Report

AI Implications on Journalism in Jordan

JOSA
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Introduction

Increasingly, decisions in both the public and private spheres are being taken on by AI-powered algorithms. While Artificial Intelligence has a great potential for social, economic, and technological development, it presents complex and unprecedented challenges on the policy level. Without a doubt, the traditional regulatory toolkit may not be sufficient to address AI ethical issues, and accountability may be easily diluted or lost between humans and intelligent machines. Moreover, AI can replicate humans too well, raising questions over bias, stereotyping, and discrimination, especially for vulnerable groups. Hence, without an ethical approach to AI, our world would perpetuate historical injustice without bounds, giving initial conditions the ability to shape our lives forward for many years to come. Also, dignity, employment, privacy, autonomy, and other aspects of humans’ lives are all susceptible to significant negative changes by AI.

Amongst the most disrupted sectors by emerging technologies is journalism. Internet and data revolutions transformed the way content is created, presented, communicated, and received. As a result, paper-based media in Jordan and internationally
are struggling to survive and thus the sector is finding it particularly challenging to adapt to the rate of technological innovation. Recently, artificial intelligence (AI) developments are posing threats and opportunities for journalism as a career. For instance, continuous development effort is being put into building capacity for content creation, editing, review, and moderation by machines, with limited to no human intervention. That being said, the coming years would be vital in shaping the future of journalism and ethics of relying on automation to do specific tasks, previously done by humans.
Executive Summary

Journalism methods, tools, and practices are undergoing significant and continuous changes as technology advances. Recently, AI is proving to be one of Journalism’s game changers, as new automated and intelligent tools for content creation, curation, editing, and personalized delivery are being increasingly deployed. This rapid transformation of the field has many apparent advantages, in addition to several risks that need to be addressed, and thus mitigated. Accordingly, JOSA organized a roundtable of local experts and journalists to gauge opinions and perceptions regarding the implications of AI on journalism in Jordan.
The roundtable emphasized several AI risks and challenges pertaining to journalism, including the lack of understanding of AI technologies or potential, undermining human dignity and rights, and eliminating the human role of generating and editing content. More specifically, concerns were expressed regarding AI persistent or deliberate bias and possible lack of transparency, fairness, and accountability of AI systems. Moreover, there were doubts over compliance with non-binding ethical frameworks, including the national AI ethical framework.

On a similar note, participants stressed the importance of net neutrality and acknowledged the grave harm that manipulating the Internet could have on journalism. They also described content moderation as a necessary evil and highlighted that it is being developed and implemented based on a western perspective, leading content moderation practices to undermine our communities rights and values disproportionately.

Finally, the roundtable had several recommendations that most notably include the need to: raise awareness of AI technologies and potential, preserve human rights and dignity, minimize AI bias and empower fairness,
transparency, and accountability, enact a law to protect the Internet and net neutrality, consider different cultures and values and protect vulnerable groups when applying content moderation.
Roundtable of Journalists

JOSA organized a roundtable of local experts and journalists to gauge opinions and perceptions regarding the implications of AI on journalism in Jordan. The roundtable consisted of journalism practitioners and academics, in addition to some experts in the topics of journalism or technology.

Participants list

- Dr. AbdelKarim Dubaisi (Middle East University).
- Mr. Anas Dabbas (Politics and Society Institute).
- Mr. Haitham Abu Attieh (Community Media Network).
- Ms. Haneen Bitar (ICNL Alliance).
- Mr. Hazem Shaheen (Jordan Media Institute).
- Mr. Issa Mahasneh (Jordan Open Source Association).
- Mr. Khalid Waleed - ARIJ.
- Ms. Lama Arabiat (Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship).
- Mr. Qusai Suwan (Moderator).
- Ms. Saja Mortada (ARIJ).
- Ms. Shaima Alnimer (Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship).
- Mr. Sultan Khalaileh (AlRai Newspaper).
The discussion within the roundtable regarding implications of AI on journalism focused on the upcoming themes.
AI as a Disruptive Technology

Participants started the discussion by highlighting the general lack of understanding of AI technologies or potential in journalism and other life sectors. Accordingly, they have limited visibility of the future, especially with the ever-increasing high rate of technological advancement. Based on this, they predict significant changes for the profession’s future in Jordan, with limited clarity of the details.
Similarly, the attendees pointed out that content is already being generated and edited by machines, with limited to no human intervention in the US, leading to a diminishing human role in harvesting, analyzing, and delivering information to the public. Hence, some of them expressed concerns about the job security of journalists. Others think the AI would never be able to replace human journalists sufficiently and believe that AI cannot contribute much to Journalism in Jordan, because local methods are not even closely advanced.

**Recommendations**

- Increase efforts that aim at raising awareness about AI working principles and potential, to better position journalists and activists to choose how AI shapes journalism.
- Update educational curricula and programs in schools and universities to better explain AI technologies as implications would impact everyone’s future.
- Maintain human touch and control over information creation & dissemination.
Aware of AI’s grave threat to human rights, attendees of the roundtable discussed how AI can be employed as a tool by oppressive regimes, emphasizing the infamous Chinese example as a model we need to avoid. More specifically, some participants believe that freedom of expression is at great risk, especially with AI-powered mass surveillance that will deepen self-censorship practices. Also, they are concerned about the consequences of targeted censorship capability that AI may enable.

Less obviously, participants feared that AI may empower propaganda-machines for political regimes and dictatorships, and contribute to mass thought control or manipulation strategies mainly by
Recommendations

- Refrain from developing or using AI technologies to enable mass surveillance, undermine human rights or freedoms.
- Avoid leveraging AI to manipulate masses beliefs to serve the interests of certain persons or groups and respect societies’ right to self-determination.
Participants of the roundtable emphasized that bias within AI systems would lead to harmful consequences, be it intentional or not. According to them, AI algorithms learn from data, and most content online is being generated by the west, and in English, representing a unilateral point of view on a plethora of topics. Unlike human systems, biases, stereotypes, and wrong impressions may be more difficult to correct in AI systems, mainly because biased AI empowers biased decision-making and
thus biased realities on the ground. This contributes to AI bias vicious cycles by feeding biased results to AI systems to learn from, perpetuating stereotypes, taboos, and systematic discrimination.

Also, AI algorithms may contribute to perpetuating and exacerbating polarized positions of groups or societies, by feeding and recommending tailored content to specific personas, undermining possibilities to find common grounds between opposing opinions or groups. In addition, the roundtable discussed the importance of the public’s trust in journalism and sources of information. They believe that information and news outlets are already being too commercialized. Accordingly, there is a considerable risk that AI technologies would promote selected information that better translates to dollar-value and ignore other sides of the truth which are less funded, giving capital even better grounds to manipulate common knowledge. Finally, the attendees stressed on the importance of independent journalism, since providers of funds would inevitably, sooner or later, affect or manipulate the truth to their advantage. Some participants defended media state-sponsorship as a concept, but many others said that governments would eventually control or steer narratives of journalism in such a model.
Recommendations

• Put conscious and continuous efforts to break AI bias-cycles, and provide guarantees that marginalized groups would not be subjected to long-term discrimination by such technologies.
• Make sure that AI would not be used to feed human polarization.
• Empower the independence of journalism, with sustainable and independent funding sources.
• Retain and maintain the public’s trust in journalism by ensuring that technological advancements in the field are under full human control, at least until we understand well the future of deploying AI in journalism.
The roundtable participants highlighted the role of ethics in defining the path of developing and using AI in journalism and in general. More specifically, a comprehensive examination of the principles of transparency, fairness, accountability was deemed necessary to respect human dignity and rights in the near future. Based on that, they had several questions, doubts, and suggestions regarding the national AI Ethical Framework, developed within the Ministry of Digital Economy & Entrepreneurship.
The ministry representatives explained the participatory process it followed in drafting the framework and clarified its content and target audience. Afterwards, the roundtable called for more efforts into enforcement of AI ethics, arguing that an ethical framework without punishments may not be sufficient to deter wrongdoings. The ministry defended its approach by arguing that AI is at an early stage in Jordan and internationally and drafting a binding law to regulate it is both challenging and limiting for the industry in such an early stage.

Recommendations

- Respecting human rights, and inclusion of the principles of transparency, fairness, accountability.
- Close monitoring of AI violations in journalism.
- Prepare for regulation of AI technologies when deemed necessary.
Net Neutrality

The moderator introduced the concept of net neutrality and proposed different scenarios where net neutrality mild or extreme violation would lead to, in addition to implications on free internet, flow of information, and competition. The roundtable attendees emphasized the right to freely connect to the Internet, since connected digital devices play a central role in our lives today. Also, they expressed deep concerns over journalism freedom if net neutrality would be undermined.

Later on, the need for a law to protect the Internet and guarantee
Recommendations

- Draft and enact a law to protect the Internet & guarantee net neutrality.
- Raise awareness of Internet freedom and net neutrality, to ensure that the public understands the dimensions and implications of such violations.
Moderation of Social Media Platforms and Content

Generally, platform and content moderation were perceived as a necessary evil. The roundtable concurs that without moderation, serious issues would turn much worse, and therefore practice is needed. Yet, participants view moderation as a biased process that mainly takes into consideration
western values, with disregard to, and sometimes discrimination against, other societies and cultures. Some voiced their disappointment with “double standards” of these platforms, especially regarding Palestinian voices suppression during recent events. As an example, attendees mentioned how a picture for a woman without a hijab can be used for extortion and cause severe damage, yet it may not violate the standards of social media platforms because cultural differences are not accounted for. Also, they argued that such platforms are primarily motivated by profit, which explains the lack of child protection and unsatisfactory safety guards for women.

From a different perspective, participants criticized the lack of a good governance model for content moderation, since the current model doesn’t have any democratic guarantees, lacks separation of powers, and has poor transparency. Some attendees suggested that emerging decentralized technologies such as Web3 and Blockchain may contribute to democratizing the content moderation process and managing it in a better way.
Recommendations

• Consider different cultures and values while setting and applying content moderation standards and procedures.
• Be more transparent and consistent throughout the content moderation process.
• Provide more protection to children, women, and other vulnerable groups.
• Leverage technology to democratize content moderation.
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