



The relationship of the Lebanese diaspora with the Lebanese Media and its Viability

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Introduction

The Lebanese media is facing significant financial difficulties, leading to the closure of some sectors, while the remaining ones, in the vast majority, are struggling to maintain their independence and continuity. This study aims to explore how Lebanese media can find a new business model that ensures both its continuity and independence. Considering the ongoing economic collapse in Lebanon, affecting public and private institutions, as well as the general population, finding domestic funding sources has become challenging. Therefore, the research focuses on exploring the potential of financing media institutions through the Lebanese diaspora, which consists of millions of individuals worldwide possessing diverse and substantial resources.

Thus, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Is the Lebanese diaspora capable of supporting Lebanese media?
- How can the Lebanese diaspora be actively engaged in contributing to supporting national media?
- Is it possible to create a new business model for Lebanese journalism that relies on the power of the Lebanese diaspora?

I- The General Framework

A- The Lebanese Media: A National Necessity

The support for Lebanese media is driven by the critical need for thriving media outlets in all societies, particularly within democratic ones. These outlets serve multiple roles in society and are essential for the public to stay informed and gain a better understanding of global events. Most importantly, they help shape public opinion, which is a source of power in democratic systems. Additionally, the media plays the role of the "fourth estate" or the counterpower, monitoring the performance of the legislative and executive branches and exercising necessary criticism to improve the functioning of the political process.

However, the financial deficit faced by media institutions threatens their roles firstly, and their continuity secondly. To secure the necessary financial resources, these institutions may become dependent on resources from specific parties, which in turn jeopardizes their independence. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to strive for self-funding of media institutions to maintain their roles and freedoms.

Considering Lebanon's severe economic collapse, the continuity of the diverse media outlets in the country are now at risk. Therefore, it is necessary to find solutions that allow Lebanese media to continue functioning and fulfill their expected role.

Lebanese media exhibits numerous characteristics that led to its uniqueness within the Arab world. Since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century, Lebanese journalism has played fundamental roles in the Arab world's awakening, Lebanon's independence, promoting the

Arabic language, disseminating Western sciences to Arab societies, spreading culture, and more, all of which have been widely recognized.

In addition to Lebanon being the birthplace of the first printing press in the East, its journalists and intellectuals have contributed to establishing Arabic journalism in many Arab countries, including Egypt and the Arab Maghreb.

Moreover, Lebanese journalism witnessed significant growth, especially starting from the 1950s, by virtue of the freedoms ensured by Lebanon's democratic and pluralistic system. While the press in other Arab regions faced political censorship, Lebanese media reflected the reality of the Arab world in its diverse systems and embodied the multiple tendencies within Lebanese society.

The success achieved by the Lebanese media made it a target for some Arab regimes that sought to buy certain media outlets to gain their favor, while others tried to establish loyal media in Beirut. The latter reflected on the structure of most media institutions, exceeding the size and population of Lebanon, leading many of them to rely primarily on external support for their funding. This, in turn, resulted in a state of political and financial dependence on foreign financing for numerous media outlets.

Despite facing consecutive crises in the past two decades, Lebanese media continues to stand out among other Arab countries due to its freedom from political authority and its significant role in providing critical analysis, thanks to its distinctive diversity. The Lebanese press represents various societal, religious, and political tendencies, with some supporting the political authority and others opposing it. The country is also known for the abundance of television and radio programs that satirize politicians and criticize their performance, which is relatively uncommon in the Arab region.

However, financial and political pressures on these media outlets have led to their decline. In the 2022 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, Lebanon ranked 130 out of 180, indicating a decline from previous years. In addition, a study conducted by the Samir Kassir Foundation with "Reporters Without Borders" showed that "two-thirds of the media in Lebanon are owned by political figures or parties"¹, putting them in a position of bias towards the corrupt political class responsible for Lebanon's collapse.

The Lebanese media receives valid criticism for its sectarian affiliation, the significant ownership of these institutions by political figures, and its weakness in playing a critical role against corruption, institutional decay, and the failure of officials to manage public affairs. Nevertheless, it still reflects Lebanon's diversity and political pluralism, embodying a certain model of freedom of opinion and expression. Some media institutions continue to function as a critical fourth estate as well. Thus, it is crucial to support this media to ensure its continuity and grant it more freedom and independence in decision-making and orientation.

¹<https://ijnet.org/fr/story/au-liban-la-crise-porte-un-coup-%C3%A0-la-libert%C3%A9-de-la-presse-d%C3%A9-%C3%A0-fragile>

B- The Troubled Reality of Lebanese Media

Lebanese media is characterized by its vitality and dynamism despite the crisis it has been facing for years, which has led to the closure of several significant media institutions. It keeps up with the uncertainties affecting the Lebanese people and reflects the conflicts prevailing in the country. It also serves as a political and social platform, representing the diverse orientations within Lebanese society. The media landscape constitutes eight television stations covering the entire state, with most of them broadcasting globally via satellite². Additionally, there are several newspapers and magazines, with seven Arabic-language dailies distributed nationwide and online, along with a French-language daily newspaper³. The media scene is further enriched by dozens of radio stations, falling into either the political or entertainment category, and numerous online websites, including general news, specialized, and party-affiliated ones, among others. The majority of these media outlets, including newspapers, radio stations, and digital platforms, are available online, thus accessible worldwide.

In addition to the private media landscape, public media institutions, also known as "official," include Tele Liban, Radio Lebanon, and the National News Agency. While the "official" television and radio stations suffer from significant weakness due to limited funding and lack of administrative appointments for years, the National News Agency stands out for its comprehensive coverage of events in Lebanon, making it a reference for many local media outlets and followed by citizens both within Lebanon and abroad.

Over the past ten years, Lebanese media has experienced significant setbacks, especially due to the economic downturn in the Arab region, particularly following the start of the war in Yemen in 2015, which affected the economic situation in the region. This was further amplified by the onset of the severe social and economic crises in 2019.

These successive crises deprived Lebanese media of revenue gained from advertising and reduced the purchasing power of its audience. The impact of the crisis was evident in the closure of some of the most prominent Lebanese newspapers, such as As-Safir (2016), The Daily Star⁴, and the Dar Al-Sayad group (2018), which published notable newspapers and magazines like Al-Anwar and Al-Sayad magazine, as well as Al-Mustaqbal newspaper (2019), among other media institutions. The number of journalists and media workers who have been laid off from media institutions since 2010 is estimated to be between 1600 and 2000 employees.⁵

The financial crisis facing Lebanese media has been exacerbated by the emergence of numerous free digital news websites that now compete with traditional media institutions for

² The private TV stations are: LBCI, MTV, OTV, ALJADEED, ALMANAR, NBN, and Tele Lumiere, which is a religious station affiliated with the Maronite Church.

³ The daily newspapers are: Annahar, Al-Akhbar, Al-Nidaa Al-Watan, Al-Joumhouria, Al-Lebanon, Al-Diyar, Al-Sharq. The daily French newspaper is L'Orient-Le Jour.

⁴ The Daily Star was an English newspaper that had been published since 1952. Unfortunately, it did not withstand the crisis and closed down in 2021.

⁵ <https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/19114?lang=fr>.

both audiences and advertising revenues. The advertising market itself has significantly declined, with its size reducing to less than \$100 million, which multiple media platforms, including television stations, daily newspapers, radio stations, websites, magazines, posters, and social media, compete for. This meager amount is inadequate to sustain the minimum requirements for media institutions, considering that the annual operating cost of a single television station ranges from \$10 to \$15 million dollars.

As a result, austerity policies have been implemented leading to the lay-off of hundreds of journalists, reduction in television production, and downsizing of newspaper pages and other media content. In an attempt to cope with the crisis, Annahar newspaper launched a fundraising campaign in 2019 to ensure its continuity. Within the scope, Charles Ayoub, the owner of Al-Diyar newspaper, justified doubling the newspaper's price due to the lack of financial support from then-Prime Minister Saad Hariri and a Saudi minister, pointing out that the support received from Syria did not cover but the cost of printing few issues⁶.

Lebanese media outlets are often accused of being funded by foreign sources that ensure their continuity. However, determining the sources of funding for these institutions and the extent of this funding or the institutions that benefit from it. Accordingly, Jean Kassir, one of the founders of the Megaphone website, believes that these accusations are propagated by politicians fearing for their positions, denying that his institution operates in this manner and stating, "We are funded by institutions that do not dictate any editorial lines, and the identity of these institutions is transparently published on our website."⁷

With the lack of scrutiny from concerned authorities regarding the financial aspects of media institutions, it becomes challenging to ascertain the reality of these institutions, their funding sources, and their continuity.

In 2009, the global organization Internews Network conducted an investigation into the funding of Lebanese media⁸, covering 55 institutions, including television stations, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, and online websites. The investigation revealed that "only a few television stations were profitable or claimed to be so", similarly, the majority of written media which included major newspapers, reported that they did not achieve profits over the past five years. Accordingly, 20 institutions included in the study announced that they were funded by their founders or board members, while ten other institutions did not specify their funding sources. However, the investigation mentions that most of the above mentioned institutions are founded by politicians. The investigation also covered the affiliated websites, whereby 74% of the studied institutions broadcasted digitally. Only 11% of these institutions reported that their online websites generate revenue. Furthermore, 60% of the institutions did not respond to questions regarding their advertising income.

⁶ <https://www.lecommercedulevant.com/article/16821-un-rapport-sur-les-pratiques-conomiques-de-55-mdias-libanais>. (EL-RICHANI 2016)

⁷ <https://ijnet.org/fr/story/au-liban-la-crise-porte-un-coup-%C3%A0-la-libert%C3%A9-de-la-presse-d%C3%A9%3%A0-fragile>

Au Liban, la crise porte un coup à la liberté de la presse déjà fragile ,par *INES GIL* 22 juil 2022 dans *LIBERTÉ DE LA PRESS* "MegaPhone has 120,000 followers on Instagram and a similar number on Facebook. It targets an age group between 18 and 35 years old, detached from sectarian parties. However, capturing the older age group is challenging, as 70% of Lebanese still rely on television for news."

⁸ <https://www.lecommercedulevant.com/article/16821-un-rapport-sur-les-pratiques-conomiques-de-55-mdias-libanais>,
Un rapport sur les pratiques économiques de 55 médias libanais

Joseph Semaan, the editor-in-chief of the prominent online platform "Al-Nashra," which is one of the most followed websites, affirms that the Chairman of the Board of "Al-Nashra," Arz El-Murr, still covers between fifty and sixty percent of the website's expenses from his own pocket, while advertisements only contribute around forty percent of the funding for the most active political section.⁹

There is no doubt that the financial constraints faced by media institutions and their dependence on local or external forces for their continuity pose a threat to democracy and freedom of opinion and expression. It jeopardizes the independence of media outlets and contradicts democratic principles by undermining the foundations of media and its role in relation to the audience and the public affairs, especially during election periods when media outlets can be influenced by capital.

According to a report by the Foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, television stations in Lebanon set specific rates for candidates' appearances during election periods as follows: \$100,000 for interviews during peak hours, \$45,000 for live broadcast and \$10,000 for a 30-minute radio interview. "These practices facilitated the campaigns of candidates affiliated with sectarian parties who have the financial means as they are funded through corruption and from regional powers."¹⁰

This practice was not a secret, and the predetermined rates for candidates by media outlets were widely known within the media and political circles¹¹. Such practice reflects the threat posed by media dependence on democracy, good governance, and the proper conduct of public affairs. Hence, it is essential to search for funding that guarantees the independence of media institutions and ensures their ability to fulfill their social and national responsibilities.

C- The Lebanese Expatriate Community "The Diaspora": A Force in Service of the State.

The Lebanese diaspora may be one of the largest diaspora communities relative to the resident population, which is estimated between 4 to 13 million people, spread across more than 70 countries worldwide. This diaspora maintains strong ties to their homeland and their families still residing in Lebanon. According to official statistics, the number of this diaspora community is estimated to be 13 million people, approximately three times the number of Lebanese residents.¹² The diaspora is distributed as follows: 6 million in Brazil, 2 million in the United States, 1 million in Argentina, as well as communities in other American countries like Venezuela, Colombia, and Mexico. Following them are communities in Australia, Canada, France, and Saudi Arabia. However, the majority of these diaspora members belong to the

⁹ <http://www.khiyam.com/news/article.php?articleID=23756>

¹⁰ <https://ijnet.org/fr/story/au-liban-la-crise-porte-un-coup-%C3%A0-la-libert%C3%A9-de-la-presse-d%C3%A9j%C3%A0-fragile>

RÉSEAU INTERNATIONAL DES JOURNALISTES, *Par INES GIL, 22 juil 2022 dans LIBERTÉ DE LA PRESSE*

¹¹ - Pour les médias au Liban, le juteux business des élections © AFP/ANWAR AMRO

Publié le 25/04/2018 à 09h51

Jusqu'à 6.000 dollars par minute d'antenne, 240.000 pour un débat télévisé, 1,5 million pour un "forfait" complet: au Liban, les candidats payent pour faire campagne dans les médias, et les chaînes profitent des prochaines élections législatives pour se renflouer.

¹² [La diaspora libanaise – Ministère libanais de l'Information \(ministryinfo.gov.lb\)](https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/fr/810) . <https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/fr/810>

third or fourth generation of immigrants, meaning they do not hold Lebanese citizenship and do not speak the Arabic language.¹³ As an affirmation of the role of the Lebanese diaspora, Lebanon established a Ministry for Expatriates in 1993, which was later integrated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2000.

The Lebanese diaspora plays a crucial role in the country's economy, with remittances from Lebanese expatriates estimated at around 7 billion dollars, which contributes to balancing Lebanon's economic balance and alleviating the economic crisis in recent years. These remittances support thousands of Lebanese families whose living standards have fallen below the poverty line. According to the World Bank, remittances from the Lebanese diaspora to Lebanon amount to about 6.5 billion dollars, exceeding the total exports of Lebanon, which stand at 2.4 billion dollars.¹⁴

The diaspora community often closely follows the internal situation in Lebanon, maintaining family, regional, sectarian, and political connections. They are also politically active abroad to keep up with Lebanon's situation. Tens of thousands of Lebanese expatriates visit Lebanon each year to spend their vacations or celebrate holidays with their families.

Recently, a book was published that addresses one aspect of the connections between the Lebanese diaspora and the homeland, under the title "Migration and the Formation of the Political Elite in Lebanon"¹⁵. It explains the contribution of expatriates to the formation of the political elite in Lebanon and the role played by some of them through their international connections or the wealth they acquire.

This confirms the interest of a significant portion of the diaspora in their homeland and their attention to its affairs. This in turn indicates that the Lebanese diaspora needs media outlets that keep them updated about the situation in their home country. This is what Lebanese media takes charge of, covering various aspects and details of the Lebanese situation. Digital technologies, most Lebanese TV and radio stations are available online and can be accessed from anywhere in the world. Print newspapers are also accessible through their online platforms, as well as numerous Lebanese websites covering local news.

However, it is necessary to consider the media outlets that originate in the diaspora countries and directly target these communities, often using their local language and employing various media forms, including written, audio, visual, and digital. There is a long-standing tradition of establishing a press dedicated to Lebanese and Arab communities in the diaspora, especially in the Americas, Arab countries, and Europe. Many of these outlets were established in the past, and current examples are "Sawt El Arz, the Lebanese Diaspora Radio," which broadcasts from France¹⁶, and the diasporaOn website. The latter presents itself as an "independent platform dedicated to Lebanese expatriates worldwide, with a special focus on the African

¹³ [Retour aux origines de la diaspora libanaise | lepetitjournal.com](http://lepetitjournal.com)

¹⁴ [La diaspora libanaise – Ministère libanais de l'Information \(ministryinfo.gov.lb\) https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/fr/810](https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/fr/810)

¹⁵ The authors are Paul Tabar and Wahib Maalouf from the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. The book's title is "Migration and the Formation of the Political Elite in Lebanon."

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/SAWTELARZ/photos/a.235986893910321/253896168786060>

continent aiming to convey the voice of the expatriates, their perspectives, problems, and concerns related to their homeland".¹⁷

There are numerous media outlets in the diaspora countries that have emerged from these communities and address their diverse needs. However, the transformation in media consumption and communication brought about by the internet has made it possible to connect with local media from anywhere in the world. Consequently, immigrants can continue following the national media they are accustomed to from their home country.

The internet has indeed played a significant role in facilitating the accessibility of Lebanese media for the diaspora. It enables individuals to stay connected with their homeland's news and developments regardless of their geographical location. This digital transformation has provided an opportunity for media outlets to reach a global audience, including the Lebanese diaspora, thereby enhancing the connection between the homeland and its expatriates.

D - Lebanese Media and the Diaspora: Which Product for Which Audience?

To what extent can the Lebanese diaspora support Lebanese media, and how can this community be transformed into a supporting force for the media in Lebanon?

Undoubtedly, the local Lebanese media can constitute a need for the Lebanese diaspora, as it is the best means to follow Lebanon's news. The Lebanese diaspora consists of diverse communities with various sectarian, regional, and political affiliations. Thus many immigrants have brought with them their familial and sectarian ties, as well as their regional customs. This implies that the local media, which is followed by a diverse audience within Lebanon, can also reach out to diaspora communities abroad, which also exhibit diversity and often function as an extension of local interests. This provides various media outlets with the opportunity to find followers in the global diaspora. Additionally, modern technologies enable targeted approaches to specific audiences, meeting their linguistic and cultural requirements and responding to the needs of different groups according to their expectations.

Therefore, it is possible for local media outlets to adopt a business model that relies on Lebanese diaspora communities after studying their expectations and needs. This approach ensures market integration as media outlets present content that aligns with the audience's demands, and the audience, in turn, seeks out media that meets their needs.

If support for local media dissemination is achieved, it would strengthen it by providing the necessary support for it to enrich its content and coverages and possibly enhance its decision-making freedom through increased independence regarding the advertising market and the political or partisan market that funds it.

¹⁷<https://www.diasporaon.com/read/1#:~:text=%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9%20diasporaOn%20%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9%20%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%20%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%89,%D8%8C%20%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%84%D9%87%D9%85%20%D9%88%D9%87%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%D8%8C%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%A9%20%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86>

However, this process cannot be isolated from engaging with expatriates, networking with them, and understanding their interests and expectations. The primary foundation for successful media is knowing the audience, allowing it to meet its audience's expectations and address them. Strengthening cultural exchange between Lebanon and the diaspora is also essential. As Roberto Khatlab points out¹⁸, "Lebanon does not invest in the Portuguese and Spanish languages, despite having the largest Lebanese communities abroad, in order to promote its culture and encourage tourism..." This statement emphasizes the need to build new relationships with the diaspora from various perspectives to establish continuous communication between the diaspora audience and Lebanese media.

Local media can easily communicate with the first generation of immigrants who left with the onset of the war in 1975 and through multiple waves of ongoing emigration, influenced by the ongoing repercussions of war and political and social crises in the homeland. This generation still speaks Arabic and remains constantly engaged with news from their homeland and families.

Therefore, it would be beneficial for local media to strive towards building a business model in this direction to ensure its continuity, independence, and growth.

E- New Business Models in the Field of Media

It is evident that the business model predominantly adopted by most Lebanese media outlets has failed, and these institutions can no longer sustain themselves through self-funding via their audience or advertising revenue. That is because the advertising market is weak and provides minimal income for these institutions. Thus, there is a need to search for a new business model that guarantees their continuity and shields them from the influences of forces that fund them.

Some media institutions have taken steps to develop new business models to enhance their financial continuity. Many have relied on online platforms to reach new audiences, open up new advertising markets, and establish subscription models in exchange for financial rewards, such as newspapers like Annahar and L'Orient-Le Jour. Others distribute their content across various social media platforms to generate external advertising revenue. Satellite TV stations have broadened their scope by using satellite broadcasting to reach diverse global audiences, aiming to attract subscriptions from the public and access new advertising markets.

While it is difficult to assess the success of these initiatives and the financial revenue earned by these institutions due to the lack of field studies and their reluctance to disclose their business practices, UNESCO issued a study a few months ago titled "After the pandemic,

¹⁸ Roberto Khatlab was born in Brazil to Lebanese parents. He is a researcher in the history of relations between Latin America and Lebanon and serves as the director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik. He has conducted studies on the diaspora, including the book "Les Libanais dans le monde, vision socio-culturelle et historique" published by Dar Saer al-Mashrek (Lebanon 2012). [Roberto Khatlab : "la diaspora est une grande richesse pour le Liban" \(agendaculturel.com\)](http://agendaculturel.com)

Building Back a Stronger Media"¹⁹ which reviews "innovative and promising projects from all over the world [...] and professional initiatives aimed at building a new business model that ensures the continuity of the media."

In its introduction, the study states: "Independent news media are facing an existential threat, but many are responding with proactive solutions to strengthen continuity so citizens continue to receive the credible news and information they need."

One of these proactive solutions that was highlighted is what L'Orient-Le Jour newspaper in Lebanon has undertaken.

i - L'Orient-Le Jour Newspaper Model:

UNESCO dedicated a chapter of its study to Lebanon titled "Lebanon: Making a Successful Transition from Print to Digital.", stating that "it is not just the big Western media that are making the successful switch from print to digital; even in hard-hit Lebanon, in the midst of an economic collapse, a media company thrives by understanding its audience and providing what it needs in new ways".

The study raises the question: "Is it possible for news media in Lebanon to be both financially sustainable and politically independent?"

The answer comes from L'Orient-Le Jour newspaper, which "believes so, and is charting a "third-way" between weakened independent media, and media that is strong financially but politically aligned – and doing so in a way that is worth noting elsewhere".

L'Orient-Le Jour's executive director, Michel Helou, is interviewed in the study about the company's digital transformation strategy, which successfully attracted readers and revenues. The newspaper envisions its future as a French-language media outlet expanding into English and eventually Arabic as well. L'Orient-Le Jour emphasizes its independence, refusing funding from foreign sources or affiliations with any Lebanese political parties, making it a crucial editorial foundation.

He explains that: "If we look at the media landscape in Lebanon, and probably the Middle East as well, there are two main components: one is the traditional media, traditional newspapers, that used to be independent, but have mostly collapsed, and have been very weakened by the economic situation and have not been able to find a business model. [...] On the other hand, you've got a category which is politically controlled but financially much stronger, much more powerful. [...]"

What we are trying to be is a third way between those, to be both financially sustainable and politically independent. So we don't belong to any political party, we don't get any funding from abroad, and we don't have ties or links to any political party in Lebanon. And I think this is absolutely key and is the base of our editorial proposition."

Helou adds that: "First, our goal was to find a proper business model in our traditional niche market, which is French, and be able to transition from print to online in the French language,

¹⁹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381743>

given we already have a strong position. But that was jeopardized by the huge change in business models and the digital revolution. And also, the readership shifted strongly abroad, so that we are now both a Lebanese newspaper and a diaspora newspaper in Lebanon and the Middle East. Our audience has changed massively.”

“Making that shift – and that was our main focus from 2014 to last year – relied on two major pillars: first improving the quality of our journalism, and second to monetize this journalism online, in order to reach viability. [...] Late 2019, we were experiencing a very strong subscription growth in French and there were many excellent journalists available on the market. So we had both conditions that were needed: a proper business model that worked and could be replicated, and a good potential team, absolutely key for success.”

“Our model is pretty simple and clear. Basically we used to rely on two pillars, like most newspapers, content and advertising. We saw both decreasing. Newsstand sales and subscriptions have been declining for the last 20 years. Advertising was very strong until 2012-2013 and then it declined sharply. We realized in 2014 that we couldn’t be sustainable in that way, so we followed what the Financial Times or the New York Times or what Le Monde were doing in the western world, which was monetizing their online content, not only by ads, because ads weren’t enough to support the newsroom, but by subscriptions and reader revenue.”

Michel Helou states: “What we did is, we put up a paywall in 2014, and that was a really positive move and showed us there was a willingness from readers to pay to get content online. At that time, a lot of people were still talking about news for free, which was a total illusion. It didn’t work at all, and now everyone is switching to subscription websites.[...] We’ve experienced much stronger growth. A very important milestone was 2020, when subscriptions accounted for more than 50 percent of our revenue. Coming from close to zero in 2014, it is a radical change.”

He adds: “Absolutely. That’s a key figure. In terms of general audience, For the French website, 80 percent of our audience is outside of Lebanon, 20 percent is within Lebanon, so that’s a huge shift versus the 1990s, when close to 100 percent of our (print) audience was inside of Lebanon. That’s for the free audience. For the paid audience, so we’re talking about subscribers and not just visitors, it is 50-50. So the Lebanese audience is slightly more loyal, more interested, and more willing to pay than the foreign audience. But still, 50 percent of our subscribers coming from abroad is a good figure.”

ii - Lila TV Model:

Among the new business models, we can mention Lila TV on the YouTube platform. This channel introduces itself as follows: "Lila TV is a YouTube channel for kids. Our goal is to spread children's songs and stories on the 'YouTube Kids' platform and the 'YouTube' platform and create high-quality educational videos for children that support them in learning our language and culture. Exclusively on 'Lila TV,' we publish the most famous Lebanese and

Arabic songs, such as 'Alif Baa Baa,' 'Hal Sissane Shou Helween,' 'Ghassil Wajjak Ya Qamar,' 'Ammi Bu Massoud,' and many others. We also share YouTube content dedicated to children, such as our original educational songs, bedtime stories, drawing lessons for kids, and more."²⁰

They proudly announced reaching one million subscribers after three years of launching, confirming their remarkable success. This network was launched by Maya Zankoul and her husband, Tony Yammine, and targets children in Arab countries.²¹

iii- "Cooperative Solidarity" Model:

Some propose adopting successful models from abroad, such as the "Cooperative Media"²² model, based on partnerships between journalists and readers in an attempt to address part of the funding problem. However, questions arise about whether this can lead to the "liberation" of editorial policies from the control of traditional funders, including political parties and advertisers.

Alice Kfoury, an advisor in development economics at "The Solidarity Directory," believes that "The economic model that we were accustomed to in Lebanon has collapsed, and today we have the opportunity to build a society based on new values, notably justice, democracy, and solidarity. Establishing cooperatives and solidarity institutions is one of the first means to build this new model." Especially since this experiment allows "cooperative members to contribute to all decisions and own capital fairly and democratically" through "financial contribution for one vote only when making decisions (regardless of their level of contribution)."

Regarding whether media cooperatives between journalists and readers can be a solution to the dilemma of many Lebanese media institutions being dependent on funding from politicians, parties, and bankers responsible for the collapse, Kfoury explains that "the economic crisis has shown the critical role of the media in shedding light on financial problems and their causes. Thus, these means have a social and economic role, as their media materials reach millions. However, instead of helping people become aware of their rights so that they demand them, the scarcity of funding pushes them to accept conditional money from political entities that impose political stances on them or prevent them from covering certain events according to their agendas."

She adds that "In contrast, in media cooperatives owned by readers and viewers, coverage starts with those affected by policies. The journalist understands the stories of the affected

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/@LilaTV/about>

²¹ Lila TV, pour reconnecter les petits Libanais de la diaspora avec leur culture d'origine - OLJ / Par Colette KHALAF, le 01 avril 2023 à 00h00

²² "Media cooperatives"... a solution to the funding crisis of the Lebanese press? <https://www.innlebanon.com/news/article/976273/>

individuals firsthand and directly, then questions officials and politicians, avoiding relying on statements from those with influence or those with interest in lying. This approach aims to reveal the truth and amplify the voices of marginalized communities. In other words, media cooperatives prioritize the rights and interests of people, playing a role in societal education and advocating for the issues of those harmed by systems.”

Regarding the chances of success in Lebanon, Kfoury points out that “cooperative solidarity models provide education and training to members, enabling them to actively contribute to their development”. Regarding the possibility of transferring the experience of media cooperatives between journalists and readers to Lebanon, Sanaa Sayegh, the project coordinator at 'Guide for Solidarity,' explains that the team is already working on establishing a media cooperative after having contributed to the establishment of solidarity cooperatives such as 'Sa'ed' and 'Life'."²³

The cooperative business model was the subject of an investigative study conducted with Lebanese journalists and journalism students to understand their perception and level of responsiveness to the project. Also, to understand how this model could be implemented by media professionals in Lebanon. The "exploratory study" concluded that “this model is still unclear in Lebanon and generates little interest among the relevant audience”.

II- Field Study: Which media for which audience?

How can we translate reliance on the Lebanese diaspora as a business model for internal Lebanese media outlets?

The study of L'Orient-Le Jour and Lila TV suggests that the audience, both in Lebanon and mostly among the Lebanese diaspora, is willing to contribute to financing media outlets if they are assured of their neutrality, credibility, and dedication to serving their interests through their actions. In other words, media institutions are expected to provide a service to the public that meets their expectations.

Based on these conclusions, it is essential to know the expectations of the Lebanese diaspora audience, in order to understand their expectations from the media in addition to the media services they are willing to buy and the price they can afford to pay.

²³ The project presented experiences of four successful media cooperatives from abroad, along with their principles, challenges, and the possibility of implementation in Lebanon. The session featured four speakers representing the following media cooperatives: Connie Gellink, a board member of the German cooperative "Taz," Billy Briggs, the co-founder of "The Ferret," the first cooperative media platform in Scotland dedicated to public interest journalism, Drew Oja Jay, the publisher of "The Breach," a Canadian media cooperative, and Camille Rousseau, the marketing manager of "Woz," the largest media cooperative in Switzerland. The discussion focused on the characteristics of the four media cooperative experiences, including their funding, relationship with readers, continuity, independence, financial model, and democratic decision-making. These institutions shared a commitment to achieving "independent journalism" both editorially and financially, ensuring continuity through the development of their media products based on the needs of their readers.

Furthermore, regarding Lebanese media institutions that can be accessible abroad, establishing a business model that interacts with the Lebanese diaspora requires first understanding this audience and then actively engaging with them to meet their needs. Conducting interviews with these institutions allows for a better understanding of the diaspora's level of access to their content, editorial materials, or programs that attract wider interest from this community.

For this reason, the field study relies on conducting two questionnaires: the first one targeting the audience of the Lebanese diaspora, and the second one focusing on the managers of Lebanese media outlets.

A- Questionnaire for the Lebanese diaspora

Considering that the objective of this study is to understand the consumption behavior and expectations of the Lebanese diaspora regarding Lebanese media outlets. A questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 70 individuals from this audience, approximately equally divided between males and females, representing the first-generation immigrants who are Arabic speakers.²⁴ They are distributed across the five continents, with a particular focus on countries with significant expatriate activities, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Australia, the United States, Canada, Brazil, and others.

- Public Opinion Survey Questions:

- How interested is the diaspora in news from Lebanon?
- Through which media outlets do you follow Lebanese news?
- Which media platform best responds to the needs of expatriates (TV, radio, newspapers, news websites, etc.)?
- What do you expect from a Lebanese media institution?
- What do you like and dislike about these media institutions?
- To what extent do you consider the news you receive from these media institutions credible?
- Do you have any other sources for news about Lebanon? If so, what are they?
- What is the average amount you would be willing to pay monthly for a media institution you trust for its news coverage?

²⁴ The first-generation immigrants: Expatriates who migrated to different countries around the world and speak the Arabic language.

The results of the survey of the Lebanese diaspora:

The first question dealt with the extent of these people's interest in Lebanese news, to determine their motives and the extent of their need for media outlets to keep up with Lebanon news. The level of interest is based on a scale of 1 to 5.

- 53% of respondents showed a high level of interest (scored 4 or 5) in following news from Lebanon.
- 21% expressed a low level of interest (scored 1 or 2) in news from Lebanon.
- 26% indicated a moderate level of interest (scored 3) in news from Lebanon.

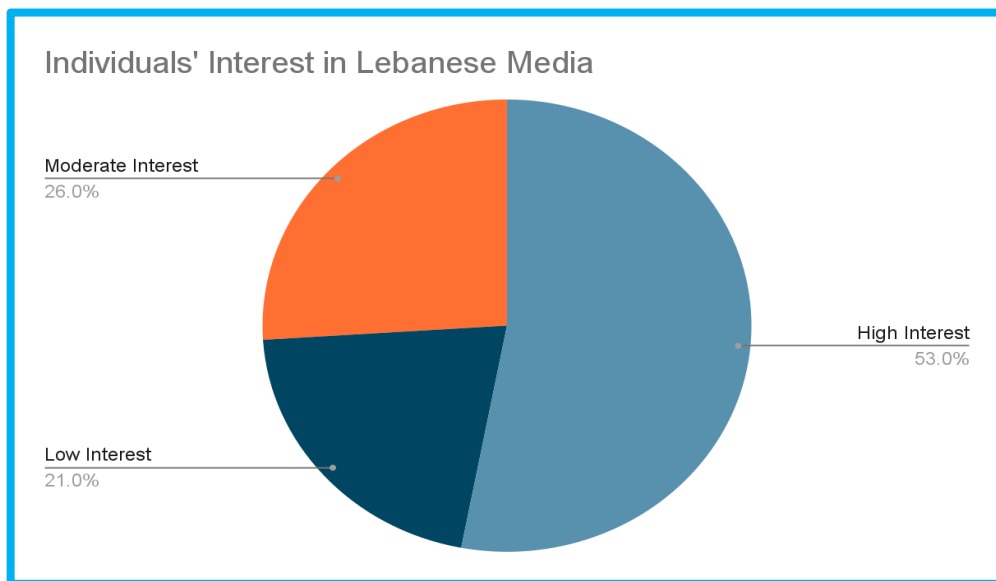


Chart No. (1)

In response to the question about the means by which they follow the news of Lebanon, the answers were as follows (multiple answers):

Social media: 51%. TV channels: 39%. News platforms and media websites: 20%. Family and WhatsApp groups: 9%. Various local and international media: 6%. Radio: 3%. No answer: 4%.

Means used to follow up on Lebanese news

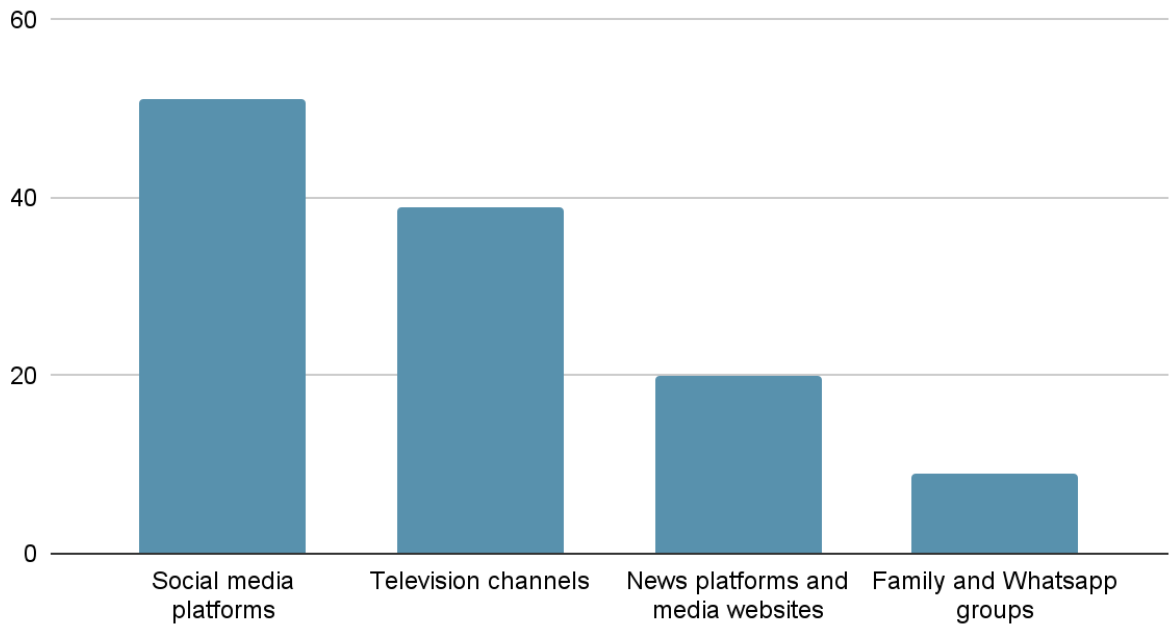


Chart No. (2)

- In response to the question: Which media outlet do you think best responds to the needs of expatriates? The answers came as follows (multiple answers): News platforms: 46%. Television: 25%. Social media: 23%. Other answers: 6%.

Which media outlet do you think best responds to the needs of expatriates?

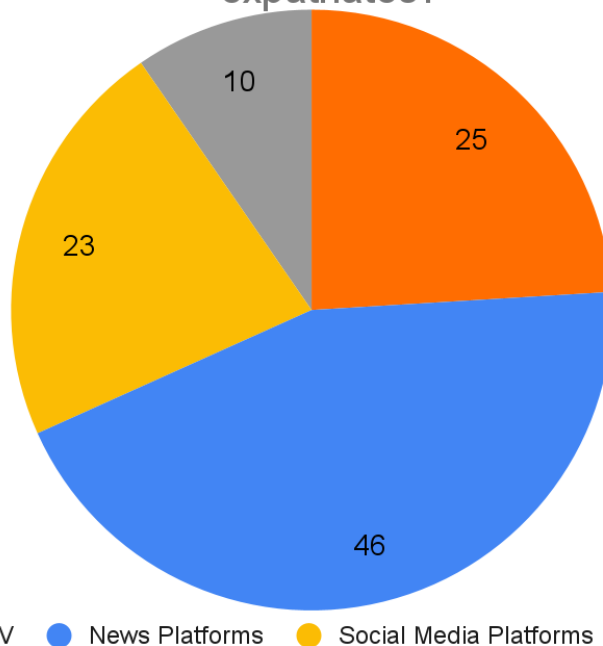


Chart No. (3)

What do you expect from a Lebanese media institution?

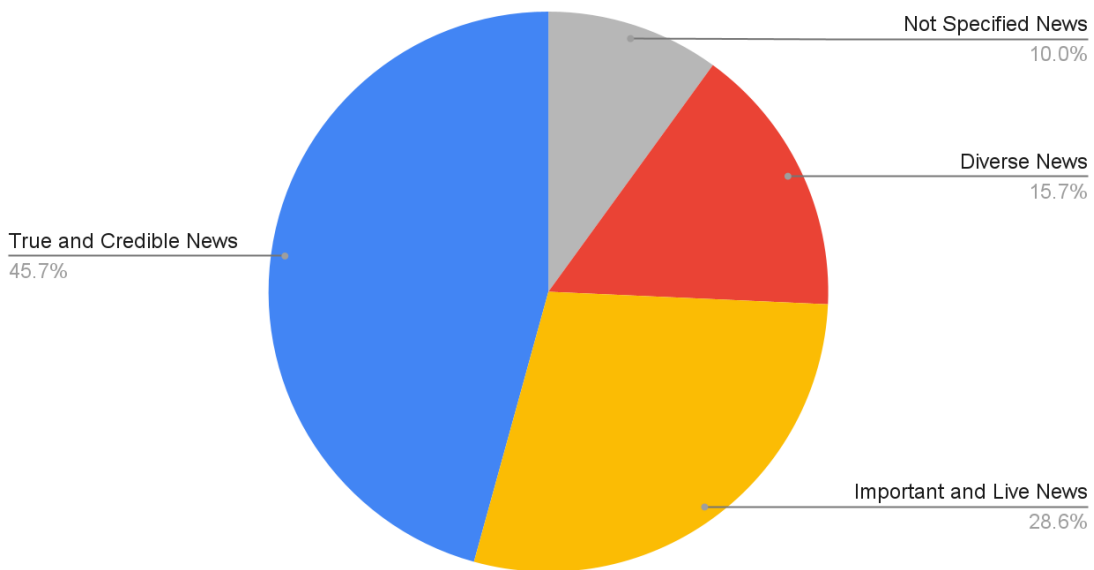


Chart No. (4)

- In response to the question: What do you like about these media and what bothers you about them? The answers highlighted three points that the sample rejected: 34% mentioned oriented news, 26% highlighted the affiliation of media institutions i.e. lack of impartiality and 14% mentioned the presence of exaggerated and trivial news.

What bothers the sample in the news provided by the media?

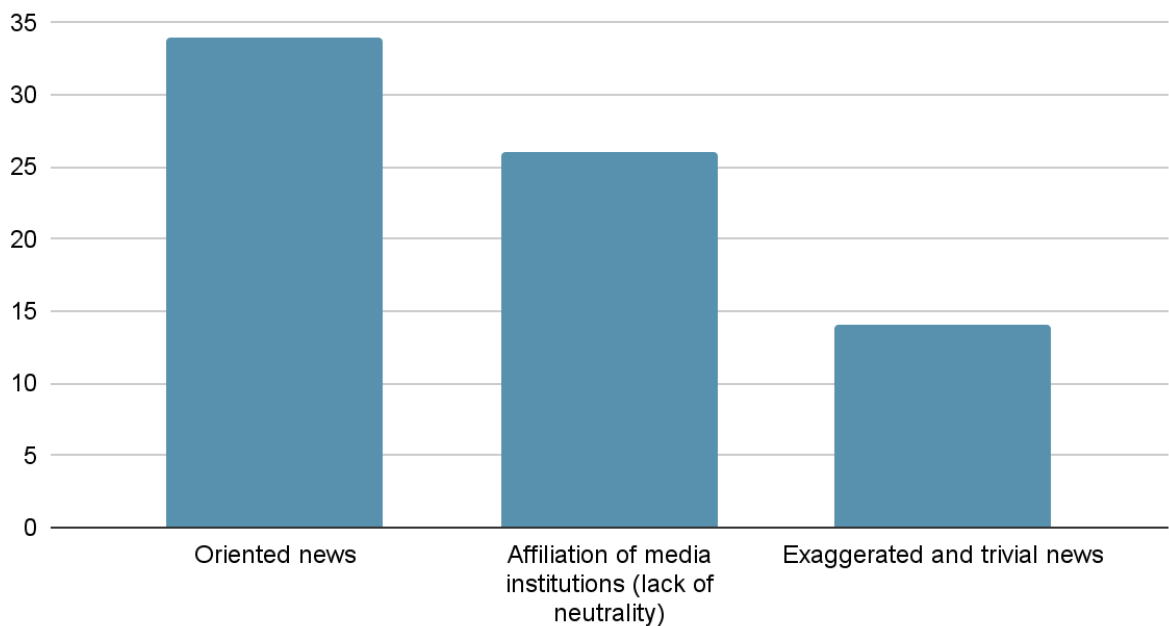


Chart No. (5)

As for the positive points: 24% ease of access to news. Local news follow up: 16%. Diverse and useful news: 4%.

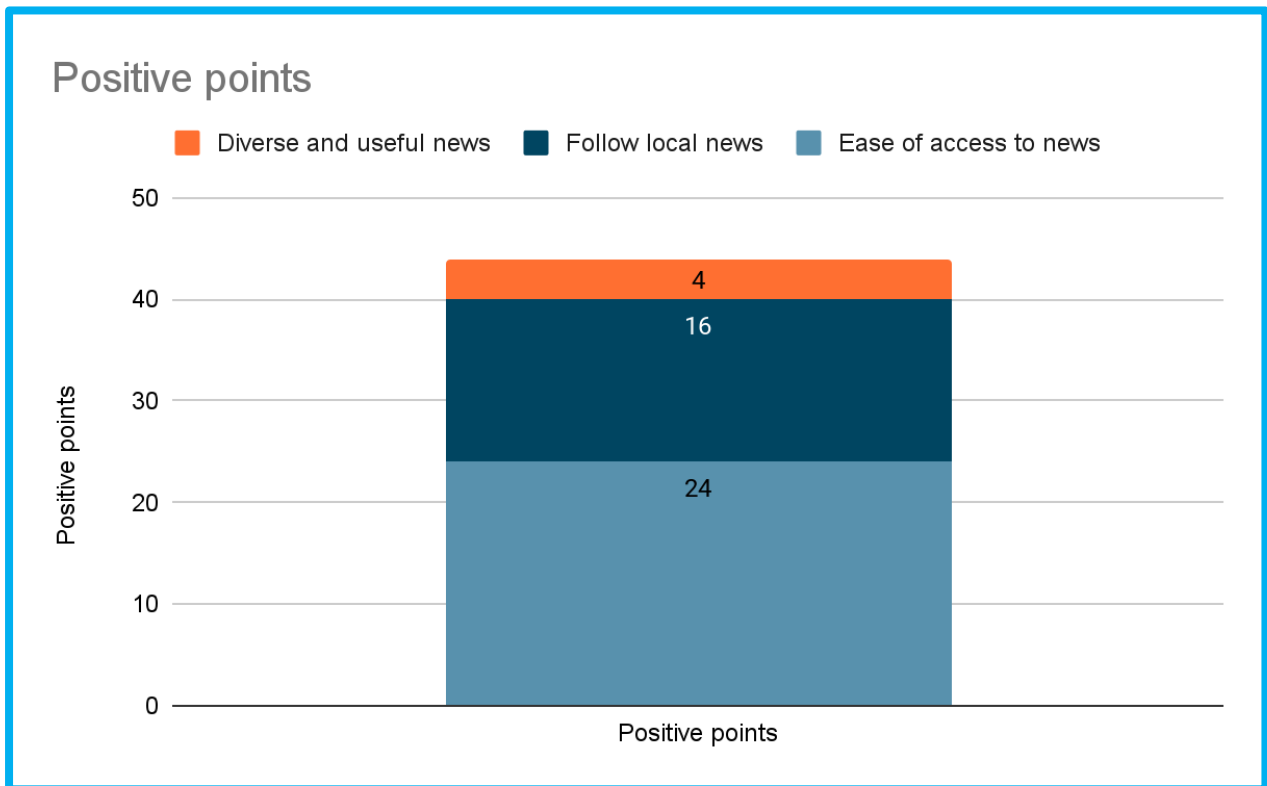


Chart No. (6)

3% wished for more human rights news. While 11% did not give an answer or the answer was not clear.

- When asked about the level of credibility placed in the news of Lebanese media institutions, the responses were evenly split, with 23% considering them credible, and another 23% considering them not credible. However, 54% of the responses fell in the middle, indicating moderate credibility.

The credibility given to the news of the Lebanese media institutions

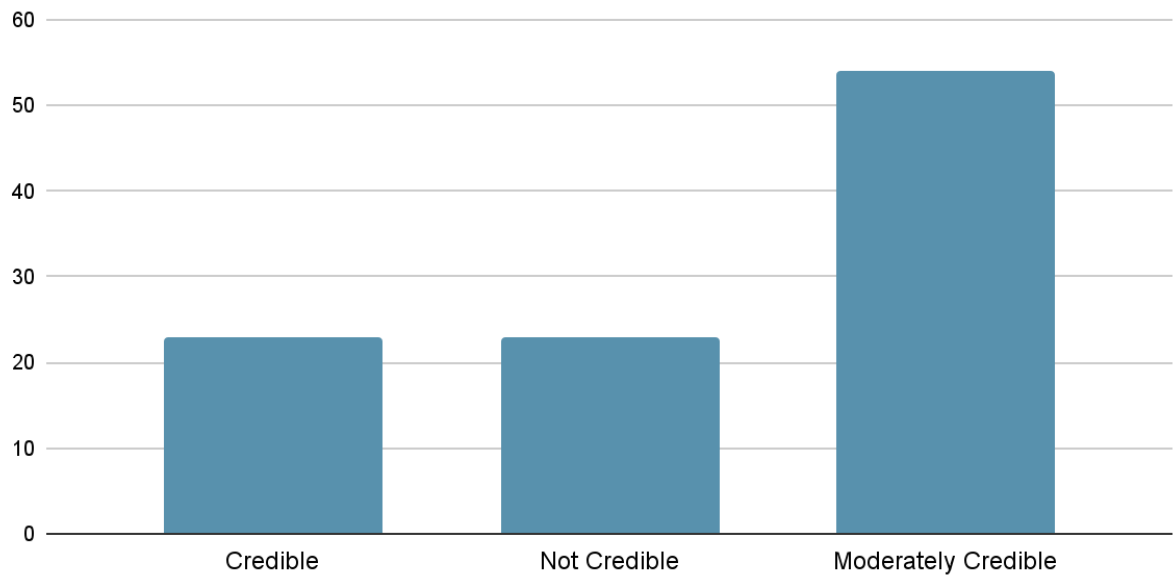


Chart No. (7)

- In response to the question, "Do you have another source for news about Lebanon?" The answers were as follows: 63% replied "No," while 37% answered "Yes." As for those who answered yes, they specified their other news sources as follows: 16% through personal communication, 14% via social media, and 3% from other sources.

Do you have other sources for Lebanese news?

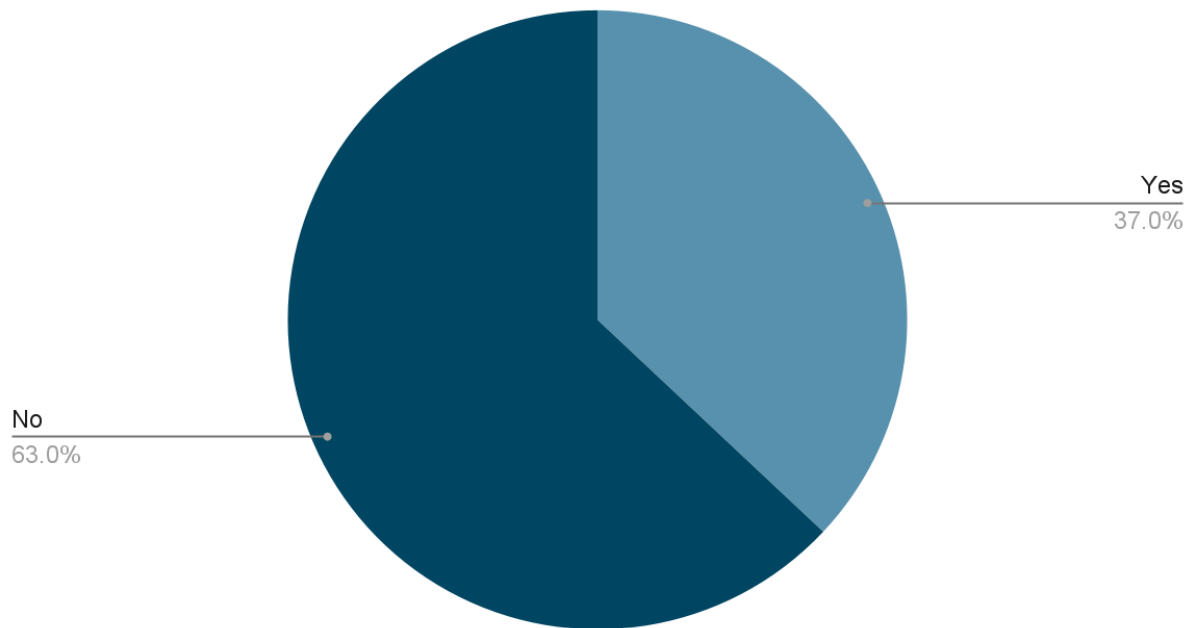


Chart No. (8)

• What is the price that you can pay monthly for a media institution whose news you trust?

81% answered between \$1 and \$10 per month, 10% answered between 10 and 50 dollars a month, and 9% answered more than \$50 per month.

Average subscription or financial support that may be paid monthly to media institutions

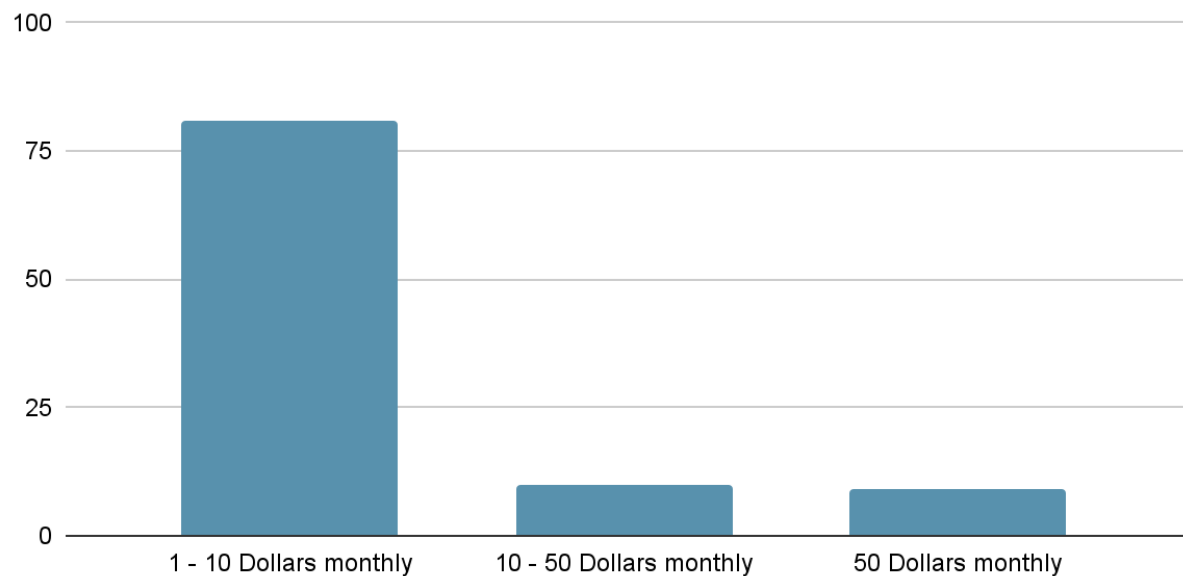


Chart No. (9)

B- Results of the Questionnaire for Lebanese Media Institutions Accessible Abroad

Concerning the Lebanese media institutions accessible abroad, building a business model based on the interaction with the Lebanese diaspora necessitates understanding this audience first and then actively engaging with it in order to meet its needs. Conducting interviews with these institutions allows for a better understanding of the diaspora's level of access to their content, editorial materials, or programs that attract wider interest from this community.

The questionnaire aimed at these media institutions encompassed eight of them, covering various platforms, namely:

1. The website of the radio Voice of Lebanon.
2. The website of Al Jadeed TV channel.
3. The website of Annahar newspaper.
4. Three news platforms: Naqd, Megaphone, and Daraj.

The survey attempted, through a set of questions directed at the managers of these media platforms, to understand the communication established between these platforms and their wide audience in general, and specifically with the Lebanese diaspora audience. This was done in order to identify the audience of these platforms and explore the consumer market that can support a business model for these media outlets.

- Media Institutions Questionnaire:

- What is the size of their audience for their news on their publicly accessible digital platforms worldwide?
- How is their audience distributed across different countries and what is the proportion of local versus international followers?
- Audience demographics: Age, professional level, and cultural background.
- Audience interests: Which pages and topics (or programs) are the most followed?
- Loyalty of the audience to the media institution (weekly or monthly visitation rate).
- Percentage of financial returns coming from outside Lebanon, and are there sources of revenue other than advertisements?
- Percentage of their revenues generated from advertisements on global platforms.
- Willingness to change their editorial and programming policies to attract the Lebanese diaspora abroad.

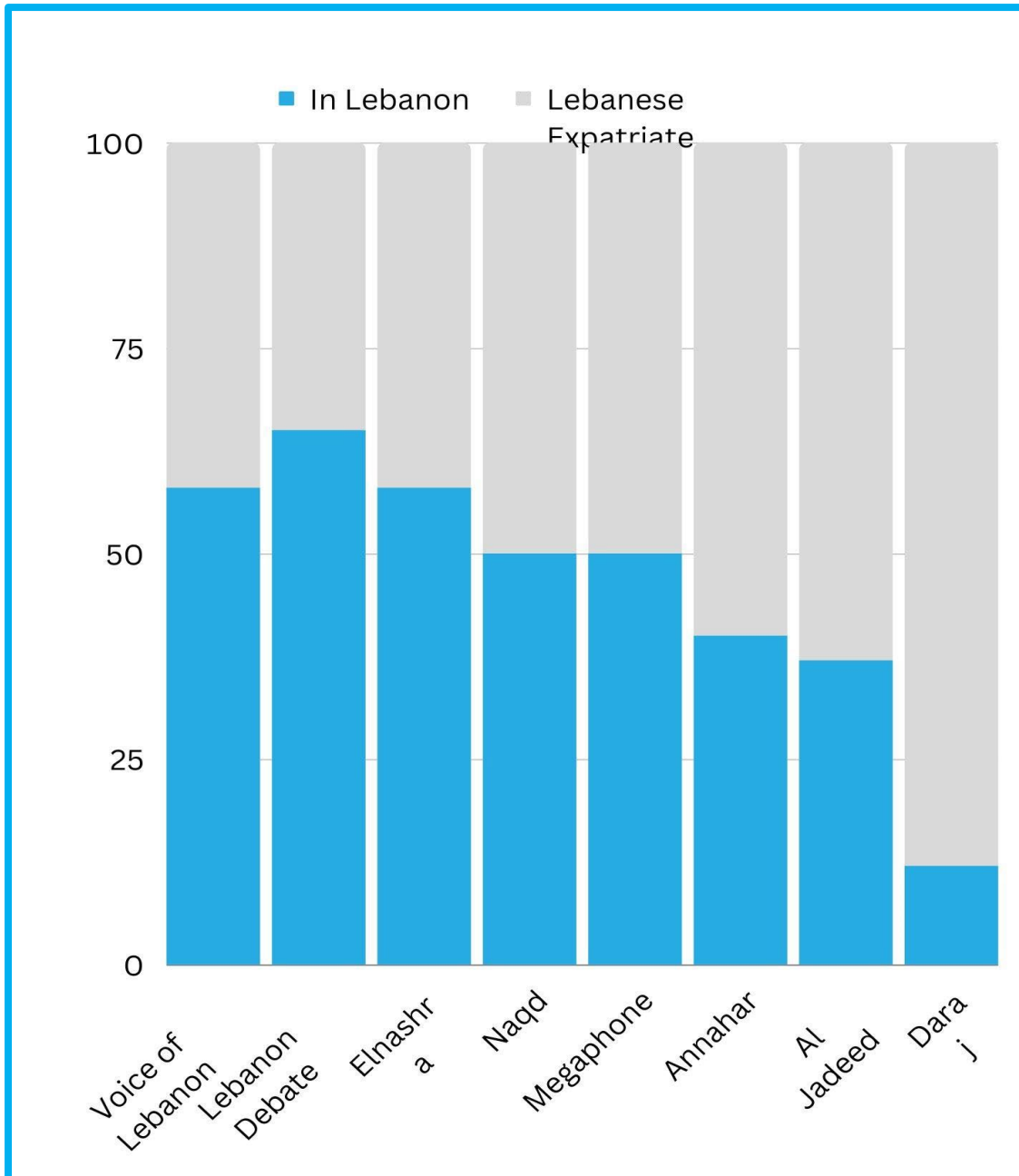
The responses from the media institutions to these questions were not complete, with some questions remaining unanswered. Furthermore, none of these institutions provided specific numbers regarding their revenues, whether from advertising, subscriptions, or production. Some answers were general or imprecise.

From the responses to this questionnaire, the following key conclusions can be drawn.

* The audience of these media outlets is distributed differently between Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora, with varying percentages of followers from each group as follows:

- Voice of Lebanon: 58% of followers from inside Lebanon.
- Lebanon Debate: 65% of followers from inside Lebanon.
- El-Nashra: 58% of followers from inside Lebanon.
- The audiences of Naqd and Megaphone platforms are equally divided between Lebanon and abroad.
- For Annahar and Al Jadeed, 40% and 37% of their audience, respectively, are from inside Lebanon, indicating that their audience abroad is more significant.
- Only Daraj website had 12% of its audience from Lebanon, while 11% from Egypt and 10% from the United States.

The high percentage of followers from abroad can be attributed to the fact that its content extends beyond local news, encompassing most of the Arab world.



- The numbers of followers of these media were reported by their managers as follows:
 - Voice of Lebanon website: 18 thousand.
 - Megaphone (their followers on all platforms): 360 thousand.
 - Lebanese Debate (site followers): 250 thousand.
 - Al-Jadeed TV website: 424 thousand.
 - Annahar site: one and a half million users per month.

•The mentioned media institutions did not provide specific financial figures regarding their revenues. They stated that their services are not paid, and there are no subscription fees. Both Megaphone and Naqda mentioned that they generate some revenues through

collaborations with institutions or organizations. Only Lebanon Debate mentioned that they have limited advertising revenues without providing a specific number. As for Voice of Lebanon, they mentioned that they have some revenues from Google Ads, but the advertising revenues are very limited, again without giving any specific figures.

- The majority of these media institutions mentioned that their audience is diverse, with a significant portion consisting of activists (aged 18-55 years old). Naqd specified their audience as being between 18-30 years old, while Megaphone's audience is predominantly under 34 years old. As for Al Jadeed, they identified their audience as falling between the ages of 30-40 years old.
- Regarding the interests of their audience, they are varied, but news remains the most prominent topic.
- Naqd and Megaphone provided numbers on the distribution of their audience across various social media platforms, being active on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, in addition to their primary website.
- When asked about their willingness to change their editorial and program policies to attract the Lebanese diaspora, the majority of these media institutions expressed flexibility, but they also emphasized the importance of preserving their editorial stance.

Based on these answers, we can deduce the following:

- There is a strong follow-up of local media outlets by the Lebanese diaspora worldwide. It seems that the Lebanese diaspora heavily relies on these media institutions to stay updated with news from their home country.
- These media outlets do not have a business model to benefit from their expatriate audience.
- The most engaged audience consists of active individuals (aged 18-60), which generally includes people who are financially capable of paying for subscriptions to these media institutions.
- The majority of these media outlets are willing to adapt their content to respond to the needs of the Lebanese diaspora abroad.

Conclusions and Takeaways

The experiences of L'Orient-Le Jour and Lila TV demonstrate the possibility of adopting different and successful business models for media outlets in Lebanon and the Arab world. Lila TV's audience consists of Arab children, while L'Orient-Le Jour's audience is distributed across Lebanon and abroad. What is noteworthy, as stated by Michel Helou, the Executive Director of L'Orient-Le Jour, is that 50% of the audience funding the newspaper through their subscription is local within Lebanon, while 80% of the free subscription is from abroad.

Michel Helou justified the success of the business model adopted by the newspaper with several elements, the most important of which are three:

- The independence of the institution and of its editorial line.
- The quality of the material provided by the newspaper.
- Distinguished work team.

Thus the Lebanese audience, similar to others, is willing to pay for the news content they desire, provided it meets the required standards and is known to be accurate and independent of political affiliations and diverse marketing tactics. This applies to global experiences, such as the newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique*, which relies primarily on readers' funding, including free donations whenever there is a deficit. In an article titled "Free Information Doesn't Exist,"²⁵ The newspaper explains that free access to its content is made possible because its subscribers fund its content and all the professional work involved in gathering news, verifying information, publishing texts, and fact-checking, with advertising revenues contributing only about 1% of its overall business volume.

This is also the case for the *Mediapart* website in France, which is distinguished by its serious and investigative journalism, with the motto "We only survive through our readers' subscriptions." It is evident that someone has to bear the cost of this type of journalism, and when it is funded by donors or advertisers, the readers become the target audience through the content.

The field study responses with the Lebanese diaspora indicate a pressing need for media outlets through which they can follow news about Lebanon. The majority of the respondents expressed their interest in following news about their homeland, considering it to be of utmost importance in their media consumption. However, they also voiced their rejection of biased or exaggerated news. Instead, they seek reliable and credible information and are willing to pay for such a service.

The numbers provided by the website administrators reveal a significant number of followers, ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, with some exceeding one million. Additionally, the majority of their audience consists of active individuals capable of paying for media services. Thus, it appears essential to explore how to capitalize on the large audience of these media establishments, both among residents and immigrants, similar to what *L'Orient-Le Jour* has done. Consequently, it is necessary to develop mechanisms to harness the potential of this substantial audience.

However, the desire of the Lebanese diaspora audience is to have independent media free from political affiliations and political propaganda. This implies that local media should liberate themselves from political ties and adopt an independent editorial stance that ensures credibility. This would require media outlets to abandon their role as propagandists serving the political authority and political parties, and transitioning into serving the national interest and their audience.

²⁵ **L'information gratuite n'existe pas**" SERGE HALIMI, 13 OCTOBRE 2010

All views expressed in this study are those of the author and do not reflect the views of Deutsche Welle.