessibility and persuasive power of the narrative. This cognitive mechanism underpins forced priming's effectiveness, explaining how repeated lexical patterns influence readers' perceptions and reinforce the intended ideological framing.

The article predominantly cites “**les députés de Sumar**,” a left-wing Spanish political party, presenting their « **forte opposition** » and detailed criticisms as authoritative voices aligned with Algerian and separatist political agendas. This revoicing of external actors creates the illusion of diverse and independent criticism, though it reinforces a unified antagonistic narrative against Morocco. Interdiscursivity and intertextual link to United Nations bodies—the « **Comité des Nations unies contre la torture** » and the « **Groupe de travail des Nations unies sur la détention arbitraire** »—serves to amplify the narrative's legitimacy by invoking institutional authority.

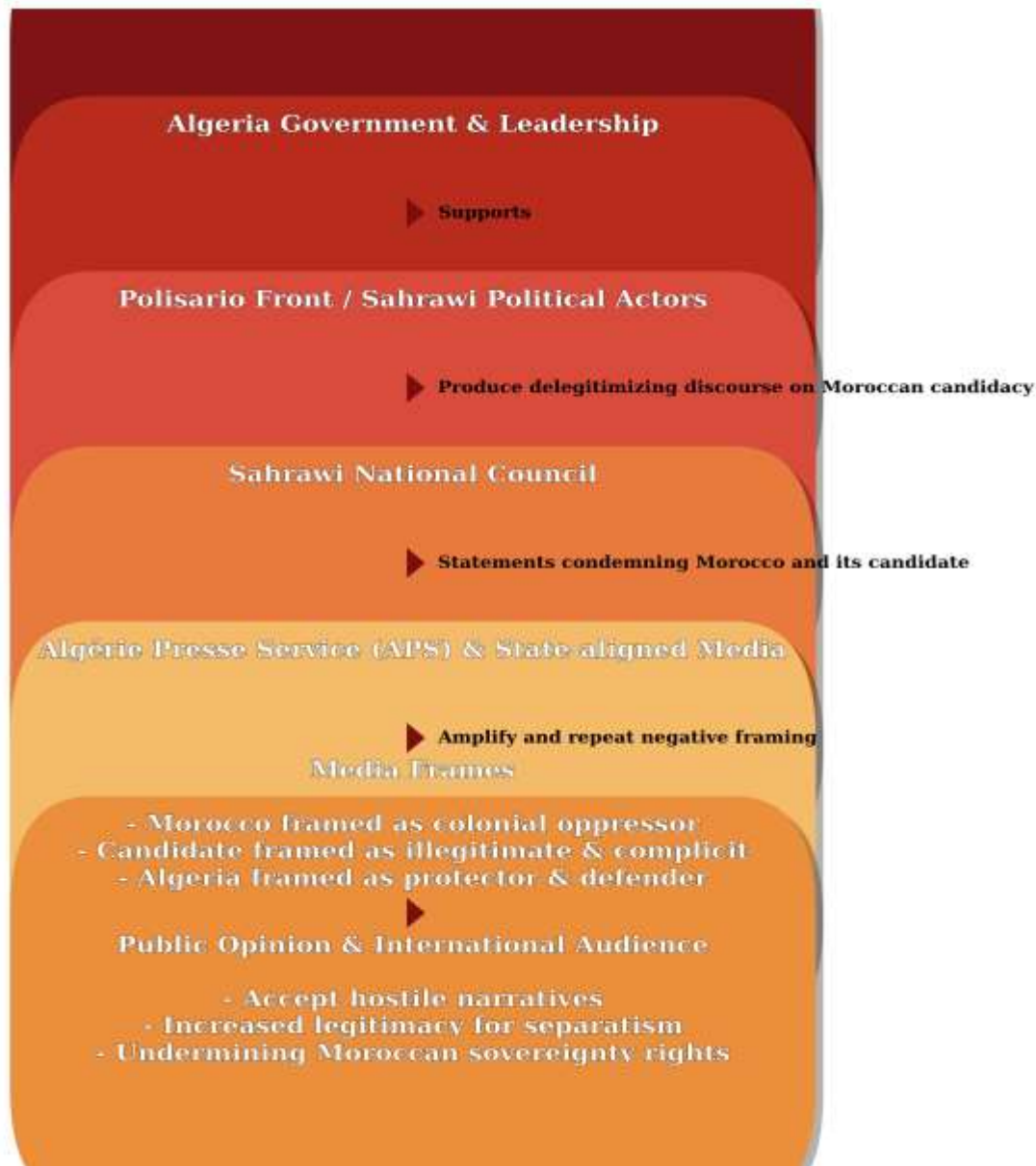
These processes also benefit from lexical priming: by repeatedly associating the candidate with these external critical actors and authoritative institutions, the article embeds a network of legitimizing nodes in readers' minds, increasing acceptance of the dominant narrative.

The article exemplifies a clear division between the actors producing the discourse—media outlets and aligned political parties—and those cited or quoted, such as the deputies of Sumar and UN committees, all of whom contribute to constructing a narrative that fosters opposition to Morocco's candidacy and implicitly to its sovereignty. This orchestration supports Algeria's and its allies' foreign policy aims by promoting separatist and subversive agendas.

The analysis reveals a close relationship between the media platform (*L'Expression*) and aligned political interests, serving to advance a hegemonic discourse that delegitimizes Moroccan institutions and policies. The framing of the candidate and Morocco as violators of internationally recognized human rights norms operates within this hegemonic nexus, shaping public opinion by presenting coordinated narratives as spontaneous and independent critiques.



### 6.8 Power and Discourse: A Cascading Network Model of Algeria's support for Polisario and the framing of media narratives



Narratives surrounding Morocco's candidacy for the UN Nelson Mandela Prize, as reported by *Algérie Presse Service (APS)*, exemplifies a strategic and coordinated framing effort deeply embedded within a broader geopolitical conflict. The *Sahrawi National Council*, supported by Algeria and its aligned political actors, the *Polisario Front*, produces a delegitimizing narrative portraying the Moroccan candidate as complicit in human rights violations and colonial oppression. This narrative is amplified and repeated by APS and allied media outlets through lexical priming and forced repetition of hostile phrases like "*régime oppresseur*" and "*crime colonial*." Such repetition not only polarizes the narrative but also enhances the cognitive accessibility and perceived truthfulness of these claims, following the illusory truth effect. The framing constructs Morocco as the unequivocal antagonist, while Algeria and the *Sahrawi* cause are cast as righteous defenders of anti-colonial resistance, thus embedding a hegemonic discourse that serves to reinforce Algeria's expansionist agenda.

This framing is further reinforced by the perpetual celebration of Algeria's "*indéfectible*" support for the *Sahrawi* cause and the *Polisario Front*,<sup>22</sup> portraying them as legitimate agents of resistance against what discourse qualifies as Moroccan "*occupation*." The Algerian government's active role in sponsoring separatism through political, diplomatic, and media channels creates a "**cascading network of discourse activation**" that flows from elite political declarations to media amplification, and ultimately shapes public and international perceptions. This **cyclical process** sustains a polarized, **disinformation-laden** environment where counter-narratives are suppressed, and the legitimacy of Moroccan sovereignty and international candidacy is undermined, if not annihilated.

Together, the APS's interconnected articles reveal a complex network in which political interests, media framing, and repeated lexical strategies converge to influence cognition and reinforce divisive narratives, illustrating how discourse can be weaponized in geopolitical conflicts.

### **6.9 Discourse and propaganda strategy in the APS article on the Moroccan candidacy for the Nelson Mandela Prize**

In the context of disinformation discourse, we consider that "the spreading activation of thoughts or nodes on a knowledge network within an individual's mind has parallels in the way ideas travel along interpersonal networks and in the spread of framing words and images across the different media" (Entman, 2009: 9).

From a concrete and tangible perspective on the spreading activation of deceptive narratives—specifically in terms of semantic representations and meaning assignments to actors and events—the collocation "**Western Sahara**" functions not only as one of the dominant nodes but also as the **central nucleus** within a network of interconnected nodes. These nodes can be activated individually, in parts, or as groups within the broader context of Algeria-Morocco unilateral and diplomatic relations. This activation occurs within the holistic framework of Algerian orders of discourse, encompassing political, economic, legal, media, and cultural discourses, and, more broadly, the dominant ideological discursive formation.

Words, statements, and texts systematically combine to produce a particular worldview. As Foucault states, "to define a system of formation in its specific individuality is ... to characterize a discourse or a group of statements by the regularity of its practice." (cited in MacDonald *et al.*, 2015) The lexical choices used to represent this general formation carry a negative polarity that is both linguistically and discursively generated. The notion of discourse here involves textual, social, and cognitive components specific to Algerian practice, with such items predominantly observable in media discourse. Media space acts as a theatre where discourse, as spectacle, is cast and projected within a highly restrictive and selective distribution—one that operates almost exclusively within a negative context in this case, functioning as disinformation within a propaganda war.

The APS article titled "**Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela: la candidature marocaine est une 'insulte à l'héritage de cet illustre combattant contre l'oppression'**"<sup>23</sup> serves as a clear example of the discursive mechanisms underpinning disinformation and strategic framing within Algerian media discourse.

#### **a. Central Node Activation: "Western Sahara and related semantic field**

Although the headline nominally focuses on the Moroccan candidacy, the article's discourse activates a dense semantic network centered on the "*Sahara occidentale*" as the pivotal node. This activation is evident through lexically charged collocations such as « **régime brutal, dictatorial et colonialiste** » and « **l'occupation brutale et illégale du Sahara occidental** ». These interconnected negative nodes reinforce each other, consistent with the spreading activation model (Entman, 2004), whereby triggering the "*Western*" Sahara node simultaneously activates adjacent pejorative meanings, shaping the reader's perception within a highly politicized frame.

#### **b. Lexical Choices and Negative Polarity**

The article's lexical field is dominated by emotionally loaded and evaluative language that delegitimizes the Moroccan candidacy. Discursive patterns like « **candidature scandaleuse** » and descriptions of the candidate as « **une défenseure acharnée d'un régime oppresseur déguisée en défenseure des droits humains** » illustrate a deliberate discursive strategy to create a strongly negative polarity. Furthermore, repeated references to « **règne par la terreur, l'emprisonnement arbitraire, la torture, les disparitions, les assassinats** » deepen this delegitimization. The constant recurrence of these terms magnifies the psychological effect, instilling a pervasive sense of moral condemnation toward both the candidate and Morocco's diplomatic efforts to resolve the Moroccan Sahara issue. As MacDonald *et al.* (2015) note, "participants [are] downplayed through a variety of rhetorical devices," highlighting how such lexical choices are used to undermine the legitimacy and agency of the Moroccan candidacy within the narrative.

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<sup>22</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, February 25). Zaalani: la lutte de l'Algérie pour la défense des peuples colonisés découle de la Déclaration du 1er Novembre. Algérie Presse Service. <https://www.djazairess.com/fr/apsfr/583493>.

<sup>23</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 9). Prix des Nations unies-Nelson Mandela: la candidature marocaine est une "insulte à l'héritage de cet illustre combattant contre l'oppression". Djazairess. <https://www.djazairess.com/fr/apsfr/586464>.

### c. Foregrounding Algerian-aligned voices and silencing Moroccan perspectives

The article exclusively foregrounds the *Conseil national sahraoui*, presenting its *indignation* and *opposition* as the authoritative voice against the Moroccan candidacy. Notably, Moroccan perspectives or counterarguments are completely absent. This omission exemplifies the concept of silence in discourse, as discussed by Becker (1985, 1988) and Tannen (1989), where what remains unsaid—in this case, the exclusion of Moroccan voices—is as powerful as what is explicitly stated. Such strategic silence effectively erases alternative viewpoints, reinforcing a monolithic and ideologically aligned narrative. As Fairclough (2003: 17) emphasizes, “What is ‘said’ in a text is always said against the background of what is ‘unsaid’—what is made explicit is always grounded in what is left implicit.” Here, the explicit condemnation by the *Conseil national sahraoui* is underscored and shaped precisely by the implicit silencing of Moroccan voices, consolidating a selective and partial representation of the issue.

### d. Intertextuality and revoicing to reinforce dominant narrative

The article employs intertextual references and revoicing; in other words, it echoes and amplifies a hegemonic Algerian discourse that portrays Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara and Morocco itself as synonymous with “colonialism” and “oppression.” Phrases such as « **une insulte à l’héritage de cet illustre combattant contre l’oppression** », « **apologie du crime colonial marocain** », « **candidature indécente** », « **régime oppresseur déguisé en défenseur des droits humains** », and « **régime monarchique absolu** » are part of a well-established discursive repertoire recurrently deployed across Algerian media outlets. These expressions, along with accusations of systematic human rights abuses—such as « **la terreur, l’emprisonnement arbitraire, la torture, les disparitions, les assassinats** »—are revoiced in the article, which blurs the boundary between reported speech and reporting discourse.

As Fairclough (1988: 49) notes, “One important contrast in reporting is between reports which are relatively ‘faithful’ to what is reported... and those which do not,” highlighting how texts either maintain or dissolve distinctions between original voices and the reporting narrative. Here, the article’s revoicing strategy actively merges the *Sahrawi council*’s strongly evaluative statements with the reporter’s voice, reinforcing the dominant ideological stance. This repetition and blurring of voices naturalize the hegemonic discourse, presenting it as an uncontested truth and thus reinforcing its perceived legitimacy among the audience. Furthermore, the absence of Moroccan counter-narratives intensifies this effect by excluding alternative viewpoints, consolidating a singular and politically aligned representation of the issue.

### e. Propaganda war and ideological function

The article serves as a tool in the ongoing propaganda war. It employs disinformation strategically to shape perceptions and influence public opinion. Maci et al. (2024: 4) note that “disinformation can create a false sense of reality used to bolster the image of those in or seeking power or to undermine their critics and opponents. Propaganda is a key purpose of disinformation, with many tactics relying on it as a resource.”

In this context, the article exemplifies this propagandistic function by using language as a weapon to delegitimize Morocco’s international positioning and to undermine its credibility on the global stage. The deliberate negative framing of Morocco’s candidacy, selective quoting of Algerian-aligned voices such as the *Conseil national sahraoui*, and the emotionally charged lexicon—terms like « **régime oppresseur** », « **crime colonial** », « **scandaleuse** »—operate within a tightly controlled Algerian media environment. This environment systematically reproduces and sustains a hostile ideological discursive formation that complies closely with broader state interests in the geopolitical dispute over the Moroccan Sahara, reinforcing a polarized narrative that delegitimizes Morocco’s position and strengthens Algerian geopolitical positioning.

### 6.10 Disinformation and beyond: What is critical in exposure to disinformation discourse?

Given that “social representations are mental entities. They are made up of both abstract and concrete elements (concepts and images, respectively),”<sup>24</sup> (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 139) the primary critical threat of exposure to disinformation lies in brainwashing and the weaponization of public opinion—leading people not only to share and spread distorted narratives but also to act under the powerful influence of language and discourse. This is because fake news tends to be more novel; false news is often more surprising or unusual, making people subsequently more likely to share novel information (see Bernecker et al., 2021). As Fuller (2010: 116) observes, “the information revolution has not produced a utopian improvement of human nature; it has done the opposite,” enabling the spread of disinformation and deceptive narratives on an unprecedented scale.

For instance, in the news story titled “**La candidature d’une représentante du Makhzen pour le Prix Mandela, une insulte à la mémoire du militant sud-africain hors pair**”<sup>25</sup> from *Algérie Presse Service*, this can be illustrated as follows:

<sup>24</sup> Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: beyond attitudes and behaviour*. Sage.

<sup>25</sup> Algérie Presse Service. (2025, May 12). *La candidature d’une représentante du Makhzen pour le Prix Mandela, une insulte à la mémoire du militant sud-africain hors pair*. Algérie Presse Service. <https://www.djazairress.com/fr/apsfr/586583>.

The article is a strong example of how news discourse constructs social representations through strategically deployed language and rhetorical devices. By explicitly condemning the Moroccan candidacy for the Nelson Mandela Prize using highly charged terms such as “*un régime totalitaire*” (a totalitarian regime), “*atteintes répétées aux droits humains*” (repeated human rights violations), “*oppression*,” “*torture*,” and “*harcèlement judiciaire*” (judicial harassment), the article constructs a social representation of Morocco not as a sovereign state acting within legitimate boundaries but as an “*oppressor*” and “*violation of fundamental human rights*.”

The communicative act in this case is highly stance-saturated (Ruxăndoiu, 2022). This means the speaker’s evaluation and positioning include subjective value judgments, attitudes, and feelings. To express these attitudes, irony and its more extreme form, sarcasm, are used as key rhetorical devices.

These emotionally penetrating lexicons and rhetorical strategies function not merely as tools of argumentation but as mechanisms to naturalize a particular version of reality.

The discourse frames Morocco’s candidacy as a ‘*betrayal of founding principles*’ and a ‘*propaganda tool*.’ This framing forecloses critical examination and invites the audience to accept the delegitimization of Moroccan sovereignty as unquestionable truth. It embeds a simplified, polarized representation of the conflict, equating Morocco’s sovereignty with systemic oppression and distorting the complex geopolitical realities.

From the perspective of social representation theory, this discourse exemplifies the construction and weaponization of collective mental constructs to influence public opinion and political perception. The persistent repetition of negative portrayals helps create a social “common sense.”

The common-sense frames Morocco’s actions and rights as both illegitimate and morally reprehensible. As van Dijk (2011: 384) emphasizes, “ideologies are more like language systems than variable personal opinions; they are socially shared and distributed mental representations defined for groups rather than individuals.” This framing not only marginalizes alternative narratives but also contributes to the polarization of public discourse, reducing space for nuanced understanding or dialogue.

As Giusti and Piras (2020: 2) explain, “disinformation is the product of the construction of a purposeful untruth [ ...] composed of mostly true facts, stripped of context or blended with falsehoods to support the intended message, and is always part of a larger plan or agenda.” This strategic manipulation contributes to a form of cognitive naturalization, whereby audiences absorb the representation uncritically, limiting their ability to engage in reflective or critical thinking about how reality is constructed by the news and transformed into discourse emotionally charged with negative appraisal.

This process reflects van Dijk’s (2011: 384) insight that “ideologies are slowly developed and adapted through public discourse and social interactions over time, becoming deeply ingrained in group mental models and guiding ideological conduct beyond mere talk.” This observation aligns with concerns about brainwashing and the weaponization of public opinion through discourse, emphasizing the critical need for media literacy and critical thinking skills when engaging with politically charged information.

In sum, the APS article’s discourse on the Moroccan Sahara and Moroccan sovereignty illustrates how social representations are constructed and manipulated within media narratives to produce a distorted, polarized reality. As van Dijk (2011: 384) points out, “ideologies control many kinds of social practice, not just discourse, functioning as socially shared cognitive frameworks that underpin and justify specific group behaviors and attitudes.” Such narratives not only shape public discourse but also influence everyday social practices and interactions within groups, reinforcing entrenched attitudes and limiting opportunities for critical reflection or change.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research clearly reveals the systematic and strategic demonization of the Moroccan candidacy within Algerian media discourse, as demonstrated by outlets such as APS, *El Moudjahid*, *Le Courrier d’Algérie*, and *L’Expression*. The pervasive negative framing, rich with emotionally charged and pejorative language, constructs a narrative that delegitimizes the candidate and Morocco’s rights regarding the Moroccan Sahara. Through deliberate lexical priming and forced priming, these media narratives embed hostile semantic associations, shaping and reinforcing the audience’s perception of Morocco as oppressive and morally compromised.

Furthermore, the mechanisms of revoicing and intertextuality amplify a hegemonic Algerian discourse by selectively foregrounding voices aligned with Algerian political interests—such as the *Sahrawi National Council* and the *Spanish party Sumar*—while systematically silencing Moroccan perspectives. This selective inclusion contributes to the construction of a monolithic narrative that fosters antagonism and supports separatist agendas.

The Algerian media landscape operates within a tightly controlled hegemonic nexus, where political elites exercise an invisible yet effective social division of labour to orchestrate news production. This control enables the media to frame “what is true and what is false, what is reality and what is fantasy” (MacLeod, 2019: 1) in ways that serve the state’s foreign policy objectives, notably through the strategic use of propaganda and conspiracy discourse that remains covert yet highly effective in influencing public opinion.

The interplay of repetition, emotional lexicon, and authoritative intertextual references exploits cognitive biases such as the illusory truth effect, further normalizing disinformation and reinforcing polarized narratives. Conspiracy discourse, by suggesting hidden malevolent forces and secret plots, complements propaganda’s persuasive power, deepening mistrust and fostering a polarized, antagonistic media environment. This contributes to the erosion of journalistic ethics and undermines the media’s role as an impartial informant, instead transforming it into a weaponized instrument of ideological warfare.

In sum, the Algerian media’s treatment of the Moroccan candidacy for the Mandela Prize serves as a microcosm of the broader propaganda war against Morocco and the legitimate sovereignty of the Moroccan Sahara. It underscores how language, discourse strategies, conspiracy narratives, and controlled propaganda are strategically employed to delegitimize opposing political actors and construct public opinion in service of geopolitical objectives, primarily expansionism and secessionism.

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