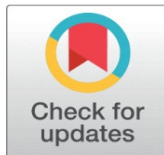


CRISIS-MOTIVATED DEPENDENCY: HOW TELEVISION TALK SHOWS SCHOOL THE LEBANESE PUBLIC AGENDA DURING STATE FAILURE

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ABSTRACT

The media system experiences a structural change following such a fundamental transformation in a failing state environment whereby there is a paralysis of the public institutions and an overall lack of credibility in the system. This paper examines how television talk shows, i.e. on MTV, Al-Jadeed and Al-Manar are the main means of navigation among the Lebanese youths. Beyond the description analysis, the study will use a Functional-Dependency Model to describe how media reliance serves as a survival mechanism.

The research relies on a 2-method design, content analysis of talk show programs and a field survey of 200 Lebanese youth to identify a deep level of Navigational Dependency ($\rho=0.73$). These results reveal that media framing effectively solves the ambiguity of the economic meltdown into making the extent of Priority Convergence ($\rho=0.67$) between the media agenda and popular consciousness high. The research is presented with the conclusion that the television talk shows act as Shadow State, which is offering a cognitive structure to a topography of institutional destruction. Nevertheless, this dependency is characterized by a Paradox of Anxiety when cognitive clarity of high level is traced with considerable affective suffering.

Keywords: Crisis-Motivated Dependency, Television Talk Shows, Information Survival Paradox

1. INTRODUCTION: CREDIBILITY VACUUM AND INFORMATION SURVIVAL PARADOX

The media regime has evolved in the modern Lebanese environment into an element of leisure to a very important survival support. In a setting marked by a failing state - where social safety nets dry up and the judiciary fails the state - people experience the state of Acute Ambiguity. The diminished ability of the state to offer verifiable accounts of states has created a credibility vacuum. Although digital platforms are fast moving, they tend to have a lot of rumors that have not been confirmed.

This results in an Information Survival Paradox: people need institutional media to provide directions in their efforts to work through the crisis, at a time when they see the media as cutting across the conflicted terrain.

This study examines why television talk shows have turned out to be the major cognitive infrastructural system of the Lebanese youth.

It deals with one of the underlying questions: How does media dependency work as a mechanism of meaning-making in a society with a systemic collapse?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: TALK SHOWS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

Television talk shows in the Middle East have become the major tools of socialization of politics. Due to institutional voids, it is indicated that in regional conflict areas, these shows serve to fill that emptiness. Another scenario that was analyzed by Fakher and Al-Mousawi (2022) was in the context of Iraq where the authors found that the interests of the political talk shows were directly positively correlated with the priorities of the people. They have arrived at a conclusion that such programs are proactive in channeling the audience focus on particular issues that media financiers are interested in. Likewise, the same study by Khan (2020) established that in Pakistan, talk shows are the main sources of political awareness and have a substantial ability to change the perspective of people on the state policy.

In Egypt, Al-Shahat (2024) demonstrated that talk shows shape communicative behaviors, noting that audiences adopt the interpretive "frames" provided by these programs to understand complex social problems. For youth specifically, Al-Omari (2020) found that talk shows play a vital role in help students navigate "information disorder" and verify news amidst a "war of rumors." In Lebanon, Farhat (2015) examined sectarian channels and found that outlets like MTV and Al-Manar create distinct interpretive frameworks for the same events, directly influencing the sectarian attitudes of the public.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MEDIA SYSTEM DEPENDENCY (MSD)

The Media System Dependency (MSD) theory serves as the primary lens for this study. It posits that as a society becomes more complex or unstable, the media's role as an information provider becomes central to the social system's survival (Al-Sakhawi, 2021, p. 163).

3.1. FOUNDATIONS OF STRUCTURAL DEPENDENCY

MSD views media as a critical system providing "rare resources" required by individuals to achieve survival goals (Al-Dulaimi, 2016, p. 231). The intensity of this bond—Structural Dependency—is determined by the degree to which the media controls information necessary for the audience to achieve cognitive, affective, or behavioural clarity (Kim, 2020, p. 15). In Lebanon, media dependency provides the "cognitive clarity" needed to resolve the ambiguity caused by the state's failure (Khafifiya, 2022, p. 42)

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: THE NAVIGATIONAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilizes a descriptive-analytical approach to measure the convergence between broadcast priorities and public perception.

4.1. VARIABLE DEFINITION: FUNCTIONAL OPERATIONALIZATION

- 1) Independent Variable:** Navigational Dependency: Measures the intensity of the functional bond between the viewer and the media—specifically the degree to which youth *must* watch talk shows to understand the political and economic landscape.
- 2) Dependent Variable:** Priority Convergence (Agenda Alignment): Measures the degree to which the individual's mental hierarchy of "crisis importance" mirrors the time-allocation and framing of the talk shows (Al-Sakhawi, 2021, p. 163).
- 3) Mediating Variable:** Cognitive Ambiguity Resolution: The psychological process of moving from a state of confusion regarding the crisis to a state of "framed awareness" (Khafifiya, 2022, p. 42).

4.2. CATEGORIES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

To quantify the "Media Agenda," categories are applied to the "Episode" as the unit of analysis (Al-Dulaimi, 2016, p. 185): Issue Type, Prominence (Order of presentation), Importance Level (Main vs. Secondary), and Time Allocation.

5. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: THE FUNCTIONAL-DEPENDENCY MODEL

The empirical portion of this study moves beyond a simple description of media influence to analyze the Functional-Dependency Model. In a failing state, media consumption is transformed into a survival strategy. This section presents the statistical results from a sample of 200 Lebanese youth, utilizing Spearman's Correlation Coefficient (ρ) to determine the strength of the functional bond between talk show content and public navigation ($p < 0.05$).

5.1. THE NAVIGATIONAL PROFILE: WHO IS SEEKING MEANING?

To understand the dependency model, we must first define the demographic "seekers" who are repurposing media data for daily survival.

Table 1

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the "Information Seekers" (n=200)			
Demographic Variable	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	108	54%
	Female	92	46%
Political Status	Non-Affiliated (Independent)	96	48%
	Party-Affiliated / Supporters	104	52%

The most significant finding in the demographic data is that 48% of the youth sample are politically non-affiliated. In the context of a failing state, these individuals are "information navigators" who lack a pre-defined sectarian or party narrative to interpret the collapse. Consequently, this group possesses the highest level of Structural Dependency on institutional media to achieve "Meaning-Making" and cognitive clarity (Al-Sakhawi, 2021, p. 163).

5.2. TESTING THE TRUST SHIFT: FROM STATE TO MEDIA

The research tested the hypothesis that the collapse of state institutions creates a "Reliability Shift," where media reliance becomes a functional necessity.

Table 2

Table 2 Correlation Results for the Navigational Dependency Axis				
Hyp.	Variable Correlation	Spearman's Rho (ρ)	Sig.	Result
H3	Trust Shift: Collapse of State Credibility × Media Reliance	0.73	0.000	Accept
H1	Structural Awareness: Dependency × Political Framework Decoding	0.68	0.000	Accept
H2	Economic Navigation: Dependency × Financial Shortcut Alignment	0.61	0.000	Accept

Analysis of H3 ($\rho=0.73$): This represents the strongest correlation in the study. It proves that Lebanese youth treat MTV, Al-Jadeed, and Al-Manar not as entertainment, but as vital survival systems (Kim, 2020, p. 15). When state information systems are paralyzed, the individual's reliance on talk shows becomes structural; the media becomes the primary source of "rare resources" necessary to understand the environment (Al-Dulaimi, 2016, p. 231).

Analysis of H1 & H2: The strong correlation for political decoding (0.68) compared to economic navigation (0.61) suggests that while talk shows are highly effective at explaining the *political mechanisms* of the failure, they are slightly

less effective at providing a clear path for *economic survival*. This is likely due to the inherent complexity and "information disorder" surrounding Lebanese financial data (Matar Hamdi, 2018, p. 14).

5.3. COGNITIVE UTILITY AND AMBIGUITY RESOLUTION

The study analysed how effectively these programs resolve the "Acute Ambiguity" inherent in state failure.

Table 3

Table 3 Measuring Cognitive Ambiguity Resolution and Behavioral Activation			
Hyp.	Impact Domain	Spearman's Rho (ρ)	Impact Intensity
H4	Cognitive Utility: Resolution of Ambiguity	0.70	Strong
H6	Behavioral Activation: Civic Participation	0.64	Moderate-Strong
H5	Affective Paradox: Emotional Distress	0.56	Moderate

Analysis of H4 ($\rho=0.70$): This result confirms that talk shows function as the "Cognitive Infrastructure" of the Lebanese public sphere. By providing a structured narrative for the collapse, these programs move the audience from a state of confusion to a state of "framed awareness" (Khafifiya, 2022, p. 76).

Analysis of H6 ($\rho=0.64$): The study found that media dependency triggers "Activation." Youth who rely on these shows are more likely to engage in social discussions, share information on digital platforms, or modify their economic behaviours based on the analysis provided in the talk shows (Hamdi, 2023, p. 413).

5.4. THE PARADOX OF ANXIETY: THE PRICE OF CLARITY

A critical intellectual pivot of this study is the contrast between H4 (Cognitive clarity at 0.70) and H5 (Affective distress at 0.56).

The data reveals an Anxiety Paradox. While the audience gains "Navigational Information" (knowing why the state is failing), the process simultaneously triggers significant emotional exhaustion (Al-Hajj, 2020, p. 147). The moderate correlation of 0.56 indicates that while understanding increases, relief does not. The public is hyper-informed but emotionally paralyzed, creating a self-perpetuating loop of seeking more information to manage the anxiety that the information itself generates (Kim, 2020, p. 15).

5.5. PRIORITY CONVERGENCE: THE MIRROR EFFECT

Finally, the study measured the "Convergence" between the Media Agenda and the Public Agenda.

Table 4

Table 4 Priority Convergence: Media Weight vs. Public Perception ($\rho=0.67$)		
Issue Rank	Media Agenda (Broadcast Frequency)	Public Agenda (Mental Priority)
1	Political Deadlock / Government Formation	Economic Survival / Financial Crisis
2	Economic Policy / IMF Negotiations	Political Deadlock / Corruption
3	Administrative Corruption	Security / Port Investigation
4	Security / Beirut Port Investigation	Social Welfare / Migration

Analysis of H7 ($\rho=0.67$): The hierarchy of importance is almost flawless. Although the population considers Economic Survival as the leading source of pain, the emphasis of Media on Political Deadlock as the source has permeated the minds of population. This shows that the talk shows establish priorities of the Lebanese youth, namely what aspects of the failed state should receive the greatest attention (Al-Sakhawi, 2021, p. 163). The talk show has become a successful assassination of a Shadow State which defines the daily reality of a crisis population.

Empirical findings of this study demonstrate the reason as to why the Lebanese social contract is changing fundamentally. With the state institutions, the judiciary, the executive arm and the financial system, abdicating or collapsing, the media system has grown to fill the structural vacuum created. This is what transforms television talk shows into things other than observers; it becomes a Shadow State because it offers the only cognitive infrastructure that a society working in a systemic ruin has.

6. THE MEDIA AS A SHADOW GOVERNMENT (THE SHADOW STATE).

The Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory is the theory that argues that at the stage when social systems are becoming unstable, the role that the media plays as a provider of information turns the priority of the survival of this system (Al-Sakhawi, 2021, p. 163). The complete inability of the state of Lebanon to offer any credible explanation of the economic meltdown or judicial responsibility has oblige people to use talk shows as an equivalent of a court and ministry.

The landmark Navigational Dependency correlation ($\rho=0.73$ $\rho=0.73$, Table 2) proves that Lebanese youth no longer view these programs as secondary news sources; they are vital survival utilities (Al-Dulaimi, 2016, p. 231). By determining the frequency and prominence of issues like political deadlock, MTV, Al-Jadeed, and Al-Manar create a mental reality for the youth that the actual state can no longer sustain. This Priority Convergence ($\rho=0.67$ $\rho=0.67$, Table 4) confirms that the media agenda has become the public's default reality, dictating which aspects of the state's failure the public should prioritize (Hamade, 2019, p. 213).

6.1. MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL RUINATION.

The Cognitive ambiguity Resolution ($\rho=0.70$ $\rho=0.70$, Table 3) has a high correlation meaning that talk shows combined to be the major meaning-makers in the Lebanese landscape. Young people, in an environment of Acute Ambiguity, where the causes of financial devastation are covered by official silence, need these shows to hold some cognitive clarity (Khafifiya, 2022, p. 42). The shows act as a thinking shortcut, enabling the viewer to make meaning out of complex political structures that cannot be explained by the state (Hamdi, 2023, p. 413). 6.3. The Irony of Anxiety: Certainty vs. Mania. One of the leading contributions of this work is the fact that it has found out what is known as the Paradox of Anxiety. The findings indicate that, there is a serious disparity between Cognitive Utility ($\rho=0.70$ $\rho=0.70$) and Affective Response ($\rho=0.56$ $\rho=0.56$). This signifies that the solution process by the youth is not relieved with the watching of talk shows in the name of solving ambiguity and knowing about the crisis, yet the answer is gained but not alleviated.

This creates a self-perpetuating cycle:

- Systemic Failure creates Ambiguity.
- The audience Relies on media to gain Cognitive Clarity (Kim, 2020, p. 15).
- The media provides clarity, but through a lens of Conflict and Crisis.
- The result is Increased Affective Distress (anxiety/powerlessness), which leads to further dependency as the audience seeks even more information to manage the fear generated by the first exposure (Al-Hajj, 2020, p. 147).

6.2. THE VULNERABILITY OF INDEPENDENT SEEKERS

The demographic analysis revealed that 48% of the sample are politically non-affiliated (Table 1). In a failing state, this group is the most susceptible to media-driven dependency. Unlike partisan supporters who possess a "party shield" to filter information, independent youth rely entirely on institutional media for their "Meaning-Making" process (Hamade, 2019, p. 213). For this cohort, the talk show is the sole architect of their political and economic reality, making the media's agenda-setting power absolute and the resulting emotional toll significantly higher.

Conclusion of the Discussion

The Lebanese media system has transcended its traditional role. By providing the only structured navigation in a chaotic reality, TV talk shows have become the primary architects of the public sphere. . But the cost of such intellectual benefit is an immense emotional load. The Lebanese people are constantly informed but have become emotionally exhausted as a result of the priorities, that the actual state (Government) cannot fulfil, being addressed by the Shadow

State (Media), who understands just why their society is not operating but feels increasingly powerless to do anything about it (Hamdi, 2023, p. 413).

7. CONCLUSIONS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS.

7.1. SUMMARY: THE ARCHITECTURE OF PUBLIC REALITY.

This research proves the fact that without a functional state, the Lebanese system of media has passed installation in the field of observation to the installation of the sphere of the public. Applying a Functional-Dependency Model, the study has established that media dependence is a structural adaptation mechanism of youth to manage as an Acute Ambiguity (Al-Sakhawi, 2021, p. 163).

Empirical data gives a strong line of influence: The Navigational Dependency (0.73), which is led by the failure of state narratives, has caused Cognitive Ambiguity Resolution (0.70), with a strong association (0.73). Only television talk shows on MTV, Al-Jadeed, and Al-Manar are, therefore, not just a coverage of a crisis; they form a sort of Shadow State, delivering the thinking resources that would allow the basic survival (Kim, 2020, p. 15). The paper however concludes that this dependence is two-sided. These programs, as much as they bring out the necessary "navigational clarity needed to unravel political stalemate and economic collapse, contribute to the institutionalization of the "Paradox of Anxiety." People are over-educated about their very torment and find themselves in the condition of affective disorder and emotional burnout (Al-Hajj, 2020, p. 147).

7.2. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

To transform the Lebanese media system into an anxiety-inducing generation into a positive mechanism of national orientation, the following are the strategic steps that should be adopted:

To begin with, the journal article starts by highlighting the distinction between Conflict-Rhetoric and Solution-Building.

The analysis conducted by the content showed that the media agenda circulates with the political wrangles on forming a government that are connected to the feelings of anxiety among the people (p. 196, 231). The media establishments have to find a balance between such narratives and survival-enhancing economic reporting and professional policy discussion to bring light without darkness (Hamdi, 2023, p. 413).

1) Diversity of the Information Elites.

In order to overcome the cycle of the theory of Meaning-Making in the prism of conflict, talk shows need to be more diversified in guests. Replacing traditional political elites with technical experts, academicians and civil society representatives will help create the so-called framed awareness, which is formed not around sectarian accusations but around data (p. 203, 246).

2) Mitigating the Affective Burden of Reporting

To address the Anxiety Paradox, media outlets should adopt a more analytical and less inflammatory tone. Reducing the use of high-intensity, emotionally charged language can provide the necessary cognitive gain while mitigating the severe affective distress identified in the youth sample (Al-Hajj, 2020, p. 147; p. 246).

3) Institutionalizing "Navigational Literacy"

Media houses and institutions of learning must work together to encourage "Navigational Media Literacy." This assures the independent seekers, that is, the 48 percent of youth who are most susceptible to media framing, are able to critically recycle media data as positive Civic Activation instead of passive hopelessness (Hamdi, 2023, p. 413; p. 246).

4) Modifying Programming to the 'Public Agenda'.

Talk shows need to shift their editorial bias of an institution to audience-based model. Survey-based feedback loops on a regular basis would be sufficient to ensure the relevance of broadcast priorities (The Media Agenda) on the immediate need to survive of the population (The Public Agenda) (Al-Sakhawi, 2021, p. 163).

Final Outlook

The talk-show has become the proxy story of the country in a failing state. Adapting to become a stage of institutional accountability and onstage navigation, the Lebanese television has the tools to offer the actual resources needed to convert informed anxiety into a social response that is resilient in the community.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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