

# SAT-7

*A case study of a Christian satellite-TV network in an  
Arab and Islamic context*

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Master thesis, Media Studies  
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SAT-7. A case study of a Christian satellite-TV network in an Arab and Islamic context.

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# Abstract

This case study investigates SAT-7 – a Christian independent satellite-TV network – in its context – the Middle East and North Africa – with a majority of Islamic inhabitants and traditions. It examines and describes *what* the actual implemented strategy is in order to do the daily work of SAT-7. Three sub-questions, aimed to *explain* the strategy in further detail, look at *how* SAT-7 operates, *how* they design their programming, and *how* they tell the stories of themselves. These describe strategic measures. The empirical data are two sources of evidence; I) interviews with a “pool of leaders” in SAT-7, and II) formal documentation presenting the written institutional narrative of SAT-7. This study focuses on theories of *media and religion*, *religious programming* and *institutional narratives*. The analysis sets out to describe, interpret and explain the findings of strategic measures done by SAT-7. The key strategic measure is being *present* in the region. SAT-7 is *for* the Middle East, *by* the Middle East. This presence includes crossing religious borders, including Christians – even a cooperation of several Christian denominations. An enhancement of cultural authenticity and coexistence becomes the result after taking cautious steps, never attacking, denigrating, or perhaps more important, proselytizing, others. SAT-7 presents the “love of God” – bringing hope and reconciliation to the region.

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Dette case studiet undersøker SAT-7 – en kristen, uavhengig satellitt-TV stasjon – i sin kontekst – Midtøsten og Nord Afrika – bestående av en majoritet i befolkningen av Islamske innbyggere og tradisjoner. Studiet undersøker og beskriver *hva* den egentlige strategien er for å gjøre det dagligdagse arbeidet. Tre del-spørsmål forsøker å *forklare* strategien grundigere, ved å se på *hvordan* SAT-7 opererer, *hvordan* de utformer programmene deres, og *hvordan* de forteller historier om seg selv. Disse beskriver strategiske tiltak. Den empiriske dataen er samlet fra to kilder; I) intervjuer med en ”miks av ledere” i SAT-7, og II) formell dokumentasjon som presenterer skriftlige institusjonelle narrativ. Dette studiet fokuserer på teorier om *medier og religion*, *religiøse programmer* og *institusjonelle narrativ*. Analysen har som mål å beskrive, tolke og forklare funnene av strategiske tiltak gjort av SAT-7. Det viktigste tiltaket er *tilstedeværelse* i regionen. SAT-7 er *for* Midtøsten, *av* Midtøsten. Denne tilstedeværelsen gjelder på kryss av religiøse grenser, inkludert kristne – blant annet et samarbeid av flere kristne konfesjoner. Forsiktige steg som aldri å angripe, diskriminere, eller kanskje viktigst, misjonere, andre, forsterker SAT-7s kulturelle autentisitet og sameksistens i regionen. Virkemiddelet er å presentere ”Guds kjærlighet” – som bringer håp og forsoning til regionen.



# Acknowledgment

Before anything, I would like to give a huge shout out to my advisors, Knut Lundby and Mona Abdel-Fadil (F-15/S-16). It is mandatory to mention that this thesis do at no point, what so ever, mirror the quality of my advisors. I must mention that my last year has been time consuming, and there was never enough time to spend on this thesis as I would have liked, which would honor my advisors more. They did, however, understand my situation, and have been superb in restoring faith and motivation, and “doing the best as we can” to help me, given the lack of time. I am also grateful for SAT-7, for opening up any door that I requested, and allowing me to do this study. I need also mention Martin Birkedal and Norea Mediemisjon, who made this connection with SAT-7 possible, and for assisting me during the Network conference. Finally, a big thank you to Kjetil, my brother, for your assistance at the end of my writing.

2016 will always be a year to remember. This thesis, and me finishing my studies at the university is a big milestone. Another, bigger than any, is the birth of my son, Markus. He has been my “light at the end of the tunnel”, what I always longed to come home to after tough days of writing. To my wife, Solveig, there is no way of describing how you have supported me during the course of this study, and how you have carried out the business at home with Markus, while I had long days of writing. Thank you for your perseverance, your support, and your love, every day. Forever grateful.





# Preface

As this report is to explore, television is still – despite the decline of linear TV in the West – the most sought after and used medium in the Arab world. And as the title entails: it is about a Christian satellite-TV network, with the bold slogan of “making Gods love visible”. My academic interest has always revolved around the interaction between “media” and “religion”. Growing up in as a missionary kid – to “share the word” has always been something common and close to me, and definitely true to the reality of how I grew up. To me, media and religion – a communication tool and “a word to share” – is a natural topic of interest, and a natural combination, worthy of being examined further in detail. Later years have brought with it an interest of the Middle East and North Africa. I’m particularly curious of the political and religious challenges that exist in this region. It might be due to the news covering, making this region seemingly constantly actual and relevant. It might be due to the questions surrounding “media” and “religion” in a sensitive region, such as the Middle East. It might be how recent years have shown a decline in Christianity, and stories being told of suppression and massive exodus of Christians in this MENA-region (Middle East and North Africa). Perhaps it is all a combination. However, it has happened, and it has led me to asking questions, questions necessary in leading me to this thesis. My interests in media, in religion, and in the complex MENA-region, has led me to the following curiosity: How is it possible to run a Christian media network in the Middle East and North Africa – in a context where stories are being told of Christians emigrating and being pursued? (Note: my assumptions).

My first encounter with SAT-7 was in 2014. What got my attention was that it was a satellite TV-broadcaster, with a clear and present Christian profile, running and residing in the Middle East. And it had done so for the last 19 years. No fatwa, no bounty. SAT-7, a Christian independent satellite TV-network, operating in the Middle East and in North Africa, from Morocco in the west to Iran in the east, from Sudan in the south, all the way to Afghanistan in the north. Their description is as follows: “A Christian satellite TV by and for the people of the Middle East and North Africa.” And I had never heard of it, and neither did I find any studies on it. This *revelatory* case (Yin 2014), as I experienced it, really needed scrutiny, and my thesis had chosen its course.

Oslo, May 2016  
Leif Ørjan Thingbø



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The SAT-7 network is made up of five different channels: *SAT-7 Arabic*, *Kids*, *Plus*, *Pars* and *Türk*. ‘Arabic’, ‘Kids’ and ‘Plus’ are all Arabic speaking channels, and covers all the countries in the region where Arabic is the mother tongue. ‘Plus’ is a combination of ‘Arabic’ and ‘Kids’, a «best-of», and is broadcasting to Arabs living in the diaspora, especially in Europe. ‘Pars’ is the Iranian channel, and ‘Türk’ is the Turkish speaking channel. SAT-7 also uses freelancers from the other countries, for instance in Algeria and Tunisia. My main interest in the MENA-region<sup>1</sup> has always been the Arabic-speaking countries. This thesis will therefore revolve around these Arabic-speaking channels of SAT-7. It will be a focus on the *organization* that is SAT-7, and how and what their actual strategy, operations and programming, is like in this region. What are the thoughts behind such a strategy? It might also give me answers to the curiosity leading me to this thesis: Is it possible with a Christian profile (visible even) media broadcaster in this Arab-ethnic region, where the majority is Islamic context?<sup>2</sup> Which strategies are implemented? This might also give some insights on freedom of the press, freedom of speech and religious freedom, and what it might look like (though only from one perspective and one actor), and point to similarities and differences between the different countries in the region. Another factor, of a truly interesting character, is the *institutional narrative*, how SAT-7 tells stories of themselves, giving insight to how they perceive themselves – both as Christians, and as a professional media actor in the Arab world and the media market. All formal statements that from SAT-7 are institutional narratives, telling how they operate and why. Oral conversations might also be institutional narrative, but might also evolve during the course of the conversation or in time. Some stories overlap with the written narratives, others differ. Conversations with the leaders of the organization will examine if what they *say* are discrepancies from official narratives. Counter narratives, alternative institutional narratives, or individual opinion may reflect other stances than the official institutional narrative. Looking at the context of SAT-7, the MENA-region, institutional narratives gives an insight to how SAT-7 view their audience – who are they, what is SAT-7s understanding of them, and how do they talk about them? Stories and narratives are in this study considered the same, and are given equal meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> Middle East and North Africa

<sup>2</sup> *Arab* Christians are of course a part of the “Arab-ethnic” – the emphasis is on Arab Christians as a *minority*.

## 1.1 Research question

As my introduction has described, the curiosity underling my further inquiry of SAT-7 was how it was possible for such a media broadcaster to operate in such an assumed, challenging context and environment. These assumptions and this curiosity eventually evolved into the following research question:

*What is the actual strategy of the Christian satellite-TV network SAT-7 in the Middle East and North Africa?*

This is a descriptive position, aiming at exploring and describing what strategy SAT-7 has implemented, making it possible to broadcast in an Arab and Islamic context, which the Middle East and North Africa is. This emphasizes SAT-7 as my operationalization, pointing out their context of being a minority actor, as a Christian satellite-TV network, in the MENA-region, in the realm of Arabic television. I have the following sub-questions for the thesis, looking to further examining the strategy, by explaining three different aspects of strategies implied by SAT-7:

- *How do they operate?*
- *How do they design their programming?*
- *How do they tell the stories of themselves?*

There are some important appraisals to the research question. SAT-7 Türk and Pars will not be included in the empirical database. My first attempt at designing a research question, involved narrowing the context down to Tunisia<sup>3</sup>. In the case of SAT-7, and their structure, that would be too narrow. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the Arabic-speaking countries where SAT-7 operates. This implies the three Arabic channels of SAT-7: Arabic, Kids and Plus. As SAT-7 Plus is a combination of the most popular programs of SAT-7 Arabic and Kids, there will not be much focus on that channel, essentially narrowing it down to the Arabic channel and the Kids channel. The material I have collected and which is most available of SAT-7 is from their work in Egypt and Lebanon, where the two main studios are located (Cairo and Beirut).

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<sup>3</sup> This might help to sort out any confusion that *Appendix 3 – NSD Approval*, and how Tunisia is mentioned in this document, would possibly create.

## 1.2 Outline of thesis

This case study looks at SAT-7 as a case in an Arab and an Islamic context. By *Islamic context*, it is meant that the majority of the demographics in this region are followers of an Islamic religious view. This thesis will touch several areas that themselves could be studied, but there is unfortunately no time for that at the current moment. To give a greater understanding of the context in which SAT-7 operates in, the following chapter aims to give a background for further reading. The first subject to be given a background, is the case which is under scrutiny, SAT-7. I will present an overview of the organization, presenting the history, its structure and, most importantly, its formal statements. This is contributing to emphasize SAT-7 as my main focus, and secondly to give the necessary understanding of SAT-7 as an organization and its basic structure, before further reading. Formal statements are a contribution to the institutional narrative of SAT-7, telling the official story of who SAT-7 is and what they do. The second subject that this thesis is attached, and necessary to be given a background, is Christianity in the MENA-region. This part will mainly give a brief summary of the newly published book *The Christians of the Middle East (De kristne i Midtøsten)* by Berit Thorbjørnsrud, and will hopefully give a greater understanding of Christians of the Middle East as a minority. The third, and final subject where it is helpful to give a background is religious satellite-TV in the Arab world. Satellite-TV is widely spread in the MENA-region, and is not a new phenomenon. It is fairly based on the works of Ehab Galal.

Theoretical frameworks create a blueprint in a case study, and the fourth chapter will try to create just that. I've narrowed it down to three theoretical propositions, starting with theories concerning *media and religion*, aiming at answering how SAT-7 operates as a religious media broadcaster. Second is *religious programming*, looking at the programming of SAT-7, specifically looking at the content, design and structure of the programs. Both operations and programming give an insight to strategic choices done by SAT-7. I look at strategy in sight of meaning making. This will give necessary tools to analyze the strategy of the organization and the thoughts behind it. Third, and last is theories of *institutional narratives*. How does SAT-7 as an organization tell the story of themselves. In other words, how do they look at themselves, as a satellite-TV channel in the MENA-region? How do they speak (Oral) of themselves, their daily work, their audience, their choices, etc.? These narratives will all be compared to the written, formal statements of SAT-7. Do they *say* what they actually *say* they do? Are they accountable to their own statements? All methodological steps and choices I've done will be

described in the methodology chapter. This chapter describes a case study as a method, my development of a research question and the sub-questions, the empirical data collection – how and why – which analysis method I've used and finally any shortcomings and caveats about my study. All of the chapters until now will hopefully have given a worthy platform for further inquiry, as I analyze my findings and discuss them in light of my theoretical framework – giving an answer to my research question. I will end this thesis by summarizing and concluding in the sixth and last chapter of this master thesis.



## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 SAT-7

SAT-7 is a unique ministry which seeks to serve the peoples of the Middle East (including North Africa) by providing a Christian satellite TV service for the 21 Arab countries, Iran and Turkey. SAT-7 is a not-for-profit, non-political, Middle Eastern venture being undertaken in partnership with churches, agencies and individuals both within and outside the region. (Partnership Kit: 5)

This is the introduction of the document *Partnership Kit*, written in 2013, which is given to potential partners or affiliates of SAT-7. This kit, together with the current website and any printed materials of SAT-7, gives the basic information needed before considering partnering with SAT-7. As seen in theories of institutional narratives, it is an approach to reproduce the institution, describing the identity, and induct new members (Linde 2003: 518). The Partnership Kit provides organizational structure, and includes constitutional issues. The document contains an important explanation of the general program policy and ethos of SAT-7, and all the guidelines for publicity and public relations. It gives us an important insight to the basic structure of SAT-7 as an organization and the strategy underlying the organization. This also includes vision and mission and any values of SAT-7. These are all formal statements, telling who SAT-7 is, and what SAT-7 does. The introduction continues by writing that

The underlying vision of SAT-7 is that it should participate in the process of transformation which God intends for this area of the world. SAT-7's television programming is balanced, culturally appropriate and designed to support the work of churches, Christian and development agencies in the Middle East. (Partnership Kit: 5)

The Partnership Kit, along with the *SAT-7 Strategic Plans 2015-2017* and other documents will be examined further and more thorough in the analysis later. Documents used in this thesis is listed in the *case study database* (Appendix 2), explained further in the methodology chapter. In this background chapter, I will present a brief summary of the history of SAT-7, a short overview of the organization – including structure, strategic plans, and formal statements.

### **2.1.1 History**

The Arab world and the Arab media were in the 1990s introduced to several new satellite channels. It was during these years that the founder, after several years working with Christian print media in the MENA-region, would start researching and conduct feasibility studies for a Christian satellite-TV channel. In Mid-November 1995, the founding meeting found place, and SAT-7 became legally incorporated. Twenty agencies joined the partnership. The year after SAT-7 opens office in Nicosia, Cyprus. At this time the organization has five staff (plus one located in Lebanon), and starts weekly two-hour broadcast on the analogue satellite Eutelsat 2F3. By 2000, SAT-7 has bought its first camera, started telephone counselling training, opened office in the UK, Egypt and opened a studio in Lebanon. By April 2000 SAT-7 starts daily broadcasting, still analogue, but also additional daily digital broadcast on Eutelsat HotBird. One year later, SAT-7 expands to 24 hours a day broadcasting on digital channels. During 2002 to 2003 the studio in Mokattam, Cairo is opened, burnt down, and reopened six months later. During these years there is also a digital shift, and SAT-7 launches an Arabic Website ([www.sat7.com](http://www.sat7.com) - later [www.sat7.org](http://www.sat7.org) (2008), and SMS text messaging service for viewers begin. In September 2002 the Iranian Christian Broadcasting (ICB) is launched. SAT-7 continues its expansion, and by July 2004, a daily one-hour program for children, SAT-7 Kids, is launched. (Partnership Kit: 25)

By the ten-year anniversary, analogue broadcasts stop, and it's all digital, from their new Master Control Room (MCR) in Cyprus. SAT-7 also starts their first live broadcasts. One year later the channel TURK-7 begins regular Turkish broadcasts on SAT-7. The same year the SAT-7 PARS channel is launched, and in 2007 SAT-7 KIDS channel is officially launched. By October 2009 marks a milestone, as SAT-7 ARABIC and KIDS go live on Eutelsat AB4 – co-located with Nilesat – the most popular satellite platform in the region, enabling SAT-7 to reach millions of new viewers. In 2010, TURK-7 merges with SAT-7 and becomes SAT-7 TÜRK. SAT-7 KIDS start regular live shows, and the viewer responses on the Arabic channels double. This year, SAT-7 also launches a new, third Arabic speaking channel, called SAT-7 PLUS, launched on Hot Bird, which is a line-up of the best programs from SAT-7 ARABIC and KIDS. An Intermedia research show that SAT-7 in 2011 has an audience of 14 million, with 9.25 million watching SAT-7 KIDS. (Partnership Kit: 26-27)

## 2.1.2 Organizational structure

SAT-7 began as **SAT-7 MEDIA SERVICES LTD** (bold used in original document – considered helpful in order to separate different titles in SAT-7), a registered company in Cyprus. Later on, a nonprofit SAT-7 International Trust was registered in 1999 to hold and manage donations from supporters and the support offices of SAT-7. The owners of these two legal entities, being in total responsibility of SAT-7, are the individuals who form the **International Council** (formerly the Board of Directors for the SAT-7 International Board). The majority of SAT-7 directors are as of now, and will continue to be Christians from the MENA-region, living in the region, and this way safeguarding that SAT-7 remains a truly Middle Eastern enterprise. The first International Council was chosen in consultation with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the initial SAT-7 Partners. Today, the council will on a yearly basis elect new council members to replace the leaving members of the International Council of SAT-7. Before any such elections, there will be consultation with church leaders, MECC and the SAT-7 Partners. An important note to this is that each member of the council is in their own right, *not* representing any church, agency or partner. The SAT-7 Board appointed the first **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** in 1995. The main task of the CEO is to be the international spokesperson for SAT-7 in all external relationships, including governments, the general public, churches and support agencies, and all other organizations relating to SAT-7. The CEO also monitors the result of the channel's operation and the Chief Operations Officer (COO) reports to the CEO, along with the Directors for Programming, Business (CFO), Personnel, Fundraising and Partnership, and Public Relations. The **Chief Operations Officer (COO)**, or Station Manager, is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the SAT-7 channel, as well as the IT and Engineering, Broadcast operations and facilities. Churches, Christian organizations or agencies, or individuals who make a substantial and restricted annual contributions to SAT-7 (in 2013 defined as a cash subscription of USD15,000 or more per year) are invited to become official **Partners** with SAT-7. Written Partnership agreements will be established between SAT-7 and such Partner (Partnership it is part of this). A Partner has no legal or financial liabilities for SAT-7. Each official Partner has one seat in the **Partnership Council**, founded in 1995. The council convenes at least once a year, and give advice, proposals etc. to the SAT-7 International Council, even though the International Council will have the final say in all matters. (Partnership Kit: 73)

Individuals, agencies and local churches who cannot or do not wish to become Partners, can become **SAT-7 International Associates**, with a minimal membership subscription of USD 1,000. Two elected representatives will have the right to attend and vote at the Partnership Council meetings. The International Associates was founded under the name ‘Friends of SAT-7’ in 1995. New Partners and Associates are approved by the SAT-7 International Council. The **SAT-7 Executive Board** currently (2013 – no change to my knowledge) oversees the program policy, and specifically the program policy for the Arabic channels. Other, separate boards have been created to specifically oversee the policies of programs in Farsi and Turkish respectively. A number of **SAT-7 advisory Committees** are from time to time established to advise on such important issues as program policy. SAT-7 invites representatives from churches in the Middle East and the SAT-7 Partners to participate in these as appropriate. Participants normally include clergy or people with theological training, people with television experience, etc. The SAT-7 Policy documents provide the basic guidelines for these Committees. (Partnership Kit: 74)

### **2.1.3 Vision, mission and constitution**

The Partnership Kit gives an overview of formal statements, such as vision, mission and the SAT-7 constitution and byelaws. These all form the institutional narrative of SAT-7, telling who SAT-7 are, and what they do. The collection of statements from the constitution below were adopted by the SAT-7 International Board in 1996, and have been revised on later occasions, latest revision being in 2011 (Partnership Kit: 45). The Partnership Kit is dated to March 2013.

#### **Vision**

*To see a growing church in the Middle East and North Africa confident in Christian faith and witness, serving the community and contributing to the good of society and culture.*

(Partnership Kit: 7)

#### **Mission**

*To provide the churches and Christians of the Middle East and North Africa an opportunity to witness to Jesus Christ through inspirational, informative and educational television services.*

(Partnership Kit: 7)

It might already be clear that no certain church or agency has been defined. I will look more into the people “behind” SAT-7 later on, but a beginning point is that SAT-7 as a Christian organization have committed themselves to the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (325 AD) and the *Lausanne Covenant*. They are also a part of the *World Council of Churches World Evangelical Alliance*, and are apprised to the *Christian witness in a multi-religious world – recommendations for conduct*. (Partnership Kit: 11; 13-18; 19-22)

## **Constitution**

The first point of the preamble in SAT-7’s constitution states that SAT-7 is a unique partnership of Christian churches, agencies and individuals, seeking to serve the people of the MENA-region by providing a distinctive Christian satellite TV service explicitly for the region. The second point of the preamble states that SAT-7 programming should be culturally appropriate and designed to support the work of churches, Christians and development agencies across the region. (Partnership Kit: 45) The purpose of SAT-7 as stated in their constitution is as follows:

- Support and maintain the scattered Christian communities in the Middle East and encourage them in their faith and witness<sup>4</sup> for Christ.
- Offer its audience an opportunity to hear a presentation of the Christian message (The Gospel) in their own language. This should be free of unnecessary foreign cultural and political baggage.
- Supplement and add to all public education and information channels with a balanced Christian world view. SAT-7 shall promote principles of democratization, and human rights, peace and justice (Partnership Kit: 46).

### **2.1.4 Values, ethos and program policy**

Looking at through the Partnership Kit, values, ethos and policies (program and publicity guidelines) are all presented. Below is a selection of some of the values, ethos statements, and how the program policy is shaped in order to quality check what SAT-7 provides through their programming. These are helpful in understanding strategic choices being made by SAT-7.

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<sup>4</sup> The need to tell others of ones’ own experience with God – living accordingly to “The Great Commission” – when Jesus told his disciples to “therefore go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19-20).

## **Values**

To work out the daily work of SAT-7's mission and to accomplish its vision, the entire organization adheres to the values written in their official documentation. Below is a sample of some of the most important values (all cited from the Partnership Kit, page 9):

**Cultural awareness:** We recognize the many cultural, ethnic and religious differences that exist in the Middle East and North Africa and are committed to enhancing harmony among all people and to social transformation through mutual understanding and respect.

**Political sensitivity:** SAT-7 is not a political organization and will not promote any particular political policy or party. SAT-7 will refrain from all political associations (national, regional and international).

**Respect for other religions:** SAT-7 will not broadcast material that in any way denigrates or attacks any religion, Christian denomination or other religious body. We will refrain from any coercive attempts at changing people's faiths.

**Christian diversity:** We recognize what the Christians of the Middle East and North Africa are a diverse group with regard to doctrine and ecclesiastical tradition. We will reflect this diversity and yet seek to emphasize the doctrines, traditions, realities and challenges that the Christians of the region have in common.

**Holistic ministry:** We aim to serve the whole human person in the Middle East and North Africa and to enrich his/her spiritual, social and human life. We will give particular emphasis to easing the plight of those in society who are disenfranchised by means of disability, poverty, ethnicity or any other cause.

(Partnership Kit: 9)

## **Ethos**

The service of SAT-7 is provided for the people of the Middle East and North Africa (SAT-7 defines this as all the Arab countries, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey). SAT-7 always aims to attain a balance in programming to meet the needs and interests of different national, ethnic and cultural groupings across the entire region. This includes cultural sensitivity. An

important aspect of the programming is to be educational. This includes primary health care, literacy, community development, etc. (Partnership Kit: 29), creating a holistic ministry (as noted in their values).

### **Program policy**

The SAT-7 Program policy is designed and written to ensure that SAT-7 provides (all cited from the Partnership Kit, pages 30-31):

1. Channels to educate, inform, inspire and motivate Christians. It should encourage church attendance and stimulate spiritual growth.
2. An opportunity to improve the image of Christianity in the eyes of non-believers and a unique opportunity to present the Gospel to those who may never otherwise hear it.
3. A high quality TV network that church families and youth can watch without being exposed to materialistic or anti-Christian ideas. It will bring a Christian perspective on major issues directly into people's homes.
4. New resources on DVD, audio CD and online, the stimulation of new printed matter for ministry, materials for women, youth, children, etc.
5. An opportunity for the church to respond to spiritual enquirers.
6. Specially trained and qualified personnel (TV workers, counselors, administrators, etc.) to better equip the Church
7. A voice and a sense of identity for Middle Eastern Christians, helping legitimize their existence as Arabic, Farsi or Turkish-speaking Christians.
8. That Christians in the Middle East have the right of reply to criticism against them in other media. The channel will also provide a unique opportunity to discuss sensitive issues with non-Christians or Government representatives being fairly represented.
9. An opportunity for the church to contribute to national and public life and society (e.g. programs on health, safety and education, citizenship, caring for the marginalized and oppressed, human rights and responsibility, etc.).
10. An opportunity to show both believers and others the diversity in unity that exists within the Christian community.
11. Local employment and career opportunities for church members.

(Partnership Kit: 30-31)

## 2.1.5 Strategic plans

As the title of the SAT-7 document SAT-7 Strategic Plans 2015-2017 entails, this document presents plans and goals for the organization. SAT-7 has four strategic goals:

1. Making the Gospel available to all people in the Middle East and North Africa, especially to those who would never otherwise have the opportunity to hear it, with an emphasis on:
  - a. **Children**, the least reached but most important audience. Children are, according to SAT-7, the main hope for change in tomorrow's MENA. There are 150 million children under the age of 16 living in in the region.
  - b. **Women**, who are still generally isolated from the Gospel. SAT-7 considers women's potential for influence as constantly under-estimated.
  - c. **The illiterate**, whose only source of uncensored information is satellite TV.
  - d. **Closed homes**, in closed countries. The people that this might concern may never even have met a Christian before.
2. To *encourage, support, and empower* the church in their life, work and witness for Christ. This is especially important in areas of political turmoil and Christian persecution. SAT-7 aims to be a catalyst for spiritual renewal, church growth, discipleship and social change in the quickly changing region.
3. To develop and implement a comprehensive *TV EVERYWHERE* (Caps lock from original document) strategy for all language services.
4. To build a strong and sustainable organization that will be equipped to efficiently and effectively achieve its vision and mission, both today and in the future.

(SAT-7 Strategic Plans 2015-2017: 1)

## 2.2 Christians in the Middle East

Christianity originated in the Middle East, and through this region it became widespread, and the doctrine was developed in the early centuries (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 15). It was also in this time that different beliefs and forms of Christianity evolved, and the “church” split into several different doctrines, including the Assyrians, the Armenians and the Coptic Church. It would also evolve into a main conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Constantinople. When the Catholic Church later encouraged a crusade to liberate Jerusalem, the holy city, from the new Muslim rulers, it was just as much the local



Christians that were attacked and robbed, as well as churches were destroyed. This left a “permanent trauma in the soul of Arab Christianity” (Cragg 1991: 96), meaning that there might also be a gap between Christians of the West and the Arab Christians, and not just between Christians and Muslims in the Arab world. However, even though the local Christians suffered during the crusades, because the crusades were executed by their fellow believer, the Muslims began suspecting the Christians of a potential fifth column activity (Cragg 1991: 23). These suspicions were repeated during the age of colonies, the establishment of Israel, and latest with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 16-17). The early divisiveness between the Christians has had long-lasting consequences. The lack of contact and communication has led to a wide gap between Western, or in other words the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches, and the eastern, meaning the orthodox church, the oriental-orthodox churches (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Eritrean and Ethiopian) and the Assyrian church (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 17). As Western countries established a stronger position both economically and politically, the western churches started to proselytize to the Christians of the MENA-region, as they were not considered true believers (Mahmood 2012: 423). This was obviously provocative, and the Coptic Orthodox church has had it difficult to forgive the Catholic and Protestant church of proselytizing and converting the Coptic elite. Today, however, the relationship between western and eastern churches are better, and many are cooperating in the World Council of Churches. The relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental-Orthodox Churches are also better, working together in the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 18).

### **2.2.1 From majority to minority**

Christians remained a majority many years after the Muslims conquered the entire region. Lack of equality contributed most likely that most part of the population converted to Islam. Muslims did however introduce religious freedom not seen in Europe. Jews, Christians and others gained access to practice their faith by paying a certain tax and by accepting certain restrictions. Cultural and social fellowship was created independent of religious belief, despite the hierarchic frames. Christians and Muslims would stand together in battle against the European colony powers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, most Arabs considered themselves as Egyptians, Syrians, Iraqis etc. (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 18). Acts during and after the first world war triggered tragedies, like what many define as the genocide of the Armenian Christians. In addition, the exchange of 600 000 Muslims from Greece with the 1 – ½ million

Greek-Orthodox from Turkey, as well as other Christians migrating, has left the Middle East with a marginal minority of Christians in which once was the center of the first Christian kingdom (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 19).

### **2.2.2 National liberty and equality**

During the twentieth-century Muslims and Christians were united in wars for liberation from the European colonies. By 1952, most countries had obtained national independence. These new Arab states were inspired by Pan-Arabism, a secular, nationalistic ideology which glorified the linguistic and the cultural unity and fellowship. Islam was just one of many components. The Syrian Christian Michel Aflaq was one of the founders, as he thought Pan-Arabism emphasized equality despite religious affiliation, which could facilitate new possibilities for the Christians of the region. Eventually, these Arab states evolved into a more authoritarian status, with both Christians and Muslims losing political rights, and power was in the hands of dictators ruling for decades. This negative development, along with economic problems throughout the region (with the exceptions of the Arabian Peninsula) has led to many people, whatever religious affiliation, to emigrate (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 19).

#### **Rights: career.**

In the Middle East, except for Lebanon, you will seldom find Christian governors, Christian headmasters of any university, or Christians in top positions in the military. This indicates the existence of some form of a glass ceiling which the Christians seem to have quietly accepted. Thorbjørnsrud writes that they have at least not fought for any visible power positions. They might have thought that they would not succeed, or might have been anxious of any negative reactions from the Muslim majority (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 20). Christians in the upper-middle class have instead become more involved in the private sector and in professional occupations.

#### **Rights: religious.**

Christians of the MENA-region live, with the exception of Israel, together with the Muslim majority. Majority of Muslims causes domination of Islamic rituals, traditions and other public arrangements; Islamic calendar and holidays; Islam more visible in the media than Christianity (and others); curriculum in schools emphasizes Islam and the Islamic history more than other. In Israel, the Jews dominate at the same level. This leaves the Christians

marginalized in the public sphere. One exception is Lebanon, where the Christians originally were a majority, and where Christians still have a prominent role in the society (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 21). The countries vary in how they allow Christian practice. In Jordan, in Iraq until 2003 and in Syria until 2011, Christians have been able to live relatively free. They've been able to buy land, build churches, educate priests and practice an active congregation. Egypt does however have certain laws that institutionalize differences between Christians and Muslims. An example is how new mosques are built "easily", while churches need to apply to the president for building permission. This process of application can take several years. Even restoration needs an application. These problems frustrate the Egyptian Copts. In Saudi-Arabia, all public, non-Islamic religious practice is illegal. In all of the Middle East, proselytizing directed towards Muslims is forbidden. It varies which laws exist that forbid Muslims to convert, but it is generally considered as unacceptable, and those who convert risk serious consequences. Christians are sometimes alleged of "hidden proselytizing"<sup>5</sup>, and rumors of such have shown the possibility of triggering existing tension. Some westerns missionaries cross the local Christians caution, and their active proselyting – also directed at Muslims – can create reactions which aggravate the problems of the local Christians (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 22).

### **Rights: family.**

With Turkey being the only exception, citizens of the MENA-region have to deal with parallel religious systems of law. Christian laws on family are more restrictive than Islamic when the issue is divorce. Muslims and Christians in the entire Middle East share more or less the same view on gender; they share the view on marriage and children; they share the idea of honor and shame, and they share the idea of rumor as a collective phenomenon. But they do not share the same laws on divorce, and Muslim women cannot marry Christian men. These joint laws and views combined with the differences is the source of escalating conflicts between the two religious groups (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 23). Among Christian Egyptians, stories are being told of Muslim men kidnapping and converting Christian women. Some stories are verified, but others are in reality stories about frustrated, young women who have escaped from their homes. Among Muslim Egyptians, rumors about Christian men who usher relationship with Muslim women can create a huge stir. In Cairo 2012, such a rumor resulted in fighting in the streets, a church being burnt, people killed and many injured. The

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<sup>5</sup> From the Norwegian word "snikmisjonering"

social tension is high, and the polarization between Christians and Muslims is greater than ever before. In addition, social media helps spreading rumors (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 24).

### **2.2.3 Difficult numbers**

There are several numbers abound on the Christians of the Middle East. In many countries it has been seen as politically sensitive to count the minorities. Higher or lower numbers could potentially effect the political representation the Christian are entitled to have. In 1932, a census done in Lebanon showed a Christian majority, giving the Christians a dominating position. There has not been done a new census since 1932 (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 31). Some of the churches themselves seem like they are not interested in updating the numbers. Practically, they lack the capacity to do any counting. The churches of the Middle East also emphasize the correct doctrine rather than correct number, which they believe is a western superficiality. This means that the numbers sometimes are higher than they really are in order to create strength from within. At the same time, churches like to tell the story of being threatened, and that Christianity that has existed for two thousand years in the Middle East is under pressure (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 32). Thorbjørnsrud has based the number from the American PewResearchCenter<sup>6</sup> and the official numbers from the different countries. I'll present the numbers relevant for this thesis (Arabic speaking countries targeted by SAT-7 Arabic and Kids). Official government numbers and Pew research states that there are approximately 150 000 Christians in Israel. About 25 000 – 30 000 of these are Russian-Orthodox, about 10 000 are Lebanese Maronites, and about 50 000 are Christian workers from other countries, such as Philippines, Thailand and India. In Palestine, Pew report that there are 100 000 Christians. The local numbers are only 50 000. Palestinian/Arab Christians are in other words not more than about half of the Christians that are living in Israel today. According to Pew, Lebanon has about 1,6 million Christians. Jordan has about 140 000. In Egypt, there are several numbers, but Thorbjørnsrud operates with the number given by Pew, which states that in 2008, the Christian were around 5% of the population. That would mean 4-5 million Christians living in Egypt. In Syria, before the civil war, it was about the same percentage, about 1 million Christians. These numbers are of course impossible to know or to predict given the status of the war today (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 33-34). In Iraq the numbers are really diverse, and the demography is hard to determine. After the invasion of USA in 2003, the numbers have unquestionably fallen drastically. Pew reports

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<sup>6</sup> Table: Christian Population in Numbers by Country. <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/table-christian-population-in-numbers-by-country/> (Assessed 21.02.16)

as little as 270 000 Christians and as the conflict escalated in 2014, it is expected to keep falling. The Arabian Peninsula has about 3,2 million Christians. 1,2 millions of these live in Saudi Arabia, meaning that there are more Christians in Saudi Arabia than there are combined, living in Turkey, Israel, Palestine-area, Jordan and Iraq. Thorbjørnsrud writes that it is important to see however that the majority of these Christians in the Arabian Peninsula are temporary workers, not citizens with the rights it implies, as opposed to the Christians in the rest of the MENA-region.

#### **2.2.4 Egypt**

The Egyptian church has from its beginning before 50 AC., been in a special position: First by its original and lasting contribution to a Christian common tradition, later by being relatively isolated from the rest of the Christian church. Which religious affiliation a person has is just one of many factors which decides placement and status in the Egyptian society. Christians, as with Muslims, do not form a monolithically unit. Another consideration is whether a person is from the north or the south, from a city or from the countryside. The same can be said about education, profession and social class, political preferences and perspectives on religion and religious practice. There is probably not a single situation or social experience which is exclusive to Christians (Vogt 2015: 117-8). After 1970 there was a public religious mobilization, amongst both Muslims and Christians. Since the state came short at fulfilling their promises of the people's welfare, the religious actors took the matter in their own hands: welfare benefits such as clinics, schools, kindergartens, student homes, saving associations and homes for elders were all organized by religious actors (Vogt 2015: 121). The new post-revolution constitution states that Christians and Jews now have the right to their own sacred places. Religious freedom is now "absolute" (*mutliqa*), and not just "guaranteed" (*masuna*), and all Egyptians are guaranteed full freedom of expression. The former article that forbade mockery of the prophets is altered into forbidding mockery of the "heavenly religions". It is also stated that there is complete equality before the law, independent of religion, gender, race, etc. (Vogt 2015: 125).

#### **2.2.5 Lebanon**

Christianity had a vital role in the establishment of Lebanon as an independent nation in 1943-46, which makes the country a special case in the context of statehood in the Middle East and the Arab world. The establishment was explicitly reasoned by French politicians as

necessary in order to protect the Christian Maronites<sup>7</sup> in a national unity where they had demographical majority, and avoid that they became a minority in a Sunni-Muslim dominated Syria (Grung 2015: 158-9). According to a census done in 1932, the Christians were numerically superior, and got more prominent positions in the political system. The president has to be a Christian Maronite, and the Christians should have a majority in the parliament. Nearly all Christian denominations are represented in Lebanon, and all the different denominations have their distinctive history and tradition, aligned in different international church families. Maronites have been the loudest and most powerful voice for a Christian, Lebanese nationalism (Grung 2015: 162; Longva 2012). Religious affiliation is first and foremost a question of which affiliation your family has or has had. All Lebanese people must belong to one of the eighteen religious groups that are defined by law. Religious identity is therefore mostly decided by family tradition, and most people are married within their own group (Grung: 2015: 163). Empirical data from World Value Survey conducted in 2008, commented by Johan Gärde (2012) showed that all religious groups in Lebanon attended more religious events than all other Middle Eastern country. The Christians were more often attending church than Muslims attending the mosques, with Maronites being the most eager (Gärde 2012: 298-300). The survey also shows that the Lebanese people rate their national identity considerably higher than their religious identity. Grung concludes the survey and its results as Christian Lebanese self-understanding being solid and anchored in Lebanon, both as Lebanese *and* as Christians, and this view is shared by the other religious groups (Grung 2015: 166). The religious pluralism in Lebanon has become the nation's mainstay, not just for the Christians, but for all groups (Grung 2015: 170).

## 2.3 Religious satellite-TV in the Arab world

### 2.3.1 Arab religious satellite media

Until the 1950s, religious programming was, by several Arab states, restricted to Quran recitations and Friday prayers, with the purpose of legitimizing the states own authoritarian power. By limiting religious programming and drawing the line with Quran recitations and Friday prayers, and separating it from other media programs, these broadcasts, according to Ehab Galal, mirrors "traditional institutionalized religious practices" (Galal 2014: 8). In years after the 1950s, religion has, however, been succeeded in obtaining new spaces in the realm

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<sup>7</sup> The Maronite church is one of the largest Eastern-rite communities of the Roman Catholic church. (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

of Arab media, caused by political, technical and social factors. A wide variety of different religious programming has emerged, and is competing with the traditional recitations and prayers. These programs vary from religious teachings to reality shows. Some are a part of the broadcasting schedule of “ordinary” channels, containing all programs, religious or not. Others are broadcasted by the immense number of religious channels that has emerged since the late 1990s (Galal 2014: 8). Characterizing these recently emerging religious satellite channels, is the clear transnational character, coloring the media production and circulation, referring to operating and extending the broadcast across national boundaries. Galal argues that transnationality is a major influence of all kinds of media today, in terms of “ownership, production, transmission, circulation or as sources for local media” (Galal 2014: 9).

Transnationality has become a reality for Arab media as well, not only in their reach, but also in ownership and language included. The Arab League report from 2013 estimates that there are more than 1320 television satellite channels broadcasted by Arab satellites. Among these, 168 are state owned, while 1152 are private. Amongst these, 16 of the channels are owned by non-Arab states who are broadcasting in Arabic (Itihad iza’at al-Dewwal al-’Arabiya 2013: 20-22; Galal 2014: 9). As mentioned, these channels broadcast through satellites. Arab channels transmit through twelve satellites, which covers almost the entire planet (Itihad iza’at al-Dewwal al’Arabiya 2013: 27). All these numbers combined confirms the development in Arab television, implying a shift from the national monopolies of TV and Radio, which promoted secular nationalism, allowing only recitations and prayers as a way of justifying their authority, as the key role of religion was to obtain cultural and moral order (Abu-Lughod 2005: Rugh 2004).

The growing liberalization of Arab media supported the emergence of new private media, especially satellite channels (Sakr 2001), as seen in the early 1990s, which showed us a number of Arab satellite channels being launched (Galal 2014: 10). This also saw the entrance of Arab-Christian channels. As we shall see, SAT-7 was launched in the mid-nineties. Websites or pamphlet literature of Islamic nature has been low-cost, and published mainly by the religious institutions or associations only. Islamic satellite television, however, has been valued as worth investing in by several actors. With the Arab-Christian satellite channels, high of cost, they were mostly launched by churches or religious associations, and not any media corporations (even though some, as SAT-7, would evolve into a similar character of a media corporation) (Galal 2014: 11). Another aspect that Galal points out, is the Nordic immigrant audiences, who in Galals studies seem to watch local Nordic news at

one channel, international news at another, and their regional, home news (Middle Eastern), at a third channel. This confirms how Arab satellites covers most of the planet. The measure of sending programs to the diaspora is a part of strategy to SAT-7, and seems to be a requested feature of Arab TV audiences. Immigrant media users combine TV from where they live, the country of origin, and other countries (Galal 2012: 148-153; Mikkelsen 2007).

Islamic channels claim to be apolitical in the discourses of internal political affairs (Galal 2011). Egypt in the days after the Arab uprising has shown, however, that this might not always be the case. The Muslim Brotherhood channel, Misr25, along with al-Nas, al-Rahma and al-Hafez TV, were all taken off air by the Egyptian military after president Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was removed in July 2013. These channels had expressed emotions and mobilized support to president Morsi, and as the military action shows, political Islam, such as the Brotherhood, was a problem to the military (Galal 2014: 11). Arab regimes continuous attempts to control media, and especially the access to the media, is shown through such shutdowns of channels (and deciding which are allowed to stay). It also shows us how different groups or people aim to influence public debates, especially during times of political changes (Galal 2014: 12). Most Arab regimes aims to control media, and most Arab regimes censor media products, such as film and TV, more than they ever have censored print media. Religious content is being censored by the regimes with help from traditional institutions.

### **2.3.2 Arab TV audiences**

It is worth mentioning the audiences which Arab satellite-TV addresses, as it may give some insights to the different strategic assessments that SAT-7 would do in their programming choices.

Shared mediated experiences come to define the terms and outlines of social and political discourse. Through such trends, *culture* increasingly functions with a kind of autonomy that is in many ways unprecedented. At the same time, practices of religion are changing, with *individuals* assuming more responsibility for the direction of their own spiritual quests. Through their “seeking”, the influence and legitimacy of formal religions of all kinds has increasingly come into question. The power of *legitimation* is more and more in the hands of the seeker as she looks to a wider and wider range of sources and contexts – beyond the



traditional ones – for religious or spiritual insight. This has all served to center the media in these trends and in our understanding of them. (Hoover 2006:2)

This statement from Hoover, Galal argues, points to several aspects that describe the media's role in the believer's individual pursuit of religious meaning in modern day. First, the traditional and the formal religious institutions are under pressure, being challenged by the ever present presence of the media, which offers an alternative place that offers resources in this pursuit. Secondly, it is more than ever before in the hands of the believer and media user, to navigate and choose between all the offers that are available and given through media. Galal explores the relationship between Arab audiences and how they respond to religion in Arab media. (Galal 2014: 7). This study will look at SAT-7 as a producer rather than the audience in the Arab world. When, as Galal argue, it is more than ever before, the choice of the viewer to navigate through the many offers currently available, what does that imply? This gives the audience some relevance after all. What does it mean for the strategic choices done by SAT-7 in their operations? What does it mean for the institutional narrative, the way SAT-7 talks about themselves, and about the audience – the Christians in the region. What is the understanding SAT-7 have of its audience?

### **Watching religious channels and programs: fragmented audiences**

The majority of studies and publications on Arab media are focused, as with this study, on the program content, potential economic and political gains of TV production, or democratic potential. Little is published on Arab audiences (Galal 2014: 15). A description of a typical Arab audience is not an easy task, as an Arab audience is diverse and spread out “across a region of approximately 7.5 million square kilometers, a population over 250 million people and an extensive number of spoken dialects” (Project Team 2010: 43). In addition, there are other differences, such as literacy, conditions for living, and the generational divide 250 million people implies (Galal 2014: 16). What is known is that, despite the global trend of moving towards other media platforms, the audience of the Arab world still prefers the traditional television, including satellite TV, as it is the most popular media outlet still today. Another factor, distinguishing the Arab world from the rest of the international media market, is the preference (and other factors, such as socio economic, digital divide and how watching TV is a group activity) for satellite television (Project Team 2010: 43).

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main focus of this thesis will be on SAT-7 as an organization, what their strategy is, and how they operate in the MENA-region, and how they design their programming. The third characterization of their strategy, is to look at the written and oral narratives, institutional narratives, which SAT-7 tells to create self-representation, tell what they do and why, and to induct new members (or viewers – such as me) to these narratives. This is a curiosity of how a professional actor works in the media image in the Arab world. Many theories could arguably have been applied in this study, however, these theoretical propositions are the ones I have chosen to highlight. The first theoretical proposition will be *media and religion*, looking at different characteristics of religion in media, the role of the producer, and the role of the viewer. This theoretical proposition will refer to the sub-question of *how SAT-7 operates*. I will also look at some similar characterizations from American religious broadcasting. Secondly, I will look at the theoretical proposition of *religious programming*. This means looking at the classical Hoover study of American Televangelism, and more examples and similarities from America. I will look at the different formats of this so-called electronic church, and the myths and realities surrounding it. In order to contextualize more, I will look at studies of Islamic programming, and explain any characteristics which is relevant to the study of SAT-7. This combination – American Televangelism, electronic church, and Islamic programming – will shape the theory of *religious programming* – referring to *how SAT-7 design their programming*. In this study, I conduct interviews with a pool of leaders in SAT-7, whom give their views and experiences, both at a personal and an institutional level, giving insight to the self-representation of leaders of SAT-7 (the representatives of the institution) – how SAT-7 wishes to be perceived. As a reference to this, I will look more closely on theories surrounding *institutional narrative*, considering how all my interview objects are professional communicators. Do the leaders of SAT-7 tell the same stories that the formal statements tell – or are there any contesting, counter or alternative stories?

I want to emphasize that it is not a question answered by statistical generalization, but an analytical generalization, aiming at expanding or generalizing theoretical propositions. One media outlet in the MENA-region is not a representation for all other minority media outlets, not even for Christian satellite-TV networks working in the region.

## 3.1 Media and religion

### 3.1.1 Mediatization

The theory of mediatization has proved useful for analysis and discussion of how media has spread, intertwined with, and influenced other fields, in this case specifically, to religion (Hjarvard 2008). This influence and making other fields dependent on media, varies in both degree and quality, and is a process of a reciprocal character. Mediatization as a process is characterized by a double-sided development; on one side, media requires a certain autonomy from other social institutions; on the other side, media becomes integrated into the “very life-world of other institutions (Hjarvard 2012: 24-25). Another notable mention, is how the digital and interactive media has become an omnipresent part of everyday life in nearly all social institutions, and has enabled both the individual, and the organizations to interact across time and space in a way never seen or experienced before. Media is present “out-there”, as an institution, and available “in-here” for communicative interaction. As we have seen in the background chapter with the shift of the religious landscape – from the mosque to the screen – mediatization of religion concerns exactly the way that religious organizations, practices and beliefs are presented through the presence of media (Hjarvard 2012: 26). Meyrowitz (1986) describes three metaphors of media, which Hjarvard has applied to concern religion:

- *Media as conduits*. The media is the primary source of information and experiences concerning religion.
- *Media as languages*. Not only is it a primary source of religion, but it presents religion in various ways, particularly through genres of popular culture and other. Media does not necessarily have the intention to preach, but rather get attention. Cultural demands of the population therefor have a high course in media.
- *Media as environments*. It also alters the social relationship and cultural communities (Carey 1992; Morley 2000), and is ever more present of public celebration and other major national and cultural events (Dayan and Katz 1994), both on micro- and macro levels. “Media provide moral orientation, emotional therapy and consolation in times of crises. As such, the media have in some respect taken over many of the social functions formerly provided by the church” (Hjarvard 2012: 27).

Mediatized religion can, as Hjarvard argues, be distinguished between three forms: *religious media*; *journalism on religion*; and *banal religion* (Hjarvard 2012: 28). It is *religious media* that is most valuable to me in this study.

### 3.1.2 Religious media

When we speak of religious media, we are talking about media organizations and practices that are most commonly controlled by religious actors, either as a collective, such as a church, or individually (Hjarvard 2012: 28). Compared to journalism on religion and banal religion, religious media is considered less of a mediatized form, as these religious organizations are in much greater control over the communication. As we shall see, however, when put in the realm of the general media's public sphere, religious media are rated in the same manner and by the same standards as other, non-religious media. This includes technical ability, and producing and presenting different genres in an appropriate manner and interesting to the public (Hjarvard 2012: 30-31). Table 3.1 shows the key characteristics of the three mediated forms, and the comparison between them.

	<b>Religious media</b>	<b>Journalism on religion</b>	<b>Banal religion</b>
<i>Dominant genres</i>	Religious services, preaching, confessions, discussions	News, current affairs, moderated debate	Narrative fiction, entertainment, self-help services, consumer advice
<i>Institution in primary control</i>	Religion	Journalism	Media
<i>Religious content</i>	Interpretations of religious texts and moral advice	Utterance and actions of religious actors framed by secular news values	Bricolage of texts, iconography and liturgy of various institutional and folk religions
<i>Role of religious agents</i>	Owners, producers, performers	Sources	Fictional representations of ministers and believers; in factual genres social counsellors, entertainers etc.
<i>Communicative functions</i>	Persuasion Social rituals Religious community	Information Critical scrutiny Political public sphere	Entertainment Cultural rituals Self-development
<i>Challenge to Protestant Church</i>	Multiple and individualized religious voices and visual representations	Critical of religious institutions if out of sync with secular values	A bricolage of religious representations provides a backdrop of cultural knowledge about religion

Table 3.1: Key characteristics (Hjarvard 2012: 40)

### 3.1.3 Religion in the media age

As Hjarvard has argued, religion and the media seem to be ever more connected as we move further into the twenty-first century. It is through the media that much of contemporary religion and spirituality is known. Along with this development, a set of social ideas and social understandings of the medias force, effect and significance emerged. Hoover writes that the realms of “religion” and “media” is no longer easily separated, and in his book *Religion in the Media Age*, he begins mapping the ways that these two realms are intertwined in a cultural experience of media audience (Hoover 2006: 1). The major argument of his book is that media and religion are together in fundamental ways (Hoover 2006: 9).

#### **Definition on religion**

Hoover defines religions as systematic, which offers all-encompassing explanations. He points to Clifford Geertz description of religion as:

(1) A system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 1973; Hoover 1988: 22).

In other words, in order for a social meaning or practice to be significant in manner which we would categorize as “religious”, it has to – in an individual perspective – move beyond the everyday-life experiences, unto a level of particular significance and something that a human would see in those terms. This way, we are able to observe how people describe themselves and their practices as religious. The key, however, is not to “validate” what they say about religion; it is to embed these ideas in a larger context of humans social lives. This is also true to the leaders of SAT-7. Their statements are perhaps a representation for SAT-7 as an institution, but as individuals, their religion is of a particular significance – to some, even more important than the medium television. Is this true to the institution of SAT-7 as well? Answering these questions creates an image on how religion is perceived in SAT-7 as an organization, and also how SAT-7, as a practice, are feeding into this. Another important factor to this study, is to understand and describe what the leaders of SAT-7 are hoping to achieve (individually, religion plays a great role in the identity of many of the leaders – but

also institutionally) – rather than understanding the role of religion in the lives of the individual viewer (Hoover 2006: 23).

### **3.1.4 Research on media and religion**

We are probably not thinking of media as a “mass” in present times. Media is under constant change and is today more diverse, specialized (niche), targeted, and especially, due to social media, more interactive than earlier (Hoover 2006: 70). Changes in technology, structure and patterns of consumption means that we look at media today in a different manner than before. Due to the emergence of multiple sources of media feed, the “dominant” media is in decline. An example is in magazine publishing, which was predicted to be near the end because of the growing television, and other media industries. On the contrary, there has been an amazing emergence of new titles in magazines, each targeting a smaller and narrower “niche” audience – called diversification. The same has happened in the television industry, and as chapter two showed us, especially in the satellite TV realm in the Arab world. Together with cable TV, satellite television has emerged into a multitude of channels and services. These are varying from targeting large heterogeneous audiences (e.g., the news) to, as seen with magazines, more narrow interests and demographics (Hoover 2006: 47). Along with this expanding development in the television industry, religious channels and services have become increasingly possible and available. A big influence in this development is televangelism, which helped building the concept of the religious channel (Hoover 2006: 48).

### **Ways of looking at religion and media**

The traditional way of thinking home, school, community, church or family as a network of resources to provide the tools for the making of our “selves”, is today more often replaced with *me* and my *own* responsibility. In religion, the pursuit of our religious selves is by Roof identified as “seeking” (Roof 1992; Hoover 2006: 52). “Seeking”, religiously and spiritually, is a big part of the modern religious landscape (Wuthnow 1998). Written in 1992, Roof describes “seeking” as typical of the Baby Boom generation, and acknowledges this generations’ relationship to media, as it was the first television generation – “All these trends – a more focused spirituality, experience with pluralism, selective mixing of traditions, and new styles of commitments – are deeply entrenched in the popular culture today” (Roof 1992: 247). In greater observation of the medias’ connection to religious seeking, Roof explored,

Never before has human life been so caught up in mediated image and symbol. And never before have the people themselves been so aware that ours is such a world of image and symbol. The role of cultural industries and communication technologies continues to expand, and at the expense of traditional institutions of socialization – the family, the school, and the church (Roof 1999: 67-68).

Media has become “symbolic inventories”, offering resources and making them ever available in the quest for self in religious matter (Hoover 2006: 55). What does this imply to the creators of this inventory, a position that SAT-7 holds? How do the leaders deal with their audience as “seekers”? Religious broadcasting and televangelism represents more of a “broadcasting with a difference” (Hoover 2006: 61). When the televangelism era in America was on a high, one important feature of the audience and supporters of these programs, was the importance of content that they could learn from and that would be inspiring. This content should not be discrete. These programs were to represent another cultural space in the mix of media, where the audience could feel safe and comfortable. Though there was a hope to enter the mix of commercial media market, this hope quickly faded. Cinema or Christian music that aim to cross into the “secular” mainstream face skepticism from both believers and secular audiences. As Hoover argues, “all media audiences understand the basics of media production well enough to know religious media when they see it” (Hoover 2006: 63). The “media literacy” movement has an assumption that media audiences should be understood as an audience capable of encountering, interpret and also contest much of what the media presents. The underlying model in this media consumption places media as instruments which functions as sources for cultural action. In other words, “the momentum is with the media, and audiences must respond or face a kind of subjugation” (Hoover 2006: 67). Roof has classified certain religious sensibilities which he identified with the Baby Boom generation. Hoover considered these, and shows us how these are in relation to religion and spirituality in the media culture (Hoover 2006: 78). *Born-Again Christians*: Became a significant label, together, and relating to the emergence of Evangelicalism. This is considered a “highly personal” kind of faith. To many “born again”, their experience of faith exceeds the importance of being a member or participant of the traditional church. “What” is more important than “where”. In general, Evangelicalism, and the “born again”, is more connected to what is described as “strictness” (Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Hoover 2006: 78).

As for their relationship to the media, Evangelicalism<sup>8</sup>, as a movement, has throughout history been more positive and active in their use of media than both Catholics and the Mainline Protestants. This is a matter of theological grounds, as the act of evangelism or “sharing the word”. This, combined with media, is therefore a logical relationship (Hoover 2006: 78; Roof 1999). *Mainstream Believers*: This category is most likely to define themselves as the Mainline faith groups of the mid-point during the last century. They consider themselves as “mainstream”. Religion is more seen as a “shared tradition”, rather than “highly personal”. “Where” they are, is more important than “what” they are (Hoover 2006: 79). Tolerance is a key factor, as a “mainstream” can see past traditional barriers. Mainstreamers sees Jesus as “a savior, and a teacher, redeemer, and a moral teacher” (Roof 1999; Hoover 2006: 79). The mainstream believer relationship to the media is that this group identifies themselves with the “mainstream” representation presented by the media in religious terms. They would be less judgmental, or strict, about cultures other than their own, possibly even accepting them (Roof 1999; Hoover 2006: 80).

## 3.2 Religious programming

### 3.2.1 Televangelism – the electronic church

Early supporters of the electronic church stated that this phenomenon would represent a new era for religion. First and foremost, religious broadcasting is an activity of religious character, produced and viewed by people who together celebrate their symbols, values and morals they commonly share. The electronic church represents a form of broadcasting, as all the elements – formal and informal – are shared with classical broadcasting, and meaning making is shaped in that context. Hoover wrote back in 1988 that religious broadcasting has its own, distinctive structure, with their own history and politics which we should make an effort to understand (Hoover 1988: 20-21). If so, what is this electronic church, and how can we understand them? James Carey suggests that media are cultural systems, in which the viewers – the audience – consume in specific places and ways. These are not necessarily aligned with the intentions of those producing the content (media). Further, Carey suggests that what is needed is a “ritual” definition of media in a social and cultural context (Carey 1975; Hoover 1988: 26). As an argument *not* to do only audience observations, we need to be concerned

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<sup>8</sup> Usually, in the English-speaking world, a term describing the religious movement and denominations which arose from a series of revivals in the North Atlantic Anglo-American world during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century – set out to convert the nation. (<http://www.wheaton.edu/isac/defining-evangelicalism>) (Assessed 25 April, 2016)



with the communication media, and how it has become integrated into our culture. He argues that we should be observing the meaning. Only through analysis that places this phenomenon, electronic church, in their social and cultural context can give us a full understanding of them (Hoover 1988: 27).

### **Religious broadcasting in America**

Hoover has conducted such an analysis on the electronic church, religious broadcasting, in America. He found that Evangelicals and fundamentalist organizations were early in catching the possible power of using broadcasting as a proselytizing tool. Most of these actors, however, were not new to the concept of communication, as they had all been a part of Bible schools, religious publications (print) and other revival ministries (Hoover 1988: 49; Carpenter 1985). Joel Carpenter argues that in an age of sight and sound, Evangelicals was able to use mass communications, and the force to establish reality through it, to convince themselves and others that they were a real presence in America and in the public life. “They have transmitted their images into the ‘show windows of modern publicity.’” (Carpenter 1985: 15). This clearly is a need of cultural authenticity, and the need to coexist with the ‘others’ in America. The emergence of religious broadcasters created a need for rational management in order to manage access of sustaining time at a national level. This would turn into an agreement between networks and national, ecumenical bodies – Federal Council of Churches (later National Council of Churches). Later, the U.S. Catholic Conference, the New York Board of Rabbis and the Southern Baptist Convention would join the council, to represent other US religious interest, in the negotiation of access to sustaining time on the networks (Hoover 1988: 51). One religious program became competitive on a commercial basis on the network television, and a rather successful competitor as well. This program was a non-evangelical and non-independent paid-time broadcasting, produced by Bishop Fulton Sheen<sup>9</sup>. Sheen pioneered a format which contained instructive and inspirational chats. There was nothing unique to the themes or subjects of Sheen’s programs. It seems as it was his particular style in which the audience could relate to (Hoover 1985: 53; Parker, Barry and Smythe 1955). A scandal (unsurprisingly) would later lead to the end of Sheen’s program. Harold Ellens (1974) found that ever since that program, the search for a good model has been continuous. Ellens identified four models, or approaches, to religious broadcasts. First, the “mighty acts of God” models mirrors revivalist formats (popular and successful formats)

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<sup>9</sup> Fulton John Sheen was an American archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church, known for his work with television and radio. (<https://www.fultonsheen.com/about>) (Assessed 25 April, 2016)

produced by fundamentalist broadcasters. Second, the “pulpit” model, as its name alludes, were typical sermons produced by many denominational broadcasters in the 50s and 60s. The third model that Ellens identified is the “instructional” model, inspired by Sheen, often as a documentary or in drama series. The fourth, final model, called “leavening”, was some major denominational and ecumenical broadcasters that would present messages into the more traditional, and conventional television programs, trying to avoid stereotypes and other descriptions that were synonymously to “religious” broadcasting (Hoover 1988: 53-54; Ellens 1974).

### **The formats of the electronic church**

Central persons in early televangelism would be Oral Roberts and Billy Graham, who attempted, and succeeded, to do what the radio had done, just on this new sight-and-sound medium. Graham came first, and in many ways, he standardized the forms for this new medium of organizational sophistication and national fame and importance. He was not just the first religious broadcast phenomenon; he was also a representative of the new form of Evangelicalism (Hoover 1988: 56; Marsden 1982). Together with Fulton Sheen, Graham would draw the attention of fundamentalists and other Evangelical leaders on to a national level of broadcasting. It raised awareness of the potential benefits of religious broadcasting. Graham would model the early ministries of the electronic church. The form and content, as well as the institutional structures of the electronic churches during the 1970s varied a lot. Graham would use broadcasting to cast a light on his ministry outside the media realm, other, more modern institutions seems to rely mostly on the electronic media alone (Hoover 1988: 57). Another program, in a perhaps different genre than Graham, is what Hoover would describe as a quintessential example: the *700 Club* from the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN). It started as a prayer and Bible-study program, and evolved into a Christian talk show. CBN was first in a great matter of occasions: they were the first television to use satellite time to in order to distribute the 700 Club in North America. It was also among the first to install telephone-counseling equipment (Hoover 1988: 60).

### **3.2.2 Islamic programming**

Oliver Roy argues that islamisation has led to religion becoming a matter of the individual, depending on the premises of the existing religious marked (Roy 2004: 53). Put in this perspective, Islamic channels (and SAT-7, for that matter) offer the symbolic resources to the

individual viewer, both Muslim and Christian, to help with matters of becoming a true believer (Galal 2014: 12). Perhaps this is the reason behind the numerous emerging religious satellite channels? Audiences are invited by the several actors of the existing market, as mentioned by Roy, to participate in negotiation true religion, what it entails to be a Muslim (or a Christian, for that matter). They can do so by choosing from the many programs that exist, and choosing from the many existing religious authorities and interpretations (Galal 2014: 15). In his article, *Belonging through Believing: Becoming Muslim through Islamic Programming*, assistant professor in Media and Society, Ehab Galal, looks at how Islamic programming mediates symbols and offers a space for a Muslim to identify and belong to something greater than the individual. As audiences, Arab-Muslim included, have become individualized, reflective, and due to all the options, selective in how they spend their time on media and on their own religious identification (Galal 2012: 148; Hoover 2006: 72). This is not to make an argument for individualization, it is to present the complex context in which satellite channels, such as SAT-7, operates in. It is relevant to the degree that SAT-7 aims at the highest possible number of viewers.

The most popular channels have a wide variety of different programs, all reflecting how media practice with Islamic perspectives is translated and combined. One category of programs emphasized traditional religious practices that once were given in the institutions, and still are, but apparently not to the same degree, but are now shown on the media platform (Galal 2014: 12). These programs emphasize interpretations and recitations of Islamic traditions (Koran, Hadith<sup>10</sup>, Sunna<sup>11</sup>), and shows how the media acts as a substitute for what could otherwise be done in a mosque or by a scholar of Islam. As always with mass media, the big difference from a mosque and the TV-channels, is that the latter can offer access to a much greater variety of different interpretations and interpreters. Another popular category of programs is what Galal characterizes as lifestyle programs, since they address matters of the daily life and the everyday challenges that humans experience. The different programs include talk shows, contests, health programs and many others (Galal 2014: 13). The third, and final category of programs that Galal identifies is a minor category, being programs without a specific Islamic frame or reference. News, sports, documentaries, or other shows are included in this category. An example can be the al-Rahma TV, which broadcasts

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<sup>10</sup> Hadith refers to the record of the traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

<sup>11</sup> Sunna refers to the body of traditional social and legal custom and practice of the Islamic community (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

educational programs to students at secondary school (High school), on different subjects, ranging from languages (Arabic and English), physics, mathematics and geology. As my data collection shows, even SAT-7 has started this practice, with their program *My School*. Although the educational program is not Islamic (or Christian in my case), they do however promote ethical or traditional Arab values, as you would expect (Galal 2014: 13). Two other examples, briefly described, are the *'Ish bibasata* (Live simple) on the al-Resalah TV, and *'Ish illahza* (Live your minute) on Iqra. *'Ish bibasata* targets youths, and concerns philosophical thinking. Addressing various topics which are related to the younger generation, and through discussion, it attempts to bridge classical philosophy (more traditional), with the more contemporary mentality, used in the more modern language of the young. The other, *'Ish illahza*, addresses how young people can live happily simultaneously while living close their calling from God. Both programs emphasize on how to live a good and righteous life – in Islamic manner.

Looking at transmitted hours, the majority of the programming of about 712 Arab satellite TV channels doesn't have any religious purpose in their content. Approximately 48 of the 712 channels are defined as Islamic – including Iqraa, al-Resaleh, al-Nas, and al-Majd (Galal 2012: 149). As noted earlier, most of the Arab-Christian satellite channels are attached to different churches or Christian groups, and their views and interpretations on Christianity. In comparison, the Islamic channels claim to represent the universal and global Islam – several of them also claim to promote a tolerant Islam, as opposed to the more radicalized and extreme Islam, as an attempt to correct the broken image of Islam in the West (Galal 2012: 150). Simultaneously, Islam is being lifted up as the leading moral value in all different aspects of human life, which shows in the variety of programs, covering all parts of human life: “children’s programs, quiz programs, question programs, recitation competitions, educational programs, debates, talk shows, historical films, drama series, etc. (Galal 2012: 150). The *fatwa* program is particularly popular. Every Islamic channel usually have one or several fatwa programs. These programs invite the audience to interact directly, by sending in or calling in with question concerning Islam. This way, the channels include the audience to be a part of the definition of issues of concern in the negotiation of what being a Muslim looks like (Galal 2012: 153-154).

### 3.2.3 Myths and realities

The debate, since the early beginning of electronic churches in America, has been centered around the actual size of the audience. Claims and estimates were made, ranging from 100 to 130 million viewers. Empirical studies, however, suggest that the actual number probably would range from 10 to 20 million viewers. This might be due to “social desirability” while answering national opinion polls, with claims to be more religious than what the reality is. Another is the issue of duplication of audience ratings, meaning a viewer is being counted each time he or she should tune into a religious program. This would often lead to an inaccurate number. A further problem is that religious viewing is a question of definition. One persons’ definition and classification of a “religious viewer” may differ from what a potential observer of this person would see in his or her behavior and actions (Hoover 1988: 63).

It is part of our common “received history” of revivalism and evangelicalism that the question of what constitutes “an adherent” or “a believer” or “a convert” has always been a matter of debate. William Martin notes that there is a fairly common suspicion among observers of broadcast and non-broadcast preachers that they sometimes “... count arms and legs instead of heads.” It is part of the grand tradition of revivalism to take “on faith” each new profession of salvation by a participant in a rally, service, or meeting. Each such convert adds to the total fold of the saved, *and* to each evangelist’s reputation, adding to his or her credibility and overall audience appeal and power to continue the good work of pursuing Christ’s “Great Commission (Hoover 1987).

There are, however, a number of loyal viewers (though not as many as claimed). Questions of size is only one side of the story. Several religious broadcasters equally exalt any anecdotes from viewers who have experienced blessings, or even greater, salvation, through their ministry, as it is a huge confirmation to both the religious broadcasters and their audience, showing the power and importance of the ministry. This results in members in which considers this media religion truly important (Hoover: 1988: 69-70).

## 3.3 Institutional narrative

According to sociolinguist Charlotte Linde, there are two basic approaches to the study of narratives in institutions. One is how narrative is being used by the institution to carry out

daily work (in this study: the first and second sub-questions; operations and programming – this is how SAT-7 work). The second is on narratives is used to reproduce the institution, creating an identity of both the institution and the members involved, and how new members are inducted into the institution (in this study: the third sub-question; how SAT-7 tells the stories of themselves). The terms “stories” and “narratives” are alludes the same meaning in this study. Linde uses the term “institution”, as it represents any social group which has had an existence over time, no matter what the format status is (Linde 2003: 518-519). Linde addresses the so-called discourse at the boundaries of the institution, when one interlocutor in an institutional position, as the pool of leader interviewed in this study, require other interlocutors (such as formal statements that are written in documents) to provide an accurate narrative. Linde argues that narrative is a vernacular form, and may easily get damaged in the boundaries of a strong institution. Often, these narratives are contested, as the interlocutors may not share the knowledge, or agree on what is relevant or correct in that context (Linde 2003: 519-520). The use of narratives is, however, part of an institution-making, as it is reproducing and maintaining the institution and also contesting and changing the self-representation of an institution (ibid. 521). To operationalize this to my study, as my introduction writes, written formal documents are all institutional narratives of SAT-7. Oral statements through my conversations with the leaders of SAT-7, may also be institutional narratives – how do they *talk* about what they *do*? Oral narratives, opposed to written, have a different ability to evolve over time. Some stories might overlap with the written narratives others might differ. Counter narratives, alternative institutional narratives, or individual opinion may reflect other stances than the official, written institutional narrative.

### **3.3.1 Talking about media**

Hoover, together with his colleagues, has explained their research approach on religion and the media as “constructivist” (Hoover et al 2004), which recognized that the knowledge they find and produce throughout their study, is *constructed* through several steps and contexts. These steps and contexts include the research design, the interviews (data collection), the analysis of those interviews, their report of interpretations and findings, and, finally, the reception by the readers of the study (Hoover 2006: 86; Hoover et al 2004: 22). Hoover highlights, as a true point of interest my study, the second step being the interviews. The interviews, Hoover argues, are the source of insights – the informants sense of reality of the processes, practices and meanings that we seek to understand – to us as researchers and as

readers. What does this imply for us – or, me as a researcher in this study – and what kind of knowledge does these interviews represent? Each informant represents their own social and cultural reality that they inhabit – Hoover describes it as individuals seen at a social level. Most important: it is not the aim of our research to generalize statements from one individual to other individuals. It is rather an attempt to explain how each individual represent a range of cultural and social context, and the possible influence that might have been a part of the production of these individuals and their meanings (Hoover 2006: 86-87). It is a matter of approaching each individual as “universal singular” (as used by Jean-Paul Sartre). Each individual has a story which is important, because at the same time it is a story of the unique individual and “the embodiment of the social world that has produced her or him” (Hoover 2006: 87; Hoover et al 2004: 27). Following this, whenever we converse with people, the possibilities of learning as much as possible as we can about any individual opens up, including any cultural and social elements that are a part of their world views and their sense of themselves. Whenever we are engaged in conversation with people about these topics, it is possible to create an image about what they are telling us, and seeing it as a reflexive account related to how they really see and think about themselves, and where they fit in whatever culture that they might have inhabited (Hoover 2006: 87).

Hoover and his colleagues observed what they described as “levels of engagement” with media in interviews with their informants. I would like to suggest thinking of these theories as fitted to media itself, and not just reception – the people in charge of the production of the media – the leaders of SAT-7, and their engagement with media. The first level is *experience in the media*. These are stories and experiences of pleasure, irritations, satisfaction, boredom, dislikes, etc., that all viewers (and producers) of media have (Hoover 2006: 87; Hoover et al 2004). Another level of engagement is *accounts of the media*. These accounts are the way in which the audience (producers in this case) of media position themselves, through public scripts sent by the media. (Hoover 2006: 88). These “accounts of” media was discovered by Hoover and his colleagues as a mismatch between how people would describe – tell of – their media behaviors, and how they actually behaved. Their work, *Media, Home and Family*, aimed to theorize this mismatch, trying to understand it, and they suggested that self-representation in a manner of media, are important in the general self-presentation – making it an identity statement (Hoover 2006: 88-89; Hoover et al 2004). This nature of presentation is characterized by Hoover as narratives. Seeing the interviews of this study as oral narratives, enables me to connect them to the bigger image of the family and of normative ideals (as well

as SAT-7 and Christianity). One approaches when looking at social research on narrative is targeted towards culture and identity. Further, we distinguish between those studies that consider narratives as evidence of deeper dispositions and meanings, and between those that consider narratives as constructions of social and cultural nature, which gives us a bigger understanding of the nature of meaning and identity (Hoover 2006: 91).

### **3.3.2 Identity and narrative**

This approach of narratives, resemblance a lot with the Paul Ricoeur's ideas about narrative and identity. Ricoeur argued that mediation is crucial to personal identity, and that our understandings of self are therefore mediated by all cultural-symbolic resources that we run into – symbols, signs, language, texts, etc. (Hoover 2006: 91; Ricoeur 1991: 15). He also argued that this personal identity is a *narrative* identity, meaning that the nature of identity is not static or discontinuous in our everyday experiences and encounters with life, culture and history. Narratives, Ricoeur adds, are striving for coherence between elements that occasionally contradicts one another, into a coherent path through time. The narrative can create coherences of experiences that are “contingencies” that normally would not work together. It also unites disparate elements – people, experience, symbols, events – and intertwining them into something that seems necessary, or even rational (Hoover 2006: 91; Ricoeur 1992). Ricoeur also claimed that the way that we human beings make sense of ourselves include a certain reflexive self-evaluation, which we do by telling stories about our lives – to ourselves. The identities that we create are not rigid, but rather fluid and flexible, and will continuously be intertwined. The narratives are in a normative dimension, and concerning values that are constantly evaluated. “We say, through our narratives of self, not only who we are, but also who and what we want to be” (Hoover 2006: 92; Ricoeur 1992). Narratives are a procedure, where disparate contingent parts of our lives are woven into a story that tries to be coherent. Identity narratives are these stories that we both tell ourselves, and about ourselves. In this study, my aim is to see this from an institutional perspective, seeing how SAT-7 tell the story of themselves, to themselves and to others. This includes a wide variety of elements, such as life experience, symbolic resources and interactions or experiences with other people. The narratives are value-laden in a normative sense, which means that we aim to tell who we are in how we *think* we *should* be. Simultaneously, they are grounded in real life and are not fictive, because they do include stories of real persons, experiences, languages, texts and symbols (Hoover 2006: 92).



### 3.3.3 Narrative and institutional reproduction

Most institutions use narratives in order to exist and reproduce themselves. These narratives are further used to continue (or challenge) current power structures, introduce and set of new members, adapt to eventual changes, and to deal with whatever contested or contradictory versions of the institution exists in the past. These are all various degrees in which institutions use narratives to create and reproduce its identity, as well as to create and maintain an institutional memory. Further, it contests the self-representation of the institution. Just as with any individuals, institutions have stories representing “who they are”. To understand this, Linde (2010) distinguish between the immediate and the long-term stories, and the between personal stories, or stories able to be told by any given member of the institution. Institutions, Linde argues, are more affected by narratives that have been told over again (repeated) over a longer period of time, by many different members, or tellers. This includes the *non-participant narrative* (NPN): when an event is being told of by a person *not* witnessing or participating in the event (Linde 2010). It is a retold story, told on the memory of what another person has told the narrator. The importance of a NPN, is that these are stories in which is a part of reproducing and extending the life of an institution, as the essential feature is that it is retold at least one time – reproducing the collective memory of the institution. This is a process of narrative induction. This process can be divided into three parts. First, the person telling the narrative has begun to consider key stories within the institution as relevant to him or her. These stories have become meaningful and, therefore, natural to be retold. Secondly, new members begin to tell their own stories in such a matter that it is shaped by these normative stories, as described in the first step. Their stories have become framed, by having similar events or meanings. This is also important of the reproduction of institutional values. The third, and final step, is that some of the people’s stories could possibly become examples of normative patterns. Institutions have career tracks – models of success – and the stories of the individual members are telling can be seen as an example of a possible life in the institution, given to motivate any member (Linde 2010).

In her study of “MidWest Insurance”, Linde found that every employee knew of the company’s history, as it was told by the founder (and they were not part of the founding). They had all the same evaluative points on their narratives of the company:

- It was founded by a charismatic founder, who had a strong vision

- The history and character of the company still shapes the values of the company
- The company is experiencing, because of the values, an ever-growing commercial *and* ethical success
- The final, coherent point, was that the company was a family, representing values that a family entails.

(Linde 2003: 521-522)

These evaluative points all give a coherent account. The reason that I bring this up in this study is that some of these evaluative points, giving a coherent account, is very much similar to SAT-7. This shows how institutional narrative is a common ground for the reproduction and maintenance of any institution. There will always, obviously, be some things left unsaid. What is relevant, Linde argues, is what is saliently unsaid, meaning what could have been told, but is not, or, material that is *not* represented in any official account. There might also be different types of oppositional stories, such as *countermemories* and *counterhistories*. These stories are explicitly critical of the existing power relations in an institution, and the official accounts which shapes the institutional memory, or identity. These “unofficial” histories, as Linde observes, are often unstructured, and lacking a systematic, encompassing narrative (Linde 2003: 528-529)

### **3.3.4 Narrative as a research tool**

To our informants, these narratives are, as Hoover argues, “representations”, a “self” and its life course described by an individual. Being grounded in space and time, they are a kind of “history”, but also a story of future expectations. Ricoeur maintains that this integrates the narrative into social and material factors, which are significant in a social and cultural manner. They target coherence, combining contradictory parts into something that to the informant should wish to see as a whole – led by normative ideas, and what, to the informants, is socially desirable, and in what context. At the end, narratives are an opportunity to create a sense of representations, being focused on the accountability somewhere between “the personal” and “the public”. Importantly, these representations are the chosen ones by our informants to make in a context where some sort of normative authority (in the form of a university-based student / researcher) is “listening”. This means that what we see in our written transcripts is:

what these informants are willing to say or want to say in that context. Which contradictions they choose to address, to ignore, and to resolve in that context is significant. It is valuable information (Hoover 2006: 95).

### **3.3.5 Who speaks for the institution?**

Narratives can be both written and oral (and many others). Stories are not just retellings of the past, but do also tell of the speaker's morale of the past, and past events. As hearers, listening is not just passive consumerism, but an option of agreeing or disagreeing to the story being told. Both on what actually happened, but also on what the meaning of the story is – the interpretation (Linde 2001: 4; Linde 1993). This is true to me as a researcher, listening to the interviews talking. But also to keep in mind, as the interviews are telling stories that they have either heard before, or told several times before. They have the choice of retelling it as it is, modify it, or even mock it or ignore it (Linde 2001: 5). Linde argues that when being inducted into an institution, learning how to tell the stories of that institution is a big part of the induction. Especially telling one's own story in a manner which is coherent with the institutional narrative (Linde 2001: 6). Narratives may be represented through history (biographies, or other authorized written-down history pages), newsletters, speeches, individual telling (or retelling), or through personal experience and paradigmatic narratives (e.g. an account of the contours of an ideal career). It is the task of the narrator, the person telling the story, to make it relevant to the hearer (Linde 2003: 522-525). An important factor concerns storytelling rights: who is allowed to speak for the institution, representing the institution? As Linde writes, a focus on institution will, for obvious reason, begin with any official narratives that exist, and with the accounts from those people (or documents) that have the acceptable position and is representative for the institution. Some studies have focused on hegemonic discourse, where the official accounts aim at creating facts not up for change about the institution (Mumby 1988). This discourse is, however, rarely, if ever, fully successful. This is also true to this study, as we shall see the narratives contesting the institutional narrative of SAT-7. Speakers, even leaders and representatives of the institution, are able to maneuver across several hindrances, telling their critiques, support or even possible reforms (Linde 2003: 531). An important feature is what is termed as “recipient design” (Sacks 1992) – when the narrator tells a story, even one told on several occasions, he or she will tailor this particular telling to the listener, especially leading the conversation to the point where he or she wished to go (Linde 2001: 8).

## 4 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative studies aim to attain a holistic understanding of specific relations or to develop theories or hypothesis concerning social context (Grønmo 2004: 246). This study seeks a holistic understanding of a specific case in a social context. Chapter two in this thesis has emphasized the context for Christians in the Middle East, the history and current situation of religious satellite-TV in the Arab world, as SAT-7 is a Christian actor in the satellite-TV realm in the Arab world. SAT-7 is the case; the MENA-region is the social context. Klaus Bruhn Jensen describes the distinction between *method* and *methodology*, as method representing the instrument used for collecting and analyzing empirical data, and methodology being the theoretically grounded research design which guides the choices of method being done in a study (Jensen 2012: 284). This study will give such a theoretical grounded research design, and I will explain and justify my assessment and choice of method.

### 4.1 How, why and what?

Robert Yin says that in order to differentiate between the various research methods, the starting point should be the research question(s). A research question which is dominated by “how” and “why” questions should suit a case study research. As stated in the introduction, my research question is as following: *What is the actual strategy of the Christian satellite-TV network SAT-7 in the Middle East and North Africa*

I have the following sub-questions for the thesis:

- *How do they operate?*
- *How do they design their programming?*
- *How do they tell the stories of themselves?*

According to Yin, research question(s) seeking to explain some present circumstances (“how” or “why”), and in need of a comprehensive and “in-depth” descriptions of a social phenomenon, paves the way for a case study research (Yin 2014: 4). “How” and “why” questions are more explanatory and deal with operational links needing to be traced over time. “What” questions are exploratory and descriptive, meaning that my research question, and sub-questions, combine an explanatory and an exploratory feature (Yin 2014: 10-11).

“What is the strategy” is the main question of this study. I am aiming to explore and describe what the SAT-7 strategy looks like. The “how” of my three sub-questions are pointing out three dimensions of this strategy. They are giving an explanation of choices being done, and answering any question of “how is it possible ...” that I’ve had while reflecting on a Christian satellite-TV channel as a minority actor in the MENA-region. This has been crucial in designing my research. Yin defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that:

Investigates a contemporary phenomenon (“the case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. (Yin 2014: 16)

SAT-7 is a phenomenon, a “case”, by being a media network with a clear and present Christian profile, broadcasting in an Arab and Islamic culture in the Middle East and North Africa, which creates the “context”. This study focuses on SAT-7 as a case, and aim at creating a holistic and real-world perspective on *what* the actual strategy of SAT-7 is. This is explained by looking at *how* SAT-7 operates, *how* SAT-7 design their content (programming) in this context, as well as *how* they tell the story of themselves, leading to a *holistic case study design*. This meaning that it is examining the global nature of the organization, and not just a subunit, or segment – such as only one of the shows running on the network (Yin 2014: 55).

## 4.2 Case study design

Designing an empirical study identifies and encloses portions of reality – “what” – for continued inquiry to base on theoretically informed purpose – “why” – and through a systematically conducted process of data collection and analysis – “how” (Jensen 2012: 267; Kvale 1987). One methodological approach is not sufficient in order to give rich and in depth descriptions, enabling me to interpret the case according to theories. This study contains: I) qualitative interview enlightening how employees of SAT-7 describe and consider their work and their place in the Arab and Islamic culture in the MENA-region and; II) document analysis giving insight in formal statements and values of SAT-7. I have chosen these two of methods for strategic reasons: specific assessments of what I’m studying, and because it strengthens the trust to the methods and results (Grønmo 2004: 55-56). Another inquiry of a case study points to the technically distinctive situation which creates more variables of interests than “data points”. This results in a case study relying on multiple sources of

evidence, and also benefitting from theoretical propositions being a “blueprint” for data collection and analysis (Yin 2014: 17). As we have seen in the background chapter, many studies have been conducted on Arabic TV, or on Islamic programming. There is, however, an interesting absence of similar studies on TV-programming from religious minorities. This combined with the context of Christians in the Middle East, has given me a platform for further inquiry on the subject, or the case, *SAT-7*. A distinction in designing a case study is whether the research is a *single-* or *multiple-*case study. This thesis will be a single-study, which is an appropriate design under several circumstances, in this case the rationale is the *revelatory* case (Yin 2014) – a situation which normally exists when an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon which previously has been inaccessible, has become accessible to the researcher. Then the study will be worth conducting based on the descriptive information alone, which has a revelatory character. *SAT-7* is not inaccessible, but is never-before documented, which are conditions that justify the use of a single-case study on the grounds of its revelatory nature (Yin 2014: 51-52). Different theories on religion and media, religious programming, and on institutional narrative – how *SAT-7* is telling the story of themselves – is all part of a blueprint of theoretical prepositions. This might create a greater understanding for “how” *SAT-7* operates, design programming, and tell narratives of self-representation, answering “what” the strategy of *SAT-7* looks like, and provide inferences and a conclusion worthy of attention.

### 4.3 Data collection

As mentioned, I have chosen to combine qualitative interviews and documentation as sources for evidence. The major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence. The most important advantage, which is gained by using multiple sources of evidence, is what Yin describes as a development of *converging lines of inquiry*. As pointed out by Yardley (2009), triangulation is similar to the principle of navigation, with different reference points being intersected, resulting in calculating the exact location of any desired object. I do not have three points of inquiry, but my multiple sources of evidence, containing of interviews and documentation, are making my findings more accurate. This is based on that it is different sources of information, in convergence. This helps to strengthen the *construct validity* of my study, which I will come back to later. Essentially, multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of *SAT-7* (Yin 2014: 118-121).

### 4.3.1 Interview

Common sense suggests that, “the best way to find out what the people think about something is to ask them” (Bower 1973; Jensen 2012: 270). The purpose of interview in research is to produce knowledge which is thoroughly tested, and worth knowing. The purpose is to understand a subjects’ own perspective of their “lived daily world” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 25). This study looked for descriptions from different subjects on SAT-7; strategy, practical and programming aspects, religion, culture and challenges, as well as how they tell the story about themselves (institutional narrative, and oppositional narratives). The latter is really interesting in this case, as the difficulty with interview is that people do not always say all that is on their mind, or even mean what they say. As representatives for SAT-7, it is important for me as a researcher to keep in mind, and recognize, that my interviewee’s statements are not representatives, valid or reliable, of what people think. The statements, as described by Jensen, are actions in a context, which is created in the interaction between me as a researcher (and interviewer) and the interviewees. The discourse is a strong sense of the word “data”, and as a tool of data collection, interviews “make” language (Jensen 2012: 271). Interviews in case study will resemble a guided conversation, such as an “in-depth interview”. This requires me as an interviewer to operate on two levels at the same time: collecting the need in my line of inquiry, while at the same time asking “friendly” and “nonthreatening” question. Mainly, my interview is combination of *prolonged-* and *shorter case study interviews* (Yin 2014: 110-111).

#### **Prolonged and shorter case study interviews**

*Prolonged case study interviews* became the dominant character of my interviews. An alteration from the way Yin describes prolonged interviews is the duration of my interviews, being one hour long (maximum length), and not two or more hours. All interviews were done in a single sitting. The interviewees were asked about their interpretations and opinions about SAT-7, culture and their own involvement, and their insights, explanations and meanings related to the research question. The resemblance with *shorter case study interviews* is that the interview only takes about one hour. The interviews are still open-ended and in a conversational manner, but the conversation is more lead by the case study protocol. In my case, I used a list of themes as an interview guide (Appendix 1). This presents all questions in a prolonged character, as well as being led by more focused questions in the list. These questions had a purpose to corroborate certain findings that I had already established (or at least thought to

be established), but I did not restrict the interview by not asking about other topics. With one of the interviewees, however, this was the case, as the interviewee only had 20 minutes, and would give me an overview of SAT-7 as an organization (corroborate), but the interview still ended up talking about culture and safety. As Jensen (2012: 272) writes, duration is usually set out by the purpose of the study, but is sometimes determined by the practical circumstances. Five of my interviews was conducted at a SAT-7 conference in Turkey (more to this in the sampling-section). One was done at a general assembly for a mission-organization in Norway. Another one was done in Oslo, as an employee of SAT-7 had a short business trip, and the last one was conducted at a meeting with partners and associates in Copenhagen, Denmark. In a prolonged interview, the interviewee can suggest other persons for me to interview, and also other sources of evidence. All of my interviewees suggested documents (particularly documents from the SAT-7 website, containing ethos, values, and program policies – all institutional narratives) for me to look at, as well as people I should talk to. As interviewee assists in this manner, Yin writes that their status is to be recognized as an “informant”, rather than a participant. These informants can be key to success for my case study, as they have given me insights and access to other sources of evidence, providing corroboratory or contrary evidence (Yin 2014: 111).

### **4.3.2 Documentation**

Documents, contrary to interviews, examine language as “found” (Jensen 2012: 270). Even though documents’ accuracy and bias can be questioned, they are still useful and relevant to every case study topic, and should therefore, due to their overall value, be strategically planned in data collection plans. Yin writes that in a case study, the most important use of documents is for corroboration and to augment the evidence from other sources (Yin 2014: 107). In this study, documents are used to corroborate the evidence from my interviews, as additional data (Tjora 2010: 145) – as coherent stories *or* as contesting stories by the interviewees. As pointed out in the theory of institutional narrative, narratives may also be written, and any official document by SAT-7 is an institutional narrative, telling who SAT-7 is and what SAT-7 does. By analyzing different existing documents, I can attain information recorded on specific dates and places, with different purposes. In this study I have used several different sources of documentation such as administrative documents, annual reports, newsletters, and other articles appearing on the Internet. As a complex organization, SAT-7 generates documents that feeds into the “content” (Yin 2014: 106; Jensen 2012: 275).



## Case Study Database

As a principle of data collection, I have mentioned using multiple sources of evidence. A second principle, going into to the latter, is to create a *case study database* (Appendix 2), which is organizing and documenting the data collected for case studies. Yin (2014: 123) writes that documentation commonly are separated into two separate collections:

1. The data
2. The researcher's report

This case study database is separate, but referenced to in my thesis. This data includes documents and other materials collected from the field. Yin draws comparison to a file drawer, or set of archival boxes, available for others to inspect the entire database, separately from the case study report (thesis). This will also increase *reliability* of my case study (Yin 2014: 124). Essentially, the main function of the database is to preserve my collected data. For my studies, a confidential, administrative document titled Partnership Kit, was collected during my studies. It was given as source of evidence from one of my interviewee (key informant), and I have been given permission to use and publish content from this source, despite it being a confidential document. This document includes a complete overview of SAT-7 as an organization, and is therefore dominant as corroborating source, and has already helped out in giving a background of SAT-7 in chapter two. It includes vision and mission statements, values, creeds and covenants (theology), history, ethos, program policy, and more. These are important, as most of my interviewees suggested that I looked at these written statements of the organization – again confirming the status as an institutional narrative. Other central documentation is the *SAT-7 annual report 2014*, collected during the SAT-7 Network conference in Turkey. This documents gives the latest update (as of March 2015) on the channels, studios, staff, partners, strategic goals, finances and the international council. The third document, SAT-7 Strategic Plans 2015-2017, was also a handout on the conference. A fourth, official source of documentation has been the SAT-7 website, particularly the “about” section. My field notes are also a component of my database. The notes are primarily in the form of results of my interviews and document analysis. These documents, except for the field notes, are official SAT-7 documents, and it is important to be aware of the potential overreliance on these documents. In a manner of exploratory research (the “what” questions), it is not an issue, but in the manner of the explanatory (the “how” questions), I may, as a causal researcher, assume, by mistake, that these documents contain the absolute truth. It is

important, in reviewing any document, to understand which purpose and to which audience other than me in which the documents were written. As a case study researcher, I am a vicarious observer because the documents that I use as evidence is a communication by SAT-7, trying to achieve some objective. The Partnership Kit, for instance, is written to be given to potential partners or associates, giving financial support to SAT-7. By identifying these objectives, I'm less likely to be misled, and more likely to have a correct critical interpretation of the contents (Yin 2014: 105-108). This makes it also more interesting to address these documents as institutional narratives, and how they are coherent *or not* with the interviews.

### 4.3.3 Sampling and implementation

As the field now has been accessed and operationalized, the next step is to sample elements from SAT-7, and implement the methods of data collection. Qualitative studies can be characterized with *multistep sampling* that the study often involve. First step identifies a relevant context of communication, the MENA-region. The next step will single out certain of its communicative interactions, my interviewees and documents – SAT-7 – for detailed study. The selection strategy was guided by an interest in collecting data from actors with suitable experience of the research question, and in a way it was a purposive selection of informants. Jensen (2012: 268-270) lists three types of criteria of such a multistep procedure: *maximum variation sampling*, *theoretical sampling*, and *convenience sampling*. I have conducted mainly a convenience sampling, with the attempt of maximum variation. Convenience sampling is, despite being considered easily available, giving valid and relevant insights. One variant is the *snowball sampling*, where one initial contact generates further informants. According to the appraisals of my study – focusing only on the Arabic speaking channels of SAT-7 – my requirement was to have at least one representative for each of the nations involved in these channels. As this study reveals later in the analysis, only Middle Easterners are involved in the production segment in the organization. Westerners are only involved in administrative segments, and not involved in content. This also lead me to seeking interviews from “both sides”; the production segment and the administrative department, giving more variation. The sampling consists of three women and five men. This is the line of rolls in my snowball sampling:

- The first encounter I had with SAT-7, was through Norea Mediemisjon (trans. media mission), a partner of SAT-7. Through this encounter, I got to be a part of the

Norwegian Partners meeting. In this meeting I met one of the employees of SAT-7. This resulted in an invitation to the annual “invite only” SAT-7 Network Conference for partners and associates. I would later on another occasion, conduct an interview with this employee.

- In Turkey, the staff from the meeting in Oslo, lead me to relevant and key informants in SAT-7. During the entire conference, he pointed out key people in the SAT-7 Arabic channels – fulfilling the criteria of being Middle Easterners, in production or directors of studios and channels (Arabic and Kids). This lead me to my first interview.
- My second interview in Turkey would also be pointed out by the initial SAT-7 contact. This interviewee is a key informant of SAT-7 Arabic. This informant gave an overview of the structure of SAT-7 Arabic, Kids and Plus. It is this informant who would lead me to the next interviewee:
- A key informant for SAT-7 working in Egypt. This interview gave a new, and third perspective on the organization.
- The fourth interview conducted in Turkey was done with a leader involved with SAT-7 Kids. This is an interview in which I initiated, as I wanted a representative from the children channel.
- The fifth, and final interview conducted in Turkey, was with a final key informant for SAT-7 Arabic. I still needed some clarification on the structure of SAT-7 and this informant would take time for a shorter interview (28 minutes). This was supposed to be corroborating, and as it did clear out some misunderstandings I had, it also became a deeper conversation about cultural challenges SAT-7 experienced.
- In a visit to a general assembly of a missions’ organization, Norea had arranged for a representative from SAT-7 to come and have a seminar. This gave me an opportunity, and through the connections I had gotten with Norea, I arranged for an interview. This was conducted at the general assembly.
- My eight, and final interview of this case study, was conducted August 2015. It was, again, my initial contact in SAT-7 who arranged this meeting with a key informant in SAT-7. The list of themes for this interview was the same as the previous interviews, but with some gap fillers I had noticed during the transcriptions of the other interviews.

As part of the agreement with Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD – Appendix 3) – Data Protection Official for Research – and due to sensitive matters of this case (even though the informants did not adhere to this being “sensitive”) the interviews are featured as a “pool of leaders” in SAT-7. Anonymity is necessary on some occasions, most commonly when it is a case study concerning a controversial or sensitive topic, such as this, in order to protect human subjects (Yin 2014: 196-197). All interviewees will be given pseudonyms. It needs to be emphasized that the interviewees are considered as elites, holding positions in SAT-7 with great influence, and are used to being asked about their opinions and thoughts (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 158-159). The interviews were semi-structured, and a combination of prolonged and shorter case study interviews. As previously noted, I designed a list of themes, as an outline of the most important subjects that needed to be discussed. The list of themes in line with the research question, operationalized into specific research questions as themes and tags (Gentikow 2005: 89), was used in all interviews. I adapted and emphasized the themes with whom I interviewed, considering their role and work tasks in SAT-7. All informants had to sign a *consent for participation* (Appendix 4).

All of the interviews were recorded using a recorder, and done in English. After each interview I spent some time writing notes on the circumstances and impressions I got during the interview. I have transcribed all of the interviews. Transcriptions are translations from oral language to a written language (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 204), which leads me as a researcher to intense listening, leading to more ideas to the analysis (Gentikow 2005: 117). I did not have any transcription protocol, since I transcribed all the interviews myself. I used a free software called *Transcriptions*, and transcribed everything that was said, not including pauses or sounds. I did however note if the interviewee was interrupted. I included all repetitions and incomplete sentences, this way not possibly deleting content which could affect further reading and analysis of the interviews.

## 4.4 Assessment

The purpose of collecting empirical data is to give an answer to my research questions. The quality of the empirical data is higher if it is suited to actually answer the research question (Grønmo 2004: 218). A final stage of this research is to perform and present various types of “quality control”. Reliability and validity are common criteria in quantitative research, and evaluates the empirical data (Blaikie 2003; Grønmo 2004: 222). Since it’s not possible to test

and to calculate quality with standardized methods in qualitative studies, other criteria for assessment is used, and the conceptual and operational definitions of “validity” and “reliability” is reconsidered and extended (Grønmo 2004: 228; Jensen 2012: 295). Briefly speaking, reliability addresses the consistency of descriptions and interpretations over time, while validity addresses how a research “instrument” measures what it was intended to measure. Further distinction is made between *internal* validity, which evaluates concepts and procedures – qualitative studies emphasizes the validity of the categories in context – and, *external* validity, which sees if any findings can be generalized into other contexts (Jensen 2012: 296). Reliability concerns the intersubjective component of research, by examining emerging findings and the issues of interpretations done by me as a researcher. Yin elaborates that four tests have been commonly used to establish quality control: *construct validity*, *internal validity*, *external validity*, and *reliability*.

#### **4.4.1 Validity**

To answer if a study is valid, you need to examine if the method is studying what it has set out to study (Johannesen et al. 2010: 230). Yin writes that in order to meet the test of *construct validity* – identifying correct operational measures for the concept being studied – an investigator needs to cover two steps: 1) define specific concepts and, 2) identify operational measures that match these concepts (Yin 2014: 46). Triangulation (two sources in my case), *multiple sources of evidence*, increases the probability of credible results. The interviews and the documentation used as evidence are both sources of evidence set out to explore “what” strategy SAT-7 has implemented, and explain “how” they operate, design programs, and tell their own story – the concepts of my study. The convenience sampling is also valid, as it is well documented how the snowball sampling took place. The informants were in different positions, both Westerners and Middle Easterners, creating some sense of maximum variation sampling (operational measures). Another tactic is to establish a *chain of evidence*, a principle to allow an external observer – whoever reads this case study report – to follow the derivation of any evidence from the initial research question, to my conclusion at the end of this case study report. The development of my research question, as well as the documented snowball sampling are examples of elements in my chain of evidence (Yin 2014: 127). The choice of using case study as a method, with multiple sources of evidence, was done to create thorough descriptions of the phenomenon I’m studying. The informants and documents used in the collection of empirical data was selected to attain a holistic overview on how SAT-7 operates

in an Arab and Islamic context. As this study presents one perspective, and not the condition for the freedom for all minorities in the MENA-region, this leads the direction of the study, and does not include extreme variables in the empirical data. My role was not to evaluate the truth in their statements, but rather to interpret their descriptions and experiences of working as a Christian with SAT-7 in an Arab and Islamic context. Since these are interviews with elites, I presumed that the informants were aware of the situation they were in during the interviews. If the different data I have collected are plausible or fair in comparison to one another and the empirical data as a whole, the internal consistency, the relation between the different parts of the collected data, is good. This means that all the different parts are suitable, and creates a holistic result of what I'm studying, which enables me to comment on the phenomenon (Grønmo 2004: 230).

### **Internal validity**

Internal validity is first and foremost a concern in an explanatory case study, where the researcher sets out to explain how and why  $x$  led to  $y$ . In other words, it is seeking to establish causal relationship. In this thesis, I've set out to explain *how* SAT-7 operates as a media organization, in other words, the causal relationship between SAT-7s operations and the context of being a minority actor in the realm of Arab satellite-TV. How is it possible? Secondly, *how* do SAT-7 design their programs – showing the relationship between strategy and content-making. Lastly, on a “how-matter”, *how* does SAT-7 tell its story? What is the relationship between the institutional narrative, and the narratives of the leaders? If I should conclude these questions incorrectly, without noticing a third factor –  $z$  – the research design has failed. This logic is not applicable with descriptive or exploratory studies (or questions), since it is not concerned with establishing causal relationship. The exploratory parts, my “what” questions, of my study will therefore not fall under this context – I am setting out to describe what the strategy is, not “why”, which would need interpretation. Secondly, in a case study research, internal validity extends to the issues of making inferences. Whenever an event or occurrence cannot be directly observed, it involves inferences, meaning that the researcher will “infer” that something has emerged from earlier occurrences, based on the data collection during interviews and documentation. The question is, however, is the inference correct (Yin 2014: 47)? A research design that has anticipated this challenge has begun dealing with this concern, and hopefully, my background chapter has given some of the basis of my knowledge of context before conducting the data collection. Later, I will also

describe the caveats of this study, giving insight to the role of me as a researcher, and any other shortcomings of this study.

### **External validity**

The third test used to establish the quality of my empirical research, deals with the question of generalizability beyond this study. For case studies, the issue relates to *theoretical* or *analytical generalization*, as it is more relevant than *statistical generalization*. Analytical generalization refers to the articulation of new concepts or categories. Ian Hacking (1975) argued that *epistemological* probability concerned “the degree of belief warranted by evidence”, referring to human knowledge of events, and underlying mechanisms (Jensen 2012: 296-297). This is useful in my study, as I look at how SAT-7 operates, expanding on theories concerning religion and media. Also, it looks at how SAT-7 design their programming, expanding on theories of religious programming. Finally, I also look at how SAT-7 tells the story of themselves, expanding on theories concerning institutional narrative. My intentions are to compare my empirical data with theory, and aim to make analytical generalization, discussing theory and the further development of these theories. Yin argues that the form of the research question can help in striving for external validity. Augmenting the research design with “how” and “why” questions can directly influence the strategies for theories – and striving for external validity (Yin 2014: 48). As we recall, my research- and sub-questions are “what” and “how” questions.

#### **4.4.2 Reliability**

The objective of this fourth, and last test, is to make sure that a later researcher who follows the same procedures as I’ve described, and conducts the same case study all over again, he or she should end up with approximately the same findings and conclusions as I have. However, rather than focusing on the ability to completely replicate the result of this study, I want to put an emphasis on the verifiability of this study. This entails that any researcher can follow all steps of this study nearly identically, but due to interpretation, might not end up with the same conclusion. This should minimize errors and biases in my study. This will create and emphasize the need to document the procedures in this study. Only then will another investigator be able to repeat my study. Even I could not repeat the study without this documentation. The development of my case study database gives an insight to the documentation and interviews as operational measures, and therefore not hiding any data

that I've collected (Yin 2014: 48-49). All these measures are given to create transparency, showing all choices done in this study. The documentation done in this chapter will also deal with the problem in detail. As noted previously, it is a concern of intersubjectivity. I am the only researcher in this case study, meaning that the relevant partners to discuss empirical data and the accuracy of the data, which would have created *communicative validity*, is lacking. I have, however, discussed the study and the findings with my advisors, which Grønmo titles *colleague validation* (2004: 235-236). Collegial discussion (mainly with my supervisors) of my findings, reanalyzing of data (and documenting it) and usage of both single-studies and research programs all converge into the question of “how certain can I be in order to make certain inferences?” (Jensen 2012: 295-296). As Yin points out, the reliability is strengthened if my research is conducted as if someone was looking over my shoulder. As Jensen argues, it is similar to an “audit trail” (coined by Lincoln and Guba 1985), an analogy to financial audits of companies, which refers to the systematic documentation of an entire process, keeping it transparent to the researcher in question (Jensen 2012: 276). As I do believe the same study could be conducted, leading closely to the same findings and conclusion, another researcher might come up with other interpretations than me, or even statements from my interviewees (one consideration would be if an Arabic-speaking researcher conducted the interviews in Arabic – the mother tongue of most of the informants – other, perhaps deeper answers could be given the informants).

## 4.5 Analysis method

There are at least three common denominators in qualitative communication studies. First, studies on *meaning* – as an object of study and as explanatory concept. Humans interpret both their ordinary day-to-day lives as well as the occurring extraordinary events as meaningful. As a researcher, I will, in turn, interpret these interpretations that SAT-7 leaders have of themselves and their communication. These informants are engaging in their interpretations for a purpose and in a context; they orient themselves as SAT-7 and leaders in this organization, in the world, and from there they take up position to exercise agency. “These interpretations, next, inform actions, for instance, inside media organizations”, such as SAT-7 (Jensen 2012: 266). Secondly, my research, in line with qualitative research, assumes that communication should be examined in its *naturalistic context*, meaning that my sampling is of cultures, informants and practices, with an ambition of considering these contexts as plausible to encounter and examined. The third, and final common feature is the term of me as a



researcher as an *interpretive subject*. All research is done by human subjects as interpretive agents. The distinct feature of qualitative studies, such as this, is the nature of interpretation throughout the research process. Interpretation is “a crisscrossing activity that one scholar undertakes on a continuous basis” (Jensen 2012: 266). These three common features combined, tells much of how qualitative studies perform analytical procedures. As Robert Merton (1968) has described as *middle-range theories*, this qualitative study will mediate between research operations and the theoretical framework (Jensen 2012: 267).

#### **4.5.1 General analytic strategies**

The needed strategy for analyzing obliges to follow some cycle that involves my original research question, the collected data, my defensible handling and interpretation of this collected data, and my ability to state what my findings are and to draw some conclusions. I will combine the use of the following two general analytic strategies. These will guide me through the analysis (Yin 2014: 136).

##### **Relying on theoretical propositions**

The first strategy is to follow the theoretical propositions that has led me so far in my case study. These propositions were not set before the start of my data collection (as the first interviews was done at a conference as early in March 2015), but the existing theoretical propositions are in turn reflecting the research question, as well as reviews of literature. As recalled, this study leans toward a theoretical or analytical generalization. The aim of this study is to compare empirical data with theory, make analytical generalizations, discuss theory and further develop these theories (Yin 2014: 136). This will mainly lead me in the “how” questions of my research question.

##### **Developing a case description**

In combination with relying on theoretical propositions, I will organize my case study according to some descriptive framework. As my study set out without propositions in the first place, the collection of data was still done as my initial research question was settled. First, as I’ve mentioned earlier, the case has a revelatory nature, and the original and explicit purpose of my study was descriptive – exploring how SAT-7 works. The idea came from my initial review of literature, as well as exploring the topic of interests, which revealed the gap of studies conducted on minority actors in the realm of media in the MENA-region, which led

to my interest in doing this case study (Yin 2014: 139-140). This will mainly lead me in the “what” question of my research question.

## **4.5.2 Analytical technique**

### **Grounded theory**

As suggested by the name, grounded theory considers that theory can and should be grounded in the field which is being studied (Jensen 2014: 278). “Grounded theory is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (Creswell and Clark 2011). It aims to sort out the different qualities of a phenomenon. The definition of categories evolves during the course the analytical process (Halvorsen 2008: 212). These categories are a systematic coding of statements, that are defined (Krumsvik 2014; Kvale 2007). In this study, rather than generating new theories, it aims to expand on current theories (media and religion; religious programming, and institutional narrative), explaining *how* strategic measures (qualities) done by SAT-7 is describing *what* their actual strategy is.

### **Explanation building**

The aim of the analytical technique of explanation building is to analyze the collected data by building an explanation about the case – SAT-7 (Yin 2014: 147) The explanation in this analysis will be a result of the following iterations (in combination with the case descriptive framework):

- Making an initial research question in a topic of interest
- Making an initial explanatory proposition
- Comparing the findings of my initial case against this proposition
- Revising the proposition
- Comparing other details of the case against the revision

As my evidence is examined, explanatory propositions are revised, I will examine my evidence once again from a new perspective (from another theoretical view) in an iterative way (Yin 2014: 149). Defined as an indivisible whole, human experience should have an exegesis – an iterative interpretation. In the end, media and communication research, in empirical studies such as this, the aim is to describe, interpret and explain human interaction,

as seen from the researcher's perspective (intersubjectivity). I also need to recognize the categories of understanding in which the subjects of informants are based on (Jensen 2012: 285-286). These measures are all done to explore the strategy of SAT-7, by given a further detail and explanations on how SAT-7 operates, design programs and tell the stories of themselves – giving an understanding of how SAT-7 do their daily work.

### **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics has developed out of reading and understanding written texts, with its main purpose to clarify the nature and preconditions of interpretation. One further development is the role of the reader being taken under account. Ricoeur (1981: 46) identified and redeveloped a hermeneutics of suspicion, which aims at discovering hidden principles behind what people and social institutions (SAT-7 and the leaders in the organization) say and do. This enables a distinction between “surface and reality” – people will not always say what they truly mean, or even mean what they say. Hermeneutics is seen as “reading between the lines”, and interpreting it, and report it to society. This is influential in my studies, as it points out the complexity of human communication, which always is subject for interpretation and, sometimes, a subject for suspicion. The hermeneutic tradition also reminds me that my research is a hermeneutic, and double hermeneutic (Giddens 1979) process, as I interpret my interviewees interpretations on how they communicate – institutional narrative (coherent or contesting). Again, this research reports these interpretations back to society at large (Jensen 2012: 350-351).

### **Textual analysis**

There are two main types of textual analysis, holistic analysis and subunits analysis. Both aim to create order, overview and a structure of an unstructured material. Subunits analysis presupposes that an interview text may be split into several different statements, which are possible to be counted or categorized. An issue with this “pick-and-mix” of quotations is that the readers cannot know how representative or typical the quotes are. A holistic study, creating an understanding of the *whole*, is achievable by reading through the interviews, and to form a wide impression of the whole empirical data, and then accentuate quotes that illustrates these main impressions. One should combine subunits analysis with a holistic analysis. The challenge is to find a structure or the themes that are reoccurring. In this study, it is focused on operations, programming and the institutional narratives (Halvorsen 2008: 210-211).

### 4.5.3 Coding and analysis

A distinctive feature of qualitative research is that key terms and concepts are put to words and defined as a component of the process of the study. Qualitative data analysis can be broken down into two different conceptions of coding – outline of mental categories put onto the phenomenon in reality, in this case through words. On one side, a code can offer *representation* of a part of what is being studied, gathering qualities of this unit of analysis, in my case being a person, SAT-7 as an organization, Arab culture, or other. This should result in mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories, and aims to create standard descriptions for further work. On another side, a code serves as a *resource* to both identify and retrieve an undefined amount of portion of a text or context. In the next step of the analysis, this data can be examined in greater detail, as additional units of analysis, characterized by certain structures or specific qualities. This should result to me as a researcher relying on open-ended set of categories that can be transferred into different contexts and levels of my analysis. Simultaneously, coding creates an interface between both representation and resource (or index), as they may both be developed into each other (Jensen 2012: 275-276).

As recalled, my interviews were recorded and later transcribed, transferring the oral language to written language. I defined the following 16 codes, all comments on a concrete matter, for my analysis (alphabetical order):

- **Arab spring.** Comments on the Arab Spring of 2011.
- **Authorities.** Local or national authorities in the MENA-region. Could be challenges with or reactions from some governments
- **Challenges.** Which challenges my informants had experienced in their activity with SAT-7. Defined by crossing with other codes, such as ‘authorities’, ‘culture’, ‘economy’, ‘freedoms’, etc. (e.g. challenges with being launched at the Nilesat, owned by the Egypt *authorities*).
- **Culture.** The cultural aspects of SAT-7 working in the Arab world – concerning family, honor and shame, poverty, differences from the West, etc.
- **Economy.** Economic status, both status, but also often crossed with ‘challenges’.
- **Freedoms.** Comments on freedom of expression, of the press, and religious freedom.
- **Future.** What’s next for SAT-7, and also the informant privately. Often used as a second level question, finishing the interview.

- **Institutional narrative.** Comments that were predictable and unpredictable for a key informant in SAT-7. Comments describing themselves (as part of SAT-7) or SAT-7 in a narrative matter. How do they speak of SAT-7? *I, them, we*, etc. Is it coherent, or *not* coherent, perhaps even contesting?
- **Partner / Associate.** Supporters of SAT-7, and their influence / importance to the organization. As a donor-driven organization, this code was often linked to ‘economy’.
- **Practical.** Comments on the structure of SAT-7 (and all the channels), studios, production, etc. Describing much of the operations of SAT-7.
- **Programming.** Descriptions and explanations of the content of different SAT-7 programs, and why they broadcast it and to whom.
- **Reflections.** Comments where the informants took some time to reflect upon, and give a more open-ended answer. It is distinguished from *stories*, because it was not a story used to exemplify. Rather, it could be a reflection of “why do you think this work?”, or “what does the future entail?”. These answers were often the informants *own* views and perspectives (e.g., what they think should be next for SAT-7)
- **Spiritual.** Argumentation, or sentences of a spiritual character, where Christian teaching, values and morals were central in the informants’ argumentation. Not important what *I feel* about it, but it is important to the informants. (e.g., “I believe God want this to happen ...)
- **Stories.** Whenever the informants needed to exemplify comments with a longer story. (e.g., “for example – one time, a viewer from Morocco called and said ...).
- **Strategy.** Comments on how SAT-7 is thinking strategically, and what it looks like.
- **Theology.** Comments on the theology or other Christian questions (not spiritual) of SAT-7. Distinguished from spiritual because this addresses more of the dogmatic of SAT-7.

## 4.6 Caveats about study

As this study examines the global nature of SAT-7 as an organization, *holistic design* should and will be used. This design has both strengths and weaknesses. This chapter should so far have explained my choices so far for doing a holistic case study design. There are, however some caveats that should be critically assessed. Potential problems arise in a holistic design when this global approach becomes an examination done in an abstract level, lacking clear and present measures and data. A further problem is that the entire nature of the study may

possibly shift during the study. There might have occurred shifts unbeknownst to me. Some say that this is a flexibility which is a strength of case studies, however, the loudest criticism on case study as a research design is on this kind of shift of orientation (Yin 2014: 55). Like all other methods, case study is a way of examining an empirical topic, which is of interest to the investigator, by following a set of desired (and working) procedures (Yin 2014: 23) My topic of interest is still being examined, being a case as a phenomenon, SAT-7, as a minority actor, within its real-world context, the satellite-TV realm in the Middle East and North Africa.

#### **4.6.1 Data collection**

Whether the interviews conducted where an instrument to corroborate certain findings or using it to attain the informants own sense of reality (SAT-7 and their role in SAT-7), there is a methodological threat present, due to the conversational nature of interviews. Immediately, conversations lead to a mutual and subtle influence between me as a researcher, and the interviewee, often called *reflexivity*. My perspective; white (Caucasian), mid-twenties, male, from “the West” (Norway), university student (media studies, even), “researcher”, and maybe most crucial, evangelical Christian, may unknowingly influence the responses from my informants. Their responses might even unknowingly influence my line of inquiry. This might lead to an undesired saturation of the empirical data which is collected. Both prolonged and shorter case study interviews are likely to create this relationship and contain a reflexive threat. I was not able to overcome the threat fully, but my sensitivity to the existence (and also noticing during the research) allowed me to do better interviews (Yin 2014: 112). Some incidents that would occur was the expectation that I, as a Christian, knew what they meant whenever they referred to spiritual solutions, e.g., “We cannot convert, only Jesus is able to convert, *you know?*”. Noticing this, however, helped me see the way they advert for SAT-7 to fellow believers. This does not, however, answer how they would speak of SAT-7 to a non-believer (or believer of another religion), if that is different.

#### **4.6.2 Analysis**

As I've explained, the analytical strategies are relying on theoretical propositions, and my analytic technique is explanation building, grounded theory and textual analysis. This demands much insight and sensitivity. As a master student, and lacking experience in analytical approaches, this insight and sensitivity might not be as required. As mentioned, explanation building follows an iterative process, and the pitfalls for me as a researcher might

be to drift away from the original topic of interest, which happened as I kept looking and overestimating Arabic TV-audience studies, which, to that degree, is not that relevant for my study. A bigger trench might be my study turning into selective bias, leading my explanation to glorify, or hide, certain key data. Supervision and meetings with my advisors has helped me to reduce such threats, as they are external colleagues being critical. Another helpful grip has been to frequently check my study process and procedures with my original purpose of my inquiry (which was a challenge in the beginning of my research) (Yin 2014: 150). An issue with textual analysis, especially with subunits, are that reader cannot know how representative or typical quotes are when I have picked them out. Thematic structures, such as *operations*, *programming*, and *institutional narratives*, should present and illustrate the main impressions of the study. Further, my list of codes, as presented, and the result from, which I present in the analysis chapter, should confirm that the themes are plausible to investigate, as well as representative, or typical quotes from the interviews.

## 5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This thesis has followed a *linear-analytic* structure, a standard approach for composing case study reports (Yin 2014: 188). I have looked at the topics initiating the issue, or case being studied, and I have looked at the context and background this phenomenon is under. Every methodological step has been covered, data has been collected, and now it is time to do the analysis and present findings, leading to a conclusion of this study. As recalled, the aim of this analysis is to scrutinize SAT-7 and the empirical data that is collected, and build a description and an explanation about SAT-7 – *what* is the implemented strategy and *how* does SAT-7 operate, design content through programs, and tell the story of themselves? This gives the study both an *explanatory* and a *descriptive* feature. These explanations will reflect the theoretical propositions, presented in chapter three. First, it will concern how SAT-7 operates, aligned with theories and studies of media and religion, showing how SAT-7 has strategically set out to organize and operate as a broadcaster. Second, I will look at the content of the programming at SAT-7, giving an operationalized insight into the strategic choices done by SAT-7 in content-making. This will follow the theories of media and religion, as well as theories concerning religious programming. Third, and a final explanation built on theoretical proposition, will be institutional narrative, looking at how my informants, as representatives of SAT-7 (and themselves), tell the story about SAT-7 (and themselves) – giving valuable insight to how they perceive themselves, or how their stories are contesting the institutional narrative of SAT-7. Are they doing what they say they are doing? Are they saying what their formal statements are saying? This would create three different perspectives on strategic choices and explanations, all describing what the strategy SAT-7 looks like. My chapter concerning methodology should by now have given every explanation needed for further reading, but I will note, however, that this analysis will consist of the combination of multiple sources of evidence – interviews and documentation. Rather than dividing the two findings, I will rather distinguish this chapter in my three theoretical frames: media and religion, programming, and institutional narrative – all describing strategically choices made by SAT-7. The interview followed a list of themes, consisting of open-ended questions, giving real-life insights to these questions. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the interviews were transcribed, and coded into 16 different codes – ensuring that the collected empirical data is able to answering the questions under scrutiny. Table 5.1 shows the total frequency score of the coded transcriptions (eight interviews in total). In total, there were 747 codes from the transcriptions.



<u>Code</u>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>Bar Graph</b>
Arabic spring	10	0	5	1.25	2.053	
Authorities	26	0	8	3.25	3.24	
Challenges	69	1	27	8.625	9.546	
Culture	46	0	12	5.75	3.845	
Economy	33	0	27	4.125	9.403	
Freedoms	48	0	10	6	3.586	
Future	14	0	3	1.75	1.389	
Inst. narrative	86	2	25	10.75	8.084	
Partner / Associate	27	0	24	3.375	8.348	
Practical	78	2	17	9.75	4.683	
Programming	62	1	13	7.75	4.652	
Reflections	30	0	9	3.75	2.816	
Spiritual	42	1	11	5.25	3.196	
Stories	65	3	17	8.125	4.883	
Strategy	96	7	16	12	3.78	
Theology	15	0	5	1.875	2.357	
<b>Total: 16</b>	<b>747</b>					

Table 5.1: Total frequency report

Top six, ranged from high to low:

1. Strategy (96 codes)
2. Inst. narrative (86 codes)
3. Practical (78 codes)
4. Challenges (69 codes)
5. Stories (65 codes)
6. Programming (62 codes)

An important side note worth repeating, is that during the coding, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, codes such as ‘stories’ and ‘challenges’ were combined with codes concerning the subject of matter. For instance, a challenge could be a practical challenge – such as lack of quality equipment in production. A story could be an exemplified result of an impact in which a program has made. This have contributed to a higher number of codes on ‘challenges’ and ‘stories’. If they were to be put in brackets, we would be left with ‘strategy’, ‘institutional narrative’, ‘practical’ and ‘programming’ as the most occurring codes – giving answers to what I actually set out to answer.

## 5.1 SAT-7: Operation

November 1995 would become the year that SAT-7 became legally incorporated, and the era of 20 years, and still counting, of broadcasting had begun. It started out with one channel, in Arabic, with two-hour broadcast, every week. Today, it consists of five different, 24 hours a week, channels. What started as SAT-7 Arabic, has been complemented with SAT-7 Kids and SAT-7 Plus (all in Arabic), SAT-7 Türk (which started out as Türk-7, and SAT-7 Pars. The main office is located in Cyprus, and the two main studios are located in Cairo and Beirut. Their Partnership Kit, the main documentary source of evidence in this analysis, tells of an Intermedia research reporting of a total SAT-7 audience of 14 million, 9,25 million watching SAT-7 KIDS in August, 2011 (Partnership Kit: 27). Presenting the ethos of the SAT-7 Network, the kit states that the service of the network is directed to the people of the Middle East and North Africa – which SAT-7 defines as all Arab countries, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. The network has set out to:

- Address the spiritual, moral, social and economic needs, concerns and interest of Middle Easterners.
- Portray the life of the world's Christian communities, emphasizing those in and from the Middle East.
- Enable the people of Middle East to hear and understand the essentials of Christian faith.
- Support the development of church leadership.
- Support agencies working in the areas of rural development, health, environmental protection, education, etc.
- Provide a broadcast vehicle into the Middle East for a wide spectrum of Christian churches and organizations that can provide appropriate programing.

(Partnership Kit: 29)

This goals firmly confirms SAT-7 as a more diverse and specialized (niche) broadcaster in content – as well as targeting a smaller and narrower “niche” audience (diversification) (Hoover 2006) – even if they would like to reach all people living in the region. In order to just establish SAT-7 as an actor in the realm of media and religion, looking at Meyrowitz (1986) and Hjarvards' (2008) three metaphors of media concerning religion: SAT-7 operates as a *conduit*, as source of information and experience of religion, specifically the Christian

faith. It does not only function as a conduit, but also as a *language*, presenting it through several various ways. Genres of popular culture and other will be explored in the analysis of programming. But as the list of goals stated above, it shows how SAT-7 does not intend to just preach (which is not even mentioned in the list), but also intended to meet several cultural demands as well, such as supporting the agencies working with rural development, health, environmental protection, education, etc. One of the programs which I will address later, is titled *Madrasati* – or *My School*, is a program giving education to refugee children. They also address “moral orientation”, as is a feature of media as environments, by addressing spiritual, moral, and economic needs, concerns and interests of the Middle Easterners. In light of being a religious media (Hjarvard 2012), SAT-7 is an organization that is controlled by religious actors, as a collective of denominations. As seen with American religious broadcast, most of the actors moving into this industry had associations with other Christian, communication ministries (Hoover 1988). The same is true to SAT-7.

But in the 80s we started seeing the growing importance and influence of television. You couldn't find a home in Cairo that didn't have one, even the poorest of the poor got a TV, because when you got it, it's an endless source of free information, free entertainment. (...) So, we began to kind of look at what programs could we make, for children initially, that could be sold to secular television stations (Tomas).

This initiated a research and feasibility study. In 1986, the first Arab satellite was launched, and the plans of producing and selling programs to secular TV was evolved into the idea of satellite TV, going directly into the homes of the people, and also, potentially bypass censorship. Christian radio broadcast, both Arabic and international, was a known phenomenon, but, as reports from their research showed, it reached only young, single, mostly unemployed, males – often the shape churches in the region.

(...) television was a different medium. Whole families would watch television. And whole families would either accept or reject to continue watching Christian programming (Tomas).

This serves as an opposition to the theories of the individual quest for self, “seeking”, as seen in America (Roof 1992). As seen with the Arab audiences, watching TV in the Middle East is

more of a collective activity, with the TV in the living room, gathering not just the family, but also friends and neighbors.

The television is in the living room. So we sit in the living room, and we have maybe our friends and neighbors and our cousins and everybody is in the living room, watching television. (Miriam)

As SAT-7 experienced, however, there were no doubt that satellite-TV was medium that could reach a large audience in the Middle East, making it an obvious strategic choice to start broadcasting through TV – adhering to the institutional narrative (formal statements) and goals of SAT-7:

(...) If you are gonna reach illiterates, if you are gonna reach women, if you are gonna reach children, if you are gonna go into closed homes in closed countries, you have to use satellite television, and you have to understand its weaknesses and its strengths, and try to mitigate for those weaknesses (Tomas).

The establishment of SAT-7 followed steps seen in the U.S. televangelism, seeing a rational need for management – leading to the emergence of the National Council of Churches (Hoover 1988). As seen in the background chapter, concerning the Christians in the Middle East, not only is the tension a concern between Muslims and Christians, but also within the various Christian denominations as well. Stated in SAT-7s own official papers, SAT-7 recognizes that the Christians in the region are a widely diversified group. They also recognize that the majority of the Christians share common identity with the people of the region (Partnership Kit: 33). The consequences for this is that SAT-7s program policy determines that the network shall reflect this diversity, introducing all denomination. The broadcast shall also keep in mind the context of an Islamic world, and that the three great religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) once lived in peaceful coexistence (Partnership Kit: 33). The SAT-7 International Council is the owner and ultimate authority for SAT-7. A majority of the members shall be Christian from and currently residing in the Middle East.

The next step was to try and conduct, try to get a consensus on the strategy and buy in from the widest possible group, that meant all the main churches in the Middle East, working with the Middle East Council Churches, and going directly to church

leaders in Lebanon, Egypt and other countries. It meant working with all the Christian agencies that would be interested in doing program production, follow up, research, supporting this in one way or another, and being a part of it. So that process took nearly three years, developing policies, a program policy that everyone could agree to. (...) 1995, November, we got together, all potentially interested partners, the Coptic orthodox church, the Maronites, multiple western agencies, and created the legal entity of SAT-7, and a partnership meeting. We founded a board, we had over twenty partners sign up, to become partners in the project (Tomas).

According to my informants, the policies and ethos have remained nearly intact since the beginning in 1995, with only minor revisions on two occasions. Two principles have underlined the organization since the network saw its light in 1995. First, it is the task to encourage and empower the church, which in some parts are under pressure. Second, it is, carefully worded, making the Gospel available. Several of the interviewees would word themselves in such a matter, saying that it's not their work to convert people (as it is only God who is able to convert). Mainly, however, it is not a question of validity in their wording, but what it means for the morale towards their audience. SAT-7 is only providing a symbol of acts (which is Christianity) (Ellens 1974). Strategically speaking, SAT-7 considers satellite TV as a "window" into the houses of the people of the Middle East, and central as it is able to bypass censorship.

You may witness to your faith, and the nature of satellite television is that you can say whatever you like, the censorship is no longer in the hands of the censors, but in the hands of the person with the remote control, if you offend them, they will turn you off. If they like what you are saying, they'll listen to you. (Tomas).

SAT-7 seems to be aligned to being a "symbolic inventory" (Hoover 2006), offering resources and making them available, but suggesting, that the real power is in the audience – the seekers – making the media and making SAT-7 an instrument which function as a source for cultural action (Roof 1992; Hoover 2006). This perspective suggests the ideas of individualization and mediatization, the quest of self – which is emerging in religious sensibilities – is present in the context in which SAT-7 operates. However, as noted, perhaps more weight is placed on the collective, rather than the individualization. This does not eradicate the individual, there is a balance between the individual viewer and the group

activity of viewing television. The difference is that the main emphasis is not *that much* on the individual in the context of Arab TV-audiences.

### **5.1.1 On-the-ground operations**

As mentioned above, the two studios of SAT-7 Arabic are located in Egypt, in Cairo, the other one in Beirut, Lebanon. The Arabic channels are constructed by SAT-7 Arabic, Kids and Plus. In the Arab world, terrestrial television entails that the television (which are not satellite) are, according to SAT-7 documents, very much monitored by the government. Satellite television enables broadcasting information without censorship. In the Arab world, there are two satellite providers. Nilesat is owned by the Egyptian government, and has a potential of reaching 300 million people, according to SAT-7. The other supplier is Arabsat, run and owned by the Saudi-government. Arabic and Kids are both broadcasted via Nilesat, the biggest provider in the Arab world. Apparently, the Saudi-government would never allow any Christian channel on their satellite. Nilesat has, after many years, allowed SAT-7 to be on their satellite, even though the initial rule was not to accept religious channels. An informant spoke about the process, describing that the increasing number of Islamic channels emerging on the provide, enabling SAT-7 to finally be accepted.

When Nilesat started, the first rule that they made, that they will not allow religious channels to be on satellite. But you can find some Islamic channels. How? Because the registration was not a religious channel. They registered as commercial or cultural channels, with some content of religious programming. And this percentage became bigger and bigger and bigger, until they became totally religious channels. But at the same time, the government was not allowing religious channels, but they allowed this to happen, and they allowed SAT-7 to have a contract with a third-party. So we could be on Nilesat, by the permission of the government, or by, or the government knew about. They did not give permission, but they did not stop it. So the way it's done, is Nilesat runs another satellite called AB4, then became AB7, so we have contract with AB7, which is at the same alignment with Nilesat. So if you have a receiver that receives Nilesat, you can receive SAT-7 (Nancy).

With these two channels, at Nilesat, I think we have reached, according to our statistics that we have conducted, perhaps a bit old, from 2011, we have 15 million

viewers watching the channels. The interesting part is that it's 9 million just on the SAT-7 Kids channel. And the rest is for the adult channel. (Miriam).

A main reason for such a number in the Kids channel, is argued by one of the informants to be due to the family of the Middle East, as the whole family is obliged to watch the same.

And why kids? Because it's where the family is safe, children come to the television, and they want to watch a program, and the father or the mother are obliged to watch the same program too. They cannot take the remote control (Miriam).

These words are similar to the era of televangelism in America, with programs created to make the audience feel safe and comfortable, creating a real presence in the region (Carpenter 1985). SAT-7 Plus is transmitted through Hotbird. This satellite reaches Europe, and the aim is to be intentional in reaching Arab refugees living in Europe.

### **Staff**

The team, both channels included, consist of approximately 70 full time employees (50 in Egypt, 20 in Lebanon), and possibly as many as 80-90 freelancers. Many of the employees have joined because it is a job. My informants said that they might be Christians, or they might like to do Christian work but this is not necessarily a passion. A better job offer elsewhere might make them leave. The Christians working in Egypt are mainly Evangelical, but there are other, such as Catholics as well. Lebanon is pretty much Maronite background. SAT-7 also works with several Muslims, mainly on a freelance basis – technicians, cameramen, make-up, etc., on a needed basis. The international office consists of many different nationalities. According to the program policy, SAT-7 is to facilitate local employment and opportunities for the local church members. It should be a: “voice and a sense for identity for the Middle Eastern Christian, helping legitimize their existence as Arabic-speaking Christians” (Partnership Kit: 31). A value is, however, to obtain a professional competence desiring to excel in the work, and to always improve the professional competence of the SAT-7 staff. They expect to achieve increasingly high quality result:

We don't employ anybody who doesn't have a skill set that we need. I mean we are not a charity, we don't just throw out ... people have to have a certain level of education, or technical skills (Tomas).

This serves as an attempt (this study will not be able to validate the attempt) to oppose the idea of recognizing religious media when seen (Hoover 2006), as SAT-7 tries to make the gap between religious media production and secular media production smaller, by raising the quality of religious broadcasting.

### **5.1.2 Theology**

SAT-7 aims to present the Gospel of the life-context of the people, enabling the people to understand the message through different experiences of faith in the Middle East Christian community, in worship, work and witness (See note on page 23 – briefly to tell others of Christ). The network does not, and they explicitly note – proselytize – neither to other religions nor suggesting any advantageous of other Christian denominations. In other words, SAT-7 will not broadcast material that denigrates or attacks any religion, Christian denomination or other religious body. SAT-7 shall not broadcast programs that promote theological opinions without due regard for other viewpoints.

The SAT-7 International Council is formally stated the highest authority in the organization. This is a diverse group of Christians from, and living in, the MENA-region. It is written in the constitution that not more than 40% of the elected members shall come from one country *or* denominational background. The basis of the cooperation is that all members of SAT-7 should subscribe to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325 AD). It is, however, accepted not to reject any respective traditions or confessions on behalf of this subscription. SAT-7 Partners, as the Partnership Kit is written for, will also form a Partnership Council responsible for advising on the overall goals and policies of the SAT-7 operation. Another function is to give advises and nominations for new members for election to the International Council. The Partnership Council is interdenominational and the Nicene Creed of AD 325 forms the basis of faith. It is noted, however, that these creeds and covenants do not fully represent the traditions and confessions of the council, and SAT-7 does not require any church to reject their respective traditions and confession (Partnership Kit: 47).

The foundation of SAT-7, that is the Nicene Creed of year 325, and the Lausanne Covenant and also this new document agreed on by the Vatican, the World Council of Churches and the Evangelical Alliance on Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. So these three documents are the foundation of SAT-7 (Elias).



The content of the network is to emphasize the unity of the Christian church. SAT-7 considers this unity and diversity as a strength, reflecting the Biblical concept that different members of the Body of Christ (the church) have roles in which complements each other. SAT-7 considers that this philosophy makes SAT-7 a key role in bringing together Christians, who, as seen in the background chapter, have for too long been suspicious of each other. The Partnership Kit states:

Non-Christians have the opportunity to know precisely what goes on in Christian services – dispelling a common idea that Christian worship is immoral (because women and men worship together) Equally, Christians benefit from realizing that despite the great differences between, for example, a Coptic Mass and a Baptist Communion, both services testify to the Risen Christ. (Partnership Kit: 30)

SAT-7 seeks to ensure the best possible working relationship with the *Middle East Council of Churches* (MECC) and all local churches. As stated in the Partnership Kit, it is essential that SAT-7 is *not* portrayed as ‘an evangelistic tool to reach non-Christians’ (38).

In the context of our ministry of television, we are not a theology school, we are not publishing theological papers, we are dealing with fundamental Christian ideas and so on (Tomas).

The sacraments are often where the differences between various denominations becomes most visible. Two informants mentioned sacraments, specifically the communion (or Eucharist). SAT-7 has a policy of explaining how different denominations do their sacraments, and why, but never broadcast these rituals live.

We don’t show the communion on television. One, because communion is something to experience, not to watch. Second, because we have different understandings. But at the same time, we don’t escape from these differences. But we talk about them. We, for example pick one topic in special program, and we say, each church, why do they believe what they believe, and how. And we leave the audience to discuss, ask. And we don’t present one denomination as the conclusion or the answer, because we believe each part of the body of Christ has part of the truth. (Essa).

Again, we see the power of interpretation being handed over to the viewer, as noted by Galal (2014), and SAT-7 is only functioning as an instrument, presenting the different resources available. One of the interviewees said the same, noting that there could be controversies when working with all churches and denomination. This informant added that it was a suggestion from the Orthodox Church not to show the communion on television

Well, first of all we don't usually show the sacraments on television, it's actually something that the, some of the Orthodox have objected to, they said «you never know what a person is doing in front of a television set, and you are gonna show the Eucharist, you are gonna take them through the Eucharist when maybe they don't care, or they are making fun of it, we don't know what's going on, it is better not to broadcast» (Tomas).

Another aspect that was brought into consideration, was how the communion could be perceived from another religious view.

Because for a Muslim to hear that you are now eating the blood of Jesus, what does that say? Eating the body of Jesus and drinking his blood, it sounds awful, and this is, where some of the misconceptions about Christianity goes, so better not to touch it (Tomas).

There is a slight difference in these two statements, one saying that communion should not be shown, but explained. The other suggest not touching the communion at all. A quick research would reveal a slight Evangelical majority within the organization – both in leadership, staff, and with the partners and associations. The studio building in Cairo, for instance, is registered as a media center belonging to the Evangelical church.

The major teaching is protestant evangelical. The major policy is evangelical. The majority of donors are evangelical (Isaac).

This is not surprising, as the *born-again Christians* (Hoover 2006; Roof 1999), as Evangelicals often are related to, have throughout history been more positive to the use of media, as a logical tool to “share the word”. This have, according to some of the informants, however, led to some reactions and tensions. Specifically, there were some reactions from Catholics, one of

the biggest economical contributors to SAT-7, because it was not seen appropriate in the eyes of Evangelical to broadcast a Catholic mass. One of the informants who were at the Network Conference in Turkey, mentioned that the lack of Catholics attending the conference was a dilemma to the organization,

So this has been an issue. They didn't feel they were respected, and they were fairly treated, and equally shown on SAT-7. And it is a dilemma, because the staff of SAT-7 is very evangelical, the partners as you saw are very evangelical, where are the Catholics? So, it's a real dilemma (Isaac).

At the end, the general position that SAT-7 places itself in, admittedly in a slight Evangelical Protestant, is of a position to *build bridges* between not only Christian and non-Christians, but also by showing the diversity, trying to balancing it and connecting the different churches as well. It was, however, intentional planning from the beginning to create such diversity:

It was, always a part of the original proposal that we worked with all churches that could, that were not heretics or totally off the wall. But to work with all those who subscribed this fundamental set of statements and agreed with the program policy of SAT-7 and, agreed with the vision and the mission, yeah.

(...)

You are showing diversity, but hopefully some unity of the church in belief, but not necessarily in practice. Not easy always, but actually, when it comes right down to it, the things we have in common are so much greater than the things that divide us. And it's good, the things that divide us, should challenge our thinking when we listen to each other. It can enrich us. We may not change our opinion, but at least we've thought and looked at it from another perspective, and tried to understand where do that belief came from (Tomas).

### **5.1.3 Language**

All of SAT-7 production in the Arabic channels is as the name of the channels implies, in Arabic language. In the Middle East, there are 20 countries speaking the Arabic language. Different dialects, but the same language.

Yes, Arabic, in different dialects. There is classic Arabic, Lebanese, Egyptian, Jordanian. We have some programs in the Amaziri, which some North African uses to talk. We subtitle or dub it in Arabic. We also acquire English movies, sometimes French or Italian, but we subtitle or dub them in Arabic so the viewers can watch them (Essa).

The Berber-people of North Africa speak Amaziri, which is not understood by Arabs. The Berber-people do however understand the Arab language, especially the *Masri*, or Egyptian dialect. One informant said “everybody knows Masri”. Apparently, as considered by SAT-7, due to a big production of popular culture in Egypt, Masri has become a common language of understanding in the MENA-region.

I think every Arab understands the Egyptian dialect because of Egyptian movies that has been the only, maybe, or the biggest cinema production in the region. Few in Lebanon, few in Syria, but massive production in Egypt (Nancy).

The North African countries is a mixture of Berber and Arab people. One of the informant said that it is important to get the Arabic dialect from these countries as well. There are some programs produced in the Berber language, *Amaziri*. This is not understood by the Arabs, and is therefore subtitled.

The Amaziri no Arab understand. It’s a different language. But, these people, these ethnic group in North Africa, in Algeria, Morocco, Tunis even, they are feeling belonging when they hear their own language on screen. So it’s important to put the program in their language, if you want to really get to their hearts (Essa).

#### **5.1.4 Economics**

The values of SAT-7 states that the organization will adhere to *integrity* and *fairness* (amongst several other values). This entails that they shall be truthful and transparent, acting honestly in their goods and money handling, and live by the agreements they’ve done, even if it could hurt them financially.

Our team, we cannot say we have 20 employees, ten for Arabic, 10 for SAT-7 Kids. Everybody does everything. So in Lebanon we have 22 employees full-time, maybe 53 freelance, from cameramen, to director, to sound engineers to light men, you know. In Egypt we have 50 employees, with like more than 30-40 freelance. (...) Our budget at SAT-7 Kids and SAT-7 Arabic is today, and SAT-7 Plus, these three channels, with fixed assets, you know buildings, cleaning, whatever, is not more than 8 million dollars. SAT-7 Plus is combination of SAT-7 Kids and Arabic. Let's say two channels. You are producing 24 hours of Kids material, 24 hours of Arabic material, broadcasting it, and you have a broadcast, we, to be on Nilesat, we have to pay more than 220 thousand dollars a year for each channel. It is not just production fees, it's broadcast fees, to be on this satellite as a possibility. We pay broadcast, we pay production, we pay salary, and when you think SAT-7, 8 million. You know that one episode of Friends, is 9 million dollars? So one episode of Friends costs our annual budget. Just compare it like this (Miriam).

SAT-7 does not aggressively seek financial contribution from their viewers, but does announce, publically, that it is an organization living of voluntary donations – and from time to time publish information on how donations can be made. Partners – as mentioned earlier, are defined as churches, Christian agencies, para-church organizations, Christian owned media company, Foundation or Trust, individual, etc., who have a partnership status to the SAT-7 Network. Along with being in agreement of the program policies, ethos, statements of faith, etc., it is expected of a partner to be able and willing to pay an annual minimum contribution. Continued partnership is based upon the annual minimum contribution being paid. One informant, who were specifically in charge of doing fundraising said:

You can say we are not donor driven, but on the other hand, the partners can withdraw if they don't like what we are doing, so it's a kind of balance here. We never really talk about it, but there is a natural balance. Because you want to - SAT-7 has a really sound theology, but if they didn't have that, I mean, the partners would tell them (Elias).

Just as a note, this informant spoke about SAT-7 as “them”, and other times as “we”. For the moment being (interview conducted May, 2015), SAT-7 runs three main fundraising offices; USA, UK, and European and Asia.

We started in the USA, because you can get the easy money from the big foundations who can easily give a million dollar, and then we started in the UK because Terry Ascott is from the UK, his local church is supporting him, and so on. Then, these are, the USA and the UK are independent. They have their own board. And they could actually give all the money to something else. We have no control of them. Whereas the European partners send their money directly to SAT-7. So the relation to the UK and the USA is built on trust. According to the US and the UK laws, we cannot set up an office to fundraise for us. It has to be totally independent, and it has to be, it can give the money to whatever they want (Elias).

There is also some fundraising done in the Middle East, about 200 000 US dollar, according to the informant, mostly coming from Egypt. They are also planning to send people to the Gulf States, because there are a lot of wealthy Christians, mainly emigrated from Egypt or Lebanon, who reside there, and ask for money there.

SAT-7 wishes to present a holistic range of programming, including pro-development programming – *edutainment*. These programs will address matters of health and safety issues, environmental problems, human rights, etc. Funding these programs are hoped to come from larger development agencies, such as SIDA<sup>12</sup>, USAID<sup>13</sup>, etc. Another funding might in the future be to sell advertising time to generate income, however, the informant in the economics department noted that:

I mean, as a minority channel, it's very difficult to get advertising. I mean, companies don't want to be affiliated with a minority, they want to be affiliated with the majority. So, SAT-7 is open to sell advertising, but so far we have had very little, it was mostly Christian business men who wanted support it, not for their products, but to support SAT-7 (Elias).

SAT-7 is not, however, in the business of "selling time", even though advertisement or other slots are available for purchase. The procedure is:

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<sup>12</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA.

<sup>13</sup> The United States Agency for International Development, USAID.

1. The Programming Director, Program acquisition and Scheduling departments, will set up a program grid, meeting the needs of SAT-7 audiences, and the networks objectives.
2. After being commissioned/acquired for SAT-7, the programs will in full detail be sent to the separate Air-Time Sponsorship Department of SAT-7. The programs will be scheduled for broadcast, but remained on hold until sponsors covering the cost are found (Partnership Kit: 43)

The “not selling air-time” was a recurrent theme in all of the interviews. The fear of losing control over the programming, especially in the mindset of the cultural and religious sensibilities in the region, was strong amongst the informants. One of the informants said:

We don't sell airtime, because we want to control our schedule. In a way, it's not like controlling, more than, we are Middle Eastern, knowing what's best for the Middle East. I don't want somebody from the West, Europe or America, saying “I have one million dollars, I'm buying two hours of your broadcast”, no! I have Middle Eastern leaders, a Middle Eastern pastor, Middle Eastern people that have a heart for the Middle East (Miriam).

### **The budget of SAT-7, and the annual report**

SAT-7 operates with a core budget and a conditional budget. The core budget items contain satellite time, rent, salaries, program production, etc. The conditional budget is money with conditions. They cannot be used for paying salaries. Funds given by development agencies, such as NORAD<sup>14</sup>, is designated money, placed in the conditional budget. The annual report of 2014 showed an increase of the total income, but too much of it was conditional. This means that it cannot cover the expenses needed to be covered, such as paying the staff salary.

The annual report of 2014 shows that the total expenditure of SAT-7 was \$16,213,00. 37% of this was programming and production costs; 19% was broadcasting and IT; 9% in finance and legal, HR and corporate governance; 8% fundraising; 7% marketing and communications; 5% in investing in fixed assets; 3% in program acquisition; 2% in audience relations and research; while 10% was other operational expenses. This was the total SAT-7

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<sup>14</sup> Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, NORAD

Network. In expenses by channels, SAT-7 Arabic (and Plus) stood for 49% of the budget, 8,000,000 USD. SAT-7 Kids had 16% of the expenses, approximately 2,500,000 USD. The annual income was \$14,800,000, meaning that SAT-7 ended the year with no reserves, and a difficult year. Projected income for 2015 was \$15,600,00, and the total expenditure budgeted to \$15,607,000. The budget for SAT-7 Arabic (and Plus) for 2015 is 6,444,000 USD, 41% of the expenses, meaning a cut of approximately 1,500,000 USD. SAT-7 Kids has budgeted the expenses with 3,262,000 USD, meaning that the budget has been raised for this channel. On questions whether SAT-7 was in a crisis, the informant in concerning economics answered:

The reason that we have financial crisis are that we are doing much more than did when we started. We have taken courageous steps into going into, let's say Nilesat, where we probably tenfold our audience. We have gone into Turkey, which is very, very important. So we are taking steps in faith, hoping that our donors would support that, but it seems that we have been more visionary than our donors. And also then came the financial crisis in 2008, that you never heard about in Norway, but the rest of the world we had a financial crisis, and many of the foundations lost a lot of money on the stock markets, and are only still rebuilding their capital. So a lot of, just as we started the expansion in 2008, the financial crisis came some two months after. And hit the USA and most of Europe, and so the crisis has been okay, because we have learned new things, we have learned how to do things in a better way, in a cheaper way. So it's not bad only. And last year, I mean the year before, 2013 was quite good, and as I said, we are growing a lot, and Europe has grown with 60% in just two years. So that, that gives optimism (Elias).

This informant was eager to point out that the Americans had decreased their support, and that this was an unexpected turn of event. This also tells of some internal tension, not just concerned with religion or different denomination.

What we didn't know was that the Americans had decreased more than we grew in Europe. So had the Americans just given the same as they used to give, then we would have no problems. So the elephant in the room is America. And what can you do? And the current crisis means that we have to be very careful how we spend our money. In TV you can always, it's some kind of elastic, you can always repeat programs, and don't produce new programs and so on. But there is a limit to that,



because if the viewers don't, if they get bored, they will just find another TV-station, so we can't do that a lot, without losing the viewers (Elias).

Further, after describing advertisement sales as unlikely and not profitable, the informant argued that the digital technology has decreased the cost of broadcasting a lot. Even the technological instruments, such as cameras was much better, and it was no longer necessary to buy the most expensive equipment. But the solution seemed to work for an increase of number of donors, and countries in which donors come from, yet it is recognized that there are no easy solutions to this financial problem.

## 5.2 SAT-7: Programming

The following subject, programming, follows tightly in how SAT-7 implement its strategy in its production. For a broadcast network, the programs are the end-product, the strategy draws the lines for what the programming should look like. As recalled from the background chapter and the subject of SAT-7s strategic goals, the official document SAT-7 Strategic Plans 2015-2017 listed the general strategic goals, with the aim making the Gospel available to everyone living in the MENA-region. SAT-7 puts an emphasis on *children, women, the illiterate*, and people living in *closed homes*. SAT-7 has a goal to *encourage, support, and empower* the church. (SAT-7 Strategic Plans 2015-2017: 1).

Key to understanding the network is to understand the principle of being a Christian satellite television service *for* the people in the Middle East. The programs shall concern and meet the needs and expectation of the people living in the region, in the context of their history and present experiences and trials. Therefore, it is necessary that the programs are produced and presented by Middle Easterners, and that they belong to the various churches of the area. *For* the Middle East, *by* the Middle East. SAT-7 has already, and will continue to develop various on-ground operations in Middle Eastern countries, including production centers (studios in Cairo and Beirut), news bureaus, individuals (freelancers or SAT-7 staff) and agencies (Alpha-7, Lighthouse) who will contribute to SAT-7 programming on a regular basis. SAT-7 will produce most of its programming in original, local languages. The Partnership Kit states, however, that the schedules always will be enhanced by a certain percentage of material which is imported into the region. This important material should always help to meet the entertainment, educational needs, objectives of SAT-7, and its audience. Programs

originating from outside the region will be selected on the basis of their cultural suitability. SAT-7 is, at the end, however, the sole broadcaster and retains full and final responsibility for all programming broadcasted (Partnership Kit: 35). Imported materials or materials produced by independent suppliers (freelancers) are under contract, and must conform to the broadcast standards of the network. SAT-7 commits to the highest standards of broadcast journalism, and production values. The second note in the preamble of the SAT-7 constitution and byelaws states the following, concerning programming:

SAT-7 Television programming is culturally appropriate and holistic in nature and designed to support the work of churches, Christian and development agencies across the region. The underlying vision of SAT-7 is that it should participate in the process of transformation which God intends for the region. The range of programs will encompass entertainment, education, community development, documentaries and news, acts of worship, and other programs, in the languages of the principal populations of the Middle East. Programming will seek to provide a positive alternative to both local and western broadcasts (Partnership Kit).

It might serve as a connection to the ideas behind American televangelism, where Evangelicals were able, not only to use mass communication, but also to convince themselves and others that their presence in the American public were real (Carpenter 1985; Hoover 1988). Similarly, SAT-7 aims to convince themselves, the Christians and the others living in the Middle East, that Christians have a place in the public life. Further, as Galal (2014) observed, SAT-7 might serve to broadcast symbols and in such offer a space for a Christian to identify and belong to something greater than the individual itself. This might definitely be the case, as a donor driven organization, and being under a constant questioning of their cultural authenticity.

### **5.2.1 Programs and genres**

We produce programs that is solid in content, but follow the genres that are popular in the Middle East. So we produce drama, for kids for adults, we produce short movies, we produce music shows, we produce live discussion shows, documentaries, TV-researchers and these kinds of documentaries that tries to explore things, teaching

programs, but the format is as creative as possible, with people asking questions getting answers, so we are trying to make a bouquet of TV-programs that people can enjoy watching (Essa).

All of the different genres in the SAT-7 programming can be listed in Ellens (1974) four models, or approaches to religious broadcasting. Their slogan entitles that they make Gods love visible – showing the “mighty acts of God”. Secondly, they present typical sermons and teaching programs, following a “pulpit” model. Third, “instructional” models are often used, as a teaching method, but also through the documentaries attempting to explore and explain. Fourth, SAT-7 broadcasts dramas or movies, aiming to creatively present Christian values and teachings, in a more traditional and conventional design. This also adheres to the metaphors of media (Meyrowitz 1986; Hjarvard 2012): SAT-7 functions as conduits, as primary source to Christians, and as a language, presenting Christianity in various ways. During this section, I’ll present three programming segments on SAT-7. Two of them, *Bridges* and *Forbidden* are both on the SAT-7 Arabic channel. The third segment is on SAT-7 Kids, and I’ll look at the thoughts behind the program *My School*. The first comparative notion I make, is that the programming schedule of SAT-7 mainly follows the typical religious programming, as seen in the Islamic programming, of the region. Islamic channels offer the symbolic resources to the audience, to help in becoming a true believer (Galal 2014). The clear distinction seems to be the underlining religion, more than a practical, strategic perspective. Or as most of my informants would agree on: SAT-7 is bringing hope and through the programs, they are portraying the “good news”: Gods love made visible:

The main message, simply, is this, that there is good news. We are talking about God who loved people, all people, from all background, so much, and expressed his love in the life and death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we are talking about this Christ-centered message in all of our programs, that whatever is your background, whatever is your religion even, Christ is not about religions, or about backgrounds, it’s a message of love. If you understand this, you have life. What is life? It’s people to reconcile with God and to know that he loves them, and the authority and power that controls our life is reconciled with us and is in love with us, and he wants us to express that love to one another and have good life. Naturally, this is the core message that we are trying to express, in different formats and in different things. What we want to totally avoid, is to be critical to others. Some people believe that in order to preach

your message, you need to start with telling people why they need it, and why what they have is not working, why what they have is not good. We don't believe in this at all. (Botrous).

The latter point of this argument would also be central to all of the informants, as well as an overall theme in all official documents. SAT-7 does not discriminate other life views, be it religious groupings, or other Christian doctrines. As we saw with Galals' studies on Islamic programming, the feature of "mass media" is that it offers access to a huge variety of different interpretations and interpreters, rather than the traditional mosque is able to. The same can be said of churches. A more distinct difference between Islamic programming and the Christian programming of SAT-7, is that as Islamic channels claim to represent the universal and global Islam, SAT-7 is combined of several different denominations, and attempting to present each of the different views of the Bible. SAT-7 claims, however, that the similarities between the denominations are greater, than the differences, and in such manner, claiming to present what is the universal values and theology of Christianity.

## **5.2.2 SAT-7 Arabic**

### **Bridges**

This program is a current affairs program, a result of the Arab uprising in 2011. It started as the Egyptian team were not able to go to the studio offices, disabling them in their production. All Egyptian transmission is also dependent on Internet-connectivity, which in January 2011 was cut by the Egyptian government for a short time, during the uprisings against Mubarak. There were stories of turmoil and the Christians were under attack, and churches being burnt. SAT-7 – being present for the Christians and churches – and the production team in Egypt wanted to report and present the news and updates. The team responded by travelling to the studio in Beirut, where they were able to address these actual, live happening events.

We produced seven live shows from Beirut, we called Egyptian leaders, thinkers, church leaders, online lines, just asking them to give us statements, to tell people things are okay. We our viewers that this is a number that you can call if you have something to say, or if you want to make your relatives know that you are safe and good. And we discussed the situation. What does it mean? (Botrous).

SAT-7 was the entire time trying not to overstep any boundary, as the program policy states that SAT-7 is not to take political sides, according to the informant.

We developed a policy, for news programs, that reflects really our ethos. We say that we are above politics. We are not here taking sides. We are standing for the rights of people, to express themselves, to have dignity. And to live according to the way God intended people to live, in honor and peace (Botrous).

Bridges was first intended to be a special mission, covering the “heat of the moment” of the uprising in Egypt. After the revolution, an election was due in Egypt. The production decided to cover this as well, creating a series of new episodes, to educate and encourage people of Egypt to vote. This was intended to be a six-episode campaign. Now, after several occurring events, the production has been continued, back in the studios in Cairo, Egypt.

We couldn't stop. It was going on, responding to what is happening, responding to the, the, the, the, uprising spreading, what's happening in Syria, what's happening in Yemen, Iraq, and since then we are doing the program on a weekly basis (Botrous).

This program can be classified as a live discussion show, with an “instructional” (Ellens 1974) approach, especially during the election, and how to be a part of an election for the first time. It is, of course, also similar to the traditional current affairs, bringing news and updates to the viewers of SAT-7. Here, we also see SAT-7 serving as *environment* (Meyrowitz 1986; Hjarvard 2012), with its presence during major national events, creating “moral orientation, emotional therapy, and consolation in times of crisis” (Hjarvard 2012: 27).

### **Forbidden**

Another show, in a bit different genre is Forbidden. It is a popular show, a talk show with just under an hour duration. Usually there are guests attending, and other times it is investigating certain stories. The guests range from being people from the streets, to very important or known people in the Arab world – actors, thinkers, artists, politicians, such as dr. Nawal El Saadawi (known feminist), famous poet Ahmed Foad Negm, and others – or well-known names from the West – Noam Chomsky, the linguist, Pastor John McArthur, and the Christian writer Philip Yancey. This is aired weekly. The idea is to meet with people, in a secular format but with a Christian spirit.

It's not preaching, it is not teaching, it is the idea of what would Jesus do, if he sits with this person or the other person. And from time to time, we get some Christian guests (Isaac).

It is said to be in a secular format, because there was a need of something else than the regular religious programming. It needed something that would attract viewers to watch.

We're singing to the choir, majorly. Like, we have lots of preaching, and teaching, and media it's not neither. School it's not college, and it's not church. Media is media. And media is very competitive. You're not gonna attract people to watch you, if you have one person with a book, for you it's a bible, but for the viewers who have no background, it's a book, and he is speaking the same things. And then there is another one and another one and another one, and then we have some people are singing and singing, and preaching and preaching and singing. You have some games in between, but it's about that book. It is, there is a need for that. But you cannot do it 24/7. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's not attractive for viewers (Isaac).

Forbidden often addresses more controversial, "hot" topics. Homosexuality, honor and crime killing, issued of adoption, about evangelism (*dawa* is the equivalent word for evangelism), etc., are some themes.

It's Muslim converting people. A *dawa*. *Dawa* in Islam. And evangelism in Christianity. I did five episodes. I had Muslim guests, Christian guests. I talked about worshipping God and religion. I invited a big worship leader, Muslim worship leader and big worship leader in Arab Christian. They sat together, and they sing a song about Mary. But they, he talked about his belief, and the other talked about his belief, and that is *Forbidden*. To sit together with an ex-Muslim (Isaac).

### **Annual report 2014-2015: channel and program update**

SAT-7 Arabic audience response by method in 2014 show that SAT-7 Arabic in 2014 had contact with 79,692 people through their different media platforms. Of these, 75%, the highest rating, came through Facebook-comments, followed by WhatsApp (8%), SMS (7%), YouTube (4%), e-mails and phone calls (both 3%) and the rest through website messages. SAT-7 Arabic had during 2014 approximately 8.1 million clip views on YouTube, and

reached over 35.8 million people through Facebook. 2014 marked the year that SAT-7, after installing new high definition (HD) cameras in the Cairo studio, went *live* in HD on YouTube for the first time. The reports call of groundbreaking development, carrying SAT-7 programs to any location with Internet connection, either through computers of other smart devices. Traditionally, these transmissions were expensive on satellites, now, sent over Internet, saves SAT-7 tens of thousands of dollars. On excerpt from the program update is the report of the current affairs program Bridges, which made headlines in Egypt during 2014. News sources *Veto* and *Watani* applauded the rare footage captured by the production team in northern Iraq. The newspaper *al-Fagr* would also compliment the team, praising the episode which presented a perspective on AIDS and homosexuality (SAT-7 Annual Report 2014: 18-21).

### 5.2.3 SAT-7 Kids

SAT-7 Kids official website writes that the channel airs original dramas, talk shows, educational material, cartoons, music programs, live programs, games programs and other shows that capture the attention of young viewer. SAT-7 Kids are specialized, and has the knowledge about current living situation for children, and the circumstances children face every day<sup>15</sup>.

I'm not afraid to put things that are really entertaining for kids, because these are the programs which catch the attention of kids. To watch SAT-7 Kids. And to take what they want from the programs, you know. I have a lot of people, a lot of Muslim guys, Muslim children, that they write "I love Jesus, I love him very much". "I pray for him". You know, and these are from Muslim backgrounds. We tell that Jesus is for everyone. It's not just for Christian people. You can pray for him as much as you want. (Nancy).

The informant with the statement above tells that SAT-7 Kids programming is classified. They have programs that talk about Jesus and the values of the church. Other programs are purely social. The target, is of course, kids living in the Middle East and under the SAT-7 Network "umbrella", and it is for the Christians living in the region. But many of the viewers are also from Muslim background.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sat7kids.com/en/about> (Assessed 10 April 2016)

But I just want to tell you that not all our programs are purely Christian. Because, I, it's very important that we put some entertainment, because, look, my philosophy: my philosophy is that you have to catch your audience. You catch your audience with entertaining programs, that has values, okay, but if, if they switch to your channel, and they see "ah, their talking about Jesus, about Jesus, about Jesus", and then they will switch off you channel. I don't want them to switch off my channel. I want to keep them on my channel. Because, is our motto in the channel is "where your kids are safe". And this is what we are proud of. That everything is, even the animation, we put in our channel, it's seen, it's evaluated for its content, especially if it's not Christian, but at least it has values. We don't put Pokémon, for example. We don't use, we are very, we study the program before it goes on air. We have a psychology with us also. Someone who studies psychology. To make sure that everything that is on air is safe. Safe material. It has no violence in it, it has no weird ideas, you know (Nancy).

The main challenge is parents, believing that SAT-7 is trying to convert their kids. It is emphasized, as all the documents of SAT-7 does, that this is not the strategy of SAT-7. An interesting way of wording is, however:

We don't want to convert anyone. I mean, God converts, we don't. We just talk about the experience, we just put the values, highlight the values of Christianity and of Christ. We just like, talk about Christ, this very influential person, you know. And it is up to you to decide whether you want or not. We don't say okay, now, put your hands on ... we don't do that. It's a freedom. You are free to choose, you are free choose whether you want Christ or you don't want Christ, and we love you anyway, you know. Nothing is by force (Nancy).

This is something we will see as a common feature and way of wording, when we look at the institutional narratives of SAT-7. One new feature of SAT-7 Kids is *Madrasati*, My School translated.

### **My school**

In 2014, SAT-7 Kids started planning a daily on-air school to help provide a basic education to the millions of Syrian and Iraqi children displaced by the current unrest in their countries.



In partnership with *Hearts for Lebanon*<sup>16</sup>, SAT-7 began preparing a curriculum and a strategy to teach Arabic, English, and Mathematics over the air. The presenters are teachers, already working with refugee children. It began airing early 2015.

My School program is for refugees, as refugees. I'm not saying refugees from Christian backgrounds. I'm just saying refugees. What you are given in this program is the love Jesus, it's the love of God, without even mentioning Jesus. Because they know it comes from SAT-7 (Nancy).

Hearts for Lebanon is an organization that works already with refugees. They have a special school for refugees, to help them reintegrate in real schools around. We made many meetings, it was very hard to come, because there was no idea what we are doing, it was testing project, you know. (...) We started from scratch (Nancy).

The courses that are given are strategically picked. Arabic, because everyone in the region speaks Arabic. English, because many children might not end up back in their home country. Knowing English might be helpful in order to get integrated in other countries. Finally, mathematics, because it is such a basic needed tool, useful to have in human daily life. Educational programming in the Middle East is not, however, a new phenomenon. As Galal (2014) reported, al-Rahma TV broadcasts educational programs to secondary school students. The courses are quite similar to My School, with a wider range: languages (Arabic and English), physics, mathematics, and geology. As with My School, al-Rahma TV does not explicitly promote Islamic teaching in these segments, but they promote ethical and traditional values of Islam.

### **Annual report 2014-2015: Channel and program update**

2014 marked the year SAT-7 Kids created a daily on-air school to help provide a basic education to the millions of Syrian and Iraqi children displaced by the current unrest in their countries. SAT-7 says that according to UN figures there are now more than 20 million Arab children not in school, and SAT-7 believes that this program will potentially have an impact far beyond the current conflict zone. SAT-7 producers, in partnership with *Heart for Lebanon*,

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<sup>16</sup> Heart for Lebanon's heart is to unconditionally serve those who have been marginalized and rejected. We are committed to reach the lost and broken, to advance peace, justice, and equality and to empower the marginalized and rejected by the power of God. (From official Facebook-page – Assessed 10 April 2016).

began preparing a curriculum and devising a strategy to creatively teach Arabic, English and mathematics over the air. 'My School' began airing early 2015.

One highlight of 2014 was when Essam Nagy, the presenter of *Why is that?* visited displaced children at a refugee camp in Kurdistan. He interviewed a number of youngsters about what they went through as their community came under attack by Islamic State militants. A 10-year-old girl, Myriam, whose family had been forced from their home, told Essam that she "will ask God to forgive IS". This video clip featuring Myriam went viral and reached millions of people through social media, with currently 1.3 million views on the SAT-7 Arabic Facebook-page<sup>17</sup>. SAT-7 Kids audience responses by method in 2014 show that in 2014, SAT-7 Kids had through their different media platforms contact with 70,304 people. 77% was through Facebook comments, 14% through e-mails, and the rest was through phone calls, website messages, YouTube comments, SMS and letters. SAT-7 Kids YouTube channel had during 2014 approximately 1.2 million clip views, and 5.6 million people reached through their Facebook-page (SAT-7 Annual Report 2014: 14-17).

#### **5.2.4 Myths and realities**

Just as a notion to the two annual reports that were presented from SAT-7 Arabic and Kids, it is important to recall that audience sizes has been the center of the debate of electronic churches in America since its beginning (Hoover 1988). In America, claims and estimates were as high as 130 million viewers. This should later, as empirical studies pointed out, turn out to be more likely 10 to 20 million in actual number. These huge gaps in number in America was suggested to be a reason of "social desirability", claims of being more religious than what the reality was. In the MENA-region, however, it might be due to the issue of being present in the region, as a minority. The "difficult numbers" (Thorbjørnsrud 2015) telling of the decline of Christians living in the region might call for a wish to be stronger, and more visible. SAT-7 claims to have 15 million viewers, with Muslims being the majority.

And people, we have, the majority of our viewers, we have 15 million viewers, the majority of them are Muslims. I was in Iraq, and Iraq has maximum 400 000 Christians now. We have like over 4 million viewers there. (...) And in Saudi Arabia, around 4 million. And we are not talking about immigrants, we are not talking about Philippines or

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/sat7ar/videos/10153122599221197/> (Accessed 11 January 2016)

Egyptians. We are talking about Saudi Arabians viewers. I can't remember the exact numbers. It was a study that we did with one of the bigger research companies, something like, that includes us with Al-Jazeera. (Botrous).

In light of myths versus realities, it is worth mentioned that another informant stated:

I think we have reached, according to our statistics that we have conducted, perhaps a bit old from 2011, we have 15 million viewers watching the channels. The interesting part is that it's 9 million just on the SAT-7 Kids channel. And the rest is for the adult channel.  
(Miriam)

To me, it is not precise in which the Iraqi viewers are on the adult channel or on the Kids channel. The SAT-7 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary brochure (Appendix 2 – Case study database) states that “one in three” children in Iraq watch SAT-7 Kids (SAT-7 20 Years: 4). It is difficult to get the numbers quite accurate according to the first informant, stating that 8 million viewers come from Iraq and Saudi Arabia together, considering that Egypt and Lebanon contains the largest number of Christians living in the region. If true, does this entail that the Christians living in the region does not watch, and support SAT-7? And still, the rest of the North African countries, Israel / Palestine, Jordan, Syria, etc., are not mentioned. Keep in mind that these interviews were done at a conference targeted to the partners, and what they perhaps would *like* to hear, and me as a Christian, might have colored the answers, as Hoover (1988) argued on how numbers may add to the evangelists (in this case – SAT-7) reputation, credibility and overall audience (and in this case – the partners) appeal and power to act upon the “great commission” from God. This is not to definitely discard the numbers which SAT-7 presents, but it is a topic worth mentioning. These issues of concerns could also be addressed to the numbers which SAT-7 are presenting on their social media platform. There is, however, no doubt, a number of loyal viewers to SAT-7. In many of the interviews, the informants would exalt stories of how SAT-7 is received, even more than the actual viewer numbers. The first informant spent the first five minutes of the interview telling the testimony of how this informant met Christ through SAT-7. Stories of viewers who experience blessing, salvation or other, through the works of SAT-7, serves just as much as great confirmation, both to SAT-7 as an organization (staff and leaders), but also for the partners and donors, wanting to see this type of consequences emerging due to SAT-7.

### 5.3 SAT-7: Institutional narrative

Seeing interviews as narratives enables us to see them, and connect them to a broader image of the family and their normative ideals. As Ricoeur argued (1992), it is this dimension of normative ideals in narratives that say not only who people are, but also what and who people would like to be. This is current for SAT-7, as theories of institutional narrative describes the process of reproduction and maintenance of the identity. The first and foremost noticeable feature from the interviews on what their world-view is like, and also their own sense of themselves, is how they speak of television as a medium:

I think people at SAT-7 don't really like television, I don't even have a television at home. I like books (Elias).

So, I have to admit that I hate television, and especially Christian television, as I had seen it in North America, at least. It is a superficial medium, you have to look good to go in front of a camera, you are sitting in front of an artificial set, you have special graphics and all other kinds of phony stuff. You are made up. Ugly people are only good for radio, not for television. And, it's so artificial, and people watch television to be entertained or distracted, they don't watch necessarily to learn anything. So if you take it as a package, it's a hopeless medium for communicating truth, the truth of the Gospel. Because it is such a phony media (Tomas).

Another informant said it was a matter of distinguishing religious television from secular television. It is all about producing television:

I personally hate when someone asks me: "So you work for a religious broadcaster, religious television". I don't feel comfortable; I don't think I'm working for a religious broadcaster. For me, television is television. It's a tool, and you should use it right. So, at the end of the day, we are producing television (Botrous).

These are interesting points, seen in the normative dimension. There is a clear distinction between what the workplace ideals are and the leaders of SAT-7 are. As a leader in a television broadcaster, describing it as a "phony media" is a rather disparate statement. The latter informant clearly wishes to be perceived as a professional media worker, rather than a

religious broadcaster – even so – doing ministry. This is rather odd since the slogan of SAT-7 is “making Gods love visible”, not helping to erase the label as a religious broadcaster. The leaders would, however, all agree that television is a unique way of reaching the people of the Middle East.

But, if you are gonna reach illiterates, if you are gonna reach women, if you are gonna reach children, if you are gonna go into closed homes in closed countries, you have to use satellite television (Tomas).

So but this is the way to do it. And I have to respect that this is where the people of the Middle East get their information, and this is a battle of minds and hearts (Elias).

So as their personal narratives are all contesting the institutional narrative, oral narratives being in conflict with the written statements, they still refer to the formal statements to justify the strategic choice of *using* television, despite it being “phony”. This is a fairly “top to bottom” view, putting themselves in a position above their own viewers – particularly noted through saying “this is where the Middle East get their information”. But this is common for all the leaders, which is a mix of both Westerners and Middle Easterners. All of the informants, however, speak truly positively and proudly of their organization – giving its abilities – but it not always easily measured.

I really feel that SAT-7 is the best in the world, or I feel it is very, very important. I’m not brainwashed with SAT-7, there are other things that are also important. But to me it is very exciting, to me it gives a lot of sense. And I feel there is a lot of interest out there, we are very well received where I come, people are very concerned about the Middle East. And, sees SAT-7 as a very relevant tool, sees SAT-7 as something they can identify with and they like the ethos, the vision and the mission (Elias).

They love it (people of the Middle East). And it depends also. I mean, we are, what I know, we are loved, but we are not really very well known, you know. So, we are known maybe to 30% of the ... and who knows us - they love us (Nancy).

There is also a great pride in the values, ethos and program policies of SAT-7, and that it has not been changed. Not even financial crisis would make SAT-7 “sell their souls”:

And still after 15 years I like that, and I'm proud that SAT-7 has not changed over the years. So many temptations, if you are tending to be money driven, there are money in America, from evangelicals, but there are these and these conditions. We never fall into that trap. We have kept our mission and vision. The mission and vision was so well described already from the beginning, so we, even though the Middle East is changing a lot and satellite TV is changing a lot, we still have the same policy as in the beginning (Elias).

While talking about fundraising, and the potential traps, one of the informants said that American donors could come with two million a year, and the UK a bit less and more individually, 100 to 500 pounds a year. And then there could be Middle Easterners contributing 5000 Egyptian pounds, approximately 1000 US dollars. This was a proud factor: the range from the rich to the poor – all wanting to support SAT-7:

We are so happy that they wanted to contribute to this ministry. And this is the blessing that we get, from donors that give one million, to one person who living in a 10-meter house, want to give a dollar. This is all what he can give. This is how we have sustained ourselves for 19 years now. And I'm sure that this is going to continue, another, at least 19 years (Miriam).

Again, it seems as the *ministry* is what is of significance, not the medium that is *television*. There are a lot of similarities to Lindes' study of "MidWest" (2001). The evaluative points of the storytellers' comments on the company's' founding (its founder and its strong vision), how the vision and other formal statements are still shaping the organization today, the growth of the organization, and the holistic (edutainment) service it provides, as well as presenting good values – Christian, family values. This pride in own organization, as well as – in sorts – being negative to the end product – a phony media – might indicate that these values are being reproduced. It also shows that the informants may not share the enthusiasm for the medium as presented in the institutional narratives of formal statements, but agree that it is the right strategic path for accomplishing the goals of the organization. This is without a doubt a coherent account from the leaders. The mission, apparently, is bigger than the work. This might seem to be the cultural and social context while working for SAT-7. This creates an identity of how SAT-7 is a part of the television market because they *need* to be.

### 5.3.1 Spiritual

Being a Christian profile satellite-TV network, is for obvious reasons, an important factor to the employees and leaders of SAT-7 to address this faith in their conversation with me. God is a big motivational factor for the work they are doing – as an individual, and as an institution.

Today, I'm working with SAT-7, after many, many years. So I thank the Lord for this, because God was the one who opened the doors, so I came to the Lord about, or through SAT-7, and today I'm involved in SAT-7 as a worker with them (Sarah)

This informant started the interview by telling the story of this informant's life. It was clearly putting an emphasis on faith, this is important. It is the Christian faith that creates love and hope (the SAT-7 slogan is "making Gods love visible), and sets the parameter for SAT-7s existence:

I think it is necessary for SAT-7 to exist, because it brings love to people, and it brings hope to the hopeless people. (Sarah)

SAT-7 speaks clearly of the respect of other religions (than Christianity), and of not evangelizing. The values clearly states: "We will refrain from any coercive attempts at changing people's faith" (Partnership Kit: 9). Partners are not to speak of SAT-7 as an evangelistic tool (Partnership Kit: 38). When asked about how the reactions would be if someone converted through SAT-7, it was firmly said:

The society does not accept that. (Essa)

This is perhaps not really sensational. SAT-7 would probably not be able to broadcast if they publically stated this as their goal. It is a matter of distinguishing *conversion* from *witnessing*. It is not the goal to convert, but rather a goal to present what the Christians believe, what they themselves have "witnessed" and experienced, and to create a greater understanding of this belief.

So the way we do it is we proclaim the gospel. And we share our faith. If someone wants to know more, he needs to go to a church. (...) And the, that's the way we do it (Essa).

So we are trying to tell people this thing. If you really love your religion, if you want people to really understand its meaning and experience its spirituality, leave them to choose. God is more strong than men, and he doesn't need them to support him. (Botrous).

Again – it is a matter of “seeking” or the individualization (Roof 1992), leaving it up to the viewer to interpret, and determine the truth in what is being shown through SAT-7. In light of the changes of media acting as church actor – obtaining the traditional cultural and spiritual places, such as the church – SAT-7 claims to be more in a partnership with the traditional churches. It is always a reoccurring theme that the final power belongs to God. “We don't convert – only God can convert”. This defines how SAT-7 sees religion as something of a particular significance, but also in the hands of the audience, and of God. It is, of course, the message of God's love that is central – not to force anyone to convert to Christianity.

I know, and we are all aware that things happen in different ways with different people. And this is why I always say we plant. This is our job, is to plant. Who sows is the holy Spirit, not us. After that, we have, we have audience relation. We are there for everyone who wants to talk to us. Who wants us to pray for them. We are there. But more than that, I mean, that is what we do. We are there when they want us. If they don't want us, we won't force them to want us. We just highlight that we love you, Christ is for you as well as for me, and you are free to choose. (Nancy).

Further, according to an informant, any person seeking and trying to find a convincing faith cannot be blamed for that, including SAT-7. It seems like if this were to happen, no announcement would be made, not from the individual, not from the church, and not from SAT-7:

Nobody can be blamed for that (becoming Christian), because it is the person who is searching and trying to find the faith he is convinced with. (...) If someone becomes a



Christian, we don't announce it, he doesn't announce, the church doesn't announce it. So, when things happen, we don't know about them. (Essa).

Some things are left unsaid, it might appear. It might be a matter of actually not knowing – it might also not be what SAT-7 wishes to achieve. It would in that case be in opposition to the idea of living in coexistence. What perhaps is undoubtedly more in line with the official documents is the strategic choice of never attacking others, both religions and other Christian denomination.

We don't attack others, we don't critique their beliefs, although we are ready to ask the hard questions if there are questions, like when there was violence, taking place, we had to ask how religion is related to violence, and how people are using religious scriptures to justify violence, and how this is dangerous. We don't say that all Muslims are terrorists, or that all Muslims by default if they are reading the Qur'an they are stupid. (Botrous).

Again, an informant would justify the means to use television in order to “share the word”, as it is a great tool to bypass censorship and a certain freedom to say whatever you like. This is, however, not giving the right to abuse this freedom, or at any time allow attacks on other beliefs.

It was a no brainer to reach parts of the Arab world that had never been reached with the gospel. And because, it bypasses censorship and gives you the freedom to say whatever you want. Now, that doesn't mean you abuse that freedom by attacking other people's faith or undermining religious belief, in Islam, or you know, you got to use it wisely. So that you win friendships (Tomas).

Another informant, a freelancer working with SAT-7, seemed more interested in living in coexistence with Muslims.

I believe media should be professional and competitive. SAT-7 is great screen for my work, (...) succeed to build bridges, and to break the walls of hate between Muslims and Christians. Break down the walls of hate and misunderstanding. We are not going to convert everybody. And not everybody is going to be a Muslim. We should live

together. Coexistence is a beautiful thing. Jesus loves the idea of peace. (...) We love our neighbors. They like us or not, that is their problem, it's not my problem. But, the reality is that we are gaining lots of respect of Muslims (Isaac).

The latter statement even suggests this aim *not* to achieve conversion is a strategic choice which strengthens SAT-7's position in the Arab TV realm, and even creating an acceptance of the existence of SAT-7. This is both in the television realm, but also in the MENA-region culturally, amongst the Muslims majority. As with the Evangelicals and fundamentalists in America and their need to establish reality, convincing themselves and others that they are a real presence, the same is seen in SAT-7's desire of coexistence. They convince themselves of their own existence in the MENA-region, as well convincing the Muslims that the Christians are a part of the society, a peaceful society.

### **5.3.2 Success**

Every interview was finished with ending questions, of a reflective nature, asking “how is it possible to exist in the MENA-region, and why is it necessary?”. This question implies that the organization is experiencing success – which is, I might argue, after 19 (now 20) years of broadcasting Christian faith in the region, truly success for an organization that has set out to broadcast Christian faith in the region. As Linde (2010) argues, some stories told by informants might be an instance of normative pattern – representing career tracks and the local models for success in which SAT-7 has. When asked the final question, it points out how the informants perceived their success, and what measures they had done to make all this possible. My findings show that it is broken down to several points. First, as one of the informants of non-Middle Eastern origin stressed, the crucial part of contextualizing – showing the strategic measure of being done *by* Middle Eastern professional communicators, was a key factor.

We should contextualize. We Westerners, I mean, there are so many people on the ground that can do the job. And of course, a Chinese should meet the gospel from another Chinese. And an Arab from another Arab. If you meet the gospel from a western perspective, he will tend to be a westerner, and have a western perspective on Christianity. Christianity started in the Middle East, so of course we should have a Middle East perspective and background. So I think this idea of contextualization was

in my mind already before I came into SAT-7, and part of my excitement about SAT-7 was that they used this paradigm of contextualization fully. (Elias).

This was also seen in the comments of another informant, from the region, who argued that no Western person should come and tell him or her how to “go about business”. This informant already had a pastor, a language, a set of value, a history, etc. This implies, of course, the needed cooperation of all local churches and Christian agencies. This is yet another argument for cultural authenticity, fighting for being a Middle Eastern product – not of the West. They seemingly at all times need to fortify their position as not just Christian individuals, but also a Christian actor in the Arab TV realm, as an institution. Enabling the different parts to work together is something that is thought highly of in the SAT-7 corridors. Big words are used to describe the big success:

It's an untold story, a part of SAT-7s growth as an organization, has been that coming together, if you like, around a common vision and mission and strategy, with nobody giving up what they hold sacred, but discovering things and learning things from each other, that are being bridged, the spirituality I think of everyone involved. (Tomas)

Not only in a matter of broadcasting, exceeding the broadcasting success, it is spoken in big words of how SAT-7 miraculously have been able to join forces:

And in a way it is a miracle that we can keep all these churches together, because probably SAT-7 is the only place in the Middle East where the churches are together. (...) They should go together because of the crisis, but they are not really united. So, in a way, SAT-7 has been a tool to unite the churches in some sense. (Elias).

Setting the parameter for what is television and what is church has also been part of the success, in the eyes of the informants. Joining forces with churches entails that SAT-7 cannot take on the role of the church, but rather be a partnership and a tool for the churches.

Satellite-TV can be very good in pre-evangelizing and also in discipleship, but we are not a local fellowship, we are not a church, and without the local church, it will be very difficult for the viewers to benefit from what we do, and will be almost impossible for a new believer to maintain a sound and healthy faith, without a local fellowship.

And in the Middle East, there are churches, not many, but there are there. So we should definitely work with them. And be their witness (Elias).

This is a megaphone for the church, to witness to the world for the first time. (Tomas)

One thing is to connect the churches, another is to not attack or make any derogatory claims of various Christian denominations. This is all a part of the “miracle” of cooperating churches. This also goes to show that in MENA-region, unlike the electronic churches in America, SAT-7 does not attempt to take the space of the traditional church. This is coherent and in accordance with the formal statements, to encourage and empower the local churches. Another is not to attack other religions, such as Islam. It is what the informants are calling building bridges. This bridge goes two ways, as one of the informants suggested – they should be able to talk about Jesus, and also able to hear about Mohammad.

Why should it be a one-way street? I'll tell you about Jesus, but don't tell me about Mohammed. What? You know? (Miriam).

As stated in the Partnership Kit, Christians and Muslims have peacefully coexisted for many years (Partnership Kit: 33). It should continue to do so. According to the leaders, SAT-7 has managed, despite certain negative comments, to enhance coexistence. The negative comments just show how SAT-7 actually have succeeded amongst other Muslims:

It's so surprising that in the end, when somebody attack you, like we are attacked sometimes on Facebook, and you are like a Christian channel and, you know, you see the Muslim friends defending you, when you're not defending yourselves. What? This channel, we love the Muslims. We are building bridges, building relationships. This will be the best solution to us living in the Middle East today. If you want to live with your neighbor, who is not necessary a Christian, build bridges with him. If you want to evangelize him, you have to open also to hear about Mohammed. (Miriam).

We want to reach people that we need to reach or build the bridges. And actually, I find that Christians even, when other channels have started to critique Islam, they were very popular at the beginning. Even some of our staff were doubting whether we should be doing the same, and that we are not doing right because we are not the

same. Now, when we turn to be more popular than others, or having more success with our stories, when we notice that viewers themselves, Christian viewers, are fed up with that language that is violent and aggressive, we are more confident that what we stick to, our ethos, our editorial line, was the right thing to do, and we are happy that we did so (Botrous).

This relationship with the neighbors is in the eyes of the informants measured in the good reputation that SAT-7 has gained in the region, as well as the numbers watching SAT-7. It helps, as one of the informants points out, that the production teams are Middle Eastern:

I believe so. At least it allows us to be on the ground. We are not a group of people who threw the stone and ran away, and just keeping throwing stones from outside the region. We are working inside the region, we are able to broadcast programs from studios that functions from Egypt, in Beirut, in Jordan, in North Africa. And we are accepted. And people, we have, the majority of our viewers, we have 15 million viewers, the majority of them are Muslims. (Botrous).

Not only are they doing on-the-ground production, but this strategy of not attacking is enabling them to continue to work in the region, not having to flee. This is something that they are cautious about, as the *publicity guidelines* in the Partnership Kit states that “any of these on-the-ground operations will be severely threatened by insensitive publicity in the West” (Partnership Kit: 37), again confirming the need of Middle Easterners being in control. At the end, when speaking of the success in which SAT-7 experience, it is because of the current need of the area. This is also the main motivation and main “theme” at the moment for doing what the network is doing. The leaders speak, coherently, of themselves as part of a very important “peacemaking” institution in the region, with the strategy being: the love of God.

There has never been a better time for SAT-7, because there is a need of voice of reconciliation, a voice of love and care, respect and inclusion. I wish there were many others like SAT-7, so maybe there was need for SAT-7, or maybe there were others who were talking about the love of God, about loving your neighbor and so on. But there is none at the moment. So someone has to do it. It seems that we are doing it now. (Elias).

This is a clear re-enforcement of the institutional narrative of SAT-7 – they are *needed*, now more than ever before, they argue, to bring hope, love and reconciliation. They position themselves as heroes, not only for Christians, but for the region at large.

We need SAT-7 Kids, so to ensure a safe environment to our kids, where they can watch and learn, and, and just be safe. Be in a safe environment. Not taking anything into their minds. And I think also, SAT-7 Kids is very important for the values it contains. Accepting the other, forgiveness, loving thy neighbor, all these values that Christ taught us (Nancy).

These accounts of SAT-7, is part of reproducing and enabling SAT-7 to further existence (Linde 2003). It is the identity of SAT-7, and it is the values and normative ideals of the institution, adapted and embraced, seemingly, by the staff and leaders of SAT-7. It is creation and maintenance of the institutional memory of SAT-7 – who they are, and how they go about. Another perspective is of course the need to witness, broadcasting the love of God – “making Gods love visible” – again pointing out the spiritual manner of the organization:

We believe, I mean, at the end of the day, we believe God is in this, and God wants it to happen. So we keep on (Elias).

## 6 CONCLUSION

This case study report has been an investigation of the independent Christian satellite-TV network SAT-7, aiming to answer my curiosity on how it was possible for a Christian organization such as this to operate in the Middle East and North Africa, a region with a majority of Islamic traditions and beliefs. My assumptions were that this context, with Christians being a minority, was challenging and an almost impossible environment for such an institution to exist in. My fascination grew when I learned that the institution was running *and* stationed in the Middle East – and had done so for 20 years, and counting. How is this possible? How come I had never heard of it? This curiosity led me to my research question which I set out to answer through this study:

*What is the actual strategy of the Christian satellite-TV network SAT-7 in the Middle East and North Africa?*

This descriptive position, *what*, aims to describe and exploring the strategy which SAT-7 has implemented in their daily (and long-term) work. Further, in order to help me describe the strategy, I designed three sub-questions of explanatory, *how*, nature, all giving insights into three different aspects of strategy and strategic choices done in SAT-7:

- *How do they operate?*
- *How do they design their programming?*
- *How do they tell the story of themselves?*

The operationalization is SAT-7 as a case, a phenomenon, and the MENA-region (Middle East and North Africa) as the context. An important appraisal to the study is that it only focuses on the Arabic-speaking channels of the SAT-7 network, leaving two of five channels (Pars and Türk) out of the parameter of the study. In order to answer the question, I have designed a case study research. My “how” and “what” question entails that this study seeks to explain a present circumstance, which SAT-7 is, and is in need of an “in-depth” description of this phenomenon. This is what a case study sets out to do. I have had multiple sources of evidence, as I have conducted interviews with a pool of leaders in SAT-7, whom all are, due to sensitive matter, anonymized and given pseudonyms. In addition, I have collected

documentation concerning SAT-7. These documents are all institutional narratives – telling who and what SAT-7 is and does. Other than relying on multiple sources of evidence, case studies also benefit from theoretical propositions as a “blueprint” for data collection and the analysis. I have undergone three different theoretical propositions forming this blueprint, or framework of the analysis of this study. These are all relevant in order to answer the sub-questions – and thereby leading to an answer of *what* the strategy of SAT-7 actually looks like. The theoretical framework consists of *media and religion* – answering to the operations (organization, goals and practicalities) of SAT-7; *religious programming*, a combination of the American televangelism or electronic church, and the Islamic programming – answering to the content making, the design of programming done by SAT-7; and *institutional narrative* – examining and answering how SAT-7 as an institution tells the story of themselves, and if what they say are overlapping or discrepancies from the official written narratives.

## 6.1 Operations

The network has grown a lot since its founding in 1996. Two hour per week on one channel, has turned to twenty-four-seven broadcasting on five different channels. Three of these, and the subject of study in this thesis, are Arabic-speaking channels: SAT-7 Arabic, Kids, and Plus. SAT-7 Plus is not necessarily scrutinized in detail, as it is a combination of SAT-7 Arabic and Kids. It is a “best-of”, and broadcasted via the Hotbird-satellite, reaching Arabs living in Europe. Studying SAT-7 Arabic and Kids will provide answers for the Plus-channel. The Arabic language is important in the MENA-region, as 20 countries has Arabic speaking inhabitants. It is the same language, but there are different dialects. This is important to SAT-7 as well, in order to actually reach their targeted group. I mentioned SAT-7 Plus being broadcasted via Hotbird. SAT-7 Arabic and Kids are both broadcasted via Nilesat, an Egyptian government owned satellite, with the potential of 300 million viewers. It was, originally, not permitted to broadcast religious programming, but religious broadcasters have never been stopped or censored. This is not unambiguously for SAT-7 or other Christian broadcasters; it is equal for all religious programming on Nilesat. SAT-7 is not near to having 300 million viewers. According to their research they have approximately 14-15 million viewers in the region. 9 millions of these are viewers on SAT-7 Kids. The most common institutional narrative is the vision and mission of any institutions. SAT-7 states that their vision is to see a growing church in the MENA-region, and serve the church and the community. Their mission is to provide an opportunity for the churches and Christians in the



region to witness to Jesus Christ through television. It is a service for the people, specifically the Christians, of the Middle East and North Africa. SAT-7 Arabic and Kids are located in studios in Beirut and Cairo (Lebanon and Egypt). They have approximately 70 employees and possibly around 80-90 freelancers working for them. This is all part of their policies, as they aim to create and support local employment and opportunities – all in line with the mission of the organization. It is not, however, a *charity*, as worded by one of the leaders, but they seek to employ people with the required and needed skill set. High quality result is expected. One of the informants wanted to erase the division between religious broadcasting and secular broadcasting – stating that at the end of the day, SAT-7 produces television, and high in quality.

Despite the global decline of linear television, satellite television is still preferred (by various reasons) in the Arab world. SAT-7 follows this trend, as well as creating and offering a *niche* alternative in the realm of television. As the vision and mission has stated, it is a Christian television (even if some of the leaders would prefer this categorization not present), looking to offer television to feed the spiritual, moral and economic needs of the region, specifically the Christian community, churches and Christians. It offers to build bridges in the tension that is between Christians and Muslims living in the region – aiming to explain and to give an understanding of what Christianity actually is – in order to support and fortify their own existence, as well as underpin coexistence in the region. They wish to support the church, and they wish to support agencies working with health, safety, education, etc. As with the Arab TV realm in general, SAT-7 does not only set out to preach, but aiming to provide *holistic* services for the people living in the region. One example of this is *Madrasati*, or My School, a daily on-air school to provide basic education to the millions of displaced Syrian and Iraqi children. The strategic goals of SAT-7 for 2015-2017 creates an emphasis on the illiterate, the children, the women and people living in closed homes. This was also a recurring theme in my interviews. Television is the strategic tool in order to reach these people, and to achieve their goals. As noted, satellite TV reaches almost every home in the Arab world. It bypasses censorship, the only censorship now is in the hands of the one controlling the remote control. The Arab world is also different when it comes to the ideas of *individualization*, and “seeking” (Roof 1992) – the quest for self. Now, the individual viewer might be on such a quest, but rather than being an individual activity, watching TV in the Arab world is of a collective matter. Families are watching together and even inviting their friends and neighbors to come join them. SAT-7 is offering, no matter what quest or not, symbolic inventories – offering

resources and making them available. It is in the hands of the viewer to interpret what they are viewing.

The content – what the viewers are to interpret – is the end product of any broadcasting network – the programs. Two vital features of SAT-7, which has never been changed and are inalterable to the organization, is that SAT-7 seeks to encourage and empower the church, and make the Gospel available. In matter of theology, SAT-7 clearly defines themselves as presenters of the Gospel, but not under any circumstances aiming to proselytize, hoping to achieve conversions of other peoples' faiths. Not only people of other religions. As the context of Christians in the Middle East showed, there is also tension between the different Christian denominations residing (and also from other parts of the world) in the region. SAT-7 does not aim to contest any denomination either. It consists of mostly all denominations and churches in the region, emphasized by the partnership with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). SAT-7 strives for coexistence, both within the different branches of Christianity in the region, but also with the other two great religions in the region – Islam and Judaism. It seems that this coexistence is truly important to SAT-7 in order to fortify their position in the region. This alone is an obvious reasoning for the strategic choice not to denigrate or attack any religion or denomination. Rather than attacking, or converting for that matter, they aim to create an understanding of what Christianity is, and to erase any suspicions or mistrusts of the Christians living in the region. It is not just about relations to other religions, but also internally among Christians in the region. This collaboration of churches in SAT-7 is truly visible in the SAT-7 International Council, the highest functioning authority in SAT-7. It is a diverse group of Christians from, and residing in the MENA-region. They all adhere to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Lausanne Covenant, and the more recent document from the Vatican – World Council of Churches and the Evangelical Alliance on Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Agreements with these and the formal statements of SAT-7 is required. It is noted, however, that these creeds and covenants do not fully represent the traditions and confessions of the council, and SAT-7 does not expect any member to reject their respective tradition and confession. It is no secret, however, that the employees and partners (supporters and donors of SAT-7) are a majority of Evangelical Protestants. The Cairo-studio is registered under the Evangelical Church.

Looking further into the operations of SAT-7, it is a fairly low-budget broadcaster. One informant made a comparison to the well-known Friends series, where one episode cost 9

million US dollar, as the entire budget of the three Arabic-speaking channels, annually, is 8 million US dollar. As briefly mentioned above, SAT-7 is reliant on Partners, or at least voluntary donations – usually through their partners or associates. These can be churches, Christian agencies, foundations or trusts, etc. As with the International Council, agreements with the Creeds, Covenants and the formal statements is required to be a Partner or an Associate, as well as the annual minimum contribution. This entails that SAT-7 is donor driven – with donors originating from the US, UK, and Europe and Asia. There is some, but not much, coming from the Middle East as well. Even though this amount was low, this was by many of my informants “hailed” in their conversation with me, alluding an important thought of the MENA-region also part of the contribution, feeding into cultural authenticity. Some funding is also gathered through their strategy *edutainment*, get funds through aid organizations for programming concerning issues of health and safety, human rights, environment, education, etc. There are talks of also selling advertisement, but is, according to my informants, not very much likely to happen, as any affiliations to Christianity (which ads on Christian television would create) is “bad for business”. This confirms the need for SAT-7 and Christians living in the region to fortify themselves and their existence. A non-negotiable issue was, and this was a recurrent theme in the interviews and in the documentation, that SAT-7 never sells air-time. This could potentially lead to SAT-7 losing control. Not only that – SAT-7 themselves, as Middle Easterners – knows best the needs of the culture and region. They don’t need any foreigner coming to tell them what is best. Again, back to the formal statements of SAT-7: SAT-7 is *for* the Middle East, *by* the Middle East. Even financial crisis or bad times cannot change this – as they have proven in the last couple of years. A hope in SAT-7 is that the digital technology is decreasing the cost of broadcasting – leaving any temptations of selling air-time out.

## 6.2 Programming

As mentioned above, programming is the end product of a broadcast network. And as a second point of view in my research question, programming mirrors the strategy of SAT-7. In alignment with the questions of operations, the recurring theme for my informants, also current for the programming, was that it is *for* the Middle East, *by* the Middle East. It is produced on the ground: Cairo and Beirut studios, or freelancers from other parts of the region, and it is in the native language, Arabic. Should SAT-7 ever buy and import programs, they need to meet the entertainment and educational needs of the region, and be

selected on the basis of their cultural suitability and being cultural appropriate. SAT-7 is the sole broadcaster, with full and final responsibility. Again, being cultural appropriate is a manner of cultural authenticity, fortifying their existence as Middle Easterners, living in the Middle East. The Middle East and North Africa are in the focus of the programming. The genres of the programming have a wide range: entertainment (dramas, films, talk shows), education, community development, documentaries, news, acts of worship, and many other. As seen in combination with theories of Islamic programming, SAT-7 follows much of the principles as any other religious broadcaster in the MENA-region. It seems that the main difference is the religion itself. One difference is, however, that Islamic programming claim to be “global Islam”, whereas SAT-7 is a mosaic of Christian churches and denominations. Rather than portraying one view, SAT-7 explores the differences, as well as substantiate the similarities between them. All the programs should be a portrait of Gods love – the good news of hope and reconciliation. This is considered as much more important than criticizing or attacking others. In this study I gave an oversight of two programs running on SAT-7 Arabic, *Bridges* and *Forbidden*. *Bridges* is a current affairs program, which was designed during the Arab spring in 2011, as a response to all the uncertainty that circulated at that time. After the spring, it continued to provide cultural education – such as how to vote during the election. *Forbidden* is a talk show, investigating stories and addressing controversial topics. This show has more religious annotations. Celebrities or known figures of the region are on the show. The idea is that *Forbidden* is a meeting with people, in a secular format, but with a Christian spirit. In both programs, SAT-7 emphasizes the need to attract the viewers, and contextualize by making it relevant. Again, there is a desire in high quality, not just in personnel, but also in programming. As for SAT-7 Kids, the programming is categorized as specialized, and the team behind it claims (I am not aiming to validate this or not in this study) to have the knowledge about the current living situation for children in the MENA-region. Even in SAT-7 Kids, the production team is not afraid of making it attractive in order to get viewers. Some programs were, as they described, purely Christian, other purely social. The thought was that if the message was “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus”, people would switch channels. This is classical broadcasting strategy – they set out to get as many viewers as possible. The target is of course Christian children, but also for all other children living in the region as well. Despite being the biggest success of SAT-7, with 9 million viewers, their biggest challenge was with concerned parents afraid that SAT-7 tried to convert their kids. Both formal documents and the interviews emphasized that this was not something SAT-7 Kids aimed to achieve – rather it is an attempt to create a safe environment for the children. Television was even described

as “bad for children”, and that children rather should spend their time outdoor, playing. It was in this context that SAT-7 Kids stated that they would rather have children watch their “safe” programs, than any other, if they spent their time watching television anyway. One good alternative was the mentioned *My School*, which offered daily on-air school, giving lessons in Arabic, English and Mathematics. This is, however, nothing distinctiveness about SAT-7, but rather a common feature in religious programming in the MENA-region. This comes to show that SAT-7 necessarily is not that different from others. Personal and sensational news are presented just as in any other broadcasting service – which the story of Maryam, the girl asking “God to forgive IS”, is an example of. This story went viral on SAT-7s social media, and was also truly “hailed” in my conversations with the leaders of SAT-7.

As with all other debates on electronic church, televangelism and religious broadcasting, the numbers are a hot topic, and SAT-7 is no exception. Often, the number presented is higher than the reality. To SAT-7, as noted on several occasion, the need to be present in the region, to fortify their position, both as Christians, and as a broadcast network, is truly important, and might be strengthened by their numbers. Especially as the numbers of Christians living in the region are of a difficult character, declining in number. SAT-7s own research tells of viewer numbers of 15 million. 9 of these, are as mentioned, of SAT-7 Kids. SAT-7 themselves puts an emphasis that a majority of these viewers are Muslims. An immediate observation is that there are some gaps in these numbers. One informant spoke of 8 million viewers from Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Given that Egypt and Lebanon have the biggest Christian populations in the region, this raises some wonderings. Also, if the majority of the viewers are Muslims, does that mean that the Christians of the region do not support SAT-7? As with these questions, the numbers of viewership are never fully certain. Sometimes, however, stories are of a greater value than the numbers. This could be said to be true in SAT-7 (to some extent). SAT-7 follows the trends in religious broadcasting by exalting stories. The mentioned story of Maryam is such a story. At the end – as SAT-7 would say – *this is what SAT-7 is all about*. This is what is seen in religious broadcasters – numbers of viewers are not as important when compared to stories telling of any *influence* which SAT-7 has had. These stories are, as seen with the story of Maryam, exalted, both internally in SAT-7, but also to their viewers, and their partners and affiliations.

## 6.3 Institutional narrative

As a part of the strategy, SAT-7 uses institutional narrative to reproduce and maintain their company's identity. On many occasions, the leaders' narratives were coherent with all official documents, containing formal statements of what SAT-7 is, and what SAT-7 does. One interesting note, however, was how the personal narratives of almost all informants, contested the idea of television as a good medium. The leaders don't like television. One said that most of the employees in SAT-7 doesn't even have a television. This particular informant preferred books. Another described television as a "phony" medium. This is rather disparate from the institutional narratives, as television *is* what SAT-7 does. Another informant did not like being labelled as "religious broadcaster", but considered it as normal television production. Considering SAT-7's slogan being "making Gods love visible", this is a rather odd statement coming from one of the leaders in SAT-7. Interestingly enough, however, even though these personal opinions and moral towards television is not coherent with the institutional narrative, their opposing thoughts are coherent to each other. The pride of the organization, particularly its formal statements was undoubtedly coherent. This tells of narratives contesting to the means of the organization, but agreeing on the reason for doing it. The ministry is the most important element, and the narratives tell of a pride in this ministry. A rather noteworthy comment on this is that as SAT-7 talk highly of being *for* the people of the Middle East, the leaders do have a certain "top-bottom" perspective, considering television as a poor medium, but good enough for its purpose. One informant even mentioned that this is the way the Middle East gather information, and they need to consider that.

SAT-7 considers themselves loved and successful. I cannot validate this, but I would argue that being on-air for 20 years is a measure of success. During those years they have never been stopped or censored. Their own consideration of their success is pointing back to their pride of their formal statements: ethos, values, and program policies. Even a financial crisis, which they just underwent, will not make them change their ethos. Their main factor is of course their faith. Spiritual talk – defined in this study as comments their faith and how it affects them – is common talk amongst the leaders of SAT-7. They are "sharing Gods love" to the Middle East and North Africa. In this, gathering all the churches and the denominations are mentioned as a vital part of their success. In the midst of the tension between Christian and Muslims, and also between the different Christian branches, SAT-7 mention their ability to unite these forces as a main factor for success. Even partners stationed

in Europe that would never work together, are now partnering up and together supporting SAT-7. This is, by the leaders of SAT-7, labelled as nothing else than miraculous. The way they have managed this is by contextualization. Again – *for* the Middle East, *by* the Middle East. Their focus is their cultural authenticity – they are Middle Eastern, belonging in the Middle East. This have created an understanding and a new earned respect amongst their fellow Middle Eastern, Muslims or not. Therefore, the most important action that SAT-7 could do is to never attack or denigrate other beliefs. Sharing the Gospel only entails to witness what their faith means – not to proselytize and to convert people of other faiths. And, as mentioned on several occasions by my informants – if they tell their fellow Middle Easterners about Jesus, they need to accept listening and learning about Mohammed.

## 6.4 Finishing thoughts

This study has set out to describe, interpret and to explain the actual strategy of SAT-7, a Christian satellite-TV network, broadcasting in the Middle East and North Africa. In that attempt, I have looked at their operations, I have looked at how they design their programs – making content, and finally, how they tell the story about themselves. As 20 years of broadcasting has gone by, SAT-7 is doing something right. The leaders might not prefer the television as a medium, but it is, according to the leaders, the right way to do it. They emphasize the need of being a service provided for the people of the Middle East, produced by the people of the Middle East. This presence on the ground is considered vital to SAT-7. They seek to build bridges, and not, in any occasion, attack or denigrate any other beliefs, or even Christian denominations. This has managed to gather many of the otherwise separate churches and Christians to share a common ground, creating a *Christian within*. It was never an attempt to replace the church. As it was firmly stated by one of the leaders: “SAT-7 is a megaphone for the church, to witness for the world”. The coherent account when asked *why* SAT-7 is needed in the MENA-region, it was because SAT-7 broadcasts a voice of reconciliation, love and of hope. As a key factor also mentioned by all informants – it is their calling – their ministry of doing God’s work, that is the most important powerhouse of the organization.

A further study could be case studies, comparative perhaps, of other religious broadcasting networks in the MENA-region. A comparative study of SAT-7 and another *Christian* satellite-TV network could be interesting, possibly contesting the uniqueness of SAT-7 and its success.





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# APPENDIX 1 – List of themes

## **Before interview:**

I am studying freedom of religion and the press, focusing on the minority religions in the Arab region, in this case Christianity. SAT-7 is the case I am studying. The aim of this study is to look at how SAT-7 operates in an Arab / Islamic context, how freedom of religion and expression is applied / experienced by staff in the production department of the arabic channel programming, and how / if you experience change in the religions environment in the region after the Arab uprising 2011. This interview will not exceed 60 minutes, and I will use a recorder and take notes during the interview.

## **Theme 1: Introduction**

- Involvement in SAT-7
- History of SAT-7

## **Theme 2: SAT-7: purpose**

- Vision / mission
- Target group
- Why SAT-7?
- Theology

## **Theme 3: SAT-7: practical**

- Production
- Satellite
- Programing
- Economics
- Freelancer

## **Theme 4: Arabic context**

- SAT-7 working in the region
- Strategy
- Challenges
- Cooperation with authority
- The Arab Uprising 2011 – seen from SAT-7

## **Theme 5: Finishing**

- What is next for SAT-7?
- Why does SAT-7 exist / why is it important that it does?
- Reflections of the future of
  - o MENA-region
  - o Cooperation
- Reflections of own participation in SAT-7
- Own wishes and dreams

# APPENDIX 2 – Case study database

## **List of collected documents during study:**

- (1) Partnership Kit (March 2013)
- (2) SAT-7 Strategic Plans 2015-2017
- (3) SAT-7 Annual Report 2014
- (4) SAT-7 20 Years Brochure

# APPENDIX 3 – NSD Approval

## Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS

NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



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Knut Lundby  
Institutt for medier og kommunikasjon Universitetet i Oslo  
Postboks 1093 Blindern  
0317 OSLO

Vår dato: 09.03.2015

Vår ref: 42209 / 3 / IB

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

### TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 12.02.2015. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

<i>42209</i>	<i>SAT-7: en annerledes mediekanal i Tunisia</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Knut Lundby</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>Leif Ørjan Thingbø</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.07.2016, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Inga Brautaset

Kontaktperson: Inga Brautaset tlf: 55 58 26 35

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

*Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.*

*Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:*

*OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no*

*TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no*

*TROMSØ: NSD, SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. nsdmaa@svt.uit.no*



Meldingen gjelder et masterprosjekt som tar for seg den kristne uavhengige satellittkanalen SAT-7 sitt arbeid i Tunisia. Formålet er å undersøke hvordan religionsfrihet og pressefrihet er i praksis for kristne medier i Tunisia, etter den arabiske våren 2011. Data innhentes ved intervju med produsenter og programansvarlige.

Utvalget informeres skriftlig og muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet.

Intervjumaterialet vil kunne inneholde sensitive personopplysninger om politisk/filosofisk/religiøs oppfatning.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at student og veileder følger Universitetet i Oslo sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet. Dersom personopplysninger skal lagres på privat pc/mobile enheter, bør opplysningene krypteres tilstrekkelig.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 31.07.2016. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:

- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)
- slette lydopptak.

I tillegg til intervju, kan det være aktuelt å observere og foreta dokumentanalyse. Etter det vi forstår vil dokumentene omhandle organisasjonen, ikke enkeltpersoner.

Tilrådommen her gjelder ikke registrering av personopplysninger ifm. observasjon. Dersom det skulle bli aktuelt (f.eks. i notater/video), ber vi om at det sendes endringsmelding til personvernombudet vedlagt observasjonsguide og informasjonsskriv/samtykkeerklæring rettet til dem som observeres (evt. begrunnelse for hvorfor det ikke kan innhentes samtykke).



# APPENDIX 4 – Request for participation

Leif Ørjan Thingbø  
University of Oslo

## **Request for participation in research project “SAT-7 – a different media outlet”**

### **Background and Purpose**

I am a masters-student in Media Studies at the University of Oslo, Norway, and I am currently working on my finishing master-thesis. The theme for this thesis is media and minority religions in the MENA-region, specifically Christianity. My main focus surrounds the question *how religious freedom and freedom of the press is in real life for a Christian media outlet in an Arab and Islamic context*. It is a case-study of the Christian independent satellite TV-channel SAT-7. I am asking you to participate in this research because of your role in SAT-7, as member of the board, or other, currently working with SAT-7 programs.

### **What does participation in the project imply?**

This study requires active participation through one hour interview with each of the respondents. The questions will concern media production, religious freedom, freedom of the press, media in the Arab world, etc. I also interested in how the religious climate has potentially changed as a result of the Arab uprising in the spring of 2011. I will use a recorder and take notes during the interview.

### **What will happen to the information about you?**

All personal information will be treated confidentially. The only people with access to the collected data will be me (student) and my supervisor. The collected data will be stored at a secured computer; any list of names will be stored separately from other data. The project is scheduled for completion by June 2016. The collected data will be anonymized and the recordings deleted when the project is finished.

### **Voluntary participation**

It is voluntary to participate in the project. You may at any time withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your personal data will be anonymized.

If you have any questions concerning this project, please contact me by sending an e-mail to Leif Ørjan Thingbø on e-mail [lthingbo@me.com](mailto:lthingbo@me.com). You may also contact my supervisor Knut Lundby at the Department of Media and Communications at the University of Oslo, on e-mail [knut.lundby@media.uio.no](mailto:knut.lundby@media.uio.no).

This study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

### **Consent for participation in the study**

I have received information about the project and am willing to participate

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(Signed by participant, date)