

THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE BEIRUT PORT EXPLOSION IN 2020:  
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS & CHALLENGES

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by  
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Finally, I stand at the end of the academic path that I chose to myself years ago and with efforts, I finished successfully. Here I am today, ending a page of hard work, hoping that the coming steps will bear other successes and greater achievements through which I prove myself.

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## 1-Abstract

The Beirut port explosion on the 4th of August opened countless windows and endless stories. Simultaneously, the effects of this tragic incident imposed itself on media channels, whereby everyone knows that media institutions were and still are subject to the authority and controlled by politicians because they are the main financiers. Without financiers the media channels will collapse, so the viewer falls under the influence of “rating” or what is known as raising viewership, and whatever the circumstances of the event.

This research will address the causes and methods of covering Three televisions channels of the Beirut explosion and the political role they played in guiding the public’s opinions. In addition to the media professional ethics that were violated during the coverage, and then in-depth interviews will be conducted with researchers and media specialists according to the SAD Formula to show up if those channels well covered the incident or they served only their interests.

*Keywords: Beirut, Beirut Blast, Explosion, Lebanon, Media, MTV, OTV, Politicians, Mikati, Aoun, Port of Beirut, Lebanese Army, Television, Hezbollah, Lebanese Forces.*

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## 2- Introduction

### *2.1 The Beirut port explosion in the media*

The coverage of the Beirut port is considered one of the most watched topics by the Lebanese and international audiences in about two years, due to the social and humanitarian importance of the event. It is the third most powerful explosion in the world under the name “Beirutshima”. The coverage of the explosion has been represented by broadcasting news, facts and investigations seen and read by diverse audiences, from different political, religious and intellectual affiliations. This media coverage created a general opinion of solidarity and sympathy with the tragedy of the affected Lebanese citizens in one hand , and on the other hand, cautious attitudes on this tragedy.

The Lebanese media is witnessing a historic financial crisis that coincides with the crisis Lebanon is suffering from its various levels. The World Bank classified the Lebanese financial crisis among the worst that the world has witnessed since the mid-nineteenth century. The inflation of the Lebanese pound and the insane rise in the prices of goods and services, and recently the lifting of subsidies on basic needs and fuel, television channels became at the disposal of financiers, whether they were politicians, businesspersons, or affiliated with influential parties.

It is not a secret that Lebanon is based primarily on partisan and sectarian divisions, which explains the subordination of some media institutions to

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those with influence and financing and thus their submission to partisan economic and sectarian political “agendas” or ideas. During the Beirut port explosion, some Lebanese media channels formed a media body to support the demand of the Lebanese people in general and the families of the victims in particular. From various religious, sectarians and regional affiliations, who launched various appeals directly through open air until late night, and indignant cries against a political class that neglected the security and safety of its people, to the correspondents of some televisions channels turned into “messengers” to support and protect the families of the victims from arbitrary arrest. As a penalty for their demand for the truth to be revealed and the suspects to be held accountable. In addition, some television talk shows and social networks alike formed free expression platforms for those who were subject to injustice, which prompted the security forces to sometimes be careful not to clash with reporters and even arrest demonstrators in front of the cameras. Also the editorials of some news bulletins of the aforementioned channels were a way to keep the memory of the martyrs alive, through phrases bearing titles, eulogies, and criticism of some negligent politicians and judges, with the aim of supporting the cause of the people and hosting a number of humanitarian cases in progress that integrate politics with society.

Away from politics, TV channels shared people’s pain and concerns during the human tragedy that befell the capital and its inhabitants with devastation brought to mind memories of the ominous war.

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In the Lebanese media scene, it became clear that the shift towards investigative reporting was particularly evident during the coverage of the Beirut port explosion, so that television institutions could no longer ignore popular calls for accountability and reveal the cards of power in order to reveal the truth. In parallel, some traditional media institution, most of which belong to political parties, were forced to change their priorities in reports preparations.

Proceeding from the aforementioned, we can consider the media as means of “creating” social reality through its coverage and approach to events and conflicts between the various discordant poles. In short, the news coverage of the Beirut port explosion had an impact on societal trends, values and political priorities, which arose thanks to the innovative methods of covering movements and events on the popular scene.

The most important question remains: were the Lebanese media institutions ready to cover the Beirut port explosion? Did it fail to report the event and take sides, or was it impartial and adhered to international press conventions and media law? Based on the role of the media in covering public affairs issues, judicial files, freedom of journalistic work and the right to access information, in parallel with commitment to professional standards and media ethics. In light of the limited communication between the judiciary on one hand and the media and public opinion on another, the need to improve this communications in order to serve the public interest. We conclude that the Lebanese media did not generally respect the symbolism of the event and

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therefore it was not adequately covered for several reasons that are manifested in the first economic crisis that imposes its work under the cloak of parties or officials, or political scores and follow special agendas.

The role of media is based first on covering verified information to citizens, with professionalism, accuracy and honesty of content, while ensuring that it is not a tool for spreading false or misleading information, as well as fortifying itself and its content away from propaganda of the political forces of the ruling system. The media, as a profession that requires social responsibility, cannot but prioritize the public interest over journalistic competition, especially in this humanitarian issue, protecting the feelings of the victims, their human dignity, and their right to access the truth. The media is considered a public service and not a way to manipulate information or broadcasting “agendas” seeking to impede the investigation of the case, or to correct personal mistakes and fabricate news and try to intimidate the judges who are looking into it. It is the duty of journalists as truth seekers to protect witnesses and their identities when they give their statements in front of the courts or when they themselves give testimonies to the media itself, and thus allowing any party to insult the other or attack him personally, or even harm any national standing, in order to preserve the country’s image and facade.

In accordance with national and professional responsibility, the media is required, in light of the ruling political forces evading their responsibility towards the crime, to grant its space to the people and those affected by the port crime, not to the defendants who are supposed to find no place to defend

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themselves except before the judiciary as long as they do not appear before it, and this what we clearly saw throughout the period of the Beirut port explosion, while some media outlets refrained from transmitting or broadcasting the words and speeches of politicians based on this principle. Passion to attract viewers at the expense of the families of the victims and even the victims themselves. The journalist is neither policeman nor a judge and cannot issue judgments. Rather, he searches for facts and exercise his critical role, especially when reporting any statement issued by persons involved in the case. Based on his respect for the principle of separation of powers, the journalist reserves the right to criticize judicial institutions and expose corruption, in parallel with his support for their independence and his follow-up to endorse proposing a law on the independence of the judiciary. So it is not permissible to throw accusation or slander them, or even under the slogan "it is the right of the public" because any false or misleading information would incite civil war or stir up sectarian strife that the country cannot bear in the light of the many crises it is suffering under, in addition to Corona pandemic.

In fact, despite the many difficulties and challenges that were and are still facing the media and media professionals in Lebanon, they are ready to cover this type of event. This is not a poetic talk, but rather a living testimony given by senior media people around the world, as we have the most important and prominent names in this sector. They have always succeeded in attracting the attention of the masses. Without a doubt, the Beirut port explosion showed

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the ability of the Lebanese media to cover crises, and here it is necessary to point out the primary role that the media plays in crises management, of which the August 4 explosion was a living example.

Crises represent unusual events that occur suddenly in time and place and result in negative effects that affect aspects of society in a short time, and consequently threaten stability and destabilize security. The importance of the media comes due to the multiple roles it plays, as it is responsible for covering this aspect of the crisis, because it deals with societal issues, including the crisis in a scientific manner, in light of a strategy in which the media is one of its aspects.

In light of the state's absence from providing data and investigations, highlighting the truth about the Beirut port explosion, and refraining so far from issuing any results related to this issue, this research aims to show the role played by the Lebanese press in dealing with this event and trying to reveal the truth and influence the citizens. It also aims to find out whether these journalists or media professionals are able to address all angles of the event in an objective and scientific manner. Therefore, the research intends to clarify and present the Lebanese media coverage of the explosion of the fourth of August, and if it achieves the required goal, which includes directing the attention of citizens to the heart of the issue and providing them with events and accurate legal (judicial), political and social information, and influencing them positively or negatively from the national and humanitarian side through introductions to news bulletins, media campaigns and

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propaganda in support of the cause of the victims and their families on the media channels MTV, OTV and Al-Jadeed, and therefore on some social networking sites accounts such as “Facebook“ and “Twitter” in particular, where solidarity campaigns were launched with the judicial investigator judge Tariq Al-Bitar under the title “Only Tariq takes our baitar”, and others. While the parties rejecting the completion of the investigation, because they consider it politicized, launched a campaign under the title “Our march is purer than purity” through social media, after which the events of Tayouneh and Shiah took place, which were dubbed the events of October 14 and brought back memory to the street war in 1975, which we will dedicate a section to in our research, and all of that we will review in the context of the research body or the body of the thesis.

In this context, the news introductions will be analyzed on the first anniversary of the Beirut port explosion, as it was noted that some channels were obsessed with broadcasting popular movements, especially those carried out by the people. For example, MTV prepared a report about the explosion, which included the cries of the families and some available information about the judicial investigations, not to mention the initiative it took by allowing the families of the victims to present a news bulletins under the title: “The live broadcast is for us, it has been a year.” At that time OTV contented themselves with showing the speech of the Maronite Patriarch, Mar Bchara Boutros Al –Rahi, during a mass that was held in the port of Beirut, on the intention of the victims and their families, that is in a neutral manner. As for



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A l-Jadeed channel, it used phrases, words, and actions that carried lot of sarcasm in its introductions to its news bulletins about the port explosion, against political class considering that the politicians are the cause of the explosion, based on investigative reports carried out by journalist Riyad Al-Qubaisi. Thus, each channel handled the event according to its own news kitchen standards.

### *2.2 Code and research methodology*

This research aims to explain the causes and methods of coverage and treatment of the port explosion by 3 media outlets, which are MTV, OTV, and Al Jadeed, through:

- 1- Presentation of selected cases from the mentioned TV channels and their analysis according to the SAD FORMULA.
- 2- Study the professional standards in the selected samples.
- 3- Explanation and clarification of the reason or the reasons for the channels resorting to this type of coverage and its relationship to viewership and political affiliation.

Based on all of the foregoing, the idea of studying the causes and methods of the Lebanese media's coverage of the port explosion itself was essential to see if the television channels played their informative and guiding role as they should, or were subject to partisan rulings and political orientations that changed the course of the truth is supposed to reach the viewer.

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First, we will study and analyze the news introductions on the aforementioned TV channels from August 3 to August 6, 2021 based on ethical principles in media and SAD FORMULA theory. And in this framework, and in order to support the study on the ground (specifically in terms of quality), in-depth interviews will be conducted with

Resigned MP in the Beirut First District, Paula Yaacoubian, who originally had a long experience in the field of media.

Lawyer Ziad Baroud (from the legal media authority for the case, to discuss the information provided).

Journalist Nakhli Odaimi (on MTV)

As for the quantitative field aspect, a survey field study will be conducted on how the citizen public (Lebanese) from different regions and religious and partisan affiliations interact with the issue of the Beirut port explosion through the media, specifically the aforementioned TV channels, and therefore with attitudes and campaigns published on social media. In this context we distributed a detailed questionnaire that includes closed-ended questions and varied options that affect the various segments of Lebanese society, including 94 citizens, in order to reach clear results about the interaction of media coverage and approaches the Beirut port explosion issue and the subsequent various campaigns on social media.

### *2.3 The problem*

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What are the media methodologies adopted by, MTV, OTV, and AL-Jadeed TV channels in their approach to the issue of the Beirut port explosion, specifically on its first anniversary? Was the anniversary of the fourth of August (August 4, 2021) covered according to partisan, political and even material (financial) “agendas”? In parallel, how did the social networking sites in the Lebanese street affect the issue of the explosion? What are the professional standards that the media should resort to in such humanitarian and patriotic events in the first place? In view of this scene, and in connection with the main problem, it is necessary to pause before several questions:

- 1- Did the Lebanese media deal with the issue of the port explosion according to ethical and professional standards? What was the role of investigative media in this context?
- 2- Is there excitement in addressing the issue, particularly on social media? Why was it approved?
- 3- Did politics and TV channels’ need for money play role in guiding or correcting viewers?
- 4- Was the August 4 anniversary covered according to partisan and political “agendas”?

### *2.4 Hypotheses*

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1- The media's primary messages are to convey news, facts, and events to the viewers, with the aim of creating a "public opinion about it." As for the Beirut port explosion crime, the television channels were divided between supporters and, and between transmitters of the cries of the people and the progress of investigations in general as a result of political interventions and tendencies, that overwhelm channel.

2- International organizations classified the Beirut port explosion as the third powerful explosion in the world. Despite this, not all Lebanese channels expand the scope of their investigations about the crime, for fear of political influence to which they belong.

3- Despite the horrific crime of the port and the destruction and humans and materials losses it left behind, some TV channels affiliated with the parties of the authority circumvent (And sometimes refuse) to present the facts of the investigations or harm the personalities affiliated with them and who represent them, whom the judicial investigator Tariq Al-Bitar previously summoned for investigation.

4- Some social networking sites contributed to mobilizing the Lebanese street during and after explosion and keeping it alert, given people affected by the corruption and neglect of the authority.

Keywords media - the fourth of August - Beirut port explosion - the capital - Lebanon- law - journalism- journalists – television - philosophical theories - international conventions - media law - rating/viewership-audience.

*3 What is written on the topic*

Managing the crisis and the risks resulting from it requires the preparation of a strategy based on the use of all capabilities and financial and human resources available to confront the crisis, and therefore the available capabilities must be employed in order to achieve the damages may cause (Al-Kardousi,2008). The journalist must be responsible of his coverage of any event and be sufficiently equipped to be on the ground, and this is the responsibility of his/her media organization, which is supposed to take care of this aspect, as it is the platform through which the journalist will appear (Sadaqa, 2008).

In parallel, media ethics is an important factor in defining and conducting the work of media institutions. Therefore, the media must work according to certain foundations represented in the following two forms: media ethics and professional values, while their names differ, but they have the same content that is concerned with organizing the process of media coverage and media work. It is often determined by the individual himself according to his principles and opinions. While ethics is of Greek origin, it means a set of controls that regulate the work of the media and when necessary, the journalist is held accountable based on it, as it is fully effective as the legal text. Some people often believe that it is rational process that applies established principles when two ethical obligations collide. This means that the journalist or media person must choose or adopt certain values when any external components collide with his professional honesty in coverage or

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communicating information to the public (Al-Somai,2012). Media ethics have been at the forefront of the press in Lebanon in recent years, so that universities and media institutions emphasized it, and training workshops were held to raise awareness about it. The media today, especially in Lebanon has economic gains as a result of advertisements. The reason for this is due to the absence of media censorship in the first place over the years, as well as the cessation of foreign and internal aid to media institutions, which prompted the owners of Television channels to resort to publishing or displaying any material with the aim of attracting the viewer and the advertiser at the same time. Of course, the result of this crystallized in the transgression of all moral values that the media should have, and thus the deterioration of the media situation in the country (Sadaka, 2008).

### 3.1 An overview of the history of media in Lebanon

Radio broadcasting began in Lebanon in 1937 as an anti-Nazi station run by France against Arabic-language programs sponsored by Germans and Italians (UNESCO, 1949). Many secret radio services appeared for a short period of time during the war (Boyd) (1993). But radio flourished in the early 1980s when dozens of unlicensed radio stations flooded Lebanon with the aim of conveying news to listeners during the war while the invention of television had not yet arrived in the country. After which the Lebanese TV became the first Arab station as a result of an agreement in 1956 between businessmen and the Lebanese government under the name “La Companie Libanaise De Television”.

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In 1962, the second commercial station, known as Tele Orient, was launched, funded in part by the American Broadcasting Corporation and then by the British Thomson. In 1977, the two stations merged to become Tele Liban, a joint stock company that is half owned and half governmental and still exists today (Boulos, 1996). With the outbreak of the Lebanese war in 1975, and despite the partisan system rampant in the Lebanese state during it, some private media outlets began to work and much more successful than the official media. With the official end of the war in 1990, Lebanon was the scene of a media explosion that spawned more than 50 television stations and more than 100 radio stations (credit, 1998).

On October 19, 1994, the Lebanese parliament passed the “Audiovisual Law” while Tele-Liban’s monopoly was abolished, and freedom of audiovisual information was affirmed, thus the law established the National Council for Audiovisual Media. The Lebanese Council of Ministers also issued a decision to reduce the number of private radio and television stations from 60 to 4 in the case of television, granting licenses to Future TV owned by the martyr Rafik Hariri, Murr TV owned by the family of deputy Prime Minister Michel Murr, the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, and finally the NBN network, which is A station that did not exist until now and owned by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri (Kreidi, 1998).

As for media legislation, it is concerned with defending the rights of citizens in the media and the right to knowledge, and defending the media as a need and public interest, as well as protecting society from abuses, manipulation,

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incitement, misinformation, and subversion campaigns that may be broadcast by major media outlets that coalesce on the power of money with ideological hegemony. On the other hand, professional ethics is related to the values that the journalist voluntarily embraces without imposition. It includes the set of practices and ideas on which media professionals build their relationships with others (Ministry of Information, 2006). This is what some journalists do not adopt, as they often search for the factor of excitement and suspense to achieve high viewership rates, which leads to an increase in profits. On the other hand, a different kind of ethics should be noted.

The moral laxity that our societies have been suffering from lately, so to speak, makes us adhere more moral values, which is a branch of philosophy that deals with ethical behavior, as it provides the necessary tools to make difficult moral choices on the personal and professional levels (Blair, 2003). In addition to the role of the traditional media in reporting and covering the event, it was observed during the period of the port explosion that was known as investigative journalism emerged, which was “extinct” in Lebanon, but it has returned to the fore with force. However, it should be noted that the basic principle in the profession and mission of journalism is that every journalist is a researcher and investigator of the truth, that is, in other words, journalism in itself an investigative work, and a continuous search for the truth or hidden truths. However, with the development of the field of journalism and communications, especially in the time of rapid information delivery, the investigative work has some advantages, most notably the



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“longer time” required by the journalist to investigate thorny information, corruption, crimes, suspicious deals, etc. (Agnes, 2015). The press has been called the “fourth authority” due to its direct influence on public opinion and its role in the growth and development of society and its endeavor to reveal facts and communicate them fully to the public, in addition to its exercise of its oversight role on institutions in general, and the detection of violations while exposing organized crimes in particular. Then comes its role of investigative journalism (Al-Hassan, 2012).

Investigative journalism means addressing a crime, political corruption, or a specific violation, and then investigating it, studying the data or criminal investigations related to the subject, and exposing it to the public opinion (Al-Hassan, 2012). To reveal secrets and facts of interest to the reader and society, and it is often difficult to access some information, so this type of journalism is called the field of trouble (Abu-Youssef, 1988). And among the bad investigative behavior that an investigative journalist can practice is recklessness and enthusiasm, exaggeration, emotionality, and selfishness. On August 4, 2020, at six o'clock and six minutes in the evening, a huge explosion occurred that shook the capital, Beirut, and was classified as the third largest explosion in the world, “Beirutshima” as a result of the detonation of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate which led to the fall of about 210 victims and the injury of more than 7,500 people, not to mention for the severe damage to the capital and its environs and the displacement of at least 300,000 families (MTV 2020). Subsequently, the media rushed to cover this

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huge and unique event in the country, and when investigations were not completed, Lebanese journalist must work to uncover facts, data and investigations such through investigative reports and programs dedicated to this topic. Noting that this historical event was included in the geography and history textbooks of the French Lycee in Lebanon due to the magnitude of the damage caused by this explosion and because it was an event that crossed the national geographical borders of the Lebanese state.

### 3.2 History of investigative journalism

On June 17, 1972, five thieves were arrested at the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C. (the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee) by a security guard. The incident was harmless until the FBI discovered that the thieves had ties to the CIA. And then it turned out that the robbery was a failed attempt to wiretap phones at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, in order to spy on the presidential campaign of George McGovern (Leigh 2019). During the 1972 election, McGovern accused Richard Nixon and Republicans of storming his office, but there was not enough information.

It was found out at the time that the men involved in the break-in were linked to the president. Hence Nixon easily won the election. But in 1973, the truth began to emerge. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein have been reporters for The Washington Post covering the Watergate story since the break-in. they received many tips from an anonymous source known as "Deep Throat".

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Then, in 2005, it came to light that he was the deputy director of the FBI. And they kept the story alive by publishing their research into alleged hacks and cover-ups. On August 8, 1974, Nixon resigned after police confirmed he was involved in the Watergate cover-up (Leigh 2019). This date marked the end of the Richard Nixon presidency of three decades of debate about the role journalism played in the revelation about the Watergate scandal that forced Nixon from office and how Watergate in turn affected journalism itself (Lee, 2019).

### *3.3 Internet search and investigation tools and techniques*

Search engines are an important part of the open source suite of search tools. Effective online search helps find vital information to support investigations through social media (Meers, 2015). It is also important to choose the search terms accurately and wisely, as each word added in the search leads to obtaining unwanted results, and this is done by deleting the desired results included in the scope of the search / due to lack of focus on the main ideas. Some words are on every page, and others are more likely to be or not to be on the page that constitutes the intended search target. Avoiding these unnecessary words includes the positive outcome of the research (Meer, 2015).

### *3.4 Challenges of investigative journalism in the Arab world*

State and government control have been a constant obstacle to investigative reports in the Arab world on different levels. However, the Arab Spring

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uprising have had some effects as the wall of fear has been broken (Sabbagh, 2013). It is necessary to point out that it is not only the state that restricts and puts pressure on investigative reporters, but society also has its demands and cultural restrictions that affect journalists and make their work difficult (Papui, 2016). One of the challenges facing investigators reporting in the Arab region and the practice of journalism in general is the traditional patterns of reporting rooted in Arab culture (Reese, 2004). There is also the problem of financing, as this type of reporting requires huge resources.

### *3.5 Investigative journalism in Lebanon*

The dark sides of the troubles of the press profession emerged in 2014, in light of the continuity of the phenomenon of assaulting journalists and the aggressors exploiting the absence of laws protecting freedom of the press, especially the law protecting whistleblowers. Lebanon ranked 163 in the corruption perceptions index, and this clearly indicates the society's lack of effective investigative journalism that engages civil society in the battle against corruption phenomena (Bibawi, 2016). Unfortunately, the country's sectarian and political composition does not help journalists, who are often unable to delve deeply into sensitive files. It is clear that there are barriers that the journalist cannot overcome due to the political influence (Kudai, 2016).

### *3.6 Self-censorship*

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What the Lebanese journalists are suffering from draw our attention to a form of freedom of opinion that provides an opportunity for self-censorship. It is natural that these pressures on the journalists are a major reason for his failure to carry out his investigative work in most cases (Sadaqa, 2008). However, this matter does not apply to all journalists, as some of them not subject to these pressures. On the contrary, they do not consider repression a source of threat to them, but rather it is “a great motivation for them to continue exposing suspicions of corruption in an effective manner” (Belnafez, 2017). Media actors emphasize the freedom necessary for journalism and may, in their practice, contradict the philosophy and rules of the profession. On the other hand, various institutions, whether they are government institutions, civil society or ordinary citizens, depend on the media, but they challenge them on a freedom that cannot be devoid of responsibility. Self-regulatory or peer-reviewed that there is a dynamic that must be taken into account in the development of the media (Al-Kardousi, 2008).

### *3.7 Sectarianism and the dominant conflicts in Lebanon*

It is no secret to anyone that the conflict in Lebanon is sectarian and political and dates back to thousands of years, meaning it is not new, and this was confirmed by the Beirut port explosion, which despite the chasm of the crisis, the people of the same country did not agree on it and were divided for political and sectarian reasons. The question of the existence of a Lebanese national (cultural) identity is imposed by successive events and facts, which

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confirm that during 100 years, the Lebanese society has witnessed deep tremors, one of the most prominent features of which is the predominance of the sectarian form of social conflicts over its class and political content.

This is with pointing out that this character is prior to the declaration of establishment and dates back to the thirties of the eighteenth century with the peasant popular uprisings against feudalism (colloquial), which feudalism and the religious establishment succeeded in turning it into sectarian conflicts (Shalhoub,2021). Also, one of the aspects of the lack of hope in Lebanon is the tyranny of religion, as one of the components of social identity, at the expense of national identity, as it is a more comprehensive and broad framework. This makes social integration difficult, which establishes an identity that transcends religious diversity. This tyranny is not linked to the religion itself, but is rather a result of the political system that aims to reproduce the system that works in the interest of the financial oligarchy (Shalhoub, 2021).

### *3.8 Media and conflicts in society*

The media criticizes everything, fashion, beauty, art, politics, cartoons, and sometimes criticizes itself for certain goals. This creates confusion to the viewers, especially in non-developed countries, where citizens are dragged behind any idea, even if it is wrong, just because it is adopted by a means. And here it is necessary to point out the fourth power that the media plays and its repercussions on society in its various segments by showing the way

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in which the ideology of communication shapes the daily work of journalists. Far from idealism or ways of covering up, “exposing” scandals lead to citizens’ revolts, and thus builds disjointed society that is unable to accept the truth. (Aubenas, Benasayag, 1999).

### *3.9 Philosophical theories*

Within the framework of philosophical theories, the research will be built according to the theory of teleological school, specifically Utilitarianism, that is, the public benefit that will help answer the research questions mentioned above.

Covering the Beirut explosion is extremely important given the many reasons and the number of victims that have fallen as a penalty, in addition to the material damage it caused to the capital. The audience usually prefers this type of news, especially if it is related to social matters and humanitarian cases, so the eyes are fixed in front of the small screen to know the finer details related to the news. If we look at some of the coverage topics in the Lebanese programs during the period of the Beirut port explosion, it is noticeable that the focus is on the families of the victims and those affected. Even in political programs, because people can no longer see or hear political excuses in the recent period, rather they need to watch what resembles it and expresses its opinion and personal orientation, while they considered themselves affected by the explosion even if they did not lose a home or a family member. Therefore, any media person in Lebanon tends to some

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extent to comply with these requirements desired by the audience, who became bored and weary of political economic news, so they no longer watched television, which caused a decline in the percentage of advertisements, and thus in the profit of media institutions (Al-Somai,2012).

In this context, and in contrast to what the public receives of tragic news or that is surrounded by anxiety in politics, economics, society, and other sides of daily life, we can talk about the “theory of escaping reality “La theorie de l’evasion. In the year 1950, This theory was promoted by American sociologists who consider that “individuals often search in the media for means or reasons to escape from their reality in order to face their problems “(Esquenazi, 2013). This views brings us back to the dire situation in Lebanon politically, economically, and security, which prompts a number of Lebanese to turn to various entertainment programs with the aim of escaping, even for hours, from their reality.

The problem of audience is, without doubt, one of the most controversial of all those that the sciences of media and communication have out to address. Thus, this problem was not only dealt with by theorists and researchers of media and communications sciences, but also aroused the interest of social scientists who did not hesitate to present theories and solutions in this field, as evidenced by evaluations. We can determine the nature of the audience first by knowing the media product itself in order to distinguish its audience by extrapolation. Knowing that some channels and media only fabricate distorted or incomplete information, and therefore, their audience will



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inevitably be confused and correct their orientations through a parody of the information (Olivisi, 2014).

Based on all of the above, this research attempts to study how such cases should be dealt with based on media ethics as well as the values that the responsible journalist is supposed to have.

To achieve this, some problematic cases dealing with the subject matter of the research will be collected and analyzed according to the case equation, analysis, and decision (SADFormula), which means defining the situation by identifying conflicting values or facts and ethical violation contained in the case or TV sample. Then the situation is analyzed and the ethical theories that apply to the case are applied by discussing the relative importance of conflicting values or facts, considering the possibility of external point of view, and identifying the group expected to be affected and mentioning it (colleagues, sources, advertisers, society...), and a step before moving on to the last section, the analyst or researcher should look at the emotional and rational responses to the situation. The analyst is then ready to make a final decision and make a moral judgment. The research will also analyze the media's handling of these cases in terms of philosophical theories in the field of media ethics.

Within the framework of philosophical theories, the research will be built according to the theory of teleological school and identify Utilitarianism, that is, the public benefit that will help answer the research questions mentioned

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above. Public benefits theory dates back to two of the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and is often cited as Mill's version of this philosophy based on achieving the greatest good for as many people as possible. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, believes that one should try to promote the good to as many people as possible. Teleology is attractive because it provides a specific blueprint for making moral choices when faced with a particular ethical dilemma, whether at work or in everyday life. Those involved must analyze the benefits and harms that everyone (including themselves) may be exposed to it as result of their choices and then take the appropriate decision according to the result of the analysis. In fact, appeals to the public interest to justify some populist decisions by those working in the media are a contemporary manifestation of utilitarianism at work. Thus, a socially beneficial concept is used sometimes to justify an unethical means. Journalists who accept illegally recorded conversations from news sources on the basis of "the right of the public to know" sometimes try to justify what they believe to be good consequences even though the means to achieve this end are somewhat dubious. From teleological theories, specifically utilitarianism, the focus on harm reduction is often ignored, while publishing a story or topic may be interesting to a journalist when in reality it is just an appeal to the curiosity of the public, which is considered a manifestation of selfishness. Later utilitarian's argued for the concept of happiness and concluded that it is not the only desired value and that the consequences should be concerned regardless of the

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intention behind the action. It is noteworthy that the positive repercussions on society justify the devious means used to collect information by the journalist or media person (Alvin Day, 2008).

For example, in this research we will discuss samples of TV episodes that have previously been shown through various channels and approach them based on the utility theory that is based on the principle of the usefulness of public opinion in knowledge, that is, does this information serve the viewers if it is shown? And if it does serve him, why was it displayed and what is the purpose behind it?

Media is considered primarily responsible for the material that the public receives, whether it is good or bad, because in both cases it works indirectly to correct public opinion. Will the Lebanese media do its work in according with media ethics in the context of covering the Beirut port bombing? Or is he exploiting the audience for advertising gain?

In this context, among his definitions of public opinion, Juren Habermas considered that public opinion must be enlightened through the press, discussions and cultural mediation. This contrasts with the corrupting influence and this is what Rousseau is known for in his speech from 1970 where he confirms his theory of “opinion”. Stemming from simple and natural habits and morals (Habermas, Paris).

In parallel, the interest of the Lebanese citizens, who receives information and interacts with it, is involved in all of this. It is also not possible,

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according to Bernard Lamizet, for the political competence of citizens to be based only on the meaning they attribute to the political messages they receive through the media, and the role of cultural mediation is to make the actions that constitute their citizenship meaningful. The aesthetic of cultural mediation (Lamziet, 1999).

In-depth interviews are meaningful interactions in which the researcher tries to discover what the other person knows about a topic, and thus extract his experience to reach a final result that leads to answering the interlocutor's questions on the one hand and the public opinion's questions on the other hand. This type is considered the most difficult because it depends primarily on the personality of the interlocutor and the way he asks questions. Either he returns with clear answers, or his analyzes remain vague without a direct and explicit explanation about a specific case or even a specific person. Therefore, this type is often used in research and studies due to the importance of its content and its impact on indicating the main problem and how to address it (ko, 2017).

In the following, and after this lengthy narration of previous studies, most of which are directly related to our study, we will move on to analyzing the interdictions to the news bulletins of the three channels that we chose a year after the port explosion occurred, based on the theories we mentioned above and the methodology announced at the beginning.

#### **4 Chapter One: news introductions that lack objectivity and throw accusations**

##### *4.1 Media coverage of MTV*

The MTV channel, owned by the Murr family, which was known for its historical dispute with each of the Shiite duo “Amal movement” and “Hezbollah” and in general with the so-called “Axis of Resistance”, fully covered the port explosion for 24/7 in its own style, which was considered by a large number from the public, in several media posts, there was a clear attempt to stir up sectarian and political strife. For example, it opened the air throughout the day for the families of the victims and those affected to convey their suffering, in addition to the dialogue programs that it organized with civil society on the one hand, and with the parties on the other hand to express different points of view. During the interdiction of MTV news on 4/8/2020, i.e. the day of the Beirut port bombing, Diana Fakhoury, the presenter of the media newsletter, started accusing “Hezbollah” of storing “heavy weapons in the port of Beirut, which may have prompted Israel to bomb it, and this caused the damage to the capital, Beirut, to the expense of innocent citizens”, this sentence, according to Lebanese political history and the study of sectarian and partisan strife, is capable of igniting a civil war at a time when the country cannot bear this matter, in addition to a series of legal and moral violations, as no media outlet has the right to accuse any party publicly and correct the public without completing the investigation. And the issuance of the final judgment and this is considered an assault on the powers

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of the judiciary. In the foreword to the evening bulletins, which lasted 1 minute and 55 seconds, the following introduction came:

“Mr. Michel Aoun, allow us to address you from now on without the title of His Excellency the President. Your Excellency is not commensurate with the misery and pain of your people. It is also not commensurate with the devastation of our capital before our eyes. What we witnessed yesterday and what we are witnessing today is unprecedented in the history of the Republic, and after August 4, 2020, it will never be the same. We are convinced that the tragic circumstances that we all live in require us to abandon formalities and talk to you without gloves, and this is what we will do. Indirect speech no longer works, and equivocation no longer works. You confirmed today at the start of the cabinet session that you are determined to proceed with the investigations to uncover the circumstances of what happened as soon as possible, and that you want to hold those responsible and negligent accountable and impose the maximum penalties on them. The strange thing is that you talk about the subject in the third person. Don't you know that you are the first responsible in the country, and since you are so, you bear the first responsibility for what happened? And don't you know that the accusation of negligence affects you before anyone else, and that whoever fell yesterday in Beirut is the result of the fall of the concept of the state in all of Lebanon during this era? Therefore, we say to you, Mr. Aoun: Resign immediately. Great adults are only those who know how to reach higher positions, but also

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those who know to withdraw from public life and responsibility when they err or fall short.”

MTV added: “Mr.” Aoun, we were very optimistic when you reached the presidency. We concept of the mistakenly believed that your reign would be truly sanctifying and reforming, and that reign would certainly be the strongest one. However, we admit before the country and the people that we erred a lot in our optimism, and that we were naïve in our belief. You did not achieve, and after the expiration of two-thirds of your term, one thing that was promised by the mini-state during your term, it became stronger than the state, clientelism took control, corruption rampant, institutions collapsed, the Lebanese pound became a joke on tongues, people became poor and starved, and worse than all of this is what happened yesterday. Those who did not die slowly from poverty, hunger and oppression, died at record speed from the massive earthquake that struck the heart of Lebanon. What is worse is that the Council of Ministers, under your presidency, washed your hands and their hands of catastrophe and decided, in a theatrical, funny and crying step, to place house arrest those who were responsible for storing and guarding the explosive materials file since 2014. Does not this mean that you want to sacrifice junior officials to remain in your positions, O Seniors?”

This introduction was supported by some, while some of the pioneers of social networking sites and viewers belonging to the “Free Patriotic Movement” or allied with it attacked the matter, considering it “an insult to the presidency, the Lebanese people, and the victims of the explosion.” In

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fact, the channel tried in this way to adopt a policy of “mobilization” which often means inciting a large group of the public against a certain person or idea, regardless of whether it is right or not. At that sensitive stage according to the theory of public benefit.

Apart from philosophical theories, according to political analysts, the introduction to the channel is clearly considered an inciting speech, and both the Free Patriotic Movement and the presidency of the Republic have the right to take appropriate steps in this context, and this is basically what the presidency did, which filed a lawsuit against the channel a result of the speech. In addition, the tone of the two broadcasters was unusual, meaning that resorted most of the time to presenting in a sarcastic tone, as if they were accusing and mocking some political figures who contradict the channel’s approach or political line, while the media law and media ethics also prevent the journalist from being biased or showing his political leanings. Or even their impact on the content of the material that is presented to the viewer, which may lead several problems or war, perhaps as a result of the general situation in the country.

MTV intense coverage of the explosion’s event gained remarkable public popularity, especially in that sensitive period. In parallel, after the August 4 explosion, the channel refused to transmit the speech or word of any political official as well, in addition to stripping them of their titles, in a step that is the first of its kind in Lebanon and the Arab countries in general, as confirmation by the channel of its standing and support for the Lebanese people only.



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In the introduction of the evening news bulletins of the MTV channel, which lasts 4 minutes, on 3/8/2021, the following introduction came from the presentation of the families of the victims of the Beirut port explosion, in the reference to a memorial gesture from the station in honor of their lives on the first anniversary of the catastrophe:

“Tonight, the word is ours, may we pierce the ears of the politicians immersed in the paradise of power, wealth and greed in Lebanon. Tonight the word is for us the families of the martyrs of the port crime, we speak on behalf of the families of 219 martyrs who fell as a result of a criminal, corrupt, conspiratorial and negligent, and on behalf of the wounded, the injured and affected. We point the fingers of accusation at the Republic, its President and the three successive governments, the Lebanese parties and all the security service. If today we take the place of the news presenters here by mutual consent, then tomorrow we will occupy your institutions, your ministries and your palaces until the truth is served. Our anger is not social, political or class, so that obstructed you it will disappear with time. I want to know who deprived me of my brother, robbed us of our lives and destroyed our capital. All of you have fallen for dealing with our tragedy for the investigation, for our life before August 4 is not the same as before, and all the Lebanese are with us. Today we must pay tribute to a man in a time when men are few, Judge Tariq Al- Bitar, prove your case and complete your investigation; we are with you and behind you. To the people of power, we say: we doubt that you hear us. You see us sitting here, but you do not hear,

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no, rather you do not understand what we say. Therefore, our words are not directed at you, and dealing with you has different origins. We are addressing the Arab and international communities, surely they will come out better than you. “

We indicate that Mrs. Rima Zahid, the sister of the martyr Amin Zahid, who died during the Beirut port explosion, presented the bulletin, and then it was completed in English by the brother of the martyr, Abdo Atta, in a sign from the people that they want an international investigation in the case, according to what they had demanded earlier, and the presenters were keen to wear black in a sign of sadness and mourning, and they also deliberately used high-pitched rhetoric in a sarcastic manner, simulating their reality and their permanent uprising against the attempt to politicize the file of Beirut port bombing.

There is no doubt that the impact of this introduction in terms of presentation and content has many patriotic dimensions, especially since those who presented it are among those most affected by this crime: the families of the martyrs are the ones who suffered hardships and tortured nights in order to know a small piece of information about the fate of their missing children, and there was no listener or guide, so it was The street is their only and most effective option to put pressure on the rules to make them move. On the first anniversary of the painful incident, it was necessary to shed light on the families who were left to their fate in light of illegal actions aimed at obstructing the investigation and evading accountability under the penalty of

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judgment and fate. Social networking sites, who shared the introduction widely, especially since the wound had not yet healed on the eve of the first anniversary, which helped the channel achieve its goal and attract followers and interaction between them. On the other hand, choosing Rima Zahed to represent the people was a purposeful choice, as she was known for her permanent appearance through channels to demand a fair and transparent investigation of the case, which earned her wide fame, in addition to the tone she used to speak as if she was threatening and threatening with anger, the mouthpiece of all the Lebanese, and her black dress, which indicates national mourning, which the psychologist Leah Harb considered natural on the first anniversary of this massacre Under the anger and indignation of the Lebanese people.

The introduction to the evening bulletin of MTV, which lasted one minute and 50 seconds, on 4/8/2021, the following introduction came:

“Prime Minister Mikati armed himself with a demand for justice for the victims and for popular demonstrations demanding a decent life that coincided with the occasion. He did not suffice with these two municipal papers, but rather the treasure of accompanying his region with the calls issued by the Paris International Conference to support Lebanon, and he went up to Baabda on his fifth pilgrimage, and he says to himself, it is not reasonable, Najib, in front of this local wailing, that the international condemnation is that President Aoun will not be convinced and hasten to form a government of the mission. And be disappointed, Najib, because the

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President of Baabda cannot be affected by this type of messages in any form. In the end, there is no government, and this is expected, but what is not expected is that Mikati swallows the wrath of his fourth visit, influenced by local and international messages, and transforms from threatening that assignment deadline is not open and those who do not want to understand should understand, to an advisor and guide. With the benefits of forbearance and that there is no place in his dictionary for apology or pessimism, all this means that President Aoun does not budge on his position, and Mikati will continue to go up to Baabda and leave it disappointed, but the important thing is that Mikati does not forget, just as President Aoun forgot that the country is in ruins and the people is hungry, and the main purpose of the mandate is to form a government... it is natural that a system that is driven only by its greed and its attachment to the power to the point of domination, does not hear the groaning of widows, bereaved, brothers, sisters, husbands, and the words of the patriarch and bishops in the sad and angry celebration that took place yesterday on the first anniversary of the volcano of the fourth of August. Naturally, the censure of the heads of the superpowers that Paris gathered for the third time to help the Lebanese people to face the disasters brought by the system to its people and its country would not offend its dignity, and it is ready to bring more amidst this moral and political blockage that prevents solutions. Israel lured night air strikes from south Lebanon, broke the Israeli tradition that is limited to the formal artillery response.”

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In this introduction, we can conclude the following: firstly, it was offensive and aimed at throwing accusations and responsibilities against the person of Prime minister Najib Mikati, and this was evident through the comic expressions used by the media, Mona Saliba , in an angry and disdainful manner through her facial expressions and tone of voice, in addition to changing her voice tone with every sentence to deliver a specific message, and thus she went far away from the main part, which is the fourth of August bombing, which coincided with its first anniversary the day before, the channel reviewed the crime with the voices and representation of the families of the victims, who promised to respond and escalate in a loud tone not to mention the offensive and sarcastic method adopted by the station during the coverage of any news related to the explosion due to its impact and the damage it caused at the level of people and stones together, as this stereotype was absent, perhaps for political reasons or related to the channel's approach.

In the introduction to the evening news bulletin, which lasted two minutes, for MTV, on 6/8/2021, the following introduction came:

“what is happening in the south and will the rapid developments there lead to an all-out war? Or will the situation remain controlled under the ceiling of the red line? In form, the Israeli bombardment and “Hezbollah” missiles put Lebanon and Israel in direct and sharp contact with the danger of war, but in depth all indications indicate that all-out war is out of the question and that the matter does not go beyond the exchange of explosive messages between Israel and “Hezbollah” and through it with Iran, and the most prominent

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evidence of This is because the bombing did not target populated areas, but targeted what is known as military zones and open lands where there is no population and no possibility of civilian casualties or martyrs, this is what is between Hezbollah and Israel. The last one to know, and who knows and who informs, even with regard to the decision of war and peace. What is this total absence of the state? And what is this total surrender to the mini-state? And how do senior officials justify the convening of the supreme defense Council to which these issues are primarily entrusted? Or is the Supreme Council transformed into a shadow government and became an indefinite name which cares about ever thing except for what is required of it mainly, which is defense.”

On the third day of the anniversary of the tragedy, the channel did not mention the bombing, thus, it opened its doors to the people and opened a platform for them throughout the year, so the lion’s share went to “Hezbollah”. The main focus was on it, especially after the Shyah incident, which was considered by some social media pioneers as a political attack it has nothing to do with the media or the press, and this is basically what MTV is accused of by some audiences, especially supporters of the Shiite duo, as the channel’s transmission was banned more than once in the suburbs and neighboring areas, and in the Bekaa Valley and the south as well. This introduction did not present anything new in the file of the Beirut port explosion. And did not refer to any new developments, knowing that the people were carrying out a series of vigils at the time, but the channel

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contented itself with presenting that during a report in the bulletin and not in the introduction. In addition to the aforementioned, the presenter of the channel portrayed the state as “the absent”, which reflects a non-serious impression in that refrained from helping Lebanon or its people in the same matter.

In this case, the journalist Nakhla Odaimi believes that “investigative journalism is important reference for revealing the truth, because the investigative journalist can access certain information that no one can access”, pointing out that “the situation in Lebanon does not allow everyone to access information, even if there is no survey on certain issues, many things remain unclear and hidden”. In addition, Odaimi considers that “there are many ways that can be used, the most important of which is field research that gives geographical and strategic information that cannot be known unless we are actually on the ground. Likewise, there must be documents that give credibility to the investigative work, and I relied on it myself”. Basically, there is also the use of people from within the institution of corruption who leak information, and most of the work is done through it. The state also hid information, so we resort to these ways.

He added, “The Beirut port explosion case was one of the most mysterious cases, and we followed several matters in it, starting with the location of the explosion and a leaked of nitrates, to know later it was a fake company, and things became expanding from that. We began to verify all the data related to the case up to this day”, explaining, “We encountered There are many

difficulties, and it can be said that we do not obtain information from public administrations because of the amount of corruption within them, except when there are certain people, as we mentioned previously, that information was leaked “Ammonium and Correspondence”.

With regard to the media method used during the coverage of the events of the port explosion, the former minister, lawyer Ziad Baroud, saw that “in a case of the size/explosion of the Beirut port and its national symbolism, things got somehow mixed up, as it is no longer hidden from anyone that the media of all kinds resort to the method of emotion to attract the viewer”. And they won people’s sympathy, and after the tragedy occurred, the most prominent question was: who blew up the port of Beirut? Based on this, and according to different political agendas and goals that I cannot predict, some channels resorted to naming some of the accused or revealing the minutes of the investigations within the “rating” game, stressing on this matter is legally and morally unacceptable, but the media censorship in this period was absent, and the event mastered the situation.

### *4.2 Media coverage of the OTV channel*

OTV covered during the first week of the explosion, but intermittently and at a specific time. It was even sometimes absent from reporting the news and the event from the ground, because first, its correspondents have been subjected to repeated attacks in the field since the events of the October 17,2019 uprising, by supporters of parties hostile to the channel, and thus to



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avoid prejudice. With its own political alliance or even with the President of the Republic who founded it, given the most of the statements in the street were insulting and blaming the presidential covenant team and Hezbollah. On the other hand, according to ethics and the spirit of the media message, the channel does not have the right to be absent from such a national and humanitarian event knowing, that the channel's audience has the right to know what is happening impartially, and it is up to them to make the decision to determine the responsible party or even to respond through talk shows that the media was supposed to include the families of the victims who were completely absent from the channel screen, even refusing to make any statement to it.

In the introduction of the evening news bulletin of the OTV channel, on 4/8/2021, with a duration of 1 minute and 45 seconds, the following introduction came:

“year after the disaster justice is lost, generalization of accusation is prevalent, a year after the disaster, and the guilty are fugitives from justice, and their insolence exceeds all imagination in inventing formulas and petitions that have no goal other than escaping just punishment, a year after the catastrophe, and Lebanon is mired in tragedy, and the attempts to overthrow the constitution and the Charter remain and expand in various forms, a year after the catastrophe, and the only politician who expressed his willingness to testimony before the judicial investigator, despite the fact that the constitution prohibits his questioning, is the President of the Republic,

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General Michel Aoun. He himself is at the disposal of the judicial to hear his testimony. There is no excuse for anyone to grant himself any immunity or to arm himself with any political pretext, in order not to provide the investigation with all the information required to help it reach its goal and achieve justice in a short period of time. Because delayed justice is not a justice... Only the guilty person hides behind immunity or the petition, then he condemns himself before the people condemn him and God holds accountable, as the Maronite Patriarch announced this evening at the memorial service of the Beirut port explosion.

In this introduction, the channel intended to send veiled messages to the “Shiite duo” after Representatives Ali Hassan Khalil and Ghazi Zuaiter, who are affiliated with the duo, refused to attend the investigation, which caused a wave of anger in the country, and the remarkable thing is the acceptance of President Michel Aoun to attend the investigation. However, the channel was also keen to improve the image of the President of the Republic, as he was subjected to several criticisms and accusations. However, this introduction was not liked by a section of the audience who attached OTV’s” political affiliation” and accused it of bias and failure to convey the truth, especially after the phrase “justice is lost” was included in the bulletin Knowing that the President and the channel belong to a partisan group that participated in the political life and decisions in the country and also considered responsible, until the issuance of the final judicial decision which determines the laws, responsibilities, and convictions.

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Regarding the possibility of the President of the Republic attending the judiciary, lawyer Hussein Mashmoushi affirmed that any party, whether civil or parliamentary, has the right to sue the President of the Republic in the case of the Beirut port bombing, as he is subject to trial and accountability just like other citizens of the country, but the only difference between him and his people is that he is being tried. By the Supreme Council in accordance with Article 60 (amended by the constitutional Law of 21/7/1947) of the Lebanese constitution, which states the following: “The President of the Republic is not liable if he performs his job except when he violates the constitution or in case of high treason. For liability with regard to ordinary crimes, they are subject to general laws, and he cannot be charged for these crimes or for breaching the constitution and high treason except by the house of Representatives according to a decision issued by a two-thirds majority of all its members, and he is tried before the Supreme Council stipulated in article 80, and he is entrusted with the function of the Public Prosecution at the Supreme Council to a judge appointed by the Supreme Council, which is composed of all its chambers.

Introduction of the OTV news bulletin, lasted 1 minute and 25 seconds on 5/8/2021: the bulletin reviewed footage from the Beirut port explosion:

”On September 1, 2020, we were supposed to celebrate the centenary of Greater Lebanon, but the occasion that it will be revived, leading us to the sad centenary of Lebanon, Lebanon grieving over the dozens of dead and wounded because of the explosion that bloodied and destroyed Beirut

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yesterday, Lebanon grieving over the squabbling of responsibilities and the lack of confidence among citizens because what happened yesterday cannot pass without reckoning, sad Lebanon because the political faces that established the collapse for the thirty years and more returned to investing blood and cheap incitement That the judiciary is ineffective, that some agencies conflict, and that some administrative officials in the state are too strong to behalf accountable. Sad Lebanon because some equate the criminal with the victim, and what is between those who alerted and warned and those who underestimated and neglected, Sad Lebanon because the diversity of sets and religions in it turned some from a source of wealth and distinction into factor of disruption, and this always prevents one major perpetrator from being imprisoned... what a curse it has come to the homeland, this is the reality, but for a while, for Lebanon is great with the strength of the Lebanese who flocked to the scene of the explosion, so they provided goodness and assistance, as the President of the Republic said today, Lebanon is great with the arms of its people.”

“A curse has befallen the homeland”, this phrase topped the “trend” or the direction of public opinion on social networking sites, so that some of the people considered that the channel speaks for the party it represents, far from the truth, and the pioneers of social networking sites asked:” what curse are they talking about? Some also considered that the expression “sad Lebanon” is the result of misrule during the last 5 years, in which the “Free Patriotic Movement” was the most prominent participant and the heaviest in terms of

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the number of deputies and ministerial and institutional representation in it. “Because some equate the criminal with victim” is the second phrase that angered the public most, as they considered that President Michel Aoun knew about the issue of nitrates present in the port, but he did not move a finger under the slogan that it is not “one of the constitutional powers” which caused another wave of anger, at a time, when the channel seemed to be seeking to improve its image in the media and the public.

The introduction of the OTV news bulletin, which lasted one minute and 30 seconds, on 6/08/2021:

“Between the phrase “things have come to an end”, which the designated prime minister did not say and was circulated by some media outlets, and the phrase “things are in their end”, which he said and perhaps some did not understand their true meaning. The Lebanese, among them, were overly optimistic, while some insisted on drowning in pessimism, so that the reality of the issue remains far from emotions, and based realistically and politically on a trilogy summarized by the words of the constitution, the charter, and standards, and logic is added to the three. According to the information obtained by OTV channel from sources familiar with the authority process, there is an overlap in the discussion between the two topics of sovereign and non-sovereign portfolios. And if the intention is to reach an understanding on the first group, then agreement on the second group is a mandatory path, in light of the incomprehensible demands that some parties cling to for understandable ends. As for the names of the ministers, all the Lebanese are

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looking forward to them, hoping to be able to choose people who inspire confidence and not constitute a condition of the policy of acquiescence to this or that party, so that all parties pay the price in the end. This is the government case. As for the issue of sovereignty, Israeli aggression have been going on for decades, matched by an inalienable right to resist every aggression, and an absolute belief in the state and the army, about which no one can disagree. Today the President of the Republic, General Michel Aoun, followed the developments that took place in the southern region, after rockets were fired at the occupied territories, and the Israeli bombardment of several border villages and towns.”

Here the introduction did not deal with any remarkable developments or mentions in the file of the Beirut port bombing, as a result of public opinion in general being preoccupied with the Shuya incident and the firing of missiles towards Israel, knowing that people feared and expressed this matter through social media for fear of repeating the scene of the fourth of August again. However, the channel chose not to mention the issue and review it with a regular and traditional report in order to preserve the importance of the main event and to shorten the time, knowing that on this particular day, the people carried out a protest stand in front of the palace of Justice, Beirut. But if we want to go deeper into the output form away from the content, the introduction did not wear black color like other channels in mourning for the souls of the martyrs, bearing in the mind that the duration of the introduction did not exceed the normal time period, that it did not include any new or

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addition that can be referred to, just as the presenter did not make any provocative tone, like others. Rather, her tone was objective and normal, with a low voice and slow reading. Apart from the news introductions, the channel did not cover the port explosion or popular movements like other channels and this may be due to political reason or perhaps because of the popular resentment against the channel at the time.

### *4.3 Media coverage of Al- Jadeed TV*

The introduction of Al-Jadeed news bulletin, which lasts 3 minutes on 6/8/2021:

“The occupation fell into a miscalculation of its intelligence that Hezbollah would not respond, but the Israeli apparatus that is spying on the whole world did not pick up the signal, and the resistance established a new equation: fire with fire and open areas in exchange for open areas, terror in our south, panic in their north from above their plastic dome and from under it. Under cover of night, the occupation raided, and in broad daylight resistance responded and opened the account. The surroundings of the sites in the occupied Shebaa Farms opposite Al-Jarmak, Al-Shawakir, and Al- Badi darkened his eyes, as the enemy’s media said that Hezbollah’s response came to a large extent as a great surprise to the Israeli security establishment, and the media itself said that the party deliberately fired missiles towards open and uninhabited areas, which indicates that it does not party has no interest in escalating, going to war and turning Lebanon into confrontation line, Hezbollah’s response came

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on the basis of: an eye for an eye, and the enemy's media described the missiles as media missiles, and today's round ended in its place and did not change the rules of engagement that were established since July war. And if the occupation is not entrusted to one side, then the resistance is on the lookout as long as there is an occupied Lebanese land, and there is no need to repeat the crises of the decision of war and peace in the hands of the state. And with the end of the resistance prayers and the enemy contenting with a complaint to the "American" Security Council, the political connections in Baada were preparing a missile launcher to bomb the designated president, and Prime minister Najib Mikati was satisfied with what was said and indicated obstruction and said that matters are at their conclusion, and the correct one: things are in his hoses, and approaching the tearful end and announcing an apology soon for the assignment. In the fifth meeting with the President of the Republic, the President-designate came out with broad smiles, and the result was a rounded zero. As for today's sixth meeting, Mikati stood grim and with a fleeting smile said silence is more eloquent than words, announcing that contacts will take place to agree on the seventh date. Mikati spoke about rotation in most portfolios, which is empty talk of its content and does not apply to controversial ministries, and after the eclipse of the government moon three consecutive times from Adeb to Hariri to Mikati, authorship has no choices but to assign it to the source directly, and let the head of the national movement, Gebran Bassil, go and negotiate with the club of Presidents and Governments directly, as long as the President of



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the Republic hits deadlines from postponement in the foreseeable future. There is no government, and negotiations to author a passing day and a commanding day, and the meeting will be postponed until the expected Najib to make his contribution and withdraw tactically, leaving behind an orphan government.”

In this introduction, nothing new was presented about the file Beirut port bombing or the cry of the people due to the preoccupation of the media and public opinion in general with the famous Shuya incident. However, the introduction of the new news usually aims towards certain ideas or topics, and here we can refer to martyrdom and the idea of sacrifice for the sake of The Homeland, whether it was deliberate or treacherous, and this is similar to what happened in Beirut, where corruption and neglect reached the capital and its inhabitants.

The introduction of Al-Jadeed news bulletin which lasted two minutes and 57 seconds, on 5/8/2021:

“On the calendar, my blood is my tears and my smile’, Najla Fathi Mikati was giving the Lebanese hope planted with dramatic endings. In the fifth meeting of the designated president with President of the Republic via Mikati from Beirut’s blood and tears yesterday, to advise the Lebanese, with a smile, to resist the sharpening obstruction and the political frown. Mikati spoke from the palace about the progress, but gave it a sign of slowness, to go t the distance of writing directly to the parliamentary elections, declaring his

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commitment to the integrity of conduct before he was reassured about the course of his assignment and whether he would be killed by his co-author. Mikati realized that any other words he would make, will increase the obstacles, but he said I will apologize if I reach a dead end, and according to the donors' conference; the international distrust towards the ruling class came both in politics and money. Its summary is just "form your government, so that we may give you money", but now the money will not go to your punctured treasury. Distrust is also the case of some Lebanese streets memorizing hatred and militants time, led undisputedly by the Lebanese Forces which ironed the military uniform, abused the communist party. Its explanatory statement came uglier than sin excuse. It differentiated between the militant communist of Hanna Gharib, the son of trade unions, coordination and streets workers, and the martyr George Hawi, the man who fought discrimination and racism and was a martyr for all of Lebanon and not exclusively for one cause."

Although this introduction comes the day after the anniversary of the Beirut port explosion, it did not carry any direct correction to this painful memory, and was more like a political correction towards Mikati, the government, and the country's situation in general, without addressing the port bombing file in particular, but we cannot say it was completely absent from the introduction, because the presenter used certain expressions that indicate the difficulty of the general situation in the country..

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Introduction of Al-Jadeed news bulletin which lasted for 3 minutes on 4/8/2021:

“The sadness that loomed had never happened; the summer of the year 2020 regains its flashes. In a moment the city rose to the sky to paint on its blue color what was known as “Beirutshima”, bringing grief and sorrow to the heart of the people. A year after the tragedy, a year after the bombing of the Mediterranean port, twelve months all the tears fell, and not a single immunity fell from the leaders of the Nitrates, and the occasion is not to commemorate a year since the explosion, rather is to remind the authority with its criminality and its insistence on preserving the truth without giving permission to listen to anyone in charge, who witnessed the bombing and supervised it. The strangest thing is that the accused authorities are asking today with the families about the truth and demanding an investigation, shedding a tear, squirming and asked who brought the explosive materials and why? A torrent of political and presidential statements broke out today like a fire, and all of them are truthful. They speak of ignorance and appreciation of the perpetrator. Some of them issued a liquidated statement and some of them are waiting as the President of the Republic, General Michel Aoun, will shortly appear on the viewers to give his opinion from the Baabda ward, and it is the same platform in which Aoun declared to the media months ago that he knew of the explosive materials in the port and instructed the Secretary – General of the Supreme Council in the necessity “necessary action” I am not responsible and I do not know “where these

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materials are stored” I have no power to deal directly with the port. There is a hierarchy. Will the President of the Republic repeat his words? Does he say to the families of more than two hundred martyrs and six thousand wounded, c’est trop tard, and the issue is over? Or review the hierarchy and the powers, declaring that he is the first soldier for the sake of the homeland and that he will be a role model for everyone, and he will remove the immunity from himself, so that the rest of the people will follow him to the investigation. But Baabda source, which have no sources, say that he will not do so, and that the President of the Republic who is keen on the constitution will fortify it and cover its articles, as the sources expect that Aoun will walk in politically flaming footsteps strewn with traps. As he is on the anniversary of the fourth of August, he will be ready to detonate the fourth meeting of authorship even if he will say to Najib Mikati “neither you nor Saad can reach under my belt.” The miraculous calculations of authorship are that Michel Aoun spoiled Mikati and honored him by killing his governmental spirit in the fourth meeting and did not keep him under torture for twenty consecutive meetings, as in the case of Saad Hariri. As for this, Mikati should be thankful for Aoun as the latter thwarted the government’s formation from the beginning, announcing victory in the fourth final blow, as thus the country will continue without a government. And tomorrow it will overlook the donors’ conference with its back uncovered and without confidence. As for political immunities, they are becoming higher and a large fence is erected around them on the anniversary of the explosion, leaving only the investigative investigations

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revealing the roles and stripping the immunities and sailing towards death. Tonight, Al-Jadeed asks about the man who was the first to warn of the danger of the shipment of ammonium nitrate, and did the entire cargo of the ship actually unloaded in warehouse No. 12? Colleague Firas Hatoum investigates the reality of the torn bags that the chemical expert's report spoke of, and asks where the Jordanian company that requested the equipment disappeared? What are the details of the mysterious contract with Geo Spectrum? The director of the Savaro Company is still alive and well, so what is preventing reaching her? Was the company real before the year two thousand and thirteen? The boat of death, and on the first anniversary of the crime of the fourth of August, returns to present documents and recordings with new evidence of the eligibility of the slogan. Saying my country did this.

In this introduction the channel briefly reviewed the most prominent details related to the Beirut port bombing, especially the reasons that brought the country to this state, including the big explosion that destroyed the capital and displaced hundreds, and orphaned many children because of negligence and as a result of a political game the citizens have nothing with it. What is remarkable is that the reports are prepared by the channel in details, most of them are investigative. About the event which shows the depth of the close follow-up carried out by the channel in this context, in addition to the method of delivery that was carried out by the presenter, Samar Abu Khalil, in a manner of sarcasm, with a performance that reflects a kind of pride when needed. A reference to the hatred and disgust felt by the people towards the

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ruling authority after the explosion, which served the public opinion in terms of refreshing its memory on one hand, and the value of private information related to the latest investigations on the other hand. In addition, the expressive method of writing the introduction on which the channel relied, which carries between its lines meanings that were not written or said, and secrets left to the imagination of the viewer and his anger, not to mention the background that appeared behind the presenter who wore black mourning, which was pictures of the moment of the explosion with the condemning demonstrations that followed throughout the year, knowing that the channel opened its doors throughout the period of the explosion to cover the event and convey the suffering of the afflicted people.

“No one in Lebanon can impartially cover an event of the magnitude and specificity of the Beirut port explosion.” With these words Paulette Yacoubian, who is originally a specialist in the field of media, described the reality of television coverage of the Beirut port explosion especially that the direct victim was the journalist, his/her family, or his/her friends. Even if tried to follow philosophical and ethical theories, he/she would not succeed, especially on the day of the tragedy, because of the destruction, the backfilling, and the body parts of the victims, which we do not know if they belonged to one of our beloved ones they did not allow us to mix our feeling with our work, noting that the “Lebanese media kind of followed the venting anger approach, as it opened the coverage for citizens to portray their pain

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and anxiety, as the event imposed a high moral professional behavior in the media, and this itself is an achievement.”

likewise, Yacoubian considers that “the media in general in Lebanon in all its forms is witnessing a significant and noticeable decline, except that on the 4th of August we witnessed patriotic moments that cannot be overlooked or denied, as the media, and in particular television, was the eye of the citizen on the ground, and I can be certain that it is the only time we felt the media is regaining its role in reporting the event, away from any political or partisan interference.”

In conclusion, each channel relied on a specific presentation method. For example, MTV relied on a tone of challenge and sarcasm, believing that in this way it could convey the voice of the aggrieved people, but it deviated from the context of the event, throwing accusations and throwing responsibilities and based on this media law, it is considered a clear violation and incitement to the Lebanese street in its various sects, especially with the tone of the voice of the presenters who deliberately used in certain tone to stress some phrases such as “Mr. Aoun”, “the ruling party” “as if they did not know” ” we will not address you anymore because you don’t hear” and many more. As for “Al-Jadeed”, the duration of its introductions exceeded the normal time period allocated for the news bulletin knowing that according to media conventions, it is absolutely not permissible to present an introduction news because it corrects the views of viewers and discourages them from the truth, however, the channel adopts this formula, which

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appeared frequently during the coverage of the Beirut port explosion, as it directly accused “Hezbollah” through a series of phrases such as “the ruling party” “the Shiite duo” “war” “the state is the last to know” and therefore this is contrary to media ethics and the law, especially when using the word “war” which express national security to danger. OTV did not adopt this approach, knowing that it was subjected to a lot of criticism, but it was impartial in its coverage, even it was weak and insufficient, as it did not convey the cries of the people, it did not include enough talk shows about the event, but according to the news introductions mentioned above, its duration did not exceed two minutes, nor did deliberately make accusations or speak in a provocative tone. This is due to two reasons, first, the channel’s public affiliation with the Free Patriotic Movement, which it is considered one of the ruling parties that faced popular discontent and great rejection, or because it always faces rejection from the street and preventing its correspondents from going down the streets to stand by the bereaved families, in order to prevent exacerbation of anger and rage.

After more than one year and a half have passed, what these media campaign that supported the cause of the victims of the port explosion achieved?

So far, the investigations have not reached any tangible evidence in the Beirut port bombing case, and the local media, according to the previously presented introductions, did not contribute to adding any positive factor to the case except that they reviewed investigative reports of importance that re-raised certain topics and investigative journalism to the fore again. Returning to the



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media campaigns for his part, the former minister, lawyer Ziyad Baroud, confirmed that what happened in some media outlets in terms of infringement of political positions or personal attacks on any party is considered a media transgression for which the law is held accountable because it falls under the category of slander, slander and defamation, and even in some Programs or introductions to news bulletins lead to incitement against national peace, as the Beirut port explosion was used as a tool to settle scores and mobilize people against the state or authority.

In response to a question whether journalists who violate professional ethics and the law will be held accountable, Baroud replied: "I cannot be certain of this matter, but certainly everyone involved in a naming a person whose innocence has been proven or who has been harmed in one way or another will be interrogated and held accountable because this matter comes under the category of insult, defamation and this is a legal felony, the penalty of which ranges between 6 months and 3 years, depending on the moral or material damage suffered by the person. As for those who disclosed judicial data, the media person is called the fourth authority, and therefore he is immune and has absolute freedom to form sourced for him wherever he is. He also has the right to access the information provided that it is correct and not distorted or manipulated for one purpose or another.

In other word, no party today can determine the role of the Lebanese media in the port issue, as it sometimes opens the air to present the issues of the victims and their families and convey the cries of the aching people, and at

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other times they throw accusations and try to “polish” the images of some politicians for material or political ends or even personal agendas. Everyone of them tried to “mobilize” the viewers through loose introductions that dealt with the political part only, and not the human part, which shows the opposite of reality, according to the SAD FORMULA, the introductions to news bulletins from 3/8/2021 to 6/8/2021 did not achieve any media addition or a positive goal for the victims and their families in the case, and therefore each channel corrected the accusations and infringed on certain places such as the presidency of the republic, and inappropriate terms were used such as “Sir President” (in a sarcastic tone), “Mr. Aoun”, “you may understand”...and another sarcastic expressions that are useless in the matter of revealing the truth about the port explosion. Thus, these phrases that appeared in the introductions to the news bulletins of the three channels are considered inflammatory and non-literary and affect either a presidential reference in the country, or judicial references and other things with libel and slander, for which is held accountable by the law. Just as the phrases “war” and “conflict” were used many times which lead to implicitly incitement to sedition and may lead to a threat to national security as well.

Returning to the dates that we specified in the research blog, it must be recalled that we have set from the third to the sixth of August for the year 2021 to study the introductions to the aforementioned bulletins. We also point out that the MTV channel was distinguished in its publication on

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August 3, 2021, by paving the way for two of the families of the port's victims, Rima Zahed and Abdo Atta's brother.

### 5 Chapter Two: Social networks: Direct targeting campaigns

#### *5.1 Reflections on the audience*

During the coverage of the Beirut port explosion, we witnessed an unprecedented wave of e-campaign and other campaigns that included methods against the ruling class or those supporting it. Each group, according to its political orientations, used platforms to mobilize its audience and win their sympathy. Today, traditional media is no longer solely responsible for field coverage or anything else. Especially with the emergence of social media, where every citizen has become a journalist in terms of his ability to report and analyze the news regardless of whether it is true or not, which created several problems that were manifested on the ground, including the events of Tayounneh, which brought back to our minds memories of the civil war which we did not emerge.

For example, a number of activists launched an e-campaign under the name Nitrate Deputies to denounce the refusal to prosecute parliamentarians before the judiciary in the Beirut port explosion, and the legal Agenda that includes jurists and researchers to prosecute 3 deputies before the judicial judiciary, and requests that they be prosecuted before the Supreme Council for the trial of Presidents and Ministers, as the signatories of the petition meant Ali Hassan Khalil, Ghazi Zuaiter, and Nihad Al-Machnouk, who are former

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ministers and current deputies, the judicial investigator in the port explosion case, Tariq Al-Bitar, demanded earlier this month, that their immunity be lifted to investigate the case with them.

In response to the petition, Lebanese activists launched a campaign on Twitter under the name “deputies of Nitrates”, during which they published pictures of the signatories of the petition, and denounced what they considered “obstruction” on their part to the investigations into the case. In addition to the media coverage related to the August 4<sup>th</sup> explosion, e-campaigns launched by several civil and partisan organizations took the lead through social media, which is considered the modern media tool that helps in correcting and directing public opinion, and here it must be noted that these advanced digital communication platforms provided the opportunity for all users to become informative behind a small screen.

Thousands of tweeters interacted on social media with the events of the explosion and its repercussions that shook the capital, Beirut, and expressed their extreme shock at what happened, and asked questions about the perpetrator. They also published a large number of videos and photos that documented the moment of the explosion, each in its location, which showed the great extent of the damage it caused

“Only Tariq takes our Bittar”. Perhaps it is the most widespread campaign of the Beirut port explosion and the most supportive of the judicial investigator, judge Tariq Al-Bitar. It is also an e-campaign and non-e-campaign that was

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launched about 5 months ago by the ACT group, which is a non-governmental organization affiliated with civil society that seeks progress and achievement winning over the traditional political parties with the aim of building an independent, civil state. This group received wide popular support because of its campaigns, which the majority of the people considered it effective, especially those related to the August 4<sup>th</sup> bombing and advocacy for judge Al-Bitar, who was widely criticized for summoning some politicians, affiliated with well-known parties, headed by the former ministers Ali Hassan Khalil, Ghazi Zuaiter, affiliated with the “Shiite duo” ” Amal movement” and” Hezbollah”, which considered by the supported of these parties contrary to the constitution and justice, and accused Al-Bitar of bias and his attempts to politicize the port bombing file in favor of the United State of America, which they consider the first reason of the problems of Lebanon and the region in general.

The pioneers of social networking interacted greatly with this campaign, which was the widest of its kind with judge Tariq Al-Bitar, and the right time as well, as the case was interacting and had received death threats from some political parties unless he the judge retraces the file.

A founder of the group and the owner of the idea, Sami Saab, confirmed in an interview conducted by the researcher, with the aim of clarifying the reasons and methods for choosing the campaigns and the messages behind them, that “the idea came after some tried to silence the investigating judge in the port bombing case and change the course of the investigation, while rumors were

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raised about the assassination of judge Tariq”. Al-Bitar to prevent him from continuing investigation, so we wanted to advocate and support him within our capabilities and this was the result.

Saab explains, “The drawing of the hand that holds the hammer was chosen as a reference to the judiciary and justice, while the raised hand is an indication of the final judgment, that is, as if we are appealing to him to rule without fear or retreat. As for the raised Lebanese flags, they indicate that the Lebanese of all their sects and political tendencies stand behind the judge.”

Al-Bitar, in order to show the truth in this national issue par excellence.

He pointed out that “the calm and earthy colors were chosen, which indicate sadness and purity of the hearts of the people who are demanding their rights, while red color symbolizes the blood of the fallen victims”.



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Also, “Knock Ya Tarek” campaign was launched by the same association, ACT, after Judge Tariq Al-Bitar received a series of assassination threats and his house was attacked in attempts to scare him. In this context, Sami Saab explains that a scene of destruction in the port of Beirut was chosen in faint colors close to black and the white signifies the sadness and the tragedy that this place embodies, which has become a symbolic landmark of the ominous memory, in addition to the image of the hammer, which symbolizes our demand for a transparent and fair investigation, despite all the intimidations and threats that should not affect the judicial body.





And he adds: usually colors symbolize certain messages, and each color has its own significance that distinguishes it from others, for example white symbolize peace and purity like the souls of martyrs, red symbolize blood, black represents mourning, yellow indicates jealousy, pink indicates spring and female, and earthy colors indicate calm tranquility and sophistication, and each of these colors has its own significance for the viewer or audience, regardless of the political nature of each color towards a particular party, as yellow refers to “Hezbollah”, olive and red refer to “Lebanese Forces”, and green to “Marada Movement”, blue refers to the “Future Movement”, orange to the “Free Patriotic Movement”, and many more. Perhaps this is what caused the actual resentment in some places, as some parties were considered as if we were stealing their color and character.

In parallel, the counter street, i.e. the political parties’ followers, launched an e-campaign under the title “Our march is purer than purity”, which included a popular call to participate in a popular march under the title “The Dismissal of Judge Al-Bitar”, where a large number of supporters of the “Amal Movement” and “Hezbollah” gathered in front of the justice palace of Beirut and they carried banners denouncing the course of the judicial investigation and demanding the nomination of another judge for the third time.

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In this campaign, the duos fans used their image in a clear reference to their advocacy, with the use of yellow and green in reference to “Hezbollah” and “Amal Movement”.

In the same context, several e-campaign were launched, as we mentioned earlier, but in this research we will focus on the two campaigns mentioned above due to their political background and their influence on the popular scene, in addition to their influence on the Lebanese street.

Back to the first campaign launched by civil society, which was widely accepted by the families of the victims of the port bombing, as well as all Lebanese, and according to the theory of the SAD FORMULA, this campaign achieved good for the majority of the people, because they considered it speaking their languages and conveying their demands for a fair and transparent investigation without any pressure to get to the truth, and this was what emerged during their statements on television and social media.

On the other hand, and according to Aristotle’s theory centered on purpose and result the purpose of the civil campaign in support of Judge Al-Bitar is to raise the voice and to assure the people of the need to transform the port bombing into a political file that serves the policies of the parties, while the second campaign, based on the data presented to the various media mainly aim to stir up sectarian and national strife. So in this case we cannot consider it to have a positive outcome, and therefore it is not subject to any of the philosophical theories mentioned.

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Apart from philosophical theories, how were the events of Tayouneh covered by the e-campaign “our march is purer than purity”?

MTV considered that what happened was illogical and was prepared in advance with the aim of obstructing the course of the judicial investigation and overthrowing Judge Al-Bitar for a private political purpose and for fear of exposing the one who caused the explosion, that is, in other hand, it accused “Hezbollah” of trying to hide information about the Beirut port explosion because it was responsible for it. According to its point of view, and of course this impression is due to the channel’s political and internal agendas. According to philosophical theories, this accusation is far from objectivity and science because it did not achieve the general interest of the largest part of the people, just as the investigations were not completed or the final rulings were issued in the case to build on what is required.

For OTV, the situation is completely different, as the campaign was portrayed as if it had been subjected to an armed ambush, which inflamed the Christian street and thus caused it to be divided between supporters and opponents. According to Aristotle’s theory, the purpose behind the channel’s coverage of the event is political parties for specific ends, and therefore the goal is not the public benefit because it was not specified in the first place.

According to philosophical theories, the e-campaigns launched in a specific place served the interest of the political parties, i.e. the private public, and not the Lebanese citizens of all affiliations, while the digital armies of a number

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of parties worked to transform the campaigns for different purposes that negatively affected the Lebanese street, and this what we witnessed in the events of Tayouneh, where the squares turned into a battle arena.

### 6 Chapter three: Field study

#### *6.1 Split of opinion and consensus on the media role in “politicizing” the coverage of the Beirut port explosion*

In this thesis, we dedicated a field study through an opinion questionnaire that we distributed to 94 Lebanese citizens from different age, regional, social and other groups, first, with the aim of surveying and interrogating the largest number of citizens in this study, and because the port explosion event is a painful national event, engraved in the national memory. Lebanese and its painful events affected the Lebanese of various affiliations, noting that the residents of the capital Beirut are from different regional roots in Lebanon. Not to mention that the Lebanese channels are still to this day dealing with the issue of the port explosion of the Lebanese capital, which has huge economic, social and political repercussions, in addition to the issues that have been published and are being published on social media on this issue from various campaigns and topics.

We selected the survey questions based on the main objective of showing the impact of the Lebanese media through its coverage of the events of the 4<sup>th</sup> of August explosion on citizens, so we took into account the age group and the regional distribution to find out whether the person concerned was present in

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Beirut at the time of the incident or not, or if he was exposed to any moral, physical, or material damage due to the painful accident. Two questions were also asked about religious bonding and political affiliation due to their direct impact on the viewer's decision since we live in a mosaic environment as the Lebanese receive media messages and interact with them most of the time based on their religious, sectarian and partisan affiliations.

Therefore, we asked the audience about the most frequently seen media outlet to find out the details of the event and see the latest data, in addition to asking them whether they benefited from this coverage and felt that it was impartial or not.

Through a survey that was posed to 94 people, the following was revealed:

According to the results of the questionnaire, 66 percent of those who answered were female compared to 34 percent male, taking into consideration that the people were randomly selected from different regions in order to preserve the credibility and transparency of the research. The female is usually more sensitive than the male, as she is known for her human tendencies and her eagerness to defend her rights and strive to obtain those rights at all costs. And according to the impact of the port bombing on the majority of women who lost their children, husbands, or fathers, it was necessary to give them space for expression, at least to convey their cry.

Today, most of the young people who are dependent on change do not follow the local channels because they are in Arabic, and they prefer to keep up with

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the times and learn other languages such as French or English, which are usually used more in the labor market, and this was confirmed by the results which showed that 54.3% speak English well, compared to 24,3% for French, and the rest are from minorities who are fluent in Spanish, for example, or other languages, and this explains the reason for the decline in viewership for programs and local news bulletins, which are generally in Arabic.

The level of economic income from a scientific point of view indicates the extent of an individual's independence and his ability to live and communicate with others in society. Here, as the statistics showed 39.4% get paid a salary of approximately 1,000\$, 11.7% get paid 500\$, and 20.2% get paid about 200\$, and 28.7% get paid about 100\$. Here, we notice a significant difference in the level of individual income, as some earn salaries higher than others so it must be noted the deterioration of the exchange rate of the Lebanese pound against the dollar, and consequently the difference in prices, and of course, the increase in the allowance for basic and secondary services and consumer goods.

54.3% faced financial difficulties after the Beirut port bombing, which caused huge material losses. In contrast, 35.1% of the groups do not face material or economic problems, while 10.6% of the samples refrain from specifying. Living difficulties play a major role in determining the orientation of the individual, as some take political sides with the aim of earning money, as some influential parties pay huge sums for their people.

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The statistics show that 73.4% were at home, and 19.1% were at work, meaning that the majority were not at work, it is noteworthy here that the majority are not residents of Beirut and do not work in Beirut, but they are from the groups that were directly targeted and followed the news. 92.6% were not harmed, nor their families, compared to 6.4% who were harmed. Here it noteworthy that the majority of those who were not harmed do not work or live in the vicinity of Beirut and therefore were not in the capital at the moment of the disaster.

71.3% their families did not suffer material or physical harm, based on the previous idea that they were not in the capital, but if they lived outside Beirut, this does not mean that they did not work in the capital or did not go anywhere at the time.

91.5% did not lose their homes, compared to 8.5% who lost them, and this group is residents of Beirut or its surroundings, which explains the matter, and their heavy loss as a result of the force of the explosion.

In the same context, the information varied according to the opinion survey about the party that caused the Beirut port explosion. For example, 31.9% of the public considered that “Hezbollah” was responsible for it, while 31.9% also considered that neglect of the state and rampant corruption in all sectors is the main reason behind the explosion. What is remarkable about the issue is that the group that held Hezbollah responsible for this disaster are supporters of the Lebanese Forces party. The audience tended and directed

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their thoughts towards political and internal agendas, especially knowing that 71.4% of the samples suffer from economic and financial problems, and 65.2% are considering emigration after the Beirut port bombing. Here also it must be noted that a disaster in the size of the Beirut port explosion and according to its damage which attached to humans a stones it was better to the people to unite away from any other considerations, but according the results of the questionnaire attached below, this did not happen. Rather, the media contributed to multiplying this fact and mobilizing the public according to its orientations political.

91.5% of the samples followed news during the coverage of the Beirut Port bombing, compared 8.5 percent who did not, which is a small percentage compared to the number of those who followed, due to the enormity of the event at various levels.

In addition, MTV ranked first in terms of popular viewership according to the opinion poll, followed by Al-Jadeed with 6.6%, followed by other unspecified channels and OTV, and this explains the regional distribution of TV channels, as each channel was directed to a specific section of people that belong to a specific party, a specific religion and a specific region, for example, Al-Manar channel is the most watched channel in the south and the Bekaa, because the majority of the population is a Hezbollah audience, while in Metn and Keserwan, MTV and LBC occupy the first place, while in Beirut there are many competing channels due the diversity of religions and affiliations that exists in the capital.



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Returning to the media, about 50% of the respondents expressed that they prefer using social networking sites primarily rather than watching TV or listening to the radio, while 26.6% prefer watching TV and 20.2% tend to browse websites. It should be noted that the use of social networking sites does not mean browsing a website, as the follower can watch a live broadcast without accessing or reading the news. 50% of the audience considered that the media covered the Beirut port explosion in an objective way and professional manner, while 29.8% considered it unprofessional, while 20.2% did not give an answer. In this context, some of the samples considered that the media is “cheap” and “exploitative” and works to please the funded political parties.

90.4% of the samples considered that social media is effective in conveying news and influencing the citizens, compared to 9.6% who considered it ineffective and therefore useless.

Perhaps social media does not provide complete knowledge or comprehensive coverage of events, but it enjoys the use of a large segment of users, according to 91.5% of the samples they use social networking sites, and browse news pages knowing the latest developments, and here it should be noted that most TV channels are now using “social media” as a platform to convey developments as well, in order to reach the largest possible number of viewers.

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The analyzed samples showed that 48.9% of them followed the news during the Beirut port explosion 24 hours a day, and this is normal given the enormity of the event and its importance on the humanitarian and national levels. On the other hand, 23.4% of the samples indicated that they only followed the news for two hours, and 16 percent watched the news for about 7 hours, and 10.6% did not answer and were reticent about responding. Also according to the results 48.9% of them considered that the TV channels provided conflicting and misleading information regarding the Beirut port bombing, while 66% believed that the media contributed to some extent in directing, correcting, and changing the political orientations of the bulk of the people, and thus leading to the division of the Lebanese street.

Based on the information and data we obtained, 91.2% of the respondents watched news and political programs to know the latest developments and events on the fourth of August, 48.4% used social media to browse news related to the explosion, and 49.5% followed throughout the 24-hours live broadcast to cover the Beirut port explosion. The remarkable thing is that 80.9% preferred not to reveal their political affiliation, and 6.4% of the audience belonged to the "Lebanese Forces" party, while the others have no political affiliation, and they are minorities and they belong to the revolutionaries or the March 8 Alliance. Returning to the coverage of the Beirut port explosion and whether if the media outlets adhered to their professional and ethical role as they should, 22.3% considered that it helped them change their political orientations after the fourth of August, while

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62.8% considered that the information provided by the media did not change their partisan or political orientations for one reason or another.

45.7% of the sample confirmed that the media coverage of the Beirut port explosion did not give sufficient information about the event except for the superficial ones, while the rest was nothing than throwing political responsibilities and accusations. While 35.1% of the samples considered that the information and reports presented through the media were good, and 8.5% rated them as excellent, 10.6% declined to answer the question.

So, based on the numbers mentioned above, the media of all kinds formed a general opinion regarding the issue of the Beirut port explosion, but in varying proportions, and therefore did not provide any new or useful and scientific information to the viewer, which made it lose its credibility and prompted the viewer to be reluctant to watch television and follow the news, as it did not achieve the general benefit even for the majority of people, this is according to the theory of public benefit that was explained in the introduction of the letter and the theory of teleology of Aristotle.

### **7 Conclusions:**

#### *7.1 Search results*

There is still great ambiguity in the case of the Beirut port explosion, and so far the state has not issued any statement regarding or clarifying who caused this explosion. The aim of this research is to study the role played by the press and the media, particularly investigative journalism, in revealing the

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whole truth documents and facts, and repercussions of this coverage on public opinion. It also aims to find out if the Lebanese investigative journalists were able to highlight the hidden face of the Beirut port explosion, especially on the fateful day of the tragedy, when the media rushed to cover the event, but each according to his agenda and political affiliations. Increasing viewership, or what is known as “writing”, and according to the in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher, the majority indicates that they are a series of transgressions and moral errors recorded in the coverage of the fourth of August and beyond.

According to a review of the literature, philosophical theories, ethical schools, which are usually considered the main reference for evaluating any journalistic work or material, the coverage of the port bombing from the point of view of the Lebanese media was not subject to generally accepted laws and ethics, which made it lose symbolism, so at times the media took sides with the side of the victims’ families and at another time with the side of the politicians. While he had to remain neutral between the two parties, the pain resulting from the explosion united the Lebanese media under the banner of humanity and national affiliation, so the correspondents took of the mantle of the media affiliation and began racing to support the people and stand by them.

As for the political programs, they were completely absent from the character of impartiality and transparency, just as they were absent from the main event, due to which political agendas and orientation occupied the forefront,

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according to the opinion polls and in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher.

On the other hand, social media played a prominent role in covering the explosion, as it was used to market and launch programmed e-campaigns for specific purposes that led to the occurrence of an internal armed conflict. About 95 percent from the survey considered that the media did not provide enough information to serve the public opinion as much as it worked to direct and correct its opinions and throw accusations.

The opinion poll that was conducted, included different age groups and regions to ensure the involvement of the largest possible number of viewers in the analysis process, so that the picture may become clearer and show the reasons and methods of the Lebanese media's coverage of the Beirut port explosion, while another section and those who often affiliated with different political parties saw that the media played a role in politicizing the national event for various purposes.

Based on all the aforementioned, we conclude that the media transmitted the image to the viewer and covered the event, but to a varying extent, according to the agendas of the political and private channels that created a kind of aversion among the viewers, and this explains the reality of the Lebanese media in general, which is dependent on parties or financiers to escape from stifling economic crises. That has been rocking Lebanon for about 10 years to this day.

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Today, it is not a secret to anyone, whether in Lebanon or abroad the reality of the Lebanese media and the economic crises it is facing, which made it disguise itself with a political or foreign cloak under the slogan of fighting and survival. The media in general should not take sides with any party, especially in light of national events and a humanitarian catastrophe that necessitates it. The dismissal is in order to preserve the ethics of the profession and respect the viewers who constitute the basic public base for any station, while the media reflects the image of homeland and its people at the same time. Therefore, according to the in-depth interviews conducted and ethical schools, what was shown on the screens in Al-Manar, OTV, and MTV did not achieve the public interest for the majority of the people because the affiliation of the these channels to well-known political parties that imposed their power on them to transmit the event impartially and neutrality to the viewer.

### *7.2 Research difficulties*

At the end of this work, it is necessary to stop at some of the obstacles that prevented the researcher from reaching the documents she needed to finish the analysis. For example, it was not easy to access some TV episodes or statements which took a long time until each station agreed to the researcher's required information. Not to mention the cholera and influenza epidemics that spread greatly. In addition, there are not enough scientific or literary references about the Beirut port bombing.

### *7.3 recommendations*

The researcher recommends that those who wish to expand on this topic choose a large number of specialized journalists who covered the port explosion, in addition to intensifying the number of participants in the opinion questionnaire, given that the issue is humanitarian and patriotic, and all citizens of the country are involved in it one way or another.

## **8 Appendices**

### *8.1 Appendix 1: An interview with the investigative journalist Nakhlah Odimi*

1- Has investigative journalism in Lebanon become a basic reference for citizens to find out the truth?

Reference investigative journalism is an important for revealing the truth, because an investigative journalist can access certain information that no one else has access information, and if there is no investigation on certain issues, many matters remain unclear and hidden.

2- What are the means that you usually use to access accurate information that gives citizens confidence in your work? Does it include cooperation with specific agencies in the state?

There are many methods that can be used, the most important of is the field research that gives geographical and strategic information that cannot be known unless we are actually on the ground. Likewise, there must be documents and papers that give credibility to the investigative work, and I

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rely on them mainly. There is also the people from within the institution of corruption who leak information, and the majority of the work is done through it. The state also hides information, so we resort to these means.

3- How did you take the initiative to investigate the case of the Beirut port explosion, in light of all this ambiguity surrounding it? Did the blurring of evidence constitute obstacles that prevented you from reaching tangible results?

The case of the Beirut port explosion was one of the most ambiguous cases, and we followed several issues in it, starting with the location of the explosion and a leaked image of nitrate, to show later that it was a fake company, and things expanded from that. And we began to verify all the data related to the case up to this day.

4- What are the difficulties or obstacles that you faced when seeking information from public administrations? Was there a positive response during the investigation of the Beirut port explosion?

There are many difficulties, and it can be said that we do not obtain information from public administrations because of the amount of the corruption that exists within them, except when there are certain persons as we mentioned previously who leak information. We were unable to obtain any information related to the port explosion except from the Customs administration, from which some papers related to nitrates ammonium and correspondence were leaked.



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- 4- Has the investigative work that you carry out during the practice of your profession ever constituted a threat to your personal safety?

The investigative work naturally poses a danger to personal safety, especially in Lebanon in the absence of the judiciary and security forces, especially since the influential and gangs have a large hand and threaten journalists if their affairs are exposed. The threat is always there when the state wants to silence the free pen, especially when there is a mini-state inside the state that seeks to keep matters hidden in the issue of smuggling and electricity theft.

- 5- Who protects the investigative journalist?

God only protects the investigative journalist in Lebanon and his/her media institution, of course.

### *8.2 Appendix 2- An interview with the former Minister of Information Melhem Riachy.*

- 1- What do you think of the Lebanese media covering the Beirut port explosion?

From a scientific point of view, I think they are okay, but some of them lacked professionalism, whether in surveying the scene or presenting content away from exaggeration in emotion at the expense of content. The Beirut port explosion is one of the holiest and greatest events that took place in the history of Lebanon, and it was supposed to deal with it impartially and realistically, away from politics or religion, because the damage that occurred

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did not differentiate between a Muslim and a Christian, or between a son of the south and a son of the Ashrafieh.

2- Was the media impartial or was according to special agendas at the expense of the families of the victims and martyrs?

Both sides are permissible, some of them are neutral, while others are biased, whether in favor of the families of the victims or even at their expense, by directing the event as his political requires. For example, when the air was opened for long hours on behalf of the families of the victims, we witnessed a series of ethical and professional transgressions by attempting to politicize their protests or inventing unrealistic positions from their tongues with the aim of gaining a media “scoop” or rising viewership. In other cases, we have witnessed some politicians or parties polishing a goal in Jacob’s breath on the channels, as if no explosion had occurred and we are still suffering under its weight.

3- What is the reason for the absence of some TV channels from covering the incident, in your opinion?

I do not know, but any absence absent of such an event is undoubtedly media stupidity.

4- Social media played a prominent role in covering the Beirut port explosion. What about the media law and professional ethics, were they violated due to rumors and false news promoted by some websites?

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Regarding violations, speak up, and there is nothing wrong with verbal violence, horrible speech, hate speech, incitement, and deviance from objectivity as well. All of these and others were prevalent and prevail, and their causes are many, and sufficed with three of them. The first is the absence of a vertical culture among most of the activists on the means of communication, as well as many media professionals, unfortunately, and the second is the absence of laws that deal with accountability, the projects of which I put in place when I was minister of information, and the third is the exposure of virtual societies to harsh reality based on ignorance, flatness, and political illiteracy in the first place. On a personal level, I included in the draft media law, which unfortunately did not see light, a special chapter on media ethics, inspired by the Medical Ethics Law, which, in my opinion, is of the importance of media freedom.

5- How are the violating media or press organizations usually prosecuted?

Who is responsible of this and what is the role of the Ministry of information?

Responsibilities are divided between the judiciary and the Ministry of information, especially the minister, who has the right to take restraining measures, up to the closure of the institution, based on the opinion of the National Media Council, but this has rarely been restored to. However, I propose to introduce fundamental amendments to the laws in order to modernize them and make them repressive where necessary and care for freedom in depth.

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6- What violations, in your opinion, occurred during the coverage on MTV, OTV and Al-Jadeed?

I believe that the basic violations did not only include the Beirut port explosion, but in general the subordination of these channels to certain political parties that impose on them what to show and how to show them as the guests. It suffers from a certain financial crisis that weighs heavily on it, and this is another problem that threatens the Fourth Estate itself.

### *8.3 Appendix 3: An interview with MP Paulette Yacoubian*

1- To what extent do you think the media played a role in voting during the August 4 explosion?

The Lebanese media somewhat followed a ventive approach, as it opened the air for citizens to portray their pain and anxiety, while the event imposed a high moral and professional behavior in the various media, and this is in itself an achievement.

On the level of the Lebanese channels, it was the most prominent episode, as the viewers' eyes were fixed in front of the screens throughout the period extending from the fourth of August until the end of September, to follow the event and find out what is going on, and this is somehow restored the media's vital role in reporting the facts, and made it regain the title of the Fourth Authority, especially because the great impact it had on the viewers.

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The main problem in the coverage did not occur on the day of the explosion, but rather after it, especially after the normalization with the political class, where they restored themselves as if nothing happened, as if there are no victims and martyrs, and no capital was destroyed due to partisan and class bidding.

2- Do you consider that the event was covered impartially, scientifically and ethically?

No one in Lebanon can impartially cover an event with enormity and specificity of the Beirut port explosion, especially since the direct affected was the journalist, his family, or his friends. Even if he tried to follow philosophical and ethical theories, he would not succeed in that, especially the catastrophe, because the destruction, filling and the body parts of the victims that we do not know if they belong to our beloved ones did not allow us to work without feelings. In answer your question, yes, a series of transgressions accrued, but only during the coverage of the explosion, but also after the explosion, and this is what we clearly saw in the political talk shows in particular.

The media in general in Lebanon in all its forms is witnessing a significant and noticeable decline. However, on the fourth of August, we witnessed patriotic moments that cannot be overlooked or denied, as the media, and in particular television were the eyes of the citizen on the ground, and I can be certain that this is the only time we felt that the media is regaining its role in

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moving the event away from any political or partisan interference only on the day of the explosion and to be more precise only in the first hours.

3- Normally, in similar incidents, the media and state institutions rally around with the aim of solidarity in the painful affliction that befell the country, but we did touch this matter, especially since the televisions appearances were divided between March 8 and 14.as an independent MP why we did not see you on Al-Jadeed or OTV?

The parties in power have no clear enemy today, which is the convergence of the Lebanese people, which frightens them. Indeed, political divisions have returned even on independent screens. As media outlets, media and journalistic institutions tried as much as possible to create a state of awareness, but the absurd political discourses did not a will not change, and those channels hosted me and hosted a large number of neutral activists like me, but the power mouthpieces will not dare to host me because they know that my approach and my national affiliation will put them in trouble, especially on the air in a sensitive period when the Lebanese without exception were in a state of resentment and anger, which threatened their loss of the popular base, I think this is the most important reason for this.

4- In addition to your parliamentary role, you are an environmental activist, why have not seen awareness campaigns away from politics regarding the harmful emissions of explosive materials at the port?

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I am a political and environmental activist, so I do not deny that the environmental file allowed me to enter the explosion, we were about 2,000 volunteers who devoted ourselves to community service. The environmental issue has no place at that moment, so I mobilized myself for this work but I warned and alerted as much as possible of the environmental risks in all my media appearances.

### *8.4 Appendix 4: an interview with the lawyer and former minister Ziad Baroud*

- 1- Usually, a media person is not entitled to throw accusations, target a specific party, or reveal the circumstances of the investigation before the final decision is issued. This matter was not respected in covering the Beirut port explosion. What is the reason and what are the legal violations committed?

In a case of the size of the Beirut port explosion and its national symbolism, things got somewhat mixed up, as it is no longer hidden from everyone that the media of all kinds resorted to the method of emotion to attract the viewer and gain his sympathy, and after the tragedy occurred, the most prominent question was: “Who blew the port of Beirut?”, starting from here and according to for different political agendas and goals that I cannot predict, some channels resorted to naming some of the accused revealing the minutes of the investigations as part of the “Writing” game. This matter is legally and

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morally unacceptable, but the media censorship during this period was final, and the event was the master of the situation.

2- Will journalists be held accountable for these violations, if any? Who is responsible for that?

I cannot be certain of this issue, but certainly everyone who is involved in naming a person whose has been harmed in one way or another will be interrogated and held accountable because this matter falls under the category of slander and defamation, and this is a legal felony whose punishment ranges from 6 months to 3 years, depending on the damage moral or material to a person. As for those who disclosed judicial data, the media person is called the fourth authority and therefore he is immune and had absolute freedom to create sources for him wherever he is. He also has the right to access information provided that it is correct and not distorted or manipulated for one purpose or another.

3- In terms of media law, do media organizations have the right not to fully cover this event because of partisan or political affiliations?

The media law does not impose on any institution what it should cover and what it should do. Rather, professional ethics dictate that channels convey the image to the viewer, how he knows what is going on around him, and this is the role of the media in general. Personally I believe that in terms of the Beirut port explosion, it should have been covered differently. If we put media and legal ethics aside, there is a national and human duty towards



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every viewer or witness, and this must be held accountable if there is a party that is actually held accountable.

4- We have witnessed many political debates on television programs, accusations and obscene words. Does this matter fall under the penalty of slander and defamation?

Of course, all we have seen is a tangible and direct transgression of the law and professional ethics. When we attack a person who is against us personally and we open his past and delve into his personal or family life, all this transgression against the law and a violation of the freedom of others.

5- Are the insults broadcasted on some channels and news bulletin introductions to certain political sites within the legal penalties or freedom of opinion and expression?

Yes, what we have unfortunately seen on some channels falls under legal penalties, especially those that affected certain sites in the state that are considered taboo, such as the website of the Presidency of the Republic, the Maronite Patriarch, or even the mufti, who was also subjected to abuse because of his political positions. We cannot direct accusations or offensive words against anyone and consider this as personal freedom. The freedom of any of us ends when it encroaches on the freedom of others, and what happened has nothing to do with civilization or freedom. First, he addresses the people, and he must respect the minds of the viewers, and secondly, he bears a national responsibility that must be taken into account, because what

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happened in many media outlets is considered incitement and a violation of national security.

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## The Professionalism of the Lebanese Media in the Coverage of Beirut Blast

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