

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36719/2706-6185/57/61-65>

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## **The Western Sahara Issue in Algerian Online Media: A Digital Study of a Sample of Publications From the Algeria 360 Website**

### **Abstract**

This study aims to highlight the media coverage of the Western Sahara issue and Morocco on the Algeria360 website, considered one of the most prominent news sites in Algeria according to the statistics website Alexa. It also seeks to reveal the nature of this media treatment in terms of both form and content.

Due to the unique online nature of the Algeria360 website, the study employs digital content analysis. This involves extracting analytical units and categories related to the study's primary variable, ensuring consistency between form and content and treatment methods. The study utilizes the NVivo software for quantitative and qualitative analysis of these categories and units to delve deeper into the subject matter.

The study attempts to draw practical scientific conclusions primarily concerning the most frequently repeated topics related to the Western Sahara issue, the media objectives surrounding the topic, and the values inherent in the issue. It highlights the digital media approach this website uses to address the various small and large-scale actors involved in shaping the Western Sahara issue.

**Keywords:** *Western Sahara, electronic media, Algeria360, NVivo12 Software*

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## **Əlcəzair onlayn mediasında Qərbi Sahara məsələsi: Əlcəzair 360 veb saytından nəşr nümunələrinin rəqəmsal tədqiqi**

### **Xülasə**

Bu tədqiqat, Alexa statistika saytına görə Əlcəzairin ən görkəmli xəbər saytlarından biri hesab edilən Algeria360 veb saytında Qərbi Sahara məsələsi və Mərakeşin mediada işıqlandırılmasını vurğulamağı hədəfləyir. Həmçinin, bu media işlənməsinin həm forma, həm də məzmun baxımından təbiətini ortaya qoymağa çalışır.

Algeria360 veb saytının unikal onlayn təbiətinə görə, tədqiqat rəqəmsal məzmun təhlilindən istifadə edir. Bu, tədqiqatın əsas dəyişəninə aid analitik vahidləri və kateqoriyaları çıxarmağı, forma və məzmunla işlənmə metodları arasında uyğunluğu təmin etməyi əhatə edir. Tədqiqat, mövzunu daha dərinəndən araşdırmaq üçün bu kateqoriyaların və vahidlərin kəmiyyət və keyfiyyət təhlili üçün NVivo proqram təminatından istifadə edir.

Tədqiqat, əsasən Qərbi Sahara məsələsi ilə bağlı ən çox təkrarlanan mövzular, mövzunu əhatə edən media məqsədləri və məsələyə xas dəyərlər ilə bağlı praktik elmi nəticələr çıxarmağa çalışır. Bu, veb saytın Qərbi Sahara məsələsinin formalaşmasında iştirak edən müxtəlif kiçik və böyük miqyaslı aktyorları həll etmək üçün istifadə etdiyi rəqəmsal media yanaşmasını vurğulayır.

**Açar sözlər:** *Qərbi Sahara, elektron media, Əlcəzair 360, NVivo 12 proqram təminatı*

## Introduction

Algerian diplomacy is based on a set of principles and foundations, the most significant of which are neutrality and non-interference in other nations' affairs, promoting cooperation among neighboring countries in particular, resolving conflicts peacefully, and supporting peoples' right to self-determination and freedom from colonial rule (Boussadia, 2016, p. 154).

Media coverage of regional and political conflicts, particularly those with complex dimensions such as the Western Sahara issue, is a vital mechanism for understanding how public discourse is formed and transformed in the digital sphere and its impact on public perception and social representations related to these issues. From this perspective, a study examining media coverage of the Western Sahara issue, specifically through the Algeria360 website, is of significant epistemological and practical importance, given the continuous evolution of the digital media landscape and the growing role of online news platforms in shaping and directing public opinion. This interest is evident in the study's attempt to uncover the nature of the media content presented by Algeria360, one of the most prominent news websites in Algeria according to the Alexa ranking, in terms of both its stylistic form and substantive content.

### Research

The importance of this research lies in its contribution to analyzing how digital media is employed to represent a complex issue like the Western Sahara through content analysis tools and techniques. Furthermore, it interprets the functions and values inherent in this media coverage, reflecting multiple dimensions that include media and political objectives, as well as the resulting societal impacts. The study's central problem lies in its attempt to clarify the role of digital media, specifically the Algeria360 website, in shaping a comprehensive and balanced or biased discourse on the Western Sahara issue. It examines whether this media discourse serves specific agendas or reflects national and regional orientations and what narrative and rhetorical mechanisms are employed to achieve these objectives.

The problem revolves around the following key questions: How does the Algeria360 website reflect the Western Sahara issue within the context of digital media? What is the nature of the balance or bias in the published content? How are media and political values integrated into the formation of the digital discourse related to this issue? Furthermore, this overarching question leads to a deeper analysis of the content's micro and macro components and how media treatment methods influence public understanding and reinforce specific attitudes toward the issue.

In light of this problem, the study adopts a methodology for analyzing digital content using NVivo software, which provides precise quantitative and qualitative analysis tools. This enhances the possibility of extrapolating the semantic and structural contexts of the news content and allows for an examination of the consistency between media form and objective content. In this way, the study sheds light on the scientific findings that highlight the dimensions of media coverage of the Western Sahara issue in the Algerian context, which contributes to deepening the theoretical and applied understanding of the roles of digital media in regional political conflicts.

### Concepts of the study:

#### Political crises:

It represents a critical stage or turning point in the course of something, especially in a series of events or an illness. It is an unstable period, particularly a time of severe distress or danger in politics, economics, and so on (collins dictionary, 2025).

#### Digital space:

The term refers to what is displayed on the screen of a digital device (such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones). What can be displayed in digital spaces is vast and diverse, and it can take countless forms, occupying the main screen of the device, applications, movies, images, and websites, all of which constitute digital space (igi-global, 2025).

#### NVivo 12

NVivo software was used for qualitative data analysis. The software enables thematic coding of textual data, allowing researchers to identify patterns and trends within large datasets (Limna, 2023).



The word “normalization” is the most significant, as it is used in Algerian media and political discourse to describe international agreements that recognize Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara, especially by the United States and Israel. This indicates that the discourse is attempting to diplomatically isolate Morocco by portraying these steps as a violation of international law and a reward for “authoritarian” behavior.

Linking to American Policies: Paradigm Shift and New Strategy

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The analysis of Algerian discourse cannot be understood in isolation from the dramatic shift in American policy in recent years.

Historical policy: The United States, like the broader international community, has always supported the United Nations process on the settlement plan (MINURSO) and the negotiated solution leading to a politically acceptable resolution for both parties. The official stance called for “autonomy” under Moroccan sovereignty as a realistic solution, but it insisted on the necessity of negotiation.

Radical shift: Trump's recognition and the trilateral agreements: In December 2020, President Donald Trump officially recognized Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara in a deal that also included the normalization of relations between Morocco and Israel. This decision turned the tables on the traditional diplomatic stance and gave Morocco a huge political and legal boost. The Biden administration continued to act on this decision despite some hesitation.

The Algerian reaction in the discourse: The words extracted from the NVivo analysis directly reflect the Algerian reaction to this new American policy. Describing American decisions as “authoritarian” and “normalization” is an attempt to dismantle their legitimacy. It shifts the discussion from being a territorial dispute to being an ideological battle between “international legitimacy” (as presented by Algeria) and “facts imposed by force and normalization” (as depicted by the US-Moroccan policy).

## Conclusion

The findings of NVIVO's analysis of the “Algeria 360” website constitute a paradigmatic model of framing media discourse, which not only reports the news but actively constructs social reality and shapes public perceptions of the Western Sahara issue.

Leaving this issue as it is, without seeking to legitimize the decision of the Sahrawi people to determine their own destiny and helping them regain their sovereignty over their land, will create further tensions and greater crises in terms of the instability of the region and the outbreak of further wars that will destroy what remains of the people of Western Sahara who are demanding their rights (Bouakkaz & Menaceur, 2024, pp. 473–474).

### **Frames of Representation and the Discourse of Politicization:**

Key terms such as “Moroccan assimilation” and “authoritarian decisions” reveal a discursive strategy that frames the conflict within a “victim/perpetrator” dichotomy. The term “assimilation” not only describes a political event but also imbues it with negative cultural and nationalistic connotations, portraying the integration process as a deliberate erasure of identity. This framework lends moral legitimacy to the Algerian position and delegitimizes the Moroccan position by depicting it as a neo-colonial assimilationist power.

A study at the University of Ouargla indicated that Algeria, through its coverage of the Western Sahara issue, seeks a lasting peace between the two parties to achieve African unity and end colonialism on the continent without the interference of any foreign parties that do not belong to the Black continent (Benferhat & Gendour, 2022).

### **The Use of the Concept of “Normalization” as a Tool of Criminalization:**

The concept of normalization emerges as the cornerstone of this discourse. The website doesn't use it in the narrow diplomatic sense but rather transforms it into a tool for political and moral criminalization. “Normalization” here refers to all forms of international recognition of Moroccan sovereignty, particularly American and Israeli recognition, and is portrayed as “abandoning

international legitimacy” and “rewarding the occupation.” This mechanism allows the website to shift the debate from the legal merits of the issue to an arena of ideological conflict, where those who support Morocco become “normalizers” with an illegitimate policy.

### **Identity Construction and Self-Affirmation:**

In response to this negative framing of the other, the discourse constructs a counter-identity. Terms like “prosperity,” “questioning and reflection,” and “declaration” present the Algerian narrative and its supporters as guardians of international legitimacy and rational logic, in contrast to Moroccan “authoritarianism.” This binary construction reproduces the image of Algeria as a “state of principle” that stands against power politics, thus reinforcing the official discourse and unifying domestic public opinion around a single narrative. Analysis of the website's output reveals that “Algeria 360” does not act as a neutral conduit but rather as an actor in meaning-making. Through mechanisms of framing, criminalization, and identity construction, the discourse seeks to reinforce the official Algerian narrative, counter the growing international legitimacy of the Moroccan position, and manage public perceptions in a fierce battle for legitimacy that is no less important than the political battle on the ground. This makes the website a platform for managing public opinion rather than a source of neutral information.

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Received: 06.05.2025

Accepted: 23.11.2025