

ABC called for – only to be ignored

The creation of an Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC or OJD in French) in Morocco has certainly promoted transparency, but it has failed to impact advertising revenues as hoped.

Rabat - OJD Morocco (Organisme de Justification de la Diffusion) was founded in June 2004 in Casablanca. It is the first audit bureau to be created in the world for over 20 years. Its mission is to audit the circulation figures of the paying and free press.

In its first year, OJD Morocco certified around 20 publications thanks to technical assistance from OJD France.

"OJD Morocco was created based on the same organisational principles as OJD France. We act as a service provide and all of our auditing operations are conducted by our own experts," explained Philippe Rince, Deputy Director of OJD France.

Founded in 1922, OJD France is one of the world's oldest bureaus for auditing press circulation. OJD Morocco is the only initiative of its kind in both Africa and the Arab World excluding Lebanon, where OJD France is also active.

"Increased competition between advertising media made the creation of such an organization necessary," says Nasreddine El Afrit, former Secretary General of OJD Morocco and a former Head of the Moroccan press group Caractères.

"The OJD has benefited the profession insofar as it has enabled us to prove the arguments we put forward. It has raised standards in the profession and promoted greater transparency," he adds.

A growing membership

OJD Morocco is a tripartite organisation (bringing together publishers, advertisers and advertising agencies) with a revolving presidency. It is currently headed by Asmae Hassani, Marketing and Development Director at Maroc Hebdo. Three years after its creation the organisation has around 50 members from both the general and specialised press.

Why did these members join? "To reassure advertisers," says Réda Sedrati, Publication Director of *aufait*, the country's first free daily newspaper.

For Ahmed Réda Benchemsi, Director of the weekly *TelQuel* there is a dual objective: "First, to support the idea that we ourselves are transparent, despite the fact that *TelQuel*'s sales figures were certified by its printer and distributor long before the OJD was founded. Second, to gain information on our competitors' sales, giving us some idea of our market position and enabling us to formulate suitable commercial arguments for our sales forces."

Although the OJD has undeniably promoted transparency, it has had no noticeable impact on advertising revenues. "The correlation between advertising prices and circulation that should result from the certification of members has not yet emerged. Prices are more or less identical from one publication to another, regardless of their circulation," said El Afrit.

Little change

These comments were echoed at the daily *L'Economiste*: "The OJD has changed little for newspapers or the sector," said Khalid Belyazid, Managing Director of the country's leading economic newspaper. "It is the absence of an OJD that poses a problem and provides a pretext for suspicion. As long as a country does not have an audit bureau or a newspaper isn't certified, it is seen as a weakling trying to cover up poor sales and supporting non-transparency. Everyone calls for an audit bureau and then uses non-membership as a pretext not to buy advertising or to opt for another medium," he adds.

"Yet now that the OJD exists, very few people are using it, not even those agencies that are members. Newspapers like ours that were already trusted by advertisers have been strengthened in terms of their purchases, the smaller players have stopped bluffing about their sales, but continue to be supported by indulgent advertisers," he added.

Belyazid believes that the OJD is not establishing a purchasing logic for advertising space that is proportional to sales. "The OJD builds trust without resolving anything, since sales are no indicator of the quality of a readership, its purchasing power, and so on, and advertisers want this kind of information," he told APN.

Although membership of the OJD may have no impact on newspapers' advertising revenues, it does increase their chances of receiving public subsidies. "By bringing a certain calm to media-advertiser-state relations, this organisation has made it possible to request state subsidies on the objective basis of sales figures," said Belyazid.

Source: [Arab Press Network](#)

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