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Mihaela Alexandra Tudor, Farid Ladjouzi

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**MIHAELA-ALEXANDRA TUDOR**

Paul Valéry University Montpellier 3

**FARID LADJOUZI**

University of Béjaïa

# Information literacy practices of young Internet users related to the production of religious content: 2019 Algerian protests case

## ABSTRACT

*This article aims to explore the creative practices of young Algerian Internet users related to the production of religious content within the context of the protest movement post 22 February 2019. It questions the place of the Islamic religion in the Algerian protests in the light of religious redocumentarized contents on Facebook (photos). The research is based on the methodological approach of redocumentarization linked with information literacy practices. The results highlight two aspects. Spirituality and faith instilled by redocumentarized photos of religious nature play a catalytic and fuelling role in this popular movement. The Algerian youth information literacy represents the beginning of digital citizen participation.*

## KEYWORDS

Algerian youth  
digital natives  
information literacy  
redocumentarization  
2019 Algerian protests  
Islam

## 1. Friday prayer.

**INTRODUCTION**

Since February 2019 Algeria has been confronted with a popular protests movement that first targeted President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was called on by the popular will to give up his candidacy to a new presidential term. After an official resignation, the protests continued with the demand for change of the entire governance system of the country. The movement took, among other things, the form of the almost daily popular marches and demonstrations, which culminated each Friday, the holiday in Algeria, enjoying a strong religious and social symbolism. According to Muslim worship practices, Friday marks the day of the weekly prayer called *Salat al-ajoumoua*.<sup>1</sup> This religious event brings together thousands of faithful in mosques, creating *ipso facto* a significant mass of people. Thus, in countries that have experienced the media-called 'The Arab Spring', mosques have transcended their worship and spiritual role to become 'places of mobilizing crowds. Political rallies have often started just after Friday prayers' (Al-Anani 2013: 38). The 2019 Algerian protests were very similar to this *modus operandi* largely fuelled by ubiquitous religious discourse.

In this particular context of Islamic societies confronted with popular protests against the political and military powers in place for decades, this article raises the issue of the emergence of innovative forms of participation to public debate through emerging media considered as a discursive 'refuge' for young generations seeking freedom of expression and values derived from the democratic culture of digital natives. These alternative spaces were born mainly from the technical mastery that accompanied the development of new technologies in Algeria.

The purpose of the article is to explore the creative practices of young Internet users in relation to the production of religious content in the context of the protests post 22 February 2019. The article questions the place of the Islamic religion in the Algerian protest in the light of religious redocumentarized contents on Facebook (photos). It is based on the methodological approach of redocumentarization (Pédauque 2007; Zacklad 2015; Serres 2008) linked to current information literacy practices. The interest to use this methodological approach is threefold. First, a significant part of current media content is born from the redocumentarization activities creating both contagion and mimicry of users who, through this practice, reinvent their ability to participate in and mobilize for the online society by reconciling individuals and general interests, different universes of discourse (religious, political, cultural, commercial, consumer, civic, etc.), or digital activism practices through the mobilization and creative use of digital media. Thus, new normative authoritarian figures are born, collectively constructed and mimically copied, by means of a standardized community participation renegotiating otherwise, via the network – which serves both to connect and disconnect – the relations of domination and subordination with classic institutionalized authority (see the concept of 'uberization of authority' explained further). Finally, this is an approach based on the effects of mediatization (clarified below). More precisely, redocumentarization produces not only a recontextualization effect (resignification), but also a transformation at the heart of mediatization. Transformation in terms of shifting the boundaries of the public and the private (making visible practices that previously escaped public sphere), in terms of governance or collective thinking and acting.

## RELIGION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The religious phenomenon is strongly present in the Algerian society. Algeria is a 'religious society, which, as such, is expressive of its Arab-Islamic identity' (Sanson 1980: 57). The 1990s Islamist movement, which saw a political party (Islamic Salvation Front-ISF) claiming a conservative and rigorous religious discourse become the first political force in the country by winning the legislative elections of 1991, expresses the impact of religion on Algerian society. The particularly difficult socio-economic context at that time contributed to the penetration of the religious discourse in all layers of Algerian society, thus making it appear 'for all the left-behind, as a saving and purifying alternative' (Martinez 2003: 9).

Public discourse, understood as social element, a mode of action socially and historically located, in a dialectical relationship with the social context and part or aspect of social life<sup>2</sup> (Fairclough 2010), attaches a significant place to religion now considered an important player in all areas of society (Martin 1969; Berger 2001a, 2001b). In the light of the social media and the 'mediatization of everything'<sup>3</sup> (i.e. the assimilation of the media in the social, economic, political, cultural, human bodies cf. Tudor and Bratosin 2000a, 2020b) religion changes of referent. The transformative contribution and the growing importance of socio-technological mediations undeniably have strong consequences on the reshaping of the meaning and role of religion. They produce a shift of meaning from institutionalized religion to deinstitutionalized religion. The concept of religion is therefore not limited to the 'restrictive' Enlightenment's perspective where the real correspondent of religion is the ecclesiastical institution/ organization and the secularism as an indicator for the transition from traditional society to modern society, with the consequent loss of importance of the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of religion (Tudor and Bratosin 2018; Tudor 2020) and the elimination of religion from the public sphere (Beyer 2016). Media (classical and new) have gradually changed the sacred character of the traditional sphere, that of the religious institution (incompatible with modernity). Solid religious institutions or ideologies and doctrines that emanate from institutionalized ecclesial authority are now questioned. A new authority is born, the 'uberized authority', a 'disintermediate authority, pulverized, and challenged by a new model related to the digital that no longer intends to be based on the institutional world or that of the networks of traditional institutions, mastered and built on non-negotiable premises which are dying' (Tudor and Herteliu 2017: 594; Lövheim and Lundmark 2019). The religious institution is no longer an exhaustive depository of public religious discourse, ordinary people as ad hoc authorities become real influencers. Consequently, the concept of network is fundamental in public religious discourse (Campbell 2012) with all the changes that this entails for the reshaping of the concept of religion.

Traditional religious authority finds itself confronted with the Internet and digital media exactly where the traditional religious institution was considered to be the most powerful provider of guidance and moral education (Tudor and Herteliu 2017; Atifi and Touati 2020). New media are now the preferred providers of religious knowledge and ethics. All these changes are symptomatic for and at work in the Arab world. Religious discourse becomes a paradigmatic media construct where religion, politics and the media converge, where legitimacy, authority and credibility are rather conquered 'on the screen', in the form of a public religion (de Vries 2006; Casanova 2012) – the asserted presence of

2. The language being socially shaped and socially shaping.
3. The mediatization of everything is a process observable in public communication specific to all [...] symbolic forms (religion, art, science, culture, etc.) at work in the public sphere. This model is characterized by a) the increasing prevalence of media communication as a source of information for all actors in society, b) the perception of the decisive importance of the media in the dissemination of ideas and c) the adaptation of communication actors to media-oriented communication. (Bratosin 2016: 412)

religion in the public sphere. Islamic religious discourse, formerly confined to places of worship (mosques, *zaouïas* ...) and given by imams, had to adapt and review its mode of transmission. This has led to the appearance of the concept of 'digital minbar', the minbar being the pulpit from which the imam gives the sermon; the digital dimension refers to the use of social media to transmit religious precepts with a view to renewing religious discourse. Thus, this discourse has somehow 'escaped' from the hands of imams and theologians, to also become one of the dimensions of juvenile expression on social media.

The 2019 protest mobilization of the political by the religious, and by extension, by other sensitization means, was strongly felt through the social media which has contributed to reinvigorating the inflaming religious discourse. Facebook algorithms, which highlight all the content users interact with on their news feed, reinforce the important presence of the Islamic religious aspect in the digital mediatization of the Algerian protests.

Nevertheless, the current Algerian society, composed of essentially young people shows more distance, discernment and caution in receiving religious discourse. The years of terrorism experienced after the interruption of the electoral process in 1992 'immunized' the Algerian people against the risks of excesses that can generate a radical and extremist religious discourse (Khouas 2016; Belahmari 2013; Bouamama 2013). The young Algerian population is reluctant to the way the authorities both manipulate and misuse religion (Ghanem 2018). This practice is especially noticeable in the correspondence sent by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to imams after the beginning of the demonstrations (Khris 2019). The messages contained directed guidelines that preachers were meant to follow in their Friday sermons, which was perceived as an attempt to manipulate and divert the 'sacred' religious practice for political purposes. As a result, the believers have come out of the mosques during the preaching in several cities across the country in protest against these practices of exploiting places of worship (Zeidane 2019) and religion in an institutional way.

## **PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE ARAB WORLD**

The profound change in political relations with the media in the Arab world has also provided societies in the region with an unprecedented opportunity to begin their transition to democracy. The public sphere, which has opened up to the Arab citizens thanks to the change in these relations, is an essential element in widening political participation and any possible democratic transformation. Thus, the public sphere in the Arab world essentially arose from the rise of cultural products of a religious, notably of Islamic nature, due to the political rise of the Islamist movements of the early 1980s (*Sahwa*). Most importantly, the emergence of satellite television in the Arab world has enabled greater autonomy in the Arab public sphere (Hadj-Moussa 2012: 162). The 1990s witnessed increased competition between the various Arab television offers, such as the MBC, a pioneer chain in this field, but also ART, ORBIT, or one of the most famous Arab television broadcasting groups Al Jazeera. The latter, which appeared in 1996, was very successful with the Arab audience thanks, in particular, to its coverage of the second Gulf War and the conflict in Afghanistan. All these major networks have largely contributed from the media, geopolitical and diplomatic point of view to lay the foundations of the Arab public sphere by facilitating the transmission of information and by creating a new type of information consumption in the Arab world

based on exchange and interactivity, which has allowed the emergence of a public debate around common issues (Ouchiha 2016). However, the role of these television channels has somewhat declined in favour of social media which have given the Arab public sphere a more active dimension in which young people, the first consumers of digital technology, have been able to find a field of expression and involvement, otherwise building their relationship to religion, its place and role in the public space as well as traditional authority.<sup>4</sup> These new relations and pillars will be the way of conceiving a citizen participation of young Algerians in a transformed public sphere, created differently, a space of expression and debate to replace the traditional media, because it is being impacted by the ‘fatality of the technology’ (Musso 2007), emerging media and globalization, therefore equipped with new uses and practices (Ouchiha 2018).

## REDOCUMENTARIZATION AND INFORMATION LITERACY

With the new Internet features, which are more dynamic and participative, young people with sufficient information literacy skills become producers and designers of content on the Internet. They take back, modify and diffuse different formats of information on digital platforms. These platforms become privileged spaces for the reconstitution of this documentary material which gives rise to new digital documents from already existing documents. This approach is called ‘redocumentarization’. Roger Pédaque<sup>5</sup> theorized it from the following observation: ‘as the industrial era was marked by the interchangeability of parties, the information society would be characterized by the possibility of reusing information’ (Pédaque 2006: 72).

However, treating and understanding redocumentarization would not be possible without restoring the initial concept which is ‘documentarization’. Manuel Zacklad defines documentarization as ‘the work of equipping a durable medium with attributes that will facilitate its circulation in space, time and communities of interpretation’ (Zacklad 2007: 35). Documentarization refers to manipulating documents according to the different rules adopted by librarians and other documentalists, such as cataloguing, indexing, etc. (Ertzscheid 2009; Le Deuff 2009; Zacklad 2015).

In the digital age, the document takes a more technical dimension and undergoes changes in form and substance, hence the use of the prefix ‘re’ which refers to new ways of thinking and using the document. Redocumentarization would be a new model of the relationship of the individual to his world, shaping new visions and highlighting new information-documentary perspectives (Salaün 2007).

The redocumentarization of images from traditional media consists of the development of digital documents that highlight celebrities, public figures or anonymous promoted to the rank of digital memes,<sup>6</sup> presenting them in a new light according to the purposes and objectives assigned to this process of cultural creation on the Internet. According to Jean-Michel Salaün, redocumentarization refers to ‘re-processing traditional documents that have been transposed on a digital medium using the features of the latter’ (Salaün 2007: 3).

The most common technique in redocumentarization is image segmentation. It means to extract one or more parts of the original image and keep others, while adding elements to these truncated images to accentuate the creative aspect and try to provide them in messages that can take various tones: humorous, tragic, lyrical, etc.

4. See discussion above.
5. Roger T. Pédaque is the collective name of a network of French-speaking scientists working in the various fields of expertise in the humanities and social sciences as well as information and communication sciences (<https://www.babelio.com/auteur/Roger-T-Pedaque/190795>).
6. The meme is a viral phenomenon that stands out from the continuous flow of information production online. It is presented on different media (static images, animated images, text, etc.) and targets different objectives, it attracts attention and acquires great popularity in a short time, thanks to a publicization ‘relay’ (Bonenfant 2014).

The reproductions and modifications of audio-visual content are multiplying on the Internet and testify to the emergence of a 'technophile' and 'techno-competent' young generation, i.e., the 'Digital natives, digital immigrants' (Prensky 2001) who, by these redocumentarization techniques and practices, manage to express and position themselves in the public sphere. In addition, this process of redocumentarization contributes to the identity construction of the young person on the Internet, which, by means of info-documentary practices most often amateurish, bring out their impressions and appreciations by means of images retouched and designated to be their voice. Therefore, the documentary creation is for the user a means of communicating an experience (Kiyindou et al. 2013: 23). Nevertheless, the digitalization of any documentary found goes beyond the simple passage from one mode of diffusion to another. It sets up a whole system of reproduction and recontextualization of documents, thus creating new layers of information that give rise to new interpretative modalities.

Furthermore, the photo and video retouching process is not the only prerogative of young amateurs on the Internet, it can also be used by traditional media for the purpose of over-media coverage and sometimes even propaganda. One of the most instructive examples of this is the manipulation by the Egyptian newspaper *El Ahrām* of a photograph of the visit of ex-President Hosni Mubarek to the White House. This photo represents several heads of state walking to give a press conference. On the original photo the American president Barack Obama was at the head, but on the photo published by *El Ahrām* the Egyptian president was propelled to the front of the scene. This manipulation of the Egyptian media, the regime's unofficial spokesperson, created a wave of indignation in international media and political circles at the time of its publication in 2010. Another example speaking of photo retouching by the traditional media is that of a cover of the famous American journal *Time*, which featured in its front page the photo of O. J. Simpson, the famous African American football player accused of murder in the 1990s. This photo has been edited to further darken Simpson's skin to accentuate his African American origins, which has created several controversies surrounding the media treatment this journal has devoted to this matter.

The redocumentarization practices that increasingly occupy the digital space require a set of prerequisites that come down not only in the form of purely technical skills and aptitudes, but also in terms of maturity and awareness in order to create meaning and communicate messages. This semiotic reconfiguration would allow the receiver to 're-articulate the semiotic contents according to its interpretation and its uses both according to the internal or external dimension' (Zacklad 2007: 36).

The redocumentarization is closely linked to the information literacy that we consider equivalent to digital culture (see Millerand 2004; Desfriches Doria 2018). Information literacy is a relatively new concept that has been the subject of increasing research and studies (Gilster 1997; Bawden 2001; ACRL 2016; Giorgiadou et al. 2018; Desfriches Doria 2018; Tewell 2018; Jiménez-Morales 2018). The review of the literature shows a lack of consensus on the definition, coverage and approaches to information literacy (Bawden 2001; Desfriches Doria 2018). Work on the subject is usually narrowed to Library and Information Science. Nevertheless, one of the bases of the various definitions adopted is the aspect of the 'skills and aptitudes' that the individual must possess in order to access informational culture (Giorgiadou et al. 2018; Desfriches Doria 2018; Tewell 2018). As a result, the effective use of information

in the context of information literacy inevitably involves the mastery of information and communication technologies. This mastery would allow the access, processing, modification and exchange of data, especially digitalized data, in order to meet the continuous information needs. The redocumentarization is part of this range of skills required by information literacy defined by Fluckiger (2008) as a 'set of values, knowledge and practices that involve the use of computerized tools, including media and cultural consumption, communication and self-expression' (2008: 51). But these accelerated technical evolutions should not be treated only as modern forms of life which would allow a better comfort to the human being but also from the point of view of the social, cultural and behavioural changes that they create, or new modes of thought, culture and ideology.

This mastery has also resulted in a significant participation and involvement of young people in the sociocultural actions. Indeed, new opportunities for participation created by new information and communication technologies (ICTs) can strengthen the cultural engagement of young people who are already active in this regard. Artists, authors and other creators of cultural content are increasingly using these devices to reach a wider audience and to ensure a 'digital presence' essential to the era of the digital society. The ICTs can also be used to mobilize young people who are not yet interested in any form of cultural, citizen or artistic engagement. This has led to the emergence of a new generation of cultural creators, YouTubers, podcasters or page administrators on social networks. They actively contribute to the enrichment of the content of digital networks by injecting documentary material that comes in various formats: texts, videos, soundtracks or images, either in their original version or by making modifications to them according to their degree of informational literacy.

This is the reason why we have endeavoured to shed light on the various spheres of the information literacy of the young Algerian Internet users who manage to engage and position themselves in the public sphere through a work of redocumentarization of the religious phenomenon in the context of 2019 Algerian protest. The growing mediatization of religion during demonstrations, as a consequence of an informational practice dedicated to it, shows a digital visibility linked as much to the historical aspect as to the topicality.

## METHOD

We have considered as an empirical field the Facebook page 1,2,3 viva Algeria created in 2011 for three reasons:

1. Facebook is the most popular social media in Algeria with 22 million subscribers in 2019.<sup>7</sup>
2. The page is one of the most important references in terms of the number of subscribers (1.1 million), and of interest to the authorities. 1,2,3 viva Algeria was stopped several times because of its critical positions towards the establishment; its initiators relaunched it each time under the same name.
3. Its name refers to the famous slogan sung by the Algerian people during sports events and demonstrations starting in February 2019. It qualifies as 'People's Page', being also present on Instagram and Twitter.

7. <https://cmdafrique.net/2019/02/12/chiffres-facebook-2019-afrique/>. Accessed 2 March 2019.

8. Research on redocumentarizing media content is not new. Several works have been devoted to the digital practices of young people and adolescents, and their re-appropriation of documentary material on the digital sphere. We cite in particular Laure Bolka-Tabary's study on amateur mimetic practices for classifying and indexing images of 'fan culture' in Web 2.0. (Bolka-Tabary 2008). This research opted for the images taken and re-contextualized from the reality show *Star Academy*. The 'fan culture' community that grew up around this show used this process to express admiration for each other's favourite candidates and share their preferences with their peers.

We have worked with qualitative data treated through redocumentarization.<sup>8</sup> These data offer an in-depth understanding that allows both hypothesis generation (Sofaer 1999) and mapping (Pope and Mays 1995) the meaning young people give to religious fact in their practices of redocumentarization in the context of the protests against President Bouteflika.

Our corpus includes digital photos, published on the page 1,2,3 viva Algeria from 22 February 2019, the first major protest against the fifth term of President Bouteflika, until Friday, 5 April 2019, the announcement of the resignation of the president. This choice is motivated by the fact that this period has seen many major events that have marked the protest, such as Bouteflika's trip to Switzerland for medical care, the officialization of his candidacy, the renunciation of the fifth term, the direct interference by the army, the forced resignation of the president and the appointment of a new government.

Digital photos were analysed through a two-dimensional replicable grid:

1. the description of the content: facts represented and religious symbols explicitly present;
2. the redocumentarization of the content: context of publication, retouching, tonality, encouraged values and creative practices.

We organized the data collected through the grid in the form of checklists, a qualitative data collection tool useful in observing visual information.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The redocumented photos of religious nature occupy an important place in all the contents of the Facebook page 1,2,3 viva Algeria (Figure 1) since the beginning of the Algerian protest movement. We found 35 photos matching our search criteria.



Figure 1: Facebook page 1,2,3 viva Algeria. Screenshot.

On the descriptive level, the published photos present the most mediatized politicians in Algeria since the beginning of the movement. The most frequent faces are former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahya, army chief of staff Ahmed Gaid Salah, and those known in the political sphere as 3B (Bensalah, the current Head of state, Belaiz, the president of the Constitutional Council and Bédoui, the prime minister).

There is also a strong occurrence of figures and religious personalities, both old and new, members of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulemas.<sup>9</sup> Other contemporary figures of the Islamic movement in Algeria have been represented through the photos, such as Sheikh Ali Ayya, a famous imam and preacher opposed to the regime or Djalloul Hadjimi, the president of the National coordination of Imams of Algeria. The symbols and foundations of the Algerian sociocultural identity, in particular the national flag, the Algerian Constitution, the memorial of the martyr, or a few written words of the Algerian anthem are identified.

With regard to the religious symbols, the photos published on the Facebook page showed a balance in the use of material and immaterial religious symbols. We find places of Muslim worship such as mosques or *zaouïas*,<sup>10</sup> including the Grand Mosque of Algiers, prayer rugs, rosaries, or copies of the Koran. In terms of intangible symbols, interest is focused on religious texts: Qur'anic verses, Hadiths<sup>11</sup> appropriate to the social context in Algeria, or well-known quotes from Algerian religious personalities. All of these texts convey messages that call for preserving national unity and avoiding clan rifts, such as the Qur'anic verse: '[a]nd cling together to Allah's Habl' and do not be divided; and remember the benefit of Allah on you' (Surah Al Imran, verse 103) (Figure 2). Other published verses speak of the need to refer to God (Allah), and to implore his forgiveness and help in difficult times, such as

9. An association of religious, social and educational character created in 1933 by the Sheikh Abdelhamid Ibn Badis during the French colonization.
10. It is a Muslim building, mainly Sufi, dedicated to meditation and Koranic teaching.
11. Words of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad.



Figure 2: Quranic verse calling for unity. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

12. Our study focuses mainly on the use of the Quran in the broader context of the use of Islamic religious symbols from the perspective of redocumentarization practices.

the following passage: '[a]nd return repentance to your Lord, and submit you before him, before punishment comes to you, and you receive no help then' (Surah: Az-zumar, verse 53).

These Qur'anic verses mobilized in the redocumentarization process could raise questions about their degree of knowledge by users and the degree of manipulation of religion through communication pathological practices (like propaganda, disinformation, infoxication, etc.).<sup>12</sup> Therefore two observations could be made. First, the population concerned by this activity is made up of lambda users who can freely access the 1,2,3 viva Algeria Facebook page to publish content including verses. This population has the general characteristics of a 'crowd' (Le Bon 2013), digitally formed, which leads us to consider that the use of Qur'anic verses cannot be discussed in terms of knowledge vs. lack of knowledge. The 'learn advised' of the verses is henceforth on the domain of public opinion because of the mediatization effects which transforms it into a 'shared', 'popularized', 'in action' knowledge, 'uninhibited' from traditional/institutionalized religious authority. The literality of citations becomes secondary.

Second, the Qur'anic verses, considered from the angle of their mediatization, are not necessarily an object of manipulation, but a raw material for the communicational action of influencers or leaders of these digital crowds. From this perspective, the concept of 'abrogated verses' would be difficult to apply to this context in the light of the arguments developed above. In addition, the corpus analysis shows that none of the verses are concerned with the abrogation. The abrogation would mainly concern the verses that contain prescriptions or prohibitions, which is not the case in this specific case.

The Quran is considered as the supreme source of Islamic jurisprudence, the Qur'anic references are regularly present in the publications of administrators and users of the page 1,2,3 viva Algeria. Other major components of the sacred Islamic texts are the words of the Prophet Muhammad, called the Hadiths. These are widely used to appeal to the spirit of citizenship of the protesters. Hadiths are strongly shared on Facebook before the weekly demonstrations and evoke the prophet Muhammad who exhorts the believers to the protection of the environment, the preservation of public buildings and the cleanliness. In addition to these sacred religious texts, other Islamic references in the form of quotations from religious figures are included in the redocumentarized photos. The quotes that come back the most are those relating to the Arab-Islamic identity of Algerian society, as the words of Abdelhamid Ben Badis: 'the people of Algeria is Muslim and Arabity is affiliated' (Figure 3).

All the quotes included in the photos were taken from the work of Algerian thinkers and exegetes; most of them belong to the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulemas. This tendency to privilege old personalities to the detriment of the new figures of the Islamic thought in Algeria could underline a form of exclusion of the current representatives of the Islamic movement. It is also a call to return to ancestral, traditional Islam considered being purer and more authentic (Harbi 2010).

In terms of redocumentarization of the content – the context of publication – all the photos published on 1,2,3 viva Algeria have followed the evolution of the political and social situation by giving different dimensions to this mediatization. The beginning of the Algerian movement was characterized by a certain informational opacity accentuated by an inefficient and oriented official communication. Private media have been accused of manipulation and misinformation, which has led the youth population to seek alternative



Figure 3: Quote from Ben Badis. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

channels of information. This unclear media generated a mass of rumours and propaganda information that fuelled the clan and regionalist spirit. The administrators of the page 1,2,3 viva Algeria tried to react to these consequences by the redocumentarized photos mobilizing a religious discourse that was reassuring, unifying and sensitizing. This discourse comes not only from sacred Islamic texts (Qur'an and Sunnah), but also from institutional sources such as press releases from religious authorities (the National Coordination of Imams of Algeria or the High Islamic Council), who called for unity and recommended the virtues of dialogue and tolerance.

These calls were launched to respond to a large segment of the population waiting for the reaction of Algerian religious bodies, since religion was at the centre of the debate especially after several incidents that marked the beginning of the protest movement (the believers who have left some mosques on the day of the great Friday prayer, the march of imams of the 18 March 2009...) (Figure 4).

Following the announcement of the resignation of President Bouteflika and the appointment of a new transitional government, religious photos published on the page took a more offensive turn. The new government formed after the resignation of Bouteflika did not have the expected popular legitimacy and all the new ministers, including those of the religious affairs are considered as not representative. The religious discourse mobilized in front of this new situation accuses these new leaders of being opportunistic and pushy. The photo where the Prime Minister (Noureddine Bédoui) appears



Figure 4: Imams march in an Algerian city. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

with a threatening air, accompanied by a brief text where it is written: 'may Allah keep us!', could be a salient example. This has been with reference to the invocation of the divine protection against the alleged malice of this member of the government. Other photos have highlighted the greed and hypocrisy of these new ministers who went against popular aspirations to focus on their personal interests (Figure 5).

In terms of technical aspects, one of the most common processes in the photo retouching is overlay also called overprinting. This is the superimposition of two separate images to make a single photo. This process highlights a specific part of the photo while accentuating the link between the two parts. Thus, we have seen the use of this technique through the valorization of the national symbols such as the Algerian flag or the Koran against a backdrop of mass popular (Figure 6) to designate the attachment of the demonstrators to the national and religious symbols.

We also observed another frequently used technique: adding lighting effects to published photos. This operation aims to give a certain prestige and an extra aura to the parts of the photo that are the subject of this illumination. Material religious symbols are the ideal breeding ground for this kind of retouching. Thus we observed several photos that represent mosques in Algeria or Qur'an books strongly illuminated (Figure 7). The light is often associated with the divine. It evokes the salvation and inspires the serenity, contrary to the darkness. A complete chapter of the Qur'an (Surah) is called 'The light', in which a particular verse is often quoted: 'Allah is the light of heaven and earth' (Surah: The Light/En-nour/, verse 35). This symbolism plays a special role in Islamic belief and in all Muslim societies (Bonnéric 2012).



Figure 5: Unwanted government officials. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

The third technique identified is the insertion of the texts or discussion bubbles in the published photos. The objective is to obtain a comic effect; very popular when it comes seeking to give a humorous or sarcastic intonation to the messages delivered. We found this way of retouching when it was question of staging politicians or directors of undesirable media among the population, like the former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahya or the director of the private television channel *En-Nahar*, Anis Rahmani. These two characters were derided by mobilizing a religious discourse that emphasizes hypocrisy and treachery. In other photos, the discussion bubbles were used to script a dialogue between government officials (Figure 8), whose main focus is their ignorance of religious precepts and notions of good and evil.



Figure 6: *Quranic verse on the background of popular movement. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.*

Regarding the tones that emerge from the photos corpus, we have distinguished four major registers. The first is the lyrical tone that highlights the themes of faith in God, love and nostalgia for the ancestral values of traditional Islam in Algeria. The desired effect of this kind of content is to generate the empathy and support of the user who identifies with these catchy contents. This register addresses the nationalist and religious feelings of the receivers by insisting, for example, on the need to have faith and to pray to God so that he can help them. Other photos have tried to correlate the notions of nationalism and religious faith by mentioning some quotes that go in this direction as: 'the love of the party is part of the faith' (Figure 9).

The second tone on redocumentarized photos of religious nature is the ironic, satirical one. Its purpose is to provoke a dual intention in the receiver: the intention to make people laugh and to denounce the flaws and misbehaviour of the protagonists and the situations put forward.

Even if in the common representations, notably in the media, the Islamic religion is stereotyped as being incompatible with notions of humour or derision and Muslims considered as humourless and extremist (Ahmed 1992), the Internet shows that there is a 'halal humour' (Miles 2015). Islamic tradition abounds with examples of the use of certain forms of humour in religious discourse, not to make fun of religion, but rather to convey a message with religious connotation by using humour intended for young audiences, more sensitive to this form of persuasion (van Zoonen 2013). The halal is a complex



Figure 7: Algerian mosque illuminated. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

universe, a way of life, a 'living in the halal' (Bergeaud-Blackler 2015) which is also open to behaviours and acts linked to humour. Humour is present on Facebook through counter-narratives, therefore framed by this 'autonomous normative space' which is the halal – within the limits traced by the Quran, the *ahadiths* and the *adabs* (manners) – very fruitful to put in question the caricatural stereotypes concerning Islam as a religion of violence and the forbidden (Miles 2015).

In this regard, one of the photos that adopted the satirical tone shows the director of the private television channel *En-Nahar* praying on a carpet. On the first part of the picture we see him praying in front of a wheelchair (reference to the former President Bouteflika) and on the second in front of a tank of the army, with this inscription: 'Qibla has been successfully modified'<sup>13</sup> (Figure 10).

The third tone is tragic. It is noticeable in the religious texts embedded in photos that warn those who hurt around them. Algerian government officials are the first to be targeted by this intimidating discourse, accusing them of being behind the problems Algeria has experienced. For example, a photo (Figure 11) in which some government officials appear above which is written this Koranic verse: '[a]nd when they are told: "Do not sow corruption on earth", they say "On the contrary we do not we are reformers!"' (Surah: The Heifer [Al Bakara], verses: 11–12). True, they are the real corrupters, but they do not realize it.

13. In Islam it is the direction to which the Muslim must perform the rite of prayer; this direction corresponds to the city of Mecca.



Figure 8: The former Algerian Prime Minister Ouyahya in a mosque with a speech bubble that refers to the alleged theft of Ouyahy. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

The last tone observed in the photos of the Facebook page 1,2,3 viva Algeria is epic. It tends to use amplification methods to elicit admiration from the receiver and to transmit common values (Figure 12). This register highlights situations or personalities presented as exceptional, such as the founders and members of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulemas, whose intellectual contribution is considered one of the pillars of Algerian religious history. The symbolism of Friday was strongly mobilized to underline the moral and spiritual stimulation brought by these religious symbols to the protesters.

With regard to the values and behaviours encouraged by these photos, we have noted the prevalence of the values of national unity and the recourse to God to guarantee the indivision of the Algerian people in its diversity (Figure 13). The photographs published on this subject tend to reinforce the certainty that the collective strength also resides in religious faith and practice. Several photos illustrate the diversity of the Algerian society (a group of people from different regions of Algeria) accompanied by religious texts such as the Koranic verse: '[b]elievers are only brothers. Establish concord among your brethren, and fear Allah, that they may show you mercy' (Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 10).

The dialogue and open-mindedness are values present in the photos. The mobilized religious texts exhort the population to accept, tolerate and forgive



Figure 9: Algerian flag on the background of Mujahideen (fighters during colonization) and nationalist text. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

the other in everyday life (Figure 14). These values are considered very important to give a good image of the protest movement to international public arena.

From a religious and spiritual point of view, the visual publications of the page tend to encourage religious practice through several Islamic rites including prayer (*Salat*), almsgiving (*sadaka*) or invocation (*douaa*) (Figure 15). All these contents underline the importance of the spiritual life in the success of the protest movement. To this end, we have found in several publications invocations and supplications to Allah to preserve calm and peace in Algeria, bring victory against the oppressors and help the people's movement. The ideological significance of Friday is often put forward to highlight the supposed link between the great Friday prayer and the determination of the people to acquire their demands.

Social media has given a new impetus to popular protests, particularly in the countries that suffer from censorship and the arbitrary limitation of the freedom of expression, which is the case for Algeria.<sup>14</sup> The results of this study put before the use of these new digital tools for mobilization needs in the sociopolitical Algerian context with a mined and locked public sphere. Facebook crystallized the popular demand in Algeria and organized the modalities of expression. The privileged angle of attack to apprehend the role of Facebook in the 2019 Algerian protests is the use of religious approach

14. Algeria ranks 140th out of 180 countries in 2019, according to RSF (<https://rsf.org/en/classement>). In addition, popular marches have been banned in the capital of Algeria since 2001.



#### ACHOUR CHEBABHA

Figure 10: Anis Rahmani, director of the private television channel En-Nahar praying on a carpet. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

transmitted through visual content published on a reference Facebook page. This choice was motivated not only by the growing place of the religion in the Algerian social fabric (Belkhi 2011; Harbi 2010) but also by the painful experience of a political Islamism that led to a period of security instability known as the name of 'black decade' in Algeria.

Our results also reveal that the religious approach relayed by the redocumentarized photos is based just as well on the visual representation of the religion (material symbols, religious personalities...), as it is on the religious text (Koranic verse, Hadiths, quotes) integrated in the photos. This diversity of styles indicates the degree of informational control of the designers of these contents and the importance given to the critical reception of the receivers of the messages conveyed.

It should also be noted that the religious approach on Facebook related to the protest movement in Algeria is the source of values and ideals and the regulator of moral principles. Its initiators want to make it one of the most important elements of the social and cultural system, since the demand for change of political system expressed by the demonstrators must also be accompanied by a change of individual behaviour in which religion is one of the key elements. As a result, the photos have focused on behaviours, social and civic values promoted through good religious practice, beneficial in the context of a popular will for political and social change. Nevertheless, wanting to make the Islamic religion one of the major conditions for the revival of the



Figure 11: Algerian officials with a Koranic verse threatening the corrupt politicians. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.



Figure 12: Algiers the capital, dominated by the flag and a spiritual religious text. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.



Figure 13: Algerian society diversity. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

Algerian society does not necessarily imply the creation of a theocratic state, based on the same model wanted by the ex-ISEF, but rather, to draw inspiration from the precepts of Islam for the creation of a State under the rule of law. All these strategic aims are perceptible in the publications consulted and the interactions observed on the page 1,2,3 viva Algeria and other similar Facebook pages.

These results highlighted the importance of the digital culture. The information literacy comes in the form of creative technical skills and cultural and citizen maturity that allows using a reference as sensitive as that of religion. The information literacy brings together two notions that seem antonymic, namely, technique and religious spirituality. The relationship between technique and spirituality is to be considered differently. In Algeria, the politico-military system in place has always been considered powerful and impenetrable. It managed to lock the media and public sphere to maintain and strengthen itself (Arbi and Kaci 2016). Spirituality and faith instilled by religiously redocumentarized photos play a catalytic and fuelling role in this popular movement.

Another aspect revealed by the results is the almost systematic exclusion of the contemporary Algerian religious figures from the photos. Rather, they appeal to ancient religious figures in the perspective of a salutary return to the sources of the 'Algerian style Islam'. Indeed, the representatives of the



Figure 14: Values of tolerance and forgiveness. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.



Figure 15: Publication urging the Algerian people to invoke God to change the system. Source: 1,2,3 viva Algeria.

institutional Islam in Algeria (Ministry of Religious Affairs) are, in fact, discredited because they are accused of being part of the establishment that must be ousted. The religious discourse developed by these institutions is often denigrated because it is accused of being one of the instruments at the hands of the state to manipulate public opinion.

Finally, the results allowed us to record the tones used through redocumentarization processes. We observed that the designers of these photos wanted to bring certain dynamism to the religious discourse often associated with the rigour and seriousness. Several registers of presentation of this discourse have been adopted from the humorous tone to the lyrical to the tragic. The religious discourse has been revisited to meet the expectations of the Algerian youth, the leading consumer of online content.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study highlighted three salient features. First, the transposition of the 2019 Algerian protests (whose central core is religion) into the public sphere of the digital media is not the prerogative of religious (or practicing) groups. All the diversity of Algerian society has been represented through the interactions observed on the Algerian Facebook pages.

Then, the redocumentarization, understood as consumption culture and information literacy, is systematically associated with the reception of these contents and the interactions that this operation would provoke. It sheds light on the diverse scope of the information literacy of the young Algerian Internet user who manages to engage and position itself in the public sphere via the digital culture. The technical skills and abilities serve as means of conveying messages, self-esteem, identity construction and production of meaning.

Finally, the religious phenomena remain strongly present in the public debate in Algeria in spite of the political and security antecedents lived by the Algerian society. The protest movement of 2019 that took possession of the public and virtual spheres is partly fuelled by visual content that, even if it is not exclusively religious, is at least imbued with religious suggestions, inspirations and symbols. The use of religious approach through redocumentarized photos is perceived as a necessity that corresponds to the characteristics of the Algerian society, i.e. conservative and protective of its identity.

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### CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Mihaela-Alexandra Tudor is associate professor habilitate at Paul Valéry University Montpellier 3, France and associate director of CORHIS research centre. Her research mainly focuses on the study of mediatization and religion in the public sphere under the impact of emerging media.

Contact: CORHIS EA 7400, Université Paul Valéry de Montpellier, Route de Mende 34199 Montpellier Cedex 5, France.

E-mail: [Mihaela.tudor.com@gmail.com](mailto:Mihaela.tudor.com@gmail.com)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1458-8952>

Farid Ladjouzi is Ph.D. candidate at University of Béjaïa, Algeria and Paul Valéry University Montpellier 3, France. His research focuses on the study of cultural practices and information culture among Algerian youth.

Contact: CORHIS EA 7400, Université Paul Valéry de Montpellier, Route de Mende 34199 Montpellier Cedex 5, France.

E-mail: [ladjouzifarid@gmail.com](mailto:ladjouzifarid@gmail.com)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9482-5262>

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