Media and Neighborhood Gangs in Urban Society: What's the Connection? A Descriptive Study on the Role of Media and its Relationship with the Spread of Neighborhood Gangs in AlgerianUrban Society

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Abstract:

Recently, a topic of burgeoning interest has emerged in research circles: the intricate relationship between media influence and the proliferation of neighborhood gangs. This area of inquiry, gaining prominence due to the escalating number of studies on neighborhood gangs — which have seen a marked increase in many sectors of Algerian society — has experienced a significant surge, engendering fear, panic, and social instability. Scholars have linked these phenomena to a confluence of psychological, social, economic, and media-related factors. The latter, in particular, have garnered considerable attention, underscoring the need to evaluate both their positive and negative ramifications, especially their impact on Algerian urban youth. This demographic is deemed most susceptible to the hazards of social maladies, as substantiated by a plethora of studies and research.

The present study endeavors to illuminate the pivotal role of media, across its diverse platforms, in mitigating the expansion of neighborhood gangs and its consequent effects on Algerian youth. It undertakes an analysis from two distinct vantage points:

-   The media's influence in facilitating the spread of neighborhood gangs within Algerian society.

-The media's potential in countering the emergence and growth of neighborhood gangs in Algerian society

Keywords: Media, Urban Society, Neighborhood Gangs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent times have witnessed an intensified focus on the issue of 'neighborhood gangs in urban society,' encompassing their suppression and prevention. This heightened attention in Algeria stems from the state's concerted efforts to limit the proliferation of these gangs, as epitomized by the promulgation of Order No. 20/03 on August 20, 2023. This legislative measure delineates the definition of these gangs, their various manifestations, and the stipulated penalties for associated offenses. Accompanying this phenomenon is a notable rise in behaviors that undermine the stability and security of the Algerian state, including but not limited to mobile phone thefts, physical and verbal assaults, and threats involving bladed weapons. These issues form the crux of the study at

hand.

Recognizing the instrumental role media can play in bolstering the Algerian state's endeavors against neighborhood gangs and assorted forms of deviance and criminality, there has been an increasing reliance on media channels. The media's role transcends mere information dissemination about the perils of gang affiliation for the youth; it encompasses leveraging technologies for raising awareness, promoting and broadcasting its messages, amplifying awareness campaigns, unmasking the clandestine operations of neighborhood gangs, and highlighting their menace to public security and order. This is complemented by a concerted effort to reformulate youth-oriented programs to unequivocally condemn and eradicate all manifestations of violence in society.

In the wake of Order No. 03.20, which delineates new roles and mechanisms for the media in combating neighborhood gangs, researchers have embarked on an exploration of the media's tangible role and its interplay with the spread of this phenomenon in Algerian urban society. This inquiry is anchored by the principal research question:

What is the relationship between the media and the proliferation of neighborhood gangs in Algerian urban society? From this central question emerge two critical inquiries:

- What is the relationship between the media and the proliferation of neighborhood gangs in Algerian urban society?

This main question branches into two key questions:

- How can the media contribute to reducing the spread of neighborhood gangs in Algerian society?
- How can the media contribute to the spread of neighborhood gangs in Algerian society?

To address these questions, a descriptive study was conducted, focusing on the media's dualistic roles — both positive and negative — by scrutinizing its coverage of neighborhood gang activities and the character of such coverage.

1. Theoretical Framework:
1.1 Study Concepts:

a) Media:
Linguistically, the term 'media' comes from the root word 'to inform'. It involves informing, educating, and enlightening people about various events and facts. (Al-Far, 2010)

Technically, media refers to the process of disseminating accurate news and information based on truth and clarity, addressing the intellect and noble emotions of the masses, and elevating public opinion. It involves enlightening and educating through explanation, interpretation, and logical debate, aiming to provide the masses with as much accurate and clear objective information as possible. (Rashid, n.d.)

German scholar Otto Groth, as cited by Dr. Abdul Aziz Sharaf, defines media as the objective expression of the mentality, spirit, inclinations, and directions of the masses. (Sharaf, 1980) The media is the provision of people with information and facts capable of broadening their horizons. (Yaqout, 2018)

Through the various definitions presented for media, a set of characteristics can be inferred,

including:

➢ Media is a communicative activity that encompasses all communication elements: sender, receiver, message, channel, and feedback.
➢ Media aims to enlighten minds and educate intellects.
➢ Public opinion is positively influenced by media efforts, which address the intellect and noble emotions of the audience.

b) Urban Society:
Defined in the Encyclopedia of Sociology as a group of individuals living in an urban environment, characterized by a specific lifestyle. Urban society, as per Mohammed Atef Ghaith, is contrasted with rural society. (Al-Hassan, 1999)

Urban society denotes a type of community where individuals are concentrated in specific locations, leading lives distinct from their rural counterparts. Scholars like Sorokin and Zimmerman underline the importance of distinguishing cities from rural areas based on criteria such as occupation, environment, local community size, population density, homogeneity and heterogeneity, differentiation, legislation, mobility, social movements, and the interaction system, including the variety of communication models practiced by individuals in their daily lives. (Al-Samalouti, 1978)

c) Urbanity:
The concept of "urbanity" was first introduced by Louis Wirth in his seminal essay, "Urbanism as a Way of Life." In this work, Wirth explored various axes, topics, and characteristics that differentiate cities from villages. He observed that urbanity fosters competition, autonomy, and impersonality, often leading to the exploitation of individuals by one another. (Kraibia, 2016-2017)

On the other hand, Paul Meadous attempted to define the characteristics of urbanity, stating that it represents a lifestyle marked by the adaptation of heterogeneous groups to one another, labor specialization, the emergence of non-agricultural crafts and professions, interaction, and the development of education and the arts. (Azzam et al., 2010)

Given the broad scope of the concept of urbanity, encompassing all facets of urban living, including political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, some argue that urbanity represents the ultimate product of urbanization processes.
From these definitions, we can infer the key characteristics of urban society:

➢ Urban society comprises a population residing in urban areas.
➢ Urban residents differ from their rural counterparts in terms of living conditions, education, culture, and intellectual levels.
➢ Urban society generates distinct lifestyle patterns, social values, and daily habits that set it apart from rural and village life.

d) Neighborhood Gangs:
As defined by the Algerian legislator in Article 02 of Order 20/03 on the prevention and combat of

neighborhood gangs, a gang is "any group, under any name, composed of two or more individuals belonging to one or more residential neighborhoods. They commit acts with the intention of creating an atmosphere of insecurity in residential areas or any other spatial location, with the purpose of asserting control through moral or physical assault on others, thereby endangering their lives, freedom, or property. This is often done while carrying or using visible or concealed bladed weapons." (Decree 03.20, 2020)

It is important to note that a gang is inherently composed of two or more individuals, as an agreement cannot be formed by a single person. (Yousefi, n.d.)

French sociologist Estrelhedibel offers an additional perspective, defining gangs as "groups led by a distinctive figure who bears a symbol that sets them apart from others. These groups may gradually evolve into marginalized and potentially dangerous social classes." (Amal &Naïma, 2020)

Sociologist Miller characterizes gangs as "self-formed associations of peers united by common interests, often with a defined leadership structure. They operate collectively or individually to achieve specific objectives, which may include engaging in illegal activities and seeking control over a particular territory, establishment, or institution." (Fermas&Bouraoui, 2020)

Moral assault encompasses any form of verbal aggression that induces fear or terror in others, such as threats or intimidation. (Article 2 of Decree 03.20, 2020) The Algerian legislator also defines a bladed weapon as "any cutting, piercing, or blunt instruments, tools, and devices capable of causing harm or injury to the human body, or posing a threat to public security, as specified in the existing weapons legislation and regulations." (Article 2 of Decree 03.20, 2020)

In the Algerian context, neighborhood gangs can be defined as follows:

➤ A social phenomenon, particularly prevalent in urban society, distinguished by specific features that differentiate it from other social phenomena.
➤ Responsible for instilling a sense of insecurity and unrest within Algerian neighborhoods.
➤ Characterized by shared psychological, social, economic, and environmental attributes that contribute to delinquency, deviance, and societal violence.
➤ Typically composed of young individuals who deviate from prevailing societal values.
➤

2. Major Theories Explaining the Phenomenon of Neighborhood Gangs in Urban Society:
2.1 Socio-Psychological Theories Explaining Youth Deviance:

a) Social Control Theory:
According to Cusson, youth deviance is linked to a lack of social control on one hand, and an increase in anomie on the other. Cusson defines social control as a set of means through which society enforces compliance necessary for coexistence, and the specific means individuals use to prevent or limit crime. Cusson identifies four elements influencing control: (Boukhemis, 2013)

➤ **Level of Social Integration:**
Relates to the quality and frequency of interactions within society. Higher individual control is observed when relationships are numerous and close. In contrast, control diminishes in disorganized

societies with weakened internal bonds.

➢ **Level of Information Flow:**
Social control is more effective in societies where information circulates well and quickly, such as in large cities. Reduced communication and information flow in rural areas act as a deterrent to deviance.

➢ **Level of Authority Acceptance:**
Effective enforcement requires recognition of the authority of those in control. If this legitimacy is not established, any control exerted is perceived as an attack or nuisance, leading to conflicts.

➢ **Level of Social Reaction Development:**
For control to be effective, there must be a correspondence between the severity of the act committed and the intensity of the social reaction. Higher levels of social control arise when society's response to deviant acts is appropriate and proportionate to the severity of the offenses.

2.2 Media Theories Explaining the Relationship Between Media and Neighborhood Gangs:

a) Media Dependency Theory:
This theory primarily focuses on the social perspective in examining the relationship between the communicative medium and its audience. It considers a broader framework of relations - society, media, and audience - leading to the theory of mutual media dependency. This theory, rooted in socio-psychological influences, belongs to the moderate influence theories of media. "Dependency" refers to the extent to which the audience relies on media and other information sources as their primary means of obtaining information about public issues and affairs. (Khairallah, n.d.)

- **Foundations and Hypotheses of the Theory:**
Media Dependency Theory is based on two main pillars:

➢ **Goals**: Individuals and organizations depend on resources controlled by others to achieve their personal and social objectives, and vice versa.
➢ **Sources**: Individuals and organizations seek various sources to fulfill their goals. Media, as an information system, is sought after by individuals and organizations to achieve their objectives. Media controls three types of resources: information collection, coordination, and dissemination.

b) Key hypotheses of the theory include:
➢ The media's messages are more likely to achieve cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impacts when the media systems provide distinctive and essential information services.
➢ Dependency relations correlate positively with perceptions of environmental and social threats.
➢ Media source dependency increases during times of conflict and social change, particularly in societies with developing media systems.
➢ Media dependency arises from the pursuit of three main objectives: understanding, orientation, and entertainment.

Several effects of media dependency can be observed, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral impacts.

3. The Relationship Between Media and the Spread of Neighborhood Gangs in Algerian Society

3.1 Neighborhood Gangs in Algerian Society: A Legal Perspective

The Algerian authorities attribute the issuance of Order 20/03 at this time to several factors, including:

➢ **Increase in Neighborhood Violence and Crime Rate:**
In recent years, there has been a significant rise in crimes such as murder for trivial reasons. Youth have become more aggressive and violent, with an increase in knife and blade carrying, exacerbated by drug and alcohol abuse. Violence has become a hallmark of our society, with daily reports of killings, assaults, rapes, and thefts. The statistics are alarming in many states.

➢ **Escalation of Gang Violence Post-COVID-19 Quarantine:**
The early months of 2020 saw the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to nationwide lockdowns. These measures resulted in psychological pressures and disorders among the youth, especially due to prolonged home confinement, unemployment, poverty, and addiction.

➢ **Existing National Legislation Not Covering All Forms of Crime:**
Laws should evolve to keep pace with societal changes. Non-evolution leads to stagnation.

New laws are often enacted to regulate emerging phenomena previously unknown or insignificant in society. These legal texts typically address deficiencies in existing laws. Neighborhood gang-related crimes encompass a spectrum of activities, comprehensively delineated in Order 20/03, including but not limited to:

- Establishing, affiliating with, or participating in gangs.
- Recruiting individuals for gang membership.
- Assuming leadership roles or positions of authority within gangs.
- Providing encouragement or financial support to gangs.
- Directly or indirectly endorsing gang activities and ideologies.
- Offering meeting locations or shelter to gang members.
- Willfully concealing gang members sought by law enforcement.
- Deliberately obstructing the arrest of gang members or assisting in their escape.
- Coercing or preventing individuals from joining or leaving gangs through force, threats, inducement, incitement, or other means.
- Involvement in fights, riots, or gatherings resulting in fatal violence.
- Manufacturing, repairing, importing, distributing, selling, or storing weapons on behalf of gangs.
- Failing to report planned criminal activities that are known.
- Engaging in retaliation or intimidation against victims, informants, witnesses, their families, or associates.

Article 06 of Order 20/03 underscores the pivotal role of media and communication, including social

media, in the prevention of gang-related issues. Both private and public media entities are mandated to incorporate programs aimed at mitigating the dangers posed by gangs and actively contributing to the combat against this phenomenon. Preventive measures within media include:

- Conducting information and awareness campaigns to elucidate the risks associated with gang involvement.

- Harnessing media technologies to disseminate positive messages and ideas.

- Amplifying efforts to increase awareness while exposing the clandestine activities of gangs and their threats to public security and order.

- Reevaluating programs, especially those targeted at youth, with a view to distancing from and condemning all forms of violence within society.

3.2 Characteristics of Media Coverage of Neighborhood Gang Activities in the Algerian Urban Society:

Given that neighborhood gangs are an inherent aspect of any society and their activities disrupt social stability, often categorized as criminal social phenomena that demand confrontation and mitigation, Algerian media has displayed a keen interest in monitoring and reporting on these gangs. Over time, distinct characteristics have emerged in the media's coverage of neighborhood gang activities in Algerian society, including: (Esbensen&Tusinski, 2007)

➢ **Heavy Reliance on Security Forces for Information:** Media often depend significantly on security agencies as the primary source of information about neighborhood gangs, sometimes requiring security clearance for publication.

➢ **Scarcity of News Gathering on-site:** Gathering news and information directly from the sites of gang activities is rare due to the associated difficulties and risks.

➢ **Predominantly Using Journalistic News Genres**: Due to the challenges and risks involved in investigating and researching gang activities, media outlets often rely on journalistic news genres for reporting.

➢ **Avoidance of Publishing Personal Details:** Media avoid publishing personal details about individuals involved in gang activities or their victims that could lead to their identification, due to legal, ethical, and professional reasons.

➢ **Anonymity of Journalists Covering Gang Activities:** Journalists who collect and publish news about neighborhood gangs often do not disclose their identities, except for security purposes, to mitigate risks to their safety.

➢ **Focus on the Consequences of Gang Activities:** There is more emphasis on the outcomes of gang activities and the judicial sentences passed against them or their members, rather than on understanding the reasons behind the formation of these gangs.

➢ **Limitations on Media Reporting:** There are boundaries to what the media can report regarding the activities of neighborhood gangs or the security operations targeting them, limiting the full disclosure of the truth about these activities.

3.3 Forms of Media Coverage of Neighborhood Gang Activities in the Algerian Urban Society:

Through exploratory research to gather comprehensive information on this topic, it became apparent that there are no scientific studies—at least in Algeria—specifically aimed at describing the media coverage of neighborhood gang activities in terms of its scope compared to other topics, the type of programs dedicated to it, or the methods of handling and analyzing it. However, some general aspects related to the forms of media coverage of neighborhood gang activities in Algerian society can be identified as follows:

➢ **Dominance of Audio-Visual Media:** Television channels primarily cover neighborhood gang activities due to the importance of conveying news and information through sound and image. Notable programs include "Investigations" by El Nahar channel and "Echorouk Investigates" by Echorouk News, in addition to news segments or episodes that highlight and monitor this phenomenon on both public and private Algerian channels.

➢ **Rare Radio Coverage:** Algerian radio stations seldom dedicate programs to neighborhood gang topics, possibly due to the nature of the medium being less suitable for focusing on such issues. If covered, it is generally part of news segments, especially in local radio stations, catering to specific provincial audiences.

➢ Pr**int and Digital Journalism:** These media publish various journalistic pieces, mostly news-oriented (news reports, reportages), while investigative approaches to covering neighborhood gang activities are almost absent in both printed and electronic Algerian newspapers. This results in superficial information about the gangs and their criminal activities for the newspaper audience.

➢ **Diverse Media Outlets Publishing Content:** Different types of media (textual, auditory, visual) often publish complete or partial content of journalistic subjects or programs addressing neighborhood gangs on their websites. Especially after the enactment of the Algerian law on the prevention of neighborhood gangs and their combat in 2020, there has been an increased focus on covering criminal activities of gangs, news of their arrests, and penalties faced, coinciding with intensified security efforts against these gangs and attempts to limit their expansion and activities.

4. Algerian Media: Balancing Awareness and Influence on Gangs

Numerous academic studies have regrettably concluded that media plays a pivotal role in the propagation of violence and crime within urban environments. This is a disconcerting revelation, especially considering that media is expected to assume an educational role in countering phenomena that threaten the stability of human settlements.

In the case of neighborhood gangs, which stand as a significant catalyst for violence and crime, it is reasonable to hypothesize that media inadvertently contributes to the proliferation of gang numbers and the expansion of their activities. This particular facet has been identified as a characteristic of neighborhood gang-related crimes, thereby highlighting researchable issues of academic significance. (Bezaz&Fettache, 2023)

Furthermore, it has been observed that media content, encompassing genres such as movies, series, animations, documentaries, and the like, which either document or glamorize aspects of violence and crime, can directly incite youth and teenagers to imitate violent and criminal behaviors. Such imitation has the potential to escalate into involvement with neighborhood gangs or even more perilous criminal organizations.

Remarkably, many non-professional criminal groups, including neighborhood gangs, turn to audio-visual media as a valuable resource for acquiring intricate criminal plans and strategies, often presented in meticulous detail. This media influence, sustained over time, significantly contributes to the evolution and heightened professionalism of gang activities.

On the flip side, it is essential to acknowledge the significant role of media in raising awareness about the perils associated with belonging to neighborhood gangs and the detrimental impact of their activities within urban areas. While commendable efforts have been in progress for an extended period, they may not suffice or may lack comprehensive organization. (United Nations, n.d.)

There is room for a more structured and strategic approach to further enhance these awareness initiatives, ultimately yielding more effective and positive outcomes. This, in itself, presents an avenue for future research projects, delving into the critical examination of media endeavors aimed at enlightening Algerian society about the dangers posed by neighborhood gangs.

II - Methodology and Tools:

1. Methodology:

The study employs the descriptive-analytical method, a widely accepted approach in social and humanities research. This methodology centers on the accurate depiction of various phenomena, with an emphasis on the analysis of relationships and interactions between variables. It relies on the objective collection of data and its systematic analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation.

2. Research Population:

The research population encompasses the elements and units relevant to the phenomenon under scrutiny. This population can constitute a finite or infinite set of previously defined elements upon which observations are based. These elements share one or more common characteristics that

differentiate them from other units under examination.

 In the context of this study, the research population encompasses all entities exhibiting common attributes pertinent to the scientific research topic, rendering them suitable for the study. It is noteworthy that a scientific inquiry encompassing the entire research population without exception is referred to as a comprehensive census or a complete survey. (Angers, 2001)

3. Comprehensive Census Approach:
Sometimes denoted as the enumeration method, this approach involves the collection of data pertaining to specific variables from all units within the original population. Notable examples include population and industrial censuses, which provide valuable statistical indicators essential for the planning process. (Al-Ghoul, n.d.)

This study adopts the comprehensive census approach by enumerating all forms of audio-visual, printed, and auditory media in Algeria. This comprehensive approach aids in understanding their relationship with the proliferation of neighborhood gangs within Algerian society, as well as their role in mitigating this phenomenon.

4. Research Tools:

4.1 Observation:

Observation is defined as the practice of closely monitoring the phenomenon under investigation within its unique context and under its natural conditions. This method enables the observer to discern behaviors and interactions of the subjects and gain insights into their lifestyles and daily challenges. In this study, unstructured observation, a typical technique in qualitative research, was employed. Unstructured observation does not involve the prior preparation of tools or models. (Qandeelji& Al-Samarrai, 2009)

Observers record their observations naturally and sequentially. This tool was used to observe the content of audio-visual, printed, and auditory media throughout the year 2023, with observations conducted twice a month for each medium.

5. Time Frame of the Study:
As previously mentioned, the study's timeframe is limited exclusively to the year 2023. The focus on examining the relationship between media and the proliferation of neighborhood gangs in Algerian legislation emerged relatively late, with the first law related to the prevention and combat of neighborhood gangs being enacted in 2020.

III - Results and Discussion:

The descriptive study examining the relationship between media and the proliferation of neighborhood gangs in Algerian urban areas has produced several noteworthy findings:

➢ **Neighborhood Gang Phenomenon:** A relatively new social phenomenon has emerged in Algeria, marked by its susceptibility to influences from social, psychological, economic, and media factors.

- **Deterrent Measures by the Algerian State:** The Algerian government has introduced measures to counteract the expansion of neighborhood gangs, most notably through the implementation of Order 20/03. This legal framework defines the phenomenon, outlines its associated challenges, and prescribes penalties for its perpetrators.

- **Reliance on Media:** The Algerian state leans on various media platforms as instruments to curtail the dissemination of this phenomenon, as explicitly detailed in Article 20/03 of the legislative framework.

- **Weak and Inconsistent Media Coverage:** The study reveals that media coverage of neighborhood gang-related crimes falls short of expectations, characterized by inadequacy and inconsistency, particularly in the context of state objectives.

- **Lack of Awareness Programs:** A notable scarcity of programs aimed at eradicating this phenomenon has been identified, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive approach.

- **Multifaceted Approach Required:** Effectively addressing the proliferation of neighborhood gangs necessitates collaborative efforts from diverse entities and institutions, extending beyond the scope of media involvement alone.

IV - Conclusion:

Drawing upon the findings of this study, it becomes evident that the relationship between media and neighborhood gangs in urban societies, particularly in Algeria, exhibits variability contingent upon context and circumstances. In certain instances, media coverage serves to shed light on issues related to crime and violence within these neighborhoods, consequently fostering increased awareness and exerting pressure on authorities to implement requisite measures. Conversely, certain gang members may exploit media platforms to promote their activities or accentuate their grievances. Thus, media

can wield influence in conveying their messages or potentially distorting the general public's perception.

The intricacies of the media-gang relationship necessitate ongoing research and a comprehensive strategy that not only assesses media coverage but also seeks to address the underlying factors fueling the emergence and persistence of neighborhood gangs. A multifaceted approach, involving collaboration among various stakeholders and institutions, will be instrumental in effectively addressing this complex societal issue.

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