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# The integration of user-generated content and networked journalism within professional journalistic frameworks at the Arabic news channels

A case study of Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels

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## Abstract

This research examines the integration of networked journalism and user-generated content into Arab broadcasting news. It aims to investigate how traditional media organisations collaborate and interact with their audiences. The investigation takes the form of a case-study with two Pan-Arab news channels, Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. It studies journalists' perceptions and attitudes toward user-generated content and collaboration with the audience to form networked journalism practices.

The research uses a methodological triangulation comprising in-depth interviews, observation and content analysis of two selected programmes that embrace audience collaboration: the I see and Your interaction TV programmes.

Furthermore, the research explores the impact of the adoption of user generated content on gatekeeping and decision making in broadcasting newsrooms. It also highlights the emergence of social media units in newsrooms and the use of editorial analytics metrics to track audience interactions and to monitor trends and UGC relevant to journalists and news programmes. The results of this study identified five factors related to the adoption of UGC and networked journalism: personal perceptions, editorial direction, crisis reporting, the pressure of competition and the impact of deadlines and workload.

The research findings indicate that user-generated content and the gathering of content from social media have become integrated into newsroom daily routines. They identify the methods used to verify and integrate such content into news bulletins and programmes, as well as to collaborate with activists and citizen journalists on the ground.

Moreover, this study offers an insight into the growing challenges of verification and fact checking in the digital age. The research results emphasise the importance of clear practical guidelines and codes of conduct for journalists and newsrooms in the digital age. The findings also highlight potential risks that could be overlooked by news organisations, such as the impact of user generated content on the mental health of journalists, and the safety of citizen collaborators, especially those operating in conflict zones.

### Keywords:

Citizen journalism, networked journalism, user generated content, pan Arab media, Al-Arabiya

In memory of my father  
To my mother, my wife and my son

With love and eternal appreciation

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4.2.1 Interviews.....	92
4.2.2 Observations.....	95
<b>4.3 Procedure and Fieldwork.....</b>	<b>96</b>
4.3.1 Fieldwork Observation.....	97
4.3.2 Fieldwork Interviews.....	98
4.3.3 Interview guide and schedule.....	100
4.3.4 Research Sampling.....	102
4.3.5 Recording and Transcription.....	105
<b>4.4 Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>4.5. Interview Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>4.6 Content analysis.....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>4.7 Summary.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Chapter Five : Observation and interviews finding.....</b>	<b>111</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	111
5.2 Initial observation.....	111
5.3 Al-Arabiya stylebook and editorial guideline.....	114
5.4 The integration cases.....	116
5.4.1 “Your interaction”.....	116
5.3.2 The “I see” service.....	118
5.3.3 Newsroom and news bulletins.....	122
5.3.4 Social media unit.....	126
<b>5.4 Participation taxonomy.....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>5.5. Analysis and findings.....</b>	<b>131</b>
5.5.1 Understanding and perceptions of the participatory culture.....	131
5.4.2 Motivation to adopt networked journalism in the newsroom.....	134
5.4.3 Content verification.....	138
<b>5.5 Risks and challenges.....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>5.6 Content selection.....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>5.7 The impact of participatory culture.....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>5.8 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Chapter Six : Content analysis findings.....</b>	<b>166</b>
6.1 Introduction.....	166
6.2 The <i>I see</i> programme.....	167
6.3 The <i>Your interaction</i> programme.....	173
6.4 Conclusion.....	181
<b>Chapter Seven: Discussion.....</b>	<b>182</b>
7.1 Introduction.....	182
7.2 Stages of UGC and networked journalism integration.....	183
7.3 Main factors influencing UGC integration.....	188
7.3.1 Internal factors.....	188
7.3.2 External factors.....	191
<b>7.4 Verification practices in Al Arabiya and Al Hadath.....</b>	<b>194</b>
7.4.1 Verification process.....	195
7.4.2 Crediting and labelling issues.....	197
<b>7.5 Gatekeeping impact.....</b>	<b>200</b>

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7.6 Managing the implication and risks .....	205
7.7 Journalists' changing role in the digital age .....	207
7.8 Conclusion .....	211
<b>Chapter Eight: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>212</b>
8.1 Introduction.....	213
8.2 Main Findings of the Study .....	213
8.2.1 Perceptions and responses to digital media.....	213
8.2.2 Main motives and influencing factors .....	215
8.2.3 The verification process and challenges .....	217
8.2.4 Gatekeeping and agenda-setting impact.....	218
8.3 Contributions of the Study.....	220
8.4 Limitations of the Study.....	221
8.5 Practical Recommendations and Implications for the Industry .....	223
8.6 Directions for Future Research .....	224
8.7 Summary.....	226
<b>References .....</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>241</b>

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 2.1 Broadcast versus internet communication models (Miller, 2020)</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Figure 2.2 The Hierarchy of Influences Model (Reese, 2016)</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Figure 5.1: MBC group main building</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Figure 5.3 Use of Interactive studio for poll results</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Figure 5.4: Screenshot from the first segment in 2015</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>Figure 5.5: Timeline of the <i>I see</i> service</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Figure 5.6: Screenshot of “I see” TV segment, Twitter account and app interface</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Figure 5.7 Screenshot from channel website under programmes section</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Figure 5.8 Screenshot of <i>I see</i> TV Segment and the case of “Romel Alswati”</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>Figure 5.9 Screenshot of Al-Arabiya tweet and the original photo</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Figure 5.10 Screenshot of <i>Your interaction</i> TV programme</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Figure 5.11 Screenshot of a TV report on Saeed’s assassination</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>Figure 5.12 Screenshot of eyewitness tweet and circulated warning against the app</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Figure 6.1 Al Arabiya website and the analysing contents</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>Figure 6.2: Screenshot of analysis content</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Figure 6.6: Screenshot of analysis content from <i>I see</i> TV segment</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>Figure 6.7 : Screenshot of analysis content from <i>Your interaction</i> program</b>	<b>174</b>

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## List of Tables

<b>Table 3.1.: A comparison between the Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera new channels</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Table 4.2 : Overview of the interviewees</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Table 5.2 : User-generated content initiatives at Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Table 5.3: Comparison between <i>I see</i> app features</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Table 6.1 : I see news coverage of Arab countries (30th November to 31st January 2016)</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>Table 6.2: I see news topics (30st November to 31st January 2016)</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Table 6.3 : Your interaction news coverage of Arab countries</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>Table 6.4: Your interaction news topics</b>	<b>179</b>

## Declaration

I, Aiman Alsaedi, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means ([www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The study of news production has long been of great interest to researchers in the journalism and media field. This goes back to the 1950s, which paved the way for scholars to study news production and its complex processes from a sociological perspective (Berkowitz and Liu, 2016). Recently, more attention has been focused on the role of digital media and audience participation in mainstream media. At the heart of this interest is ordinary citizens' ability to be involved in the newsgathering process via social media sites. New inventions in communication technologies driven by the internet have globally transformed the media industry to an exceptional level. Social media platforms have become an integral feature of our daily lives. They are also the primary source of news and media content, particularly for the young generation.

The combination of new communication technology innovations and Web 2.0 features has created a chance for ordinary citizens to become involved in the newsgathering process. In many cases worldwide, citizens use inventions such as smartphones and digital cameras to report live news by quickly capturing videos and photos of events and sharing them through social media platforms to reach a broad audience. This is especially the case with young activists and bloggers, who depend on social media to present their content. These platforms are ideal due to their broad freedom and easy access. Consequently, this new trend has impacted the news industry as their audience are becoming news producers and receivers at the same time. The trend has also raised the status of social media to a valuable source of news and information.

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Much of the online content in social media is referred to as user-generated content (UGC). This includes any material produced by non-professional creators in various formats such as images, videos, blogs or online posts. It also comes in many forms, from general discussions and comments on news platforms to actual news materials, produced and distributed via social media and blogs, and generally labelled as citizen journalism (Bivens, 2008).

The rise of citizen and networked journalism opens many possibilities for more interactive news coverage by collaboration and content creation between professional journalists and their audiences (Flew et al., 2012). Many journalists nowadays have engaged in digital media and use smartphones in their daily routine. Journalists rely more than ever on social media platforms when gathering their news. Nevertheless, the outcomes of social media integration in the newsroom are still disputed in practice. Ongoing debates surround the influence of digital technologies on newsroom and journalistic practices. The effects of social media and citizen participation in mainstream media have yet to be better researched and understood.

Over the last few years, there has been growing research interest in the role of citizen and networked journalism in news work. This research is devoted to exploring the emergence and integration of UGC and networked journalism in Arab news channels. It focusses on the Arab region, where social media is fast becoming a pivotal instrument for citizen journalists and content creators. It investigates professional and non-professional collaboration outcomes in news production in two Pan Arab news channels: Al Arabiya and Al Hadath. Furthermore, it examines journalists' motivations and factors that influence the integration decision and its impact on their gatekeeping duties. This chapter, in particular, aims to introduce the research by explaining the background of the research problem, the research objectives, rationale, and thesis structure.

## 1.2 Background and context

Since the early 1990s, satellite TV channels have symbolised a turning point for the Arab media landscape. Much of the other media outlets suffered from extreme control and censorship by governments, which forced audiences to search for alternative means of public expression. While satellite TV channels were limited initially, they exposed the Arab audience to a whole new horizon of participation and the public sphere. According to Ayish (1997), this change was accelerated by the Gulf War in 1991, which helped to introduce in Arab countries private channels that target the majority of Arab audiences and are not restricted by governments or national boundaries.

This period witnessed the birth of several commercial media networks, some of which were free while others were pay-TV channels. The Centre for Middle East Television or the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) was the first Arab satellite network to be broadcast from London in September 1991 (Al-Jaber, 2012). This was followed by a number of general commercial channels such as the Orbit Communications Company and Arab Radio and Television (ART,) or news-based channels such as Al Jazeera in 1996 and, later on, Al Arabiya in 2003. Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya are still considered the major news channels in the region (Mellor et al., 2011). The number of satellite TV channels reached around 60 stations by the end of 1997 (Kraidy, 2002). The Arab media scene has witnessed a boom in the number of satellite channels ever since. According to a recent report by The Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), 1093 satellite channels are broadcast or re-broadcast by Arab corporations, 177 of which are public and 907 of which are private, showing the influence of the private sector on this expansion (ASBU, 2020).

This large expansion in the number of channels has caused intense media competition as companies vie with each other to gain marketplace dominance and attract millions of viewers in the Arab region. Their programming includes both general channels and channels specialised in content such as news, sports, drama or entertainment. Particularly in the news field, Allan (2006) pointed out that satellite television has created new platforms for established news organisations in the Arab region, as well as offering Arab audiences the ability to select from various news providers and platforms. Broadcasting news channels such

as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya are a significant source of news and talk shows on regional and domestic affairs. This has also encouraged international news channels to target the Arab audience by way of non-Arabic TV services such as BBC Arabic and France 24. This significant increase in satellite channels has forced these channels to compete in their coverage and to offer political talk shows and live TV reporting. It has also influenced the work of other Pan Arab media outlets (Mellor, 2007). Furthermore, Sakr (2001) argued that this competition between TV channels with a focus mainly on news and current affairs created greater pressure to reach to audiences' expectations. This pressure has become even stronger with the emergence of the internet and social media, and alternative media platforms.

Satellite TV stations are an alternative medium for regional audiences. Many researchers have suggested that news TV networks such as Al -Jazeera are an influential factor in the Arab media landscape. They created opinion diversity and released Arab audiences from the fear and silence established by government censorship and media control (Zayani, 2019). This influence could still be observed during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2010 and 2011, as it played a vital role in the Arab media landscape. Satellite TV stations became a crucial player in the region news converge by encouraging political views and activists' participation in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya and Yemen. This coincided with the emergence of citizen journalism in the region, which has started shifting the relations between mainstream media and their audience in the Arab world, as well as transforming the media industry in several ways (Al-Jaber, 2012). The internet and social media took this engagement to a new level by encouraging mainstream public participation, thereby promoting democratic behaviour and leading to unrestrained political and social change.

With the growth of citizen journalism practices via social media, the phenomenon of audience engagement in media production has received considerable attention, reaching traditional media where citizen journalism has become widely used, especially in TV news channels. These advanced technologies introduced a new chapter for news coverage worldwide. Their competitive advantage of speed and mobility has forced many media organisations to change the way they display media content and interact with the audience in order to stay relevant. As a result, this has created an opportunity for citizen media to become an alternative platform in news coverage and a valuable source of information.

Several traditional news outlets appear to encourage the use of citizen journalism materials within their news coverage and current affairs programmes. This can be observed in the case of the BBC user-generated hub, which was established in 2005, and the CNN iReport app that was launched in 2006. Arab news outlets were no exception to this trend. Several Arabic news networks have followed CNN and the BBC by adopting UGC, whether in the form of a TV programme, website or phone app or by using social media. For instance, Al Jazeera launched its portal Sharek in 2007. Also, the Al Arabiya news app “I see” was firstly introduced in 2012 during the Arab Spring.

Another trend that has emerged in broadcasting news channels during the last few years is programmes that integrate interactive forms of news presentation. These programmes are explicitly dedicated to social media trends and UGC, for example BBC Trending or Les Observateurs in France 24 (Hermida, 2010, Wardle et al., 2014). These news programme forms tend to be short, and they focus on a topic trending on social media with the potential to expand it into a more extended piece of journalism (ibid). Similar programmes were launched in the Arab media, focusing on trending social media topics and targeting interactive coverage; examples include *Your interaction* in Al Arabiya, *Your bulletin* in Al Jazeera or *Platforms* in Sky News Arabic. Such examples show a significant transition in the broadcasting landscape as social media and UGC become a new factor in newsroom routine and coverage. They also pay more attention to audience preferences and push journalists to reengage with their content, giving greater space for collaboration and media convergence.

This change blurs the line between media producers and consumers, enhances modes of communication and creates unprecedented ways to access sources and information, which encourages mass media to be more interactive and open to possibilities. It also raises doubts among many professional journalists and concerns about objectivity, accuracy, reliability, fairness and about obtaining reliable sources. All of these issues could damage the reputation of any media organisation. Therefore, these issues represent significant risks, creating considerable doubts over the use of citizen journalism within mass media, especially in the age of fake news and misinformation. Furthermore, the fast-paced nature and interactivity of the digital age of news production brings with it some challenges for journalists who are

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required to adapt to change, acquire a new set of skills and observe routines of verification, crowdsourcing, content creation and multitasking in order to succeed in the digital age.

The transformation that the Pan Arab media have witnessed during the last decade is remarkable. Insufficient attention has been paid to the phenomenon of widespread adoption of citizen journalism in broadcasting newsrooms across the region. There has been significant growth in the use of digital media in the news coverage and adoption of UGC by broadcasters in the Arab region. This thesis aims to explore this phenomenon through newsroom observation and interviews with journalists and staff at different levels within these organisations.

Therefore, this study focuses on the integration of citizen media into Arabic news networks by way of audience engagement and UGC to create a networked journalism practice. This investigation takes the form of a case study of the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news networks. It addresses the perceptions of networked journalism among newsroom journalists and editors, their motivations and verification techniques, the ethical implications and gatekeeping processes to adopt audience content and engagement in newsrooms and programmes.

### **1.3 Importance of the research**

Although a number of studies have examined citizen journalism in the Arab region, especially during the Arab Spring uprising, research focusing on the adoption of citizen journalism and participatory initiatives in the Arab newsroom is still limited. Little is known about the procedure and implications of Arab newsroom collaboration with their audiences. Such elements could provide insights into the significance of such practice and what it could contribute to the news coverage in the region. The significance of this research is a result of the following factors:

1/ The political situation in the Middle East affects news coverage and, as a result, gives more opportunities to citizen journalists to participate as the sole news source. This research aims

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to shed some light on the post-Arab Spring era, where the experience of participatory initiatives in broadcasting news can be observed in the years after the Arab Spring.

2/ This research aims to contribute to the growing area of research on citizen and networked journalism as this phenomenon comes at a time when the occupation of journalist faces many challenges worldwide, such as the journalism crisis and market pressure to change news production and journalists tasks (Singer et al., 2011).

3/ With a number of developments in mainstream media, this thesis aims to produce an analysis of the impact of technological transformation and social media on journalism and journalistic practices in the Arab region.

4/ Additionally, there are several areas where this study makes an original contribution, including methods of audience participation and the ethical boundaries of using citizen journalism in the mainstream media, as well as fact-checking and verification against the spread of misinformation and fake news in social media.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the research**

The choice of this research topic was motivated by a personal interest in the role of social media in the news coverage of television news channels. Working myself as a news reporter from 2010 to 2012, I witnessed a change in attitude towards the use of social media platforms within mainstream media. During that period, many news producers and journalists were unenthusiastic about the value of social media in their reporting, describing it as lazy or unprofessional. This seems to have changed dramatically over the last few years as social media platforms became powerful weapons in journalists and reporters' arsenal.

This has also been accompanied with a shift in media consumption as the audience has come to rely less on traditional media in favour of digital platforms, which are often the source of breaking news. The growth of platforms such as YouTube and Snapchat in the region allowed the emergence of new kinds of content creators such as vloggers and social media

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influencers, who manage to compete with many media outlets. Viral videos and trending hashtags became the focus of attention for many TV programmes.

This started to be a common trend among many media outlets, which took a different direction in response to these changes. The changing patterns caused a division and ongoing discussion between media experts and practitioners who question this shift in the industry. These trends encouraged the researcher to examine this phenomenon closely and in-depth in order to understand why this change occurred and how it will impact media practices in the future.

### 1.5 Research methodology

This research used mixed methods including both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in the form of in-depth interviews with journalists, editors and news-editorial managers, newsroom observation and content analysis of news reports. This enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of how and why Al Arabiya and Al Hadath adopt UGC. It also explores the ways that content creation and collaboration with audience members could impact journalists' understandings of their role as gatekeepers.

Furthermore, the research is qualitatively driven, which means that data were first generated from semi-structured interviews, newsroom observation and the obtained documents; this was then supported by content analysis of news reports. Having gathered qualitative data from in-depth interviews and newsroom observation, a decision was reached to involve a quantitative contents analysis of news programmes and segments using UGC and networked journalism in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. The aim of this was to connect the research field data to the news outputs.

A common technique in social science studies is triangulation, which refers to the use of a number of research methods to examine the same phenomenon. For this study, the researcher used a triangulation of methods: newsroom observation, semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, and content analysis of news reports. The analysis focuses on selected cases for the study, which are the *I see* and *Your interaction* TV programmes. It

includes a total of 466 news segments that incorporated UGC in their coverage. This will help to cross-check the results from different perspectives and increase the research validity of the case study.

The use of qualitative case studies, in particular, is a well-established approach in journalism studies. It helps to create a critical understanding of how Arab broadcasting journalists use UGC and engage with their audience. According to Bruns (2008), qualitative research could play a vital role in understanding how citizen journalism is integrated into news processes. Also, earlier studies into participatory and networked journalism practices tend to use qualitative methodology in order to understand the media production process and to emphasise the factors involved in this new type of journalism (Atton, 2009). Qualitative research also rationalises the examined topic by showing different perspectives on the research participants' views and interpretations of the topic or events (Sandelowski, 2015). Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen for this purpose in the form of a case study of two major Arab news channels. Furthermore, the data collection methods and process will be expanded on in the Methodology chapter.

## 1.6 Objectives of the study

This research is an investigation of the integration of UGC and networked journalism into newsrooms in the Arab world and the factors that shape this integration process. Adopting a range of mixed methods, including semi-structured interviews, newsroom observation and content analysis, the overarching goals of this research are to:

- Explore journalists' perceptions and response to the integration of UGC and networked journalism into the newsroom.
- Outline the main motives and factors that influence the adoption of networked journalism in Arab mainstream media.
- Identify the verification process and challenges facing the use of audience materials in the news process and the ethical issues that emerged.

- Determine the effects of networked journalism and audience engagement on Arab media's gatekeeping and agenda-setting processes.

### 1.7 Research questions

This study set out with the aim of assessing the practice of networked journalism and how Arab newsrooms use UGC in news coverage. It identified organisational, political, and social factors shaping the adoption of such content in Pan Arab TV such as Al Arabiya and Al Hadath. It also explored critical motives for the adoption of UGC and the ways in which journalists deal with UGC in their daily routine. In particular, two sets of research questions were formulated at the start of the thesis as follows:

RQ1: What are the fundamental patterns of the integration of networked journalism into Arab newsrooms and programmes?

- How does networked journalism change the relationship between Arab news channels and their audience?
- What is the motivation of Arab media to adopt networked journalism and to encourage audience engagement?
- How does networked journalism reshape Arab newsrooms and programmes?

RQ2: How do Arab news channels interact with user-generated content?

- What are the challenges and benefits related to integrating user-generated content into Arab news programming?
- What criteria and gatekeeping processes are used to determine whether user-generated content meets established news standards in Arab media?
- How do Arab news channels verify user-generated content and deal with credibility issues and ethical boundaries?
- What are the broader implications of this integration for journalism practice and professional journalists in the Arab media?

## 1.8 The structure of the thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters as follows:

**Chapter one:** The first chapter provides an introduction on the research background and the rationale for conducting the study. It also sheds light on the objectives and scope of the study.

**Chapter two:** This chapter contains a review of the relevant literature and theoretical framework of the research. It starts by focusing on the emergence of new media and Web 2.0 as well as the role of UGC in the media industry. This section further explores the definitions and the value of citizen and networked journalism. It explains its implementation in modern newsrooms and media organisations. Also, this chapter examines some topics related to the research such as training, verification and fact-checking practices before going into the theoretical framework for the research. This includes agenda setting, gatekeeping and gate watching in the digital age.

**Chapter three:** This chapter focuses on media and broadcasting in the Arab context. The aim of this contextual chapter is to provide an in-depth background on Arab media and the scope of the study. It focuses on the rise of Pan Arab media and satellite TV channels. It examines the impact of Arab politics on the media scene, including the Arab Spring uprisings and their role in media change. It also gives an overview of the new media statutes in the region. The chapter finally provides primary information and background on Al Arabiya and Al Hadath to set the scene for the case study chosen for this research.

**Chapter Four:** This chapter introduces the research design employed for this research, and it discusses the methodological approach used to answer the research questions. This includes the procedure, methods and tools that were selected for data collection. The chapter justifies the use of these methods based on the value they add to the research objectives and questions.

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**Chapter five:** This finding chapter presents the research Observation and interviews finding through qualitative and research methods, i.e., semi-structured interviews, newsroom observation and documents obtained by the researcher. The sections start with the case-study background and initial observations that include the workflow and daily routine in the newsroom. It then describes the process of news gathering and production in a number of prominent cases that integrate UGC into news bulletins and programmes.

**Chapters six:** This chapter outlines the main findings that emerged from the content analysis. The analysis focuses on selected cases for the study, which are the *I see* and *Your interaction* TV programmes. The analysis included a total of 466 news segments that incorporated UGC in the coverage. It will also look into some of the issues regarding verification and accurate crediting and labelling of the contributors.

**Chapter seven:** The discussion chapter critically analyses the main results and findings based on research data. The chapter is divided into five main sections, each of which presents the results relating to one of the research questions. The first section discusses the main patterns and stages of UGC integration in the news process based on Hermida's (2011) classification of the news production process. The second section moves on to examine the main factors influencing UGC integration. The third section explores the verification methods and other issues that emerge from integration. This is followed by a discussion of the impact of gatekeeping based on the hierarchy of influences model. The final section reflects on the implications of UGC integration for news organisations in the Arab region.

**Chapter eight:** The final chapter summarises the main findings and limitations of the study. It also provides practical recommendations and directions for further research.

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## Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Introduction

Technological innovation has long been linked to changes in the media and journalism industry. The appearance of printers, transistor radios, televisions and computers have all influenced the media field. The consequence of this has been many changes to the practice of mass communication and journalism over time. Nonetheless, the latest achievements in technology, driven by the internet, have transformed the media industry to an exceptional extent, which has forced traditional media to balance media agendas and market pressures (Krotoski, 2011). This change also blurs the line between media producers and consumers, enhances modes of communication and creates unprecedented sources of information; all of these motivate mass media to be more interactive and open to possibilities.

This research takes the form of a case study on Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels. It seeks to understand the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on the professional practice of journalism in Arab news networks. It addresses the motivations for the use of UGC, the adoption process and how journalists respond to the practical and ethical challenges posed by it.

The research aims to contribute to the growing area of research on citizen and networked journalism by exploring the value of citizen journalism to the mainstream media in the digital age. It also aims to highlight the media transformation in the Middle East and the role of Arab audiences in news gathering. Additionally, there are several areas where this study makes an original contribution, including methods of audience participation and verification, and the ethical boundaries of using citizen journalism in the mainstream media.

This chapter is divided into two main sections, each of which focuses on the following aspects of the research. Part I examines the global emergence of a 'citizen journalism', and it

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presents a discussion of scholarly reactions to the rise of audience participation in mass media. The following section highlights the theoretical framework of the research and it discusses the way in which academic literature has engaged with the development of new media technologies and how these influence theories such as gatekeeping and agenda-setting theories. The following chapter focuses on the media situation in the Arab region and the impact of digital technology on the news industry. It also sheds light on the scope of the study, which includes the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels.

## 2.2 The emergence of new media

Digital technologies and advancements in media instruments in the last decade have transformed newsrooms structures and tasks. During this period, the internet played a key role in shaping the media industry and news consumption around the world. The audience, once seen as passive recipients, is now considered a significant participant and source of news and information. McQuail (2010) argues that the organisational form of traditional media obstructed the emergence of active audiences by limiting their participation and involvement in media contents. Active and passive audiences were largely accepted and discussed by media scholars well before the digital age. However, communication network technologies have rapidly made this topic significant in a novel way. Many consider the 21st century to be the modern era for knowledge and information, which were driven by the internet. This in turn deals with a massive volume of contents from text to videos and pictures on a daily basis. Therefore, information became power and a new form of currency in this era.

McQuail et al. (2005) refer to this as the information society and it became a transitional period after the agricultural and industrial eras in past centuries. This new form of society influences media industry in different aspects, including globalisation, overloading of information, communication convergence, network growth and the loss of personal privacy (ibid). Furthermore, he the network society as “a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies” (p. 3). He argues that communication technologies cannot solely define the modern information society; this definition also includes the nodes of networks and political,

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economic and cultural factors that help to generate and process information in a society (Castells, 2004).

This expansion of communication networks and technologies occurred independently from media organisations and government control. This helped to create what could be described as self-directed communication, which allows individuals to use their online channels, such as blogs, YouTube and social media, to address worldwide audiences. All of this occurs away from the institutional gatekeeping of traditional media (Chandler and Munday, 2016). Social media platforms are one of the main patterns of this new context, marked by mass self-communication (Castells, 2010). People had the opportunity for the first time to communicate with each other and create media contents without going through institutional mass media.

This revolution in media platforms is considered to be a new form of media that depends on new methods of communication in the digital world. Van Dijk (2020) argues that:

The new media are defined by all three characteristics simultaneously: they are media which are both integrated and interactive and also use digital code at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. It follows that their most common alternative names are multimedia, interactive media and digital media. (p.9)

This distinguishes old traditional media from new media. The latter has three main characteristics: the integration of telecommunications technologies, the interactivity of media content and the digital hub of new media (ibid).

Mark Poster (1995), an early theorist in new media studies, proposed an insightful argument to differentiate between old and new media. He argued that new or digital media is active, while old traditional media is passive in nature (Poster 1995, as cited in Miller, 2020). He also introduced two models of communication. One is the broadcast model in a hierarchical form that represents traditional media's institutional way of broadcasting content and media messages (ibid). On the other hand, the internet model of communication shows two-way communications and interactions between content producers and consumers in participatory form rather than a hierarchical one (see Figure 2.1).

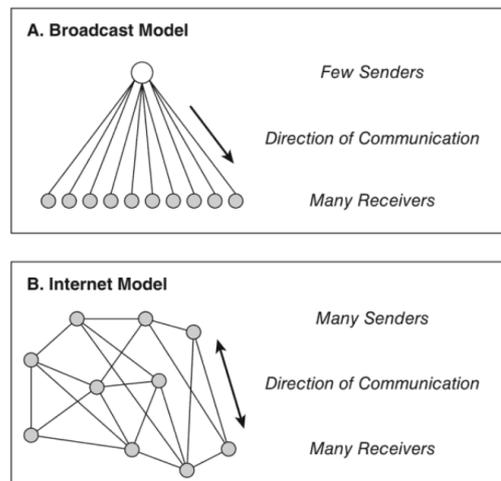


Figure 2.1 Broadcast versus internet communication models (Miller, 2020)

This interactive model of communication opens many opportunities for news gathering, as digital platforms could broadcast media contents to wide audiences, making a new form of news that depends on live updates and information by both professional journalists and citizens.

### 2.3 Web 2.0 and user-generated content

The internet has become a significant part of life, and social and political interactions for many people around the world. It is no longer considered a luxury or supplementary as there are more than 4.5 billion internet users worldwide, and 3.8 billion active users on social media, representing 59% of the global population, according to the annual digital report from Hootsuite (Kemp, 2020).

The introduction of mobile technology also enhanced the way that people use the internet and it allowed continuous access to the World Wide Web. Mobile phones have now become the most convenient option for accessing the internet for many users as mobile phones accounted for more than half of web traffic worldwide at the end of 2020 (Clement, 2020). Smartphones in particular transform the way that news is gathered and distributed. What separates smartphones is their ability to allow people to interact online and to produce visual

content. A smartphone can be defined as “a high-quality camera with video capability, and it allows the user to easily connect to the web to disseminate the pictures. As a result, more and more people have the technology in their pockets to very quickly film events they see around them and share them directly with people who might be interested, as well as more widely via social networks” (Silverman, 2014 , p.25)

This digital evolution started with Web 1.0, which was described as a web of information connections. It lasted from 1989 to 2005 (Choudhury, 2014). This first generation of the internet was considered to be a “read-only” web, according to the World Wide Web innovator, Tim Berners-Lee (ibid). This means that the ability for content creation was limited in Web 1.0 with the majority of users being just consumers of content. This changed dramatically in the second generation of internet services known as Web 2.0. This emphasised participation, collaboration and sharing content between internet users and it therefore expanded the role of content creation. The term Web 2.0, which referred to a new transition in the internet, was coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2006, who defines it on his website as:

Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this Build applications that harness network effects to get better the more people use them. (O’Reilly, 2006 , para 2)

According to Choudhury (2014), Web 2.0 is not simply the latest version of the web but it also involves collaborative content creation. This is considered to be one of the exceptional features of Web 2.0, which helps to “gather collective intelligence rather than Web 1.0” (p.8096). The emerge of Web 2.0 has opened many possibilities on the web. One of these possibilities is enabling internet users to upload online content on the web that can be viewed or accessed by any other user of the web. This has led to a massive growth in UGC (George and Scerri, 2007).

With many terms associated with audience participation in the media, UGC is considered to be a broad term that includes content creation in the digital sphere. This includes any

material that is produced by internet users, and ranges from general discussion and comments on news platforms to actual news materials that are produced and distributed via social media and blogs, which are generally labelled as citizen journalism (Bivens, 2008). While UGC takes many forms nowadays, researchers have identified three criteria for it: publication, creative work and production outside of journalistic routines and practices (Antonopoulos et al., 2020). Therefore, networked journalism and citizen journalism could be seen as subcategories of UGC, which indicates any journalistic performance conducted by unprofessional journalists (ibid).

This is especially the case with youth activists and bloggers who depend on social media as the main platform on which to present their content due to its wide freedom and easy access. Consequently, this new trend has had an impact on the news industry as its audience has become both producers and receivers of this type of news. The trend has also raised the status of social media to one of a valued source of news and information. This can be observed through the vital role that citizen journalism played during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2010 and 2011, which helped to promote this new form of journalism and encouraged citizens to become involved in media production.

Furthermore, while UGC is nowadays connected to the internet, its main concept can be traced back to old journalistic practices. Harcup (2015) provides examples of the previous use of participation in media such as:

“a reader’s letter published in a newspaper or a magazine is an example of it at work in traditional media, and other examples would be the historical photographs sent in by readers, the reports of flower shows and sporting events contributed by non-journalists, radio phone-ins, and the seemingly endless scribblings of amateur community or village correspondents that are still carried in some local and regional newspapers” (p. 221).

However, the current digital revelation has enriched such participatory acts in both volume and speed, especially with social media platforms that have created such a buzz around this phenomenon. The collaborative nature of Web 2.0 is shown by social media networks, which allow the exchange of content and information on different platforms (Cormode and

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Krishnamurthy, 2008). There is no doubt that social media is considered to be one of the most important platforms for audience interactivity and citizen journalism. Since 2005, the term 'social media platform' has been widely used to refer to new web applications that create an interactive sphere using Web 2.0 technology, empowering users to produce and distribute UGC (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Wikipedia, YouTube, Flickr, weblogs and social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter are all well-known examples of social media. (Kietzmann et al., 2011) defined social media as a means of employing "mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content" (p. 241).

User-generated content in these platforms exists in different forms such as articles, blogs, videos, photos and podcasts, which allow users to express their creativity in their contents. Moon (2014) described these platforms as online environments where social media users could create virtual communities which allow forms of participation, collaboration and open-source materials are main characterises in these platforms. For the first time, these platforms allow ordinary citizens, in the form of social media users, to wield power over real-life cultural, political and social issues.

The rise of social media and UGC has gained much attention over the years. *Time* magazine, for instance, named "You" as the Person of the Year in 2006, as recognition of the influence of internet users and social media, which open possibilities for people to create all kinds of other content on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. They also recognised the impact that UGC had on news gathering and media organisations, as Richard Stengel, the *Time* editor, said in a statement:

"Journalists once had the exclusive province of taking people to places they'd never been. But now a mother in Baghdad with a videophone can let you see a roadside bombing or a patron in a nightclub can show you a racist rant by a famous comedian" (Albarran et al., 2010)

George and Scerri (2007) argued that Web 2.0 “focuses on activities such as collaboration, cooperation, interactivity and social networking. Central to participation in the Web 2.0 phenomenon is the user as publisher, critic, journalist, reviewer, public performer and broadcaster (among others), heralding the power and influence of UGC” (p.4). Therefore, UGC or material is considered to be the foundation of audience engagement within mainstream media, and it is widely acknowledged in that industry. Recently, however, there has been a degree of uncertainty among academics about the nature of current audience engagement with the media, which may be the result of ongoing social media and technology advancements. These rapidly evolving developments enhance opportunities for this type of audience engagement.

### 2.3.1 The rise of citizen journalism

Research on social media in general, and citizen journalism in particular, has increased significantly in recent years as its adoption by journalists and media outlets has expanded. Recent communication technology innovations, ranging from Web 2.0 features to digital cameras and smartphones, have facilitated interactions between internet users and media organisations. This kind of technology provides users with the tools to gather news, easily capture videos of events, and to post and share them through social media platforms.

This development brought what could be described as ‘Journalism 2.0’. This title “refers to the use of new technologies in collaborative news-making and news analysis by lay persons with (minimal) web publishing skills, much as Web 2.0 refers to the use of similar technologies to foster user-generated content and user-to-user interaction” (Abdul-Mageed, 2008 , p.59). In traditional journalism practice, news is collected, reported, distributed, and analysed by the media institution, thereby maintaining full control. Journalism 2.0, on the other hand, decentralises the news medium, introducing open networked journalism. This focuses more on users and audiences’ services, deviating considerably from traditional journalism practices (ibid).

More recently, internet users have not only selectively searched news and information, but also actively pushed the information into online spheres. This is considered to be a radical

paradigm shift from 'industrial-style content' to "the collaborative, interactive, and user-led production of content by participants in a hybrid user-producer, or producer role" (Bruns, 2006 , p.275). Recently there has been slow changes in media outlets, from organisational, traditional-based journalism and producer-consumer relationship, to a more collaborative, liberated, and interactive means of conducting journalistic activity (Abdul-Mageed, 2008).

However, this attitude towards audience contributions to mass media appears to have evolved over time, based on the value these contributions have added to news coverage, and the impact they have made. In early stages, for instance, audience participation in the production of media content was labelled as accidental or amateur journalism (Newsroom, 2008). This view has changed over time to what we now know as citizen journalism.

Goode (2009) refers to citizen journalism as several internet practices that involve ordinary users taking the initiative in journalistic practice, including reporting about current affairs, sharing videos and photos, as well as witnessing and commenting on recent events. In the same way, Rodrigues and Braham (2008) point out that the evolution of new media has a substantial role in forming citizen journalism, which creates new ways for media audiences to participate in broadcasting the news. Additionally, they argue that this growth eliminates many obstacles to individual publishing, demolishes barriers between journalists and their audience and reshapes the way we see audience participation in the media (ibid).

Citizen journalism is frequently associated with the internet due to the substantial changes that online tools have conveyed to this participatory culture. By focussing attention on the news and those stories that have been collected by citizens, traditional media, such as the news broadcasting channels, have a significant impact on endorsing this type of journalism. According to Goode (2009), this type of endorsement could be presented in the form of a video recorded by a witness, by exploring a story supplied by a citizen, or by inviting a citizen journalist to comment on a news piece in which he/she has been involved.

As a result, this manner of endorsement has raised awareness of the value of citizen journalism and generated interest among social media activists and bloggers. Furthermore, these citizen-reported news items have become much sought-after by the mainstream media

(Perlmutter and McDaniel, 2005). For instance, in the case of the London bombings of 2005, global mainstream media relied on content – in the form of photos and videos – provided by eye witnesses in the streets (Sambrook, 2005).

The importance of citizen journalism to mainstream media may be seen in many examples worldwide, such as documenting through social media eye witness accounts of the September 11 attacks in New York in 2001 and the violent actions against protesters at the Iranian presidential election of 2009 (Jurrat, 2011). Also, the Indonesian Tsunami tragedy and the disaster at Virginia Tech. were events that necessitated an on-the-ground presence, difficult for the mainstream media, but provided to the public instead by citizen journalists .

These high-profile examples demonstrate the value of audience interactivity in media coverage and may be described by the preferred industry term ‘user-generated content’. This new practice is also known as citizen journalism, along with other associated terms that will be discussed in the next section.

### 2.3.2 The concept of citizen journalism

The participatory culture in media production is considered to be a new trend in broadcasting journalism. Therefore, several terms have been used to describe such a practice and to express our view of its importance (Gillespie, 2013). It is hence important to begin with a description of what we mean by citizen journalism, and to highlight the terms associated with it to describe how audiences participate in the media. Bowman and Willis (2003) defined citizen journalism as “the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires” (p.9).

However, citizen journalism may be linked to various modern media practices, and as a result this phenomenon may warrant a range of interpretations. This is exclusive, not only to the creation of news content for blogs and websites, but also to any participation in sharing and distributing such content via social media through acts such as “posting, re-posting, linking,

tagging, commenting, and rating” (Goode, 2009 ,p.2). Therefore, these practice differences may prompt a wider view of the participatory culture in mainstream media, one that is not restricted to individual practices of citizen journalism. Kelly (2009) has suggested a number of terms associated with the input of citizen journalism. These include: “user-generated content, user-created content, participatory journalism, audience material, ‘we media’, collaborative journalism, community journalism, pro-am collaboration, grassroots journalism, open-source journalism, crowdsourced journalism, interactive journalism, networked journalism, network publishing, bridge media and random acts of journalism” (p.17). In simpler terms, Wall (2015) defined citizen journalism as news content such as text, video, audio or interactives produced by non-professionals.

In recent years, researchers have shown an increased interest in audiences’ contribution to the news process, one that has been labelled in varying terms such as ‘citizen’, ‘participatory’, ‘public’ or ‘grassroots’ journalism (Bowman and Willis, 2002, Gillmor, 2004, Haas and Steiner, 2006, Nip, 2006). Furthermore, whether we describe the practice as ‘producer-led’, ‘peer-to-peer’ production, ‘user-generated content’, ‘citizen journalism’ or ‘citizen producers’, each term reflects principles of open democratic participation in media production (Bauwens, 2005). Bruns (2007), for instance, used the term ‘produsage’, emphasising the convergence of information production and consumption. This produsage emphasises the double role of internet users and inked production and usage highlighted the double status of internet users as were describes as “a shift from dedicated individuals and teams as producers to a broader-based, distributed generation of content by a wide community of participants” (p.4).

Nip (2006) suggested an interesting classification that distinguishes between types of journalism based on audiences’ relationship with the media. He characterised five forms of journalism: (1) traditional journalism, (2) public journalism, (3) interactive journalism, (4) participatory journalism and (5) citizen journalism. It is necessary to differentiate between these terms in order to recognise how the audience engages in both social and mainstream media.

Professional journalists are considered as gatekeepers in traditional journalism; therefore, they have the role of selecting news stories, generating ideas, news gathering, and “exercising their professional news values” to their audiences, who have to actual involvement in this process. On the other hand, public journalism aims to engage the public, and “Town hall meetings, citizen panels, and polls are common techniques used to tap the concerns of the community” (Kperogi, 2011), and to help journalists report on significant public events and issues. However, journalists in public journalism do not have control or gatekeeping of the news contents (Nip, 2006, p. 10-11). On the other hand, interactive journalism works with audiences and acknowledges their response and feedback to news items and stories from professional journalists and mainstream media. However, this involvement takes place after the news contents is published or presented, which leaves professional journalists responsible for news producing.

The evolving attempts of mainstream media to engage their audience in the production process using social media could be labelled as ‘participatory journalism’ (Deuze et al., 2007, Domingo et al., 2008, Paulussen and Ugille, 2008, Singer et al., 2011, Hermida and Thurman, 2008). Although participatory and citizen journalism may appear similar, Nip suggests that participatory journalism encourages interactivity between professional and citizen journalists in the news-gathering process. Contrary to this, citizen journalism focusses entirely on citizens’ efforts, with no news content input or control from professional journalists (Duffy and Dhabi, 2011). In the same vein, (Atton, 2009) considers citizen journalism to be an independent practice that works beyond the domain of professional media, and views this as an alternative media that “construct a reality that appears to oppose the conventions and representations of the mainstream media” (p.6).

Moving beyond Nip’s terminology, another form of participatory journalism is networked journalism. This term reflects the collaboration between mainstream media and its audience. This concept has recently been promoted by several studies that describe the collaborative environment within journalism today (Heinrich, 2012). This term was first introduced by Jeff Jarvis in 2006 and it was meant to replace the term ‘citizen journalism’ (Kim and Lowrey, 2015). As Reese and Shoemaker (2016) pointed out:

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As an orienting concept, the network captures the blurring of lines between professional and citizen, and between one organization and another, as they develop more collaborative partnerships across digital platforms (p.394).

Networked journalism takes into consideration the interactive nature of modern journalism, and demonstrates the wide use of social media platforms that connect professional and citizen journalists. This connection allows them to work side by side to gather news stories, link events, check facts, introduce more questions and reflect different perspectives in the daily news. Networked journalism demonstrates the complexity of modern journalist/audience relationships by focussing on the multi-faceted news-making process rather than the final news item broadcast in the mass media (Jarvis, 2006). By introducing the concept of networked journalism, mainstream media appears to encourage journalists to be open to audience collaboration. Although this view was not popular among traditional journalists, the past five years have seen a change in attitudes within a number of news organisations (Duffy and Dhabi, 2011).

This acceptance is clearly shown in the case of CNN's citizen engagement platform iReport, and the BBC's UGC hub, which include 23 journalists operating in the UGC hub to process contents, visuals and texts coming in from the public (Alejandro, 2010).

The research uses various terms throughout this thesis; however, the term 'networked journalism' will be chosen to highlight media/audience collaboration rather than citizen journalism, which focusses more on citizens' individual work. The main reason for this choice of term is that networked journalism best illustrates the new collaborative partnership between mass media and their audience. This thesis will focus on Arab news channels to highlight the integration of audience content and audience participation in mainstream broadcasting.

### 2.3.3 From citizen to networked journalism

Over the past few years, transformations in communication and information technology have gradually linked everything to the internet. News consumption changed rapidly, and today audience and media consumers are going online for their news instead of traditional news outlets, which forces growing competition from interactive online media. Therefore, it seems impractical to isolate journalists from this development, whether that be in newsrooms or in the field, as both of them encourage them to be active members of a network that strives to gather, process and spread the news (Beckett and Mansell, 2008). For journalists to benefit in a world where information is circulated around the internet, it is vital they adopt networked journalism principles. Journalists in the new media age cannot isolate themselves by working alone on news stories. Instead, they must become players within a network that supports them in collecting, analysing and distributing news and information (Jarvis, 2006). Jarvis also considers networked journalism as “professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives” (ibid).

In the current networked society, new technologies have changed the way in which we interact and communicate. They give normal users the opportunity to create their own contents and distribute them, bypassing the traditional media. According to Beckett (2010a), networked journalism is “a synthesis of traditional news journalism and the emerging forms of participatory media enabled by Web 2.0 technologies such as mobile phones, email, websites, blogs, microblogging, and social networks” (p.1). Networked journalism can play an important role in addressing political issues and collecting grassroots news in countries that face government censorship, such as in the cases of Iran and China, where unfiltered news would otherwise not be possible (Castells, 2009). In such conditions, citizen journalists provide mainstream media with vital videos, images and information that widen the scope of media reporters in these countries (Van der Haak et al., 2012). Working alongside citizen journalists, mainstream media can generate various perspectives on news stories while minimising the political propaganda and ideological manipulation that could otherwise accrue from using limited sources, such as government officials (ibid).

One of the main targets for mainstream media, and news organisations particularly, has been creating a collaborative form of news production. This would be to “connect more effectively with changing usage patterns and the real needs and preferences of their public” (Paulussen et al., 2007, p.132). With the emergence of the participatory potential of the internet, this became more possible than ever. New forms of citizen journalism have emerged, adding more prominence to the role of news gathering, specifically from conflict areas where it is becoming increasingly challenging for news reporters (Norris, 2016).

Recent media innovations and technological advances provide a perfect atmosphere for the engagement of journalists and audience, which two decades ago could only be seen as science fiction (Duffy, 2011). What once seemed to be impossible has become reality, with audiences’ increased interaction with the news through new media platforms. This can clearly be seen in daily Twitter feeds, blogs, social media posts and comment.

Networked journalists have to keep in mind that internet users have the opportunity to easily obtain their news from diverse sources and news outlets and to link them together to create overall concepts regarding current events (Duffy, 2012). In the same vein, networked journalists should also encourage their audience to contribute during news production and after it is published, in the form of ‘corrections, questions, facts, and perspective, not to mention promotion via links’ (Beckett and Mansell, 2008, p.46)

As Van der Haak et al. (2012) point out, networked journalists do not represent a threat to the quality and objectivity of professional journalism, but they reflect an opportunity for liberation from the strict control of formal organisations by providing unparalleled commentary strategies. Therefore, several media outlets have chosen networked journalism techniques in their coverage, including well-known organisations such as the BBC and CNN. On the other hand, this collaboration could raise a number of concerns for media organisations. This will be discussed later in this thesis.

Innovations in the communication and information sectors have prompted many new organisations to become ‘digital first’ news agencies, something that has necessitated

changes among modern journalists' skillsets. In order to accomplish the necessary levels of cooperation, formal journalists need to learn how to deal efficiently with social media platforms and how they may engage with audiences to enhance the news gathering and distribution processes (Johnston, 2016). This new set of journalistic skills also includes the ability to link events from different sources, such as using background information to support eyewitness materials to formulate and demonstrate the bigger picture to the public (ibid).

Journalistic practices have shifted dramatically from top-down direct communication to an open dialogue and partnership with the public (Paulussen et al., 2007). As Kperogi (2011) concluded in his examination of CNN's citizen journalism vehicle iReport: "the trend toward corporate-sponsored citizen media may, in the final analysis, blur the distinction between citizen and mainstream journalism" (p.1). This massive change towards digital news production has blurred the fine lines and boundaries between journalists and their audiences, and between news producers and news consumers (Bruns, 2005a, Jenkins, 2006). It also breaks the information monopoly of the media and empowers citizens who can create or recommend alternative content (ibid) . This contrasts with the news broadcast by traditional channels, oriented to the convenience of the elites in power.

News organisations faced many threats and difficulties in covering these uprisings and the Syrian civil war. As a result, this created an opportunity for citizen media to become an alternative platform for the coverage of these actions and to be a valuable news source. Therefore, several traditional news outlets appear to encourage the use of citizen journalism materials within their news coverage and current affairs programmes. Many major network news outlets and channels have added citizen journalism as a valuable source of news and information, whether through social media or by creating specific apps and websites for this purpose such as the CNN iReport app or the BBC social media hub. Therefore, there has recently been renewed interest in the relationship between citizens and traditional journalism, one that is considered to be complex and seen as a collaboration in information gathering and news comment.

This could raise doubts among many professional journalists as it creates a competitive advantage by obtaining news first and reaching the widest possible audience. Furthermore,

while this new approach of news gathering benefits news organisations covering political and natural crises, such as the Tsunami disaster, it also creates several concerns. These include objectivity, accuracy, reliability and fairness – issues that could ruin the reputation of any media organisation. Therefore, these issues pose significant risks to social media users, creating considerable misgivings regarding the use of citizen journalism within mass media.

Additionally, the integration of online media content in mainstream media re-defines roles and hierarchies in the news organisations, blurring the boundaries between producers and consumers, changing what we know to be citizens, users, audiences, fans, and the public (Gillespie, 2013). However, Bruns et al. (2012) argues that relationships between professional and citizen journalists seem to be slowly changing and developing over time. This view of change is supported by Thorsen and Allan (2014), who argue that news contents provided by the audience, which were previously used to fill the gaps in news coverage, are currently used as main sources of information, especially in the case of events and locations where journalists are unable to be present. This is considered to be one of the main benefits from the relationship between journalists and their audience.

According to Benkler and Nissenbaum (2006), peer-to-peer production is seen as a socio-technical structure that has the potential to promote political and moral values, such as autonomy, democracy and social justice. Together, these studies aim to gather an understanding of audience participation from various perspectives, but they agree on the value of internet and social media contributions.

In November 2008, Alfred Hermida and Neil Thurman studied twelve UK newspaper websites and found that all of them offered some tools for reader participation. The researchers identified nine different formats that were used by the newspaper websites to encourage contributions from the audience. These formats were: polls, message boards, comments on stories, questions, blogs, reader blogs, have your say, your media and your story (Hermida and Thurman, 2008).

**Table 1: User-generated content initiatives at British newspaper websites, May 2008 (developed from: Thurman 2008 and Hermida & Thurman 2008)**

<b>Format</b>	<b>Description</b>
1 <b>'Blogs'</b>	Allow journalists to publish short articles -- or 'posts' -- which are presented in reverse chronological order. Most allow readers to comment on the entries. 'Blogs' are explicitly authored by one or more individuals, often associated with a set of interests or opinions, and can include links to external websites.
2 <b>'Comments on stories'</b>	Readers can submit their views on a story, usually from a form at the bottom of an article.
3 <b>'Have your says'</b>	Resembling 'Message boards' but with significant differences, these are areas where journalists post topical questions to which readers send written replies. A selection is made, edited, and published by journalists, with the submissions either fully or reactively moderated. 'Have your says' usually remain open for a limited number of days.
4 <b>'Message Boards'</b>	Areas that allow readers to engage in threaded online conversations or debates on topics often initiated by readers. They are usually reactively moderated. They are structured so that users can reply to any of the posts rather than just the original one. The discussions usually remain open for weeks or months.
5 <b>'Polls'</b>	Topical questions where readers are asked to make a multiple choice or binary response. They provide instant and quantifiable feedback to readers but offer very limited interaction, which is restricted to 'yes' or 'no' answers, or a multiple-choice response.
6 <b>'Q&amp;As'</b>	Interviews with journalists and/or invited guests, with questions submitted by readers. By their very nature, 'Q&As' are moderated. But since they are usually webcast in audio or video, or transcribed, as live, they offer a sense of interactivity and immediacy.
7 <b>'Reader blogs'</b>	Allow readers to create a blog and have it hosted on a news organisation's website.
8 <b>'Your media'</b>	Galleries of photographs, video, and other media submitted by readers and vetted by journalists.
9 <b>'Your story'</b>	Sections where readers are asked to send in stories that matter to them. These then are selected and edited by journalists for publication on the website.

#### 2.3.4 The value of networked journalism

There is no doubt that the future of journalism as a field and practice seems to be unstable and unpredictable. Many optimistic professional journalists argue in favour of citizen journalism practices that enhance the work of news broadcasting by offering 'authentic', first-hand perspectives of news stories. This tool could be extremely useful in the first moments of a crisis such as a natural disaster or political unrest in an authoritarian regime, where professional journalists may not be on site to present an independent coverage (Armstrong and Gao, 2010).

Even news organisations count as nodes in the much bigger digital network, and understanding these new changes and patterns in the digital world could be fundamental to

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the survival of these news organisations (Heinrich, 2012). In conclusion, networking with the audience may improve journalism by augmenting the gathering of breaking news (Beckett, 2010a).

This change towards new media tools seems to offer many advantages to journalism, including the reduction of obstacles in the reportage of news contents to the public, and by removing the need for traditional journalism training and norms (Salawu, 2011). According to (Newman, 2009), many mass media outlets nowadays take an interest in social media tools because of three main motivations.

First is the better coverage of news stories by crowdsourcing audience opinions, comments, pictures and videos, which completes and enhances news production. Second is the creation of vital relationships with the public, as engaged audiences tend to be more loyal to the organisation, and more influenced by its advertisements and promotions. Third is to obtain new audiences and users so that social media becomes an access point for everyone, easing communication and feedback.

This view is supported by Beckett (2010a), who states that the use of networked journalism helps news organisations to obtain diversity in their editorial by introducing many information sources and points of views to support their news reports. Additionally, he points out that adopting networked journalism practices in the mainstream media has the potential to improve journalism values in four ways. Firstly, it creates editorial diversity by allowing wide-ranging news materials, especially from the public. Secondly, it generates many interactive and interconnected paths for news distribution. Thirdly, it connects audiences to news that has most relevance to their own lives and concerns. Finally, Beckett argues that networked journalism would help to increase audiences' trust in the news and media organisations. He adds that media outlets could increase their credibility and trustworthiness by providing evidence of their news sources or by openly answering their audiences' questions (Beckett, 2010a). Bowman and Willis (2003) also suggest that audience participation could allow news outlets to develop a news relationship with their audiences based on loyalty and trustworthiness. There is no doubt that such significant benefits could

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motivate journalists and editors to embrace modern networked journalism practices (Kim and Lowrey, 2015).

In her case study of gatekeeping practices at the BBC hub, Harrison (2010) identifies five reasons to use UGC in the BBC newsroom, despite the risks and tensions behind this practice. Firstly, the BBC is a public service that aims to reach a wide audience with comprehensive coverage. Secondly, this adds a new approach to finding news sources, rather than focussing on traditional approaches. Thirdly, it allows news outlets to compete for wider audiences. Fourthly, it brings the anticipation of a fresh audience interested in social media and technology. However, this new form of participation and the resulting procedural changes in gatekeeping and agenda setting could have an impact on the editorial process.

This opens up their reporting, according to BBC Online's editor Russell Smith: "It is different editorially and in style – there is more freedom to report instant analysis and reaction so it is less editorially restricted". He adds that "breaking the boundary between audiences and journalists helps to increase understanding, and lets audiences go beyond 'my interpretation' of a story." (Beckett, 2010b ,p.4). Twitter, for instance, has become a vital tool in the search for sources and eyewitnesses, and many newsrooms have embraced it to broadcast breaking news (Palser, 2009 ,p. 54). In the same vein, Duffy (2011) highlights that networked journalism could increase journalists' credibility by increasing audience trust in media outlets that embrace collaboration with them, by using news sources and replying to their questions.

Professional journalism is still seen by many scholars as the guardian of democracy (Papacharissi, 2009). However, in order for this guardianship to succeed, it requires more positive supporters of citizen journalism and public engagement with the media (Gillmor, 2004). "Networked journalism allows the public to be involved in every aspect of journalism production through crowdsourcing, interactivity, hyper-linking, user-generated content and forums" (Beckett, 2010a ,p.1).

Furthermore, the experience of the BBC hub has encouraged BBC Arabic to follow in its steps. The news channel, which focuses on the Arab audience, introduced the programme *I'm the Witness* ('*Ana Alsahed*'), which encourages viewers from all around the Arab region to create their own TV reports on political or social issues. They do this by gathering information, writing a report script and interviewing guests. This type of networked setting provides an opportunity for citizens interested in the media and journalism to create and share their own media content. It also inspires Arab audiences to be engaged with the news by generating media content, giving feedback or commenting on current events. BBC Arabic does not restrict use of networked journalism to these programmes. The channel relied on UGC in its coverage of the Iran protests of 2009 and the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. Both were complex situations during which ordinary citizens were able to provide accurate and reliable, on-the-spot reporting (Hanska-Ahy and Shapour, 2013).

The Al-Jazeera news network has also invested in networked journalism in a number of programmes and applications that depend on public engagement and evolved in the social media era. In 2008, the news network introduced a dedicated website for UGC called "Sharek", an Arabic word for 'participate' (Harkin et al., 2012). The website encourages activists and citizen journalists to submit video content and be involved in news production. In 2012, more than 70,000 videos had been submitted (Bartlett, 2012). Initially, Sharek dealt with the Gaza War and then later the Arab Spring uprising in 2010 and 2011. Al-Jazeera became interested in citizen journalism after its experience during the Gaza War in 2008 and 2009 (Ayish and Mellor, 2015).

Therefore, in order to increase the audience's involvement in seeking news and information, Al-Jazeera staff were trained on the social media application and how it could be used in the newsroom; this served them well during the Arab Spring uprising. Al-Jazeera's also added a plan is to convince professional journalists that citizen journalism and social media do not represent a threat but rather could be "the biggest assets you can have." He adds that instead of an official reporter far from the action flying to cover a story, Al-Jazeera could depend on groups of citizen journalists and activists who are known to be credible and trustworthy (Ayish and Mellor, 2015).

Another trend that has emerged in broadcasting news channels over the last few years is programmes that integrate interactive forms of news presentation. These programmes are explicitly dedicated to social media trends and UGCs such as BBC Trending or Les Observateurs in France 24 (Hermida, 2010, Wardle et al., 2014). These news programming forms tend to be short, and they focus on a topic trending on social media with the potential to expand such a topic into more extended pieces of journalism (ibid). Similar programmes were launched in the Arab media that focus on trending social media, and they target interactive coverage such as *Your interaction* in Al-Arabiya, *Your bulletin* in Al-Jazeera or *Platforms* in Sky news Arabic. This daily interactive newsletter focusses mostly on the issues and topics that are the most frequently discussed across social media networks. These examples show a significant transition in the broadcasting landscape as social media and UGC become new factors in newsroom routines and coverage. They also pay more attention to audience preferences and push journalists to reengage with their content, giving greater space for collaboration and media convergence.

In his work on the Mechanisms of Participation, Hermida (2011) suggests five news production stages, which provide researchers on participatory and networked journalism with a framework to analyse the opportunities available to audiences to participate in the news-gathering process. These stages include Access/Observation, Selection/Filtering, Process/ Editing, Distribution and finally Interpretation. The first stage, access or observation, is the primary stage for journalists to gather information and news from source material, such as eyewitness accounts or visual contributions. Hermida pointed out that “this approach can be considered a form of crowdsourcing, a practice through which journalists try to loosely steer the priorities of contributors by requesting data, analysis or other assistance with specific stories or with topics of investigation” (p.20). The value of crowdsourcing is expanded on in the following sections.

The second stage is selection or filtering, which is considered to be the gatekeeping stage that includes journalists and editors' decisions over news reporting. Journalists then enter the processing or editing stage when the news story is created and formed, which includes writing or editing any news contents. At the distribution stage, a news story is circulated and made available for the audience. The final stage is interpretation, when a story is opened for

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comments and discussion after it has been produced and published (ibid). Each of these stages represents an access point for citizen or content creators to participate and influence news production routines.

### 2.3.5 Media Convergence

The rapid technological change in modern society has led to many trends in media and journalism. Convergence is a term that has been used to label some media trends, especially in the new digital era. It focused on the blurring lines between media forms, journalist's skills and their role in newsgathering. As computing and ICTs, communication networks were introduced to the media industry it facilitates the convergent services, technologies and media contents.

According to Singer (2004) convergence "refers to the combination of technologies, products, staffs and geography amongst the previously distinct provinces of print, television and online media" (p.2). This integrations of what previously were seen as separate media mediums and tools, mostly due to the digitization in the media industry and the change in the newsroom such as organizational structures and journalists' role and content production across media platforms (Quandt and Singer, 2009). Therefore, media convergence is blurring lines between audiences and mass media as well as traditional media and their sectors in the industry.

One of the early mentions of media convergence emerged from the work of Ithiel de Sola (1983) who describe it as the convergence of modes " process which blurring the lines between media, even between point-to-point communications, such as the post, telephone, and telegraph, and mass communications, such as the press, .radio, and television "(p,23). The convergence was frequently described as a media process, however, this process expanded with the emerge of the web during the nineties as Thompson (1997) define the media convergence as the integration of the internet with other media forms, especially television and mobile.

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Since 2000, many researchers have focused on the convergence of print, broadcast, and online operations in the modern newsroom. In 2006, Henry Jenkins used the term “convergence culture” to describe the changing elements in the media industry whether that technological, economic or cultural to the universal media environments. Media convergence, according to Jenkins (2006) occurs “where old media and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (pp.259–260).

In his book with the same name, Jenkins categorized media convergence into three major elements: first, flowing content across several platforms; second, a collaboration between media industries; and finally, shifting behaviour of audiences who participate and engage in the media contents (ibid). This is the final component of convergence that mainly deals with the networked and participatory practices that the thesis is interested in. According to media convergence, new technologies reshape the media landscape. It brings a diversity in media platforms based on communications and information technology, and as result transform daily life through altering patterns of creation, consumption, learning, and interpersonal connection.

Media convergence encountered a new factor linked to the web 2.0, which is user generated content since news outlets increasingly embrace such content in news converges. This topic came up for example in discussions of the journalists’ identity in the convergence culture, as Mark Deuze understanding of convergence is centred around two journalism trends, the first is the industrial convergence of news organisations such as establishing integrated newsrooms. The second is the convergence between content production and consumption, which refers to the increased adoption of citizen contributions as a source or creator which this research has tended to focus on (Deuze, 2008a) . He especially argues that the actual level of convergence is based on the citizen-consumer convergence as this approach could determine the change in audience habits and contents consumption in the digital age (ibid).

Meikle and Young (2011) expanded the convergence concept by identifying four main dimensions of media convergence that characterised the blurring role media produces and consumers in the digital era. The first is the technological convergence which involves the combination of computing, communications and content around networked digital media platforms. Second is the industrial convergence when large tech companies such as Google, Apple, Microsoft establishes themselves as partners and a substantial content providers in the digital era. Third, the social convergence associated with the rise of social media platforms such as Twitter Facebook, and the growth of generated content. Finally. the textual convergence means the re-creating media contents into a 'transmedia' model, where news stories in form of sounds, videos and texts are circulated across several media platforms.

According to Deuze (2009), media convergence has extensive implications, impacting media content production and consumption. It recognizes changes in daily newsgathering, yet accepts that journalists preserve their fundamental role in gatekeeping, filtering and creating news converge. Similarly , Quinn (2005) pointed out that convergence in the news production process could have the greatest effect on journalists' role, especially "information gathering convergence", which encourage modern journalists to be multi-skilled when presenting a news story on multiple media platforms (p.6). He stressed that convergence requires a radical change in attitude and approach by directors and journalists who need to share an open desk with digital media editors, as well as using merits to assess their news outcome (Quinn, 2005) .

One study by Singer (2004) examined the media convergence in four U.S newsrooms which reveal some technological and cultural factors that influence the convergence process. This includes journalists understanding and attitude towards process, and lack of professional training to help journalists to adapt to new technologies in the newsrooms. The findings also show that journalists of those newsrooms consider the new convergence experience as a professional supporter and booster. Though, some cultural conflicts in newsrooms could slow down the convergence process.

Dupagne and Garrison (2006) also studied the convergence influences of newsroom work at the Tampa News Centre, they observed some changes in newsroom practices and culture

including Job and role changes. Journalists faced extra news duties and responsibilities beyond those initially required in a single-platform environment. They provided recommended job skills that could be essential for the next generation of journalists which also required in media education to adapt to the convergence expectations.

### 2.3.6 Crowdsourcing and user-generated content

Crowdsourcing has been widely used as a mechanism for problem solving by companies, and professional journalists have more recently begun to crowdsource knowledge for their stories through UGC. The term ‘crowdsourcing’, first introduced by Howe (2006), who explains the process and distribution of tasks to a team or to a large crowd of people in order to achieve a larger goal (Howe, 2006 as cited in Norris, 2016). In journalism production, this became a common practice for the tasks required in producing news content, such as capturing pictures, analysing data and writing or producing the full news content (Aitamurto et al., 2011). Onuoha et al. (2015) described crowdsourcing in news production as invitation for people to contribute to news tasks like “newsgathering, data collection, or analysis through a targeted, open call for input; personal experiences; documents; or other contributions” (p.4). Van der Haak et al. (2012) highlighted the relation between crowdsourcing and citizen journalism activities by saying:

“Crowdsourcing extends beyond citizen journalism and covers a wide range of practices that make use of collective intelligence to gather and check information, tell stories, or make choices in news production. User-generated content refers to photographs, video, textual comment, and other material provided to a news organization or news website by members of the public”. (p.7).

In crowdsourcing, the journalists control the selection and news-making decisions. They decide how the crowd’s input is used. In contrast, for commons-based peer production, the locus of power is with the online participants, and they have more say over the production process than the crowd does in crowdsourcing (Aitamurto, 2016). Using crowdsourcing, journalists can tap into the collective intelligence of the crowds and channel that into their

articles. Crowdsourcing hence supports the search for knowledge in journalism. Empirical studies show that crowdsourcing in journalism can bring in relevant information that helps journalists to proceed with their investigations and that a crowdsourced knowledge search can lead to fast knowledge discovery and even to the discovery of knowledge that the journalists did not know they should search for (ibid). Furthermore, crowdsourcing has the potential to improve journalists' relations with the public and it offers many tools for their engagement. In their guide to crowdsourcing, Onuoha et al. (2015) categorise different crowdsourcing call to action in journalism which includes:

1. Voting: prioritising which stories journalists should tackle.
2. Witnessing: sharing breaking news content like natural disasters.
3. Sharing personal experiences.
4. Tapping specialised expertise: contributing data or unique information.
5. Completing a task: volunteering time or skills to assist with a news story.
6. Engaging audiences in general journalism practices (p.21).

However, in many of these practices, journalists seem to alter their traditional methods of news gathering and they could be taking a risk over the accuracy of the facts reported. This has resulted in a new form that apportions responsibility to both journalists and their crowd sources (Aitamurto, 2016). Therefore, the following section will focus on the risks associated with networked journalism and the value of verification and training in modern newsrooms.

### 2.3.7 The risks of networked journalism

Social media allows web users to distribute news and information instantly and cheaply through their networks, unlike traditional journalism, which is known to be strict with the gatekeeping process. However, with the impact of social media and news flow, media organisations would be required to open the news gates to unprofessional news (Van Leuven et al., 2014). Despite concerns regarding the credibility of citizen journalism, several media outlets and news organisations appear to accept the risk of incorporating supplemental news materials from sources such as blogs into their coverage (McNair, 2006).

Modern newsrooms are becoming digital hubs, using the new media's advantages of efficiency and speed. But this also raises a number of concerns due to its implications for news quality and independence (O'sullivan and Heinonen, 2008). Even with the benefits of citizen journalism, there remains scepticism and sometimes even hostility towards audience contributions in the mainstream media by many journalists and newsrooms (Domingo et al., 2008). This view regards the public as ordinary audiences, not as news creators, and a clear separation is maintained by professional journalists to ensure that audiences remain simply audiences.

The main concerns for newsroom journalists and editors are connected to the identity and credibility of news contributors (Singer, 2014). This includes the argument that untrusted sources and news contributions could harm the reputation and trustworthiness of any media organisation, especially when it is difficult to verify user content and information (Hermida and Thurman, 2008). Others are concerned about the reliance on soft news, rather than significance public news and information, which is the aim of the collaboration (Domingo et al., 2008, Paulussen and Ugille, 2008) . This expands to the general lack of user accountability for what they produce or contribute to the news media (Singer et al., 2011). While there are high expectations of networked journalism, previous experiences and daily challenges in implementing such practices could lead journalists to doubt and reconsider the integration of UGC into their coverage (Wintterlin et al., 2020).

It is argued that the tension between professional and citizen journalists with regard to production methods has limited the adoption of participatory journalism practices in mainstream media (Hanska-Ahy and Shapour, 2013). There are still, however, clear boundaries between the news outlet websites and citizen websites, such as blogs that help to reinforce an 'us vs. them' attitude among journalists, and which could affect the collaborative work with citizen media (Bruns et al., 2012). The rising tension in traditional media is related to how it can adapt the news trends brought by the new media and maintain its longstanding power over information flow.

Although the use of citizen journalism and UGC in the mainstream media is considered to be a form of audience empowerment, it raises many concerns within news organisations

regarding the journalism standards of accuracy and objectivity (Harrison, 2010). This view is supported by (Ali and Fahmy, 2013), who point out that this new shared environment of participatory practices raises many concerns regarding accountability, credibility and newsworthiness.

Even though using citizen journalism content appears to be a familiar practice in the modern newsroom, data from previous studies suggest that it is only used as a supplement when there is no alternative means of telling the news story, as it may otherwise risk the editorial practice of the news organisation (Hermida, 2010, Wardle et al., 2014). Therefore, many news outlets choose to fight the desire to be the first on breaking news but instead focus on verifying and analysing content.

Schifferees and Newman (2013) identified two challenges for journalists adopting integration between citizen and traditional media. First, the overflow of information and content, especially from conflicted areas like Syria, could burden journalists in their selection and verification process. The second issue is the verification process itself, which is time consuming; for instance, there is no fixed way to verify videos and they must be checked from different standpoints. Another concern is related to training, as citizen journalists and bloggers appear to lack journalism training, a matter that could affect their news accuracy.

#### 2.3.7.1 Verification in the digital era

Verification is one of the main disciplines in news gathering that observes journalists' credibility. It enables professional journalists to claim authority, which distinguishes them from any other content creator. In their book *The Elements of Journalism*, (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014) introduced ten elements that journalists need to follow in order to provide the public with the news and information they need. This highlighted that "Journalism's first obligation is to the truth ... and its essence is a discipline of verification" (p.49).

However, the massive expansion in content arriving from users and citizens, combined with the fast spread of contents via social media platforms, has placed pressure on journalists to

perform accurate verification. Such increasing challenges include anonymous contributors or those with a fake identity. There is also the possibility of conflicts of interests and inaccuracy as the content is produced by amateur and unprofessional journalists (Antonopoulos et al., 2020). To face these challenges, the role of journalists has been changed to include filtering, selecting and verifying content before publishing (Nylund and Gopalkrishnan, 2014). While a great deal of content circulated on social media fits into the 'publish, then filter' approach, it contrasts with the fact-checking rules of professional journalism, which focus on filter, then publish (Bowman and Willis, 2003).

One of the potential pitfalls of networked journalism is exemplified by the following incident. In October 2008, a citizen journalist cited an anonymous source and posted on CNN's *iReport* that Steve Jobs, the co-founder and CEO of Apple at the time, had been hospitalised after having a heart attack. Not long after, CNN had to remove the post from the platform as it turned out to be fake. However, that false story influenced the financial markets and caused US trade in Apple stock to suffer a major hit, falling to the lowest that year (Blodget, 2008).

Such verification failures can come in different forms. According to the UNESCO Handbook on Journalism, Fake News and Disinformation, three common false or misleading types of content are often circulated on social media and require journalists' attention. The first is described as wrong time/wrong place contents, which is the most common form of false or misleading content, such as old videos or photos being circulated back on social media with inaccurate information. Some of these contents may be accidentally shared but such contents could be traced back and exposed based on the information provided or the content's digital print (Ireton and Posetti, 2018).

The second form is manipulated content, i.e., content that has been deliberately manipulated using digital tools such as editing software or Deepfake technology. Finally, there is staged content, which is original content that has been fabricated or staged with false claims; this requires more investigation to uncover it (ibid). An example of such staged contents is the footage entitled "Syria! Syrian hero boy rescue girl in shootout!", which went viral in 2014 and harvested millions of views on social media platforms. However, after it was published by several news organisations worldwide, including the BBC, The Guardian and Huffington Post,

it turned out to be untrue and was directed by a Norwegian filmmaker (Storaas, 2016). The number of such stories emphasises the importance of verification and fact-checking methods in the digital age.

Journalists use different methods for verifying content from social media, depending on their expertise and their organisation's guidelines and training. Hermida (2015) identified some of the techniques used by journalists to verify content, starting with crosschecking the location of UGC against available visual materials or maps. Also, distinctive landmarks or geographic landscapes could provide an insight into whether or not a photo or video is accurate. Journalists also check the weather conditions and reports from the area where the photo or video is said to be taken. Furthermore, the language and accents in the content can be a significant factor in assessing its validity. During the Arab Spring of 2011, BBC journalists turned to their colleagues in BBC Arabic and BBC Monitoring to advise on local accents. He pointed out that The BBC UGC hub also advises journalists to contact the content creator, preferably on the phone or by email or social media. Journalists then could ask the source detailed questions to ensure the content's authenticity (ibid).

However, Kröll (2015) argues that running such an UGC hub may not be possible or affordable for other news organisations, as it requires many journalists to be free and available for fact-checking: "ideally ones who are well trained and experienced" (p.13). Therefore, many media outlets need to realise that adopting networked journalism and collaboration with audiences requires investment in infrastructure in order to maintain credibility (ibid). This could present a major challenge for some broadcasting and news organisations; (Murrell, 2018) argues that besides large media services such as the BBC, few news organisations can spare time or resources specifically to gather and verify a massive amount of UGC from social media. Consequently, many organisations depend on news agencies to verify and validate the content instead.

In a similar case, the France 24 news channel introduced a collaborative site named *The Observers*, which expanded to include four languages: French, English, Arabic and Persian. The site covers international current affairs by using eyewitness accounts presented in a weekly TV programme (France24, n.d.). The site is run by a group of professional journalists

who verify the contents. When a story is “widely shared” but appears to the verification team to be faked and manipulated, it then goes into a special section entitled ‘Debunked news stories’. This aims to increase internet users’ awareness of fake news and the fact-checking methods that they could use, based on previous debunked stories (ibid).

In their article on the emerging Journalistic Verification Practices Concerning Social Media, Brandtzaeg et al. (2016) identified a number of online tools such as such as “ SocialMention, Storyful, Politifact, Fastfact, Topsy, Sulia, TinEye, FotoForensics, and Trackur, however the extent to which journalists use such tools is unknown, with the lack of commonly shared practices in newsrooms” (p.3) . They also acknowledged the increasing challenge that journalists face in the digital age as they are required to gather essential information such as sources, dates, locations and contacts linked to the verified content, but ideally without consuming time or affecting other news tasks (ibid). While online tools help with the verification process, Schifferes and Newman (2013) pointed out that no single tool can fully track and verify all social media content, which suggests the need for journalistic training on verification skills.

#### 2.3.7.2 Guidelines and training

One of the issues that emerges from the work of networked citizen journalists is that could be to be unprincipled in some aspects and there is a lack of guidelines for this new practice (Bowman and Willis, 2003). Professional journalists appear to use social media platforms on their own terms. They describe it as ‘same values, new tools’, summarising the rule that mainstream media used to adapt to the participatory culture while maintaining organisational norms and values (Newman, 2009 ,p.2). For many media outlets, part of this change includes rewriting guidelines to include policies on social media or UGC, and training social media editors and Twitter correspondents, as well as raising awareness among other journalists about the value of social media adaptation.

The BBC’s editorial guidelines, which were last updated in July 2019, included five topics on the adoption of UGC: verification, consent and credit, privacy, duty of case, and children and young people. The guidelines provided direct tips on how to deal with UGC in different

situations. For instance, the policy regarding consent and credit points out that “Where we are considering using significant content found on social media – such as video of a breaking news event – we should always seek to secure the consent of the owner of the material, even if we might argue a Fair Dealing use” (BBC, 2019). The guideline also acknowledges the challenge that journalists could face during this adoption process and the political influence of some content, as it states that:

“User-generated content raises particular challenges. We should not assume that the material is accurate and, depending on how we plan to use it, should take reasonable steps to seek verification. We must take care over how we use any material that may have been supplied by a member of a lobby group or anyone with a vested interest in the story, rather than a disinterested bystander. We should ensure that user-generated content is clearly identified as such” (ibid).

Sky News, in its ethics policy which was updated in July 2020, also acknowledges that social media plays a role in our daily working lives and in the media industry. Sky therefore encourages its journalists to apply the same standards that they have in the newsroom to their digital world (Skynews, 2020). The guideline gives advice regarding the use of social media such as using Twitter, breaking news and professional appearance. With regard to breaking news, its advice to journalists is: “Always pass breaking lines to the news desk and video to Sky News Centre before posting on social media networks” (p.28).

A number of guidelines and policies have also been introduced from independent professional organisations to help journalists deal with UGC and social media. This includes the verification handbook: *A Definitive Guide to Verifying Digital Content for Emergency Coverage*, which was produced by the European Journalism Centre (EJC), an independent, international, non-profit foundation dedicated to the highest standards in journalism. The book, which has been translated into nine languages including Arabic, has been described as “a ground-breaking new resource for journalists and aid providers. It provides the tools, techniques and step-by-step guidelines for how to deal with user-generated content (UGC) during emergencies” (Silverman, 2014).

This interest in verification and fact checking has also reached social media platforms. In 2019, Facebook collaborated with Agence France Presse (AFP) to establish an Arabic fact-checking service with the aim of tackling the spread of fake news and misinformation in the region. According to Facebook, the Arabic-speaking fact checker will verify Arabic contents by following a set of measures to determine the accuracy of news stories on the platform (ArabNews, 2019). This was followed by the Twitter birdwatch initiative in 2021. This is an experimental approach that depends on a community of fact checkers to spot and edit misinformation and fake news on the platform (Coleman, 2021).

One of the recent concerns emerging from the use of traumatic UGC in news rooms is the implication of journalists' mental and psychological health. According to Williams and Cartwright (2021) "members of the media often work in hostile or dangerous environments and those in news gathering roles can experience higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (PTSD) than that seen in the general population, due to repeated, intensive exposure to trauma (p.4)" Furthermore, Specht (2018), concluded that the effect of viewing violent and traumatic content from UGC is becoming an increasingly significant topic in journalism and psychology. For instance, Feinstein et al. (2014) examined the effect of witnessing images of extreme violence on journalists from three different newsrooms who interact with UGC and footage on a regular basis and they found that the frequent exposure to traumatic content from UGC arises as a strong factor to PTSD type symptoms, anxiety, depression and heavy alcohol consumption.

The second section of this chapter explores the theoretical framework adopted in the research and it discusses the way in which the academic literature has engaged with the development of new media technologies and how it influences theories such as gatekeeping and agenda-setting theories.

## 2.4 Theoretical framework

This section highlights various theories connected to networked journalism and the adoption of UGC news. It presents a reflection on the theoretical framework's relevance for the research. The following theories were used as the theoretical framework for this study: gatekeeping in the digital age, agenda setting and cyber-optimism versus cyber-pessimism.

### 2.4.1 Gatekeeping in the digital age

Gatekeeping as a term was first introduced by David Manning White (1950) who highlighted that gatekeeping is the selection process of choosing stories and/or visuals that follow the organisations' news routines and narratives. However, the gatekeeping theory mainly focused on individual journalists until Gans (1979) added the role of organisations in which journalistic norms influence news selection and the process of gatekeeping as whole. According to Shoemaker et al. (2009) gatekeeping is "the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating, and otherwise massaging information to become news" (p.73)

Since the early nineties, media organisations have started to be open to the possibility of gate opening and sharing the closed selection process, enabling more open participation (Boczkowski, 2005). With the emergence of the internet, the possibilities started with audience comments on news websites, and they have progressed significantly from that period onwards (Singer, 2014). Part of the change brought by the participatory culture in the media is the reduction in journalists' control over media content. Within the massive space of interactivity brought by the internet, 'the people formerly known as the audience' (Rosen, 2006) challenged the mainstream media and professional journalists formerly known as the sole news providers. According to Cooper (2006), citizen engagement in news gathering and reporting directly challenged news organisations' gatekeeping role, which gave rise to the term 'fifth estate' to describe citizen journalism. Journalists and media professionals no

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longer monopolise the communication space, due to the abundance of online information and news (Ayish and Mellor, 2015).

Castells highlights that: “the emergence of a new electronic communication system characterised by its global reach, its integration of all communication media and its potential interactivity is changing and will change forever our culture” (Castells, 2011 ,p.87). In the same vein, Heinrich (2012) points out that current professional journalists are not in control of the news and information gates anymore, as citizen journalists, bloggers and activists are grasping the media tools for production and distribution. Charlie Beckett expounds this argument clearly – the new media provide “a chance to replace professional exclusivity with a participatory inclusiveness that might lead to a greater variety among the people who can enter and even run the news media” (Beckett and Mansell, 2008 ,p.149).

In gatekeeping theory, journalists and news editors have always had the control of the flow of news and information. They have the ability to clear certain information for release to the public or to dismiss irrelevant information as part of their occupational tasks (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). However, this was challenged by the digital revaluation as journalists are required to share decision making; they are no longer “the ones who decide what the public needs to know, as well as when and how such information should be provided” (Domingo et al., 2008 ,p.326). Journalists have lost their power to control media content, as through the internet everyone who can access the web is able to create and publish content to a global audience.

The traditional model of communication, one that travels one way from a sender to a less active receiver, has changed to become a multidirectional communication flow. This adaptation has changed news-making from a top-down or linear method to a much more collaborative process with the public (Beckett, 2010b). This has been translated into networked journalism, which comprises an online community that stimulates co-operation between audiences and the producers of the content they consume (Bowman and Willis, 2003). However, this presents challenges to news organisations trying to adapt their traditional role and practices to this new arena.

According to Bruns (2005b), the journalist's role in the age of new media changed from strict gatekeeping to what could be described as gatewatching. The difference between these terms is explained by Stanoevska-Slabeva et al. (2012), who state that "while gatekeeping was born due to the scarcity of conventional media, gatewatching reflects the changes and new possibilities for audiences to participate in the news generation process enabled by internet and new media" (p.7). Gatewatching, therefore, as another aspect of networked and citizen journalism, involves the observation of the "output gates" of news sources with the intention of "identifying important information as it becomes available". Bruns (2005b, p.17). Charlie Beckett (2008) called journalists in the digital age enablers of content rather than privileged gatekeepers. With the impact of social media and news flow, media organisations are required to open the gates to unprofessional news (Van Leuven et al., 2014).

According to Deuze (2008b) "Instead of having some kind of control over the flow of meaningful, selected, fact-checked information in the public sphere, journalists today are just some of many voices in public communication." (p.12). Beckett and Mansell (2008) argue that traditional mainstream media would benefit from networked journalism and improved journalist skills. They explained that "successful networked journalism providers might offer the premium service of skilled journalistic functions: editing, analysis, technical support, and information packaging but this would become integrated into the flow of information from users" (p.97). Therefore, the role of journalism would be changed from gatekeeping to moderating or facilitating news and information.

As noted above, social media and networked journalism introduced many challenges to journalism principles and practices as they reflect an informal style in the gathering and presentation of news comprised of UGC. Furthermore, they raise issues of credibility and authority in traditional media organisations using such content. Difficulties also include: editorial control, gatekeeping, moderation, freedom of expression, and the (self-) regulation of an increasing number of online communities (Gillespie, 2013). As noted by Singer (2005), UGC such as blogs are used by the mainstream media to enhance their news coverage. However, adapting citizen journalism materials requires robust gatekeeping practices in order to fit into the organisational routine and narratives (Ali and Fahmy, 2013).

Journalists are keen to point out the differences between publishing and journalism. They maintain that the former can be done by anyone, whereas journalism is founded on professional values, norms and judgement, and processes such as verification, which are key to ensuring that content is reliable (Kim and Lowrey, 2015). Perhaps the area of most tension is gatekeeping (Shoemaker et al., 2009). Through gatekeeping, journalists claim authority over the ability to objectively parse reality, determine what qualifies as news, and publish credible and verified information. Some research into citizen journalism and media collaboration shows that journalists and editors still seek to hold a gatekeeping role, despite some opening up to the audience (Domingo et al., 2008, Harrison, 2010, Hermida and Thurman, 2008).

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) developed a theoretical framework that examines news media in relation to levels of analysis. They analyse gatekeeping across five levels, which are individual, routine, organisational, institutional and ideological/sociocultural. The analysis model is referred to as the hierarchy of influences. It describes different factors that influence news content, from the micro-individual level to the macro-social system (Reese Reese (2019). This framework was then improved in 2014 to become a vital analysis tool for understanding editorial decision making, journalists' role and gatekeeping.

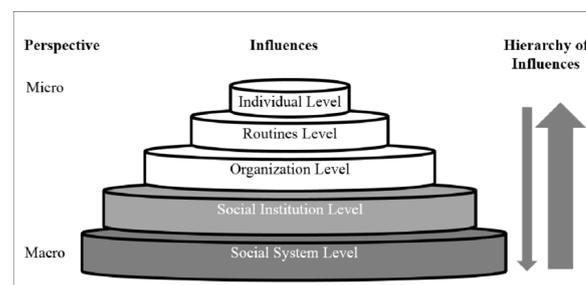


Figure 2.2 The Hierarchy of Influences Model (Reese, 2016)

#### 2.4.2 Agenda setting

In 1972, McCombs and Shaw introduced the agenda-setting model, which influenced the studies on mass communication and public opinion. The agenda-setting theory proposes that media organisations are suggestive platforms that shift audiences' focus onto certain news or events which they think they should focus on and think about (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

However, the integration between professional and citizen journalism could help to reshape the media agenda setting by focussing on those areas that prompt public interest.

Organisations would gather such news and information to maintain audience interest, which as a result would have an impact on the mainstream media agenda-setting and gatekeeping process. This concept has changed the agenda setting of news organisations. No longer able to influence the audience or tell them what to think, agendas have shifted to the provision of "what people tell the media they want to think about" (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001 ,p.375).

During some events, the overflow of UGC that is connected to breaking news could overturn the traditional flow of news from mainstream media and force them to distribute this content only. This could be described as 'event-driven' news which, together with urgent and crisis news, is considered to be a trigger for citizen journalists to have a role in the news process (Lawrence, 2000). Thousands of unprofessional journalists all over the world have been posting and sharing news stories through social media. This has forced the mainstream media to change their agenda settings in order to allow these stories to reach the public audience (Jurrat, 2011).

Based on their interviews with BBC journalists on the subject of UGC use in the newsroom, Hermida et al. (2014) concluded that adopting social media contents from platforms such as Twitter and Facebook in the news-gathering process is highly encouraged by BBC editors as a way of collecting information and rechecking it with other sources on these platforms (p.5). This citizen media content has become a vital source for news coverage, especially in local areas (Hanska-Ahy and Shapour, 2013).

Global political events like Iran's election protests and the Arab Spring uprisings have introduced a horizontal means of communication, which changes social movements and media relations by offering protesters the communication tools to represent their cases and demands and to decrease their reliance on mainstream media (Cammaerts, 2012). These examples create uncertainty about professional journalists' role in news production (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Furthermore, Singer (2005) argue that the most significant impact of citizen journalism would be challenging mainstream media's monopoly over journalistic practices and ethical guidelines, which represent the heart of media's democratic role in society and its professional identity. Networked journalism supporters argue in favour of a radical change in journalism practices to meet the developments in new media and citizen journalism (Paulussen and Ugille, 2008). Finally, Van Leuven et al. (2014) acknowledge that wide-ranging sources in the news production process could help to create more varied opinions and viewpoints, which in turn would assist mainstream media with balancing their agenda setting based on the interests of different groups in society.

#### 2.4.3 Cyber-optimists versus cyber-pessimists

The past decade has seen the rapid development of communication technologies in many areas, and this has had an impact on journalism practices. Pavlik (2000) stated that "journalism has always been shaped by technology" (p.229). However, much uncertainty and many debates still exist about what consequences technology might have and how it could shape today's journalism. Previous studies of professional journalists have focused on embracing new technologies in newsrooms within professional values and practices (O'sullivan and Heinonen, 2008). Others have considered the value of technology in order to develop data journalism or "computational journalism" (Flew et al., 2012). On the other hands, other researchers have provided a sceptical view of this transition, placing more trust in trusted traditional techniques (Reich, 2013). Generally, studies into the impact of technology on journalism has tended to fall into two main approaches, which could be described as "techno-optimists" versus "techno-pessimists" (Fenton, 2010 , p.14).

Techno-optimists or cyber-optimists tend to rely on the role of technology on the media to create social and political change. A number of scholars such as Clay Shirky and Manuel

Castells are firmly in the techno-optimist camp. Castells (2002), for instance, claims that the emergence of the internet “was expected to be an ideal instrument to further democracy – and still is” (p.155). With an optimistic approach, he maintains that cyberspace enables equal access to news and information, allowing individuals to be engaged in political debates as well as monitoring government performance. With the emergence of citizen journalism, this debate has become more significant as it explores a range of activities and practices that are highly connected to the consequences of technology in journalistic practices and audience participation.

According to Soriano (2013), a number of factors contribute to the cyber-optimists’ views of social media and citizen journalism. First, it empowers citizens to contribute to the political debate without any mediation. Second, it promotes collective work between individuals and groups who share the same goal, which could help in societies that lack freedom by creating a virtual public sphere. Third, it weakens political regimes’ capability to control news and information flow across country borders, which gives individuals the chance to reach the international level with their causes. Finally, by giving the different classes in society the tools they need to be involved in the public sphere, it allows social and economic transformation and creates pro-democratic movements.

Despite these factors, a number of scholars seem to be sceptical of the role of social media in democratic change. These optimistic and enthusiastic views that recognise citizen journalism as an influential democratising tool have faced some criticism that focuses the attention on some dark aspects of this new phenomenon. They consider cases where citizen journalism has been an advantage to be exceptional cases rather than the norm, which could not be dependence from professional journalists. Even though the internet could act to renew democracy and citizen participation, this new media would cause ‘a plurality of news providers’ who are certainly not all trustworthy (Fenton, 2010) .

These concerns have also been voiced by some professional journalists who, according to Hermida and Thurman (2008) research, tend to be extremely sceptical about the value and relevance of audience involvement in their work process. They are also concerned about the effect of low-quality contents on their professional news image, which as a result could

damage the news environment. Others have taken it further to claim that “ the promise of volume and diversity offered by the internet has turned out to be largely a false prophecy” (Scott, 2005 ,p.111). Finally, the lack of journalism training and the absence of ethical codes seem to be the major criticisms of citizen journalism, along with the relevance of the news to the general public interest, all of which could affect citizen journalism’s credibility and challenge techno-optimists’ views.

Furthermore, a number of studies have questioned the concept of cyber democracy, which seems to fall under the cyber-utopianism view by neglecting the deficiency and dark spots of this experience (Van Dijk, 2017, Morozov, 2011). Furthermore, Evgeny Morozov, for example, examined the role of Web 2.0 in democracy practice and its relation to social movements in his book *The Net Delusion* (Morozov, 2011). He critiques the way that cyber democracy is misrepresented and idolised by western countries to reach a point of “cyber-utopianism” as he described it. In his argument, he pointed out that:

“In fact, the reason why so many politicians and journalists believe in the power of the Internet is because they have not given this subject much thought. Their faith is not the result of a careful examination of how the Internet is being used by dictators or how it is changing the culture of resistance and dissent” (p.21).

Moreover, he argues that social media is complex as it allows different ways of interacting and different purposes. Twitter and Facebook, for instance, could be used for social activism but at the same time they are suitable tools for use by political regimes to track these activists (ibid).

Furthermore, one of the issues raised by the cyber-pessimists is a social dilemma regarding the unequal access to information and communications technology. As citizen journalism uses online platforms, this could be considered an obstacle to participating in the democratic process as some would be excluded from online participation, dividing society into different classes. The digital divide can also refer to the gap in technological literacy; Van Dijk (2017) defined it as “the gap between people who do and do not have access to forms of information and communication technology” (p.1). As a result, this argument challenges the

way that cyber democracy and citizen journalism are seen as ways to represent all marginalised groups and activists in society, as they could disregard citizens without the ability to have an online presence and who are therefore unable to express their viewpoints in this sphere.

This seems to complicate the views of the role of citizen journalism and social media in the mainstream news media, making it more ambivalent. These positions towards the internet's democratic potentials and the role of citizen journalism seem to fill a wide spectrum from optimistic to more pessimistic views. Although citizen journalism could help to empower media audiences and democracies, the mainstream media practices seem to be risky as they rely heavily on these contents, which could constitute a threat to journalism practices and its reputation. Therefore, citizen journalism should be treated with caution and must be examined in depth in order to avoid an over-optimistic position that influences the decisions taken in the media. As Castells (2002) concluded, "the Internet cannot provide a technological fix to the crisis of democracy" (p.156). Consequently, some scholars support the cooperative relationship between professional and citizen journalists, believing that this could help to rejuvenate the public sphere and allow participation from different perspectives.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, extensive research has shown that new inventions in communication technology, in the form of smart phones and social media platforms, have offered media audiences the tools to create their own media contents. This UGC has played a fundamental role in covering news stories in very difficult conditions such as natural disasters or political unrest. Whether due to the absence of mainstream media reporting or political pressures, this citizen coverage acts as a vital alternative media and may be described as citizen journalism.

Consequently, this massive shift in media production has blurred the line between media producers and consumers, placing significant pressure on traditional media organisations to respond and take advantage of audience interactivity. Many news organisations have already

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adopted audience-generated materials in their coverage and editorial routines, whether that be by creating TV programmes, websites or phone apps, or by establishing a social media unit, as done by CNN and the BBC.

Therefore, definitions of citizen media are changing noticeably over time, according to citizens' interactions and engagements with the mass media, from an individual's work to a more interactive organised form such as participatory and networked journalism. However, this new integration has raised many concerns regarding authority, credibility, reputation and trustworthiness, and how media organisations should deal with the agenda setting and gatekeeping processes.

Despite these risks, integrating UGC into media outlets offers openness and provides advantages to the news reportage by adding editorial diversity, creating interactive and connected paths for news distribution, targeting relevant topics by focussing on audience interests, and finally increasing audience trust.

Having examined the global emergence of networked journalism and raised discussion and debates about its collaborative nature and the way it influences the mass media, it is also important to look at this phenomenon in the Arab context and in light on the study scope, which includes the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels.

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## Chapter Three : Arab media context

### 3.1 Arab political and media scene

The Arab region occupies a vital geographic location of significant strategic importance by linking the continents of Asia and Africa, as well as extending along the Mediterranean coast from Morocco to Syria (Choueiri, 2016). In general terms, Arabs 'who speak the Arabic language, identify themselves as 'Arabs' and are nationals or residents of member countries of the League of Arab States.' (Hopkins and Ibrahim, 1997 ,p.2). The Arabs shares a common culture emerged from the Arabian Peninsula and formed by a long-standing history.

Furthermore, the Arab region is also known for rich diversity in language, ethnic and religious communities. It includes people from the different racial background, such as Arabs, Persian, and Turks. Besides, other religions such as Muslims, Christians, and Jews add the uniqueness and significance of the region to the world. The Arab region in this research is referred to 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa, members of the League of the Arab States such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf region and Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco in the North Africa region.

According to a UNPD report, the Arab region includes 22 countries containing 367.4 million Arab citizens, which equal five per cent of the world's population. This number could reach 598 million citizens by 2050 (Mirkin, 2010) . One of the region's main demographic characteristics is a high level of youth population among Arab countries. Moreover, statistics in the area shows that two-thirds of its people are under thirty years old and half of these number are between within 15 - 29-year age group (Day et al., 2016). This exceptional demographic of the young generation could be provided with the region with enormous potential in the upcoming two decades regarding working ability and the economic market as it could also contribute to political and social development if given a chance (ibid).

These demographic groups are also contributed to a shift in media consumption in the region as the young audience became a prime consumer of social media users and digital platforms.

However, despite the shared language, history and culture in the region along with major economic influence and diversity lasts across the region, it still distinct by both political and social unrest and. This region still faces political difficulties and human struggles that remain to be solved. These range from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the economic struggle of some countries, along with the people's desire to gain their full democratic rights (Choueiri, 2016). Nevertheless, the lack of full democratic rights within the Arab region may be due to several factors. One potential reason is that, in the Arab world, 'personalities rather than ideas determine the line of government and where personalism is the rule, democracy does not correspond to twentieth-century conceptions' (Browsers, 2006 , p.3).

However, this view seems to have shifted over time, as people have become more open to the democratic possibilities and rights. From the substantial amount of data obtained in large-scale surveys conducted worldwide between 1995-96 and 2001-2 it may be possible to compare Arab countries such as Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Jordan. Further comparisons could be made with other worldwide groups such as sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, South Asia, North America, Australia and New Zealand, Latin America, East Asia, and Western Europe.

What stands out in the survey results is that Arab participants value highly democratic governance and support the statement 'democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government'. The results also showed a major rejection of authoritarian regimes that do not bother with parliament and elections (United Nations Development Programme,2003, p36). This dramatic change over time reached a peak in the Arab spring uprising, which came in response to the economic and political struggles prevailing under dictatorial regimes and which contributed to the rise of youth social movement and alternative media platforms.

However,, the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region is still faced with many challenges toward freedom of press and speech. Several countries in the region were described by the latest RSF report 2021 as being yet “the toughest and most dangerous for journalists,” as they face political conflicts or repressive regimes (Alaraby, 2021). The Press Freedom Index is an annual report that published by Reporters Without Borders organisation (RSF) publish which evaluates press freedom in 180 countries.

During the last few years, there has been no significant change in the region rankings as many Arab countries yet rank low regarding press freedom. Kuwait emerged top in the Arab countries rankings by the 105th place followed by Lebanon in the 107th. Other countries like Algeria ranked 146th, Morocco 136th, Egypt 166th, Saudi Arabia 170th. While the worst-ranked country in the region was Syria in the 173rd position. A decade after the Arab spring, and this still channels in the region to the practice of journalism and press freedoms.

According to the Reporters Without Borders:

“When the Arab Spring got underway in 2011, the population in some countries demonstrated their thirst for freedom by their use of the media and social networks. Spaces for expression have emerged but the situation has not improved everywhere and the region continues to be one of the most dangerous for journalists”. (RSF, 2020)

Moreover, this freedom challenge became a centre of attention to Journalists' trade unions in the MENA region. In 2019, Journalists' unions from throughout the Arab world were gathered in Tunisia to argue their governments to release all imprisoned journalists and support media freedom and independence in the region (IFJ, 2019) . Most of these trade unions are part Federation of Arab Journalists (FAJ) which were founded in 1964, Cairo (Egypt), under the name Arab Union of Journalists with the motto Freedom and Responsibility. The first attempts to establish a trade union for journalists in the Arab region were also started in Cairo around 1920 to preserve journalists’ rights especially wages and

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work relations to newspapers owners as the Egyptian press was influenced by foreign media. (Azmy, 2017) .

The Federation of Arab Journalists (FAJ) now includes 19 unions from across the region and aim to “serve the objectives of the Arab people in their unity; defend the causes of Arab journalists and develop their talents and abilities; defend the rights and freedoms of Arab journalists and human rights” (UIA, 2012) . Furthermore, the Federation of Arab Journalists started a partnership with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). This collaboration offers journalists in the region self-regulation, professional training and restrain journalists' social and professional rights which resulted in the Declaration of Media Freedom in the Arab World which include 16 principles that aim to highlight the journalism crises in the region. (IFJ, 2017) .

The political sphere faced with major changes in the Arab media scene over the last 15 years, starting with the introduction of satellite television channels and more recently the impact from the internet and social media. According to Hamdy (2009), freedom of press and freedom of expression suffered in many Arab countries due to decades of government censorship and control over media and information agencies. Freedom House, an independent nongovernmental organisation that focuses on the levels of freedom in the world, revealed in one of its reports that Arab countries ranked low in areas like independent media and democracy. It also showed an increase in Arab citizens' political awareness and their demands for civil rights through their use of new media and activism (Abramowitz and Repucci, 2018).

This censorship, along with shortfalls in access to information and technology, forces various print newspapers and media outlets to be published outside the Arab region (Mellor, 2005). This remains a key issue for Arab media as print publications could be easily censored through government institutions. However, applying such control over satellite TV and news communication technologies is more difficult (Alterman, 1998).

Nevertheless, the situation appears to have improved considerably since the 1990s with the emergence of alternate media in the region in the form of satellite TV stations, internet access and more recently social media and blogs. Each has empowered the public and media to influence government attitudes toward alternative or controversial opinions (Hamdy, 2009).

Unlike other Arab media outlets that are still managed by the government, Arab news channels aim to create an open space for Arab citizens to receive news and information without certain ideologies and censorship. They do so by spreading the culture of a new political approach that promotes diversity and coexistence among society, despite prevailing conflicts and contradictions (Zayani, 2007, Darwish, 2009).

According to Sreberny (2000), this change in the Arab media landscape could have a significant influence in liberating the political arena and raising the democratic standards in authoritarian Arab governments. Al Jazeera, for instance, encouraged openness and diversity in Arab societies by giving voice to political subjects and guests facing censorship in traditional media and thereby expanding the notion of freedom throughout the region (Alterman, 1998).

Additionally, these Arab news channels help to create an open and free public forum by advancing agenda setting toward current events and allowing the exchange of opinions and information between panellists, guests or even members of the audience through the use of live, on air phone-ins (Karam, 2007). Even Arab journalists of news channels have become regional heroes and celebrities. This is partly due to their brave coverage of the Palestinian, Iraqi and Afghan wars in a manner that was unfamiliar, open and apparently fearless compared with those of other media outlets (Mellor, 2008). According to Rinnawi (2006)

“In the face of these controls on both ownership and content, transnational broadcasting offered a means not only of bypassing national restrictions but of influencing the output of state monopoly broadcasters, by forcing them to face unwonted competition. As their countries' chief censors, Middle Eastern information ministers had to face the possibility that foreign

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broadcasters would regale local viewers with news of, and commentaries on, local affairs that information ministries were responsible for hushing up.” (p.46)

The internet, on the other hand, took this engagement to a new level by encouraging mainstream public participation, thereby promoting democratic behaviour and applying unrestrained political pressure. This was a factor which played a significant role in the Arab spring uprising.

Since the early 1990s, satellite TV channels symbolise a turning point for the Arab media landscape. Much of the other media outlets suffered from extreme control and censorship by governments, which forced audiences to search for alternative means of public expression. While satellite TV channels were limited initially, they exposed the Arab audience to a whole new horizon of participation and the public sphere. According to Ayish (1997), this change was accelerated by the Gulf war in 1991, which helped introduce private channels in Arab countries that target the majority of Arab audiences and are not restricted by governments or national boundaries.

This period witnessed the birth of several commercial media networks, some of which were free while others were pay-tv channels. The Centre for Middle East Television or the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) was the first Arab satellite network to be broadcast from London in September 1991. This was followed by a number of general commercial channels such as the Orbit Communications Company and Arab Radio and Television (ART). All of these three channels were privately owned and funded by Saudi investments which show a major impact of Saudi media outlets the Arab media landscape during that time. However, Mellor (2008) argues that “this situation has raised concerns over journalist’s self-censorship in order to avoid conflicts with the Saudi ruling family, thereby running the risk of losing lucrative contracts from Saudi corporations or even facing a ban in Saudi territories” (p353)

The Arab media scene witnessed a boom in the number of satellite channels ever since. According to a recent report by The Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), the number of satellite channels broadcast or re-broadcast by Arab corporations reached a total of 1093

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channels, 177 of which are public and 907 privates are channels which show the influence of the private sector on this expansion (ASBU, 2020).

This large expansion in the number of channels has caused intense media competition as companies vie with each other to gain marketplace dominance and attract millions of viewers in the Arab region. Their programming includes both general channels and channels specialised in content such as news, sports, drama or entertainment. Particularly in the news field, Allan (2006) pointed out that satellite television has created new platforms for established news organisations in the Arab region, as well as offering Arab audiences the ability to select from various news providers and platforms. Broadcasting news channels such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya are a significant source of news and talk shows on regional and domestic affairs. This has also encouraged international news channels to target the Arab audience by way of non-Arabic TV services such as BBC Arabic and France 24. This significant increase in satellite channels has forced these channels to compete in their coverage and to offer political talk shows and live TV reporting. It has also influenced the work of other Pan Arab media outlets (Mellor, 2007). Furthermore, Sakr (2001) argued that this competition between TV channels with a focus mainly on news and current affairs created greater pressure to reach to audiences' expectations. This pressure has become even stronger with the emergence of the internet and social media, and alternative media platforms.

The emergence of satellite TV stations was an alternative medium for the regional audience. Many researchers suggested that news TV channels such as Al-Jazeera, Al Arabiya and BBC Arabic became an influential factor in the Arab media landscape. They created opinion diversity and released Arab audiences from the fear and silence established by government censorship and media control (Zayani, 2019). This influence could still be observed during the Arab spring uprisings of 2010 and 2011, as it played a vital role in the Arab media landscape. Satellite TV stations became a crucial player in the region news converge by encouraging political views and activists' participation in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya and Yemen. This comes along with the emergence of citizen journalism in the region, which has started shifting the relations between mainstream media and their audience in the Arab world, and transformed the media industry in several ways. The internet and social media

took this engagement to a new level by encouraging mainstream public participation, thereby promoting democratic behavior and leading to unrestrained political and social change.

The Pan Arab media gained an importance in media and journalism research as it expands to a wide audience under what know as pan-Arabism. This ideological philosophy reached a peak during the 1950s and 1960s and aim to create an Arab unity and the dream of Arab nationalism. According Hourani (2013) this movement come on the ground of “shared culture and historical experience as well as shared interests, to make it possible for them come into close union with each other, and such a union would not only give them greater collective power but would bring about that moral unity between people and government which would make government legitimate and stable” (p.401).

In regarding of pan Arab media , Mellor (2007) identified three reasons that make the Pan Arab media exceptionally noteworthy for media research; first, the Pan Arab media unrestricted to a single nation or one country; instead, it has a broad audience around the Arab world. Second, it could be considered trendsetters to other regional and national media organisations as it employs young and highly skilled media workers. Finally, pan-Arab media expand outside the region as it acts as Diaspora media for Arab immigrants in the United estate, Europe and other Western provinces.

### **3.2 Arab new media**

With the rise of citizen journalism, which allows the gathering and reporting of news in the online sphere, editors and professional journalists will no longer have exclusive access to news or information. This is a global communication transition, not simply limited to Arab media. Because of these telecommunication developments, several Arab media outlets have chosen to embrace digital technology in their coverage. This has allowed them to attain global standards, mainly in the rich countries of the Gulf region.

In general, the Arab region is facing steady growth in various communication sectors such as the internet, mobile technologies, and e-services. This is reflected in national and international reports (Ayish and Mellor, 2015). Statistics show that Arab internet users reached a total 164 million in 2018 approximately half of these users are using Facebook, with 78 million accounts in the Arab region and Twitter also seems to be a growing as well as numbers continually increasing (Statista, 2020). According to a study by the Northwestern University in Qatar (2019)

Egypt is the largest market for Facebook in MENA. It is home to 38 million daily users and 40 million monthly users. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are the fifth and sixth largest markets for Twitter globally. Over 10 million users are active on the social network in Saudi Arabia, and 8.3 million in Turkey (Dennis et al., 2019 ,p.6)

This growth in the use of the internet and social media in recent years has been a good foundation for the citizen journalism phenomenon to spread throughout the Middle East, where for the past decade the mass media has faced government censorship and control. The arrival of the internet appears to have brought many changes to Arabs' lives by giving them unrestricted access to a vast amount of worldwide news and information.

This change has made them part of a new cross-culture world citizenship that inspires many people to address social and political issues and try to make their voice heard. Over time, this tone of voice has changed, becoming more engaged and active in their enlarged social networks and imparting greater confidence to change some of the Arab political traditions (El Gody, 2007).

For example, bloggers are using journalism techniques and online channels in order to grasp public attention away from the government controlled media that throttles political expression by setting regulations. These bloggers, like most citizen journalists, are not formal professional journalists who are obliged to follow journalistic guidelines and laws or even ethical boundaries (Hamdy, 2009).

Traditional media organisations in the Arab region face real challenges in this new digital age that urges them to create new ways of engaging with Arab audiences through social media. Some of these methods employ real-time monitoring processes to measure user engagement, improve editorial choices, reevaluate their success rate and create new projects in order to satisfy their audiences (Gillespie, 2013). This shift in the transitional media mind-set has influenced many journalists in broadcasting, online and digital journalism. In his study on the Newsroom Convergence in Saudi Press organisations, Alzahrani (2016) concluded that

“Journalists nowadays can see the reactions of online users in real time, as soon as their work has been published. On the main website, readers’ comments on news stories have the same immediate effect. This development is changing the relationship between newsrooms and audience to more active one. It also transforms the role of readers from only receiving content to participating in news production and providing valuable information. This is a clear move towards a user-generated-content model where online users are contributing to the production of the news media outlets” (p.309).

However, this adoption of citizen journalism and social media into the newsroom comes with great expectations as well as high risks, mainly regarding the authority, credibility, reputation and trustworthiness of well-known news organisations. Reputations that have been years in the making (Gillespie, 2013). Although this issue could be problematic in some respects, it has given Arab citizen journalism the chance to escape mainstream media control and censorship and increase the freedom of speech in social media. As noted by (Beckerman, 2007), this social movement and the change in media practices originates from the younger generation. One that has been motivated to become involved in the public sphere regarding political and social issues in their countries, using social media and technological advances.

Newcomb (1994) points out that official TV channels in the Middle East, such as in the case of Egypt, had a vital role in public opinion by allowing different classes of society, mostly the unfortunate poverty-stricken class, to participate in public debates and express their challenging conditions to the audience through what could be viewed as a type of ‘cultural forum’ (Newcomb, 1994, cited in (Elsewi, 2011). However, the censorship and extreme

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control over these TV shows, asserted by governments over the years, have interrupted this cultural forum and has forced audiences to search for alternative means of public expression.

Nevertheless, new inventions in communication technologies have contributed to solve these issues, as various broadcasting channels appeared regionally and globally after using the satellites in the Middle East. These have supported freedom of speech by allowing the audience to be engaged without any restriction imposed on them. In addition, social media help millions of users all over the Arab region to create a combined, recognisable voice to express their case beyond government censorship (Elseewi, 2011).

It is important to highlight that the value of citizen journalism to political change only appeared during the Arab spring events of 2011. These events revealed ordinary Arab citizens using their smart phones to document every important aspect of the protests, posting and sharing them through social media platforms, blogging and writing about the violent demonstrations and, most importantly, asking the political regime to step down. All of this suggests that citizen journalism and social media played a significant role in political change in the Arab area (Hänska-Ahy and Shapour, 2013).

Nevertheless, it appears that official media and newspapers underestimated and ignored the significance of the spark that triggered the Arab spring event in Tunisia. Only social media platforms had the advantage of presenting the protesters' voice on the street. This point is supported by Wagner (2011) who points out that the use of phone technology played an essential role in the Tunisian uprising, which enabled the activists and protesters to express their political and economic demands and share whatever they witnessed during the protests through social media.

However, this integration between citizen journalism and Arab mainstream media is not only connected with the Arab spring uprising but had been evident in cases such as the Israel-Hizbollah conflict in 2006 in which this unusual link could be seen through the media and bloggers' reporting of the conflict. According to Hamdy (2009), there are many signs of dual coverage between traditional media and bloggers, as some journalists used blogs to post unpalatable pictures of the conflict to their audiences while bloggers focussed on analysing

mainstream media contents and were even hired by them in some cases. Al Arabiya news network, for instance, created audience-uploaded video reports allowing their audience to gain citizens' perspectives of the conflict.

Many news and information flows about the conflict into the media and blogosphere were contributed by citizen journalists. Hamdy (2009) stated that 'With bloggers blogging in and out of Lebanon, this conflict is considered the most blogged about war in recent history' (p13). There is no doubt that that this blogosphere was able to affect traditional media's priorities in the conflict coverage of the audience around them (Ward, 2007). Other examples include the Gaza war in 2008 which upturned the competition between traditional and alternative media in coverage of the war. This encouraged some media organisations to collaborate with Palestinian citizen journalists to obtain an on-the-ground perspective.

Aljazeera, for example, recognised the value of citizen journalism and participatory culture by creating a YouTube channel that encouraged Gaza's citizens to cover the war through videos and upload them to be shown on the network's website. This was in addition to the Twitter feed that tweeted continuous war updates (Cohen, 2009). This adaptation also included user-generated content in the form of reports, comments and links that created a virtual map with 15 pinpointed locations on Aljazeera's website (Shachtman, 2009). An interview with Al-Atrqchi, a senior editor at Al Jazeera English website, states that the value of the user-generated content from Gaza has showed to Aljazeera the importance of citizen journalism, which encouraged the news network to adopt it in the newsroom and become a chance to promote alternative media in key news stories coverage worldwide (Hamdy, 2010).

Over time, Arab citizen journalists and bloggers have had a notable impact on Arab media and politics, whether directly or by enabling civil society communication and expanding freedom of expression within social media, as characterised in the Arab spring uprising (Hamdy, 2009). In order to understand the impact of citizen journalism in the Arab spring movement, (Elsewi, 2011) suggests that social media changed the Arab audience from being recipients of TV and media content that idolised political figures and their propaganda, to become active participants in the new media era. An era in which they have the chance to

create their own media that allows them to direct their own distinct political voices to a new set of audiences.

Arab 'traditional media, such as print and broadcasting, remain largely controlled by government laws' (Freedom House, 2013, p18). According to Al-Saggaf (2006), 'Governments in many Arab countries exercise some control over television, radio, and the press. As a consequence, views from traditional media sources in the Arab world may not be entirely balanced, because Arab governments tend to steer material emanating from such sources toward their agendas' (pp.311-312).

Similar to Tunisia, official TV news in Egypt were misleading the public during the uprising by showing empty streets in Cairo to discourage people from protesting (Elseewi, 2011). However, the reality could be seen through a live feed in social media in a form of pictures, videos and posts as well as several global news channels, all of which documented the violence against protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square (ibid).

What the Arab spring added to the news industry in the Middle East is highly significant as it changed the conventional one-way news flow between traditional media and their audience to a complex practice where the audience gathers and presents the news through social media, thereby attracting mainstream media interest (Lotan et al., 2011). Even leading news channels in the Arab region like Al Jazeera choose to use citizens as a valuable news source, which makes them citizen journalists. Castells (2011) draws our attention to the fact that during the Arab spring event Al Jazeera gathered the widespread news and eyewitness accounts from activists' pages and groups and then rearranged them to be broadcast again to their audience. However this established a new mass media model based on the combination of traditional and modern media (Castells, 2011, cited in (Khondker, 2011), p678). During the Arab spring uprising, news channels like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya reported the protests and the violence on the street using updated news from social media platforms, Twitter feeds and YouTube (Allmeling, 2011).

Furthermore, social media had a significant role in the Arab spring uprising due to the strict control over the mass media by the governments, which made citizen journalism the only

opportunity for the protesters to broadcast the reality. This is evident in the case of Egypt as, in the middle of what could be described as revolution, the government's media channels were showing empty streets, old footage, and selective interviews of a few of the regime's supporters.

There is no doubt that the use of social media platforms, especially by citizen journalists, were highly effective in encouraging the uprisings and protests during the Arab spring (Lotan et al., 2011). During the Arab spring uprising, a lot of people worldwide followed these events using social media, especially from the accounts of those citizen journalists who were using Arabic and English in their tweets and posts (ibid). However, this trend shows how much audiences rely on citizen journalists, who are audiences themselves, to provide them with news, a matter which complicates what we know about audience response to the professional media.

The technological evolution in the media over recent years created a massive opportunity for audiences to become actively involved and even control the media process (Metzger and Flanagin, 2002). However as Benkirane (2012) described the situation: 'Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions were followed through the live broadcast of amateur videos, audio interviews, short message service, tweets and emails sent by average citizens. In the beginnings of the Arab spring, social networks and information feeds were used primarily for what they are intended to be used for: connecting people on urgent issues for the sharing of vital information related to human security' (p1). And despite the violent acts against the protesters, however, 'the role of cell phones also proved crucial [in Tunisia]. Citizen journalists kept file-sharing websites supplied with photos and videos, and fed images to streaming websites' (Reporters without Borders, 2011, cited in (Wagner, 2011)p.55).

In those cases when the internet and social media were blocked during the Arab spring uprising, traditional media became essential to the coverage As Jenkins (2010) points out: 'we do not live on a platform; we live across platforms. We choose the right tools for the right job'. Nonetheless, the Arab spring citizen journalists went further than just documenting the demonstrations. They presented to the world the reasons which led them to these actions: governmental violence, restrictions over the freedom of speech, weaknesses and

corruption in the political regime and human rights violations, and did so while supporting those claims with pictorial evidence and videos to convince the world (El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2012). In her article on What to expect from the Post-Pan-Arab Media, Jessica Watkins spoke on this change in pan Arab news by saying

“Widespread disillusionment with established Arab satellite news channels has generated a diversification in media consumption patterns. By all accounts, Arab audiences have become savvier and more selective in their viewing habits, seeking to verify information from a range of sources. (Watkins, 2019)

### 3.3 Scope of the study

Al Arabiya is a twenty-four-hour news channel that was launched in 2003 in Dubai on the eve of the American invasion of Iraq, placing it in the middle of the action. The channel is part of the MBC group (Middle East Broadcasting Center), which is owned by investors from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf countries (Ayish and Mellor, 2015). The Middle East Broadcasting Center is the first private free-to-air satellite broadcasting company in the Arab World. It was launched in September 1991, becoming the first Arabic satellite TV station to be broadcast from Europe, specifically London and then change its headquarters to be Dubai media city since 2002.

Today, the "MBC Group" includes more than 17 television channels and has established itself as an important aspect in the contemporary Arab media scene. The group provides Arab audiences with a wide range of public channels some of which focus on family entertainment such as MBC1 which is considered to be the most watched channel in the Middle East (Shapiro, 2005). Some of the television channels focus on certain target audiences such as MBC3 for children's programs or for TV genres such as MBC action which is devoted to films and TV series. Moreover, others focus on being dedicated to a country or language such as MBC Persia, MBC Egypt and MBC Iraq. During the last decade, the group has become an influential player in the Arab broadcasting landscape. According to the annual report from the Dubai Press Club (DPC) on Arab media status:

“Pan Arab market is concentrated amongst few groups with the Saudi-based Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) dominating Arab viewership for the past five years. This is possibly due to its first mover advantage of being the Arab world’s first private free-to-air satellite broadcaster in 1991.” (DPC, 2017)

The group has also invested significantly over the past years in digital platforms and social media sites. One these project is “Shahid” platform, a streaming service that offer video on demand platform under the subscription system which resemble to Netflix. Furthermore, MBC Media Group joined the list of the 10 most viewed platforms around the world for video content via social networks, according to the results released by the global specialist “Tubular Labs” for the month of May 2020 (OKAZ, 2020a)

Al Arabiya were introduced as part of the broadcasting group in 2003 from Dubai media city. It began by operating a joint production with several news channels, such as the case of collaboration between the MBC bureau in Washington and the CNN to report world events (Cochrane, 2007). The cooperation in news production improved to establish Al Arabiya as an independent channel with a separate budget from the MBC group – part of what some could call ‘Saudi media empire’ (Sakr, 2006). Al Arabiya initially adopted an ‘All the news’ logo and change it later to ‘Know more’. This logo according to the branding company aim to “ to re-affirm once and for all Al Arabiya as the news channel of choice in the minds of Middle Eastern viewers, ensuring their acceptance as the primary news provider.” (Akerman, 2007). According to Al Arabiya website:

“The Al Arabiya News Channel, a 24/7 free-to-air news and current affairs satellite outlet, is ranked the top news channel across many countries in the region, reaching 36 million viewers a week. The network has seen strong growth in its social and digital platforms, including Al Arabiya English and other foreign language editions, with more than 20 million users viewing 88 million web pages every month” (Naar, 2020, para 2)

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In 2014, the Al Arabiya network added a new television service, Al Hadath, that focusses in depth on news developments and analyses, also adding a social media department with broad activities across several social media platforms. It also launched an English language website which linked to Al Arabiya net which aim to be “a bridge between the Arabic-language television channel and the English-speaking world,” (Behraves, 2014).

The recent addition of Arab news integration with citizen journalism comes with, I see (Ana Ara), a phone application that was promoted by Al Arabiya and Al-Hadath news channels in 2015. The app not only targets political issues as, according to Al Arabiya’s website, the application includes nine sections. The user can participate through them by publishing what he sees around him, worldwide. These sections are: politics, sports, community, style, food, movies, technology, comedy and music (Alarabiya, 2015). In his demonstration of the app, Mohammed Jamal, director of the Al Arabiya ‘podcast’ and supervisor of the project ‘I see’, points out that this service entrenches the concept of ‘journalist citizen’, and supports activists to deliver what they see around them to millions of people across Al Arabiya platforms, including TV channels and social networks (ibid). The channel also adds a daily interactive newsletter called ‘Your interaction’ that reviews, over half an hour, the most prominent events and developments from peoples’ interaction in social media, whether those events are political, social, sports or artistic (Alarabiya, 2017).

Many researches argue that the channel came as a respond to the Al Jazeera news converge and influence in the region. Sakr (2006) argue that since its launch on the eve of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the network has established itself as an important competitor to Aljazeera. According to Walid Al Ibrahim, the owner of both Al Arabiya and mbc groups the channel aim to “provide a more moderate alternative to Al Jazeera” (Shapiro, 2005). He also that Al Arabiya could force itself as alternative for Arab audience “toward democracy and an opponent of dictatorship, repression and Islamic extremism’ (Zayani and Ayish, 2006, p.483).

	Al-Arabiya	Al-Jazeera
Launched	3rd of March 2003	12th of November 1996
Based	Dubai Media City, United Arab Emirates	Doha media city, Qatar
Funded	Owned by Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) and funded by Saudi, Kuwaiti and Lebanese investments	Part of Al Jazeera Media Network (AJMN) which funded by the Qatari government
Info	In 2014 a new TV service were added "Al-Hadath" the Arabic word for action. Internet news service (alarabiya.net) in Arabic, English, Persian and Urdu. FM news radio service	The network provide number of international channels including Al-Jazeera English and online website and provided to the MENA and Middle East reigns free of charge by with a satellite or cable connection

**Table 3.1.: A comparison between the Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera new channels**

Al-Jazeera news channel that means the island in Arabic consider to be one of the most controversial news channel in the Arab world and plays a vital role in political and media scene in the Middle East. The channel was established in November 1996 in Qatar to be first Arab news satellite channel. The channel was financed by the Qatari government and it also relied on viewer revenue and advertising (El-Nawawy et al., 2002). The channel become widely recognized and gained a global attention in a result of its coverage to the war in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 (Ayish and Mellor, 2015). The international news channel started with a funding of \$150 million from the Emir of Qatar during that time (Mitchell et al., 2012). With impact of the Al Jazeera globally, the channel still largely funded as it an annual \$100 million by Qatar government and having a general spending that reach \$650 million (ibid).

The channel focusses on news content and public affairs programmers that tackle Arab issues, in addition to debate, shows and documentaries. From its launch, Al Arabiya was seen as a counterbalance to Al Jazeera's political views and practices. These insights proved to be true especially during the Arab spring uprisings when the two channels carried two different narratives toward the uprising and Muslim brotherhood (Ayish and Mellor, 2015). Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya are considered to be the two largest news channels in the Arab region (Mellor et al., 2011) .

Al Jazeera's support of the Muslim brotherhood, especially in Egypt, is considered to be the main dissimilarity with Al Arabiya's coverage, which supports the current Egyptian regime. Al Arabiya also appears to promote what they describe as moderate Islamic voices, unlike Aljazeera which carries some Islamic views in order to present both sides of the argument (Lynch, 2006). He highlights that the Al Arabiya network has offered more liberal views of the issues in the Middle East, which contrast with Aljazeera's. This is evident in the different narratives that the two news channels expressed toward the Arab spring uprising. According to Zayani and Ayish (2006)

"Al-Arabiya strives to match Al-Jazeera's proclaimed independence while avoiding its provocative style, eschewing its sensationalistic appeal, insisting on making a clear distinction between fact and opinion, and steering clear from the politics of other Arab and especially Gulf countries. By and large, al-Arabiya pitched itself as a neutral channel that cares for Arab interests and staying away from pursuing ambiguous agendas and other parties' interests "(p. 483).

### 3.3.1 Al Arabiya mission and principles

According to the network stylebook Al Arabiya is "a private news TV channel that transmits news around the clock Al-Arabiya is an establishment possessed by the private sector and not by a public-sector organ or department. Its main objective is to achieve legitimate commercial profit by providing a reliable professional press service. The Channel believes that it provides the service via adopting an independent reporting policy that is founded on professional criteria focusing on addressing intellect and logic, keeping away from inciting emotions. It also carefully selects the correct pieces of information and present them in an illogical and balanced framework, Al Arabiya TV Channel strives to be portrayed in the eyes and minds of its watchers as close to reality as in this strive it gives preference to professional considerations over other ones (consideration) whether political or otherwise.

Furthermore, the network abides by the values of media integrity and international covenants that safeguard the profession of press while keeping away from political partialism

social fanaticism. It also declares that it is an Arabic- culture media platform that is open to the other and believing in multiplicity. More importantly, the Channel was born in its environment so that it can fit it.”

In fact, Al-Arabiya complies with the following principles:

#### 1-The right of knowledge

The Channel believes all people have the natural right to properly know and freely express the truth. It is keen on giving the opportunity to all parties concerned to express themselves and present their respective attitudes.

#### 2-Responsibility:

Al Arabiya Channel always seeks to achieve a maximum possible degree of equilibrium between the right of circulation of information and news as well as expression of opinion from one side and between the limit of legal, literal, and moral responsibility from the other side.

#### 3- Professional integrity:

The Channel confirms that it is essential that all its staff must abide by the professional principles; and that they should not employ their positions for promoting their personal opinions or to the positions of particular political forces.

#### 4-Supervision

Al Arabiya strives its level best to find out without restrictions the truth, but it rejects all forms of supervision and dictation over the news which should be dealt with in the frame of what is dictated by the principles and ethics of the profession.

#### 5- Violence and discrimination

Al Arabiya gives due attention to the feelings and sensitivities of the viewer. Hence, it subjects the material that comprises scenes of violence or incitement for violence, hatred or religious or ethnic discrimination to minute and thorough investigation in a manner that does neither affect the news value of the material nor the right of the viewer in knowing the truth.

### 6- Sensation

Al Arabiya averts the adoption of sensational method that aims to emotionally charge the audience. Likewise, it avoids any exaggerative contexts that instigates violence with a view to achieving partialism or cheap attraction of audience.

### 7-Professional solidarity

Al-Arabia defends the right of every reporter (pressman/ journalist when he performs his task with due integrity and responsibility. It also commits itself to supporting journalists in undertaking the activities that protects the freedom of the press.

### 8- Intellectual property

Al Arabiya TV Channel respects the right of intellectual property; and it does not use at all the product or work of other, whether partially or wholly, without their expressed permission or reference to the source. It also follows all relevant human rights covenants laws that are applied nationally and internationally.

### 3.3.2 Al Arabiya in face of extremism

As news network working in turmoil region, Al Arabiya received number of threats and face attacks from extremists' groups since it was lunched. Some criticised the channel converge in some " Islamist web Iraq which they consider pro American. According to Hammond (2007) sites had by this time begun to refer to Al Arabiya dismissively as Al 'Ibriya or "the Hebrew Channel" recognition of a perceived desire to win American approval through granting considerable space to American officials and their allies in Iraq" (p.4).

The channel opened its offices in Baghdad in 2003 and has since been subjected to a series of terrorist attacks and threats by extremist groups. In September 2008, its manager, Jawad Al-Hattab, narrowly escaped from a bomb placed under his car. In October 2006, a car bomb explosion targeting the canal killed 7 people and wounded 20 others. Several journalists from Al Arabiya were injured or assassinated in targeted operations. Atwar Bahjat and two of her

colleagues were killed in February 2006 near Samarra in the south of the country, and Jawad Kadhim was injured during a kidnapping attempt in June 2006. In September 2006, the channel was closed for a month, following a decision by the Iraqi government. After Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki accused this channel of inciting sectarianism and violence, it was prevented from covering the vote on a law on governorate independence that the Sunni Arab minority was against.

On Monday, July 26, 2010, a car bomb exploded, destroying the offices of Al Arabiya News Channel in Al-Harithiya in central Baghdad. According to the first outcome, three people were killed, 16 wounded, and one person was missing. This attack occurred in the wake of several threats made by terrorist networks. (Kami, 2010). This was condemned by independent journalism organisations such as Reporters Without Borders (RSF). However, such rapid attack continues on the other region such as Syria and with extremist groups such as ISIS which were responsible for assassinating number of journalists and media workers in Iraq and Syria.

### 3.4 The conclusion

Citizen journalism, especially in the Arab region, adds more benefits in this new form of media collaboration by giving Arab citizens the opportunity to exercise freedom of speech in social media and TV news channels, breaking the longstanding control and censorship over the mass media in the region.

This could be seen clearly in the role that social media users and citizen journalists played in the Arab spring uprising by offering an on-the-spot coverage and expression platform for activists and social movements in a number of Arab countries such as Egypt and Tunisia. These uprisings proved that citizen journalism could be an important source of news and information, and encouraged major Arab news networks such as Al Arabiya to pay more attention to Arab audience engagement and the social media adoption.

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## Chapter Four: Research Design: Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the integration of citizen and participatory journalism in Arab broadcasting media through a detailed analysis of Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels. With news organisations becoming more reliant on content from citizens or activists on social media, the research aims to shine a new light on the changing nature of newsgathering routines and practices. It also examines journalists' understanding of citizen and networked journalism, their attitude towards audience participation and the methods they use to gather, verify and integrate user-generated content (UGC) into their news coverage and programmes.

This research used mixed methods including both qualitative and quantitative data collection in the form of in-depth interviews with journalists, editors and news-editorial magments, as well as newsroom observation and content analysis of news reports to gain a better understanding of how and why Al Arabiya and Al Hadath adopt UGC. It also explores the way content creation and collaboration with audience members could impact journalists' understandings of their role as gatekeepers.

Furthermore, the research is qualitatively driven, which means that data were first generated from semi-structured interviews, newsroom observation and obtained documents, and then supported by content analysis of news reports. Having gathered qualitative data from in-depth interviews and newsroom observation, a decision was reached to involve a quantitative contents analysis of news programs and segments using UGC and networked journalism in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. This aims to connect the research field data to the news outputs.

This chapter in particular introduces the research design employed for this research and it discusses the methodological approach used to answer the research questions. This includes the procedure, methods and tools that were selected for data collection. The use of these methods will also be justified in this chapter based on the value they add to the research objectives and question. It is a widely held view that choosing a suitable methodology when conducting academic research can improve the quality of the results. As Marshall and Rossman (2016) point out, researchers should select the research design that best answers the research questions. Therefore, the methodology in this study aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the fundamental patterns of the integration of networked journalism into Arab newsrooms and programmes?

- How does networked journalism change the relationship between Arab news channels and their audience?
- What is the motivation of Arab media to adopt networked journalism and to encourage audience engagement?
- How does networked journalism reshape Arab newsrooms and programmes?

RQ2: How do Arab news channels interact with user-generated content?

- What are the challenges and benefits related to integrating user-generated content into Arab news programming?
- What criteria and gatekeeping processes are used to determine whether user-generated content meets established news standards in Arab media?
- How do Arab news channels verify user-generated content and deal with credibility issues and ethical boundaries?
- What are the broader implications of this integration for journalism practice and professional journalists in the Arab media?

## 4.2 Research Methods and Design

The research adopted a case-study design to understand the integration of networked and citizen journalism in Arab news media. It aims to provide an in-depth understanding of this new phenomenon and how the age of social media has altered the role of journalists. The research data were obtained via qualitative and quantitative research methods including newsroom observations and interviews with Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath journalists and producers. These were supported by qualitative content analysis of news programmes that made use of citizen journalism and UGC.

According to Yin (2003), a research design is a rational plan for the researcher to obtain data starting with questions phase to conclude answers to these questions. Researchers in qualitative studies seek to interpret and explain phenomena using non-numeric methods that focus on meaning and context (Kakabadse and Steane, 2010). Qualitative research therefore starts with “how” or “what” questions as it aims to produce this understanding (Harling, 2012). It shows different perspectives of the research participants’ views and interpretations of the topic or events (Sandelowski, 2015). According to Bruns (2008), qualitative research could play a vital role in understanding how citizen journalism is integrated into news processes. Studies into the participatory culture in news organisations tend to use qualitative methodology to analyse the media production process and to underline the factors involved in this new type of journalism (Atton, 2009). Furthermore, this research approach provides “a way to explore the nature of news as a form of cultural meaning making – its creation, content and dissemination” (Bird, 2010, p.1) . Therefore, qualitative methods are particularly useful in this research, which enquires into the way that Arab broadcasting journalists and news organisations engage with participatory and citizen journalism.

Case studies are one of the most commonly used methodologies in qualitative research. They are considered to be a well-established approach in academic areas such as social science and journalism studies. As a qualitative research approach, case studies pay attention to the phenomenon within its daily context and environment. They also focus on a detailed contextual analysis of known events or conditions and they study their relationships in depth.

One of the best-known case-study scholars described a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003 ,p.18). This interpretive, naturalistic approach to the research subject allows the researcher to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011 ,p.3). It also provides an effective investigation tool and enhances the researcher's understanding of a new phenomenon (Wimmer and Dominick, 2013). Therefore, it is an ideal method when a comprehensive, in-depth investigation is required (Feagin et al., 1991). Qualitative case studies use several methods for this purpose, including interviews, observations, audio-visual content and documents, which finally result in a case report description and case-based themes.

As part of qualitative research, a case study could be individual or multiple and it could also be a simple or complex collective case study. Individual cases focus on one person's experiences such as those of a teacher, child or adult. However, complex cases have a group or community angle such as neighbourhoods, campaigns, organisational culture or the working environment. According to Yin (2003) , case studies could include a singular organisation and location or multiple organisations and locations if a comparative case study is appropriate. Media studies suggest that journalism practices and standards feed into a social construction of news systems that are influenced by complex work procedures, news flow and journalists' roles and experiences (Tuchman, 1978, Fishman, 1988). This research focuses on one main organisation that is divided into two news channels. It uses a combination of in-depth interviews and observation to address the research questions.

#### 4.2.1 Interviews

It is widely argued that interviews are the most commonly used method for collecting empirical data in qualitative research (Bryman, 2004). This research uses in-depth semi-structured interviews with journalists, editors and management at Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath newsrooms as a primary source of data. According to Gaskell (2000), the interview method

provides essential data to develop our understanding of the relationship between social actors and their situations. Gaskell adds: 'The objective of interviews is a fine-textured understanding of the beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations in relation to the behaviours of people in a particular social context' (p. 39). Consequently, as the overarching aim of the research is to determine participants' attitudes and practices with regard to the integration of citizen media into their traditional media environment, it is considered to be a primary source of data.

Gubrium and Holstein (2002) describes an interview as an interactive process between the interviewer and the interviewee. The semi-structured approach helps to facilitate this interaction by offering open-ended questions and topics to the interviewee with the researcher able to expand on a particular topic of interest by asking follow-up questions. It also gives the participants the chance to express their own views on their own terms. According to Aborisade (2013), the semi-structured technique facilitates a probing interview with an interview guide and additional follow up questions when needed. This was especially useful during the research; all interviews were conducted with the aid of a prepared interview guide but the participants were free to reflect on their experience of the integration. This supported the value of using the interview method in the first place and provided a strong tool to obtain the detailed, expressive opinions and experiences of the participants (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

However, as with any data collection method, qualitative interviews face a number of criticisms for different reasons, whether they be an objection to qualitative research in general or to the qualitative interview process. According to Kvale (1996), criticisms of qualitative interviews are divided into external and internal criticisms. The former includes relying on the participants' subjective opinions, lacking generalisability, and being suitable for exploration rather than for hypothesis testing. Internal criticisms include overlooking the social interactions of the participants and their wider setting within which they are embedded. Furthermore, Yanos and Hopper (2008) point out that one of the issues regarding qualitative interviews is that the researcher may fail to address topics and issues beyond their participants' comfort zone as a result of self-censorship and as a consequence of attaining findings based on the researchers' presumptions.

Therefore, combining multiple sources of data would help to improve the case study's reliability and validity, as well as explaining the phenomenon under study (Gillham, 2000). One significant concept in social science studies is triangulation, which refers to the use of a number of research methods to examine the same phenomenon. According to Stake (2005), research triangulation is "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (p.22). During the data collection, triangulation aims to find multiple sources of evidence in order to check the relevant information in the research (Yin, 2003). As a result, this gives depth to the collected data and to the research. Using multiple sources and methods in the data collection process would provide significant strength to the case under study (Soy, 2015). It also provides an important means to ensure the validity of case study research (Johansson, 2007). This view is supported by Chenail (2011), who argues that research triangulation should not be underestimated as it enhances the validity and reliability the data and results.

Using different data collection techniques within one study or combining In-depth interviewing and observation methods to understand a case study are common procedures for qualitative research, especially related to newsroom studies. Hansen et al. (1998) argues that "researchers should not only consider which is the most appropriate method for the study of their chosen topic but also what combination of research methods will produce a better and deeper understanding of it" (p.1).

According to Singer (2009), qualitative case studies and ethnography use a number of research methods, but the most commonly combined methods are interviews and observation. In addition, the researcher could also add document analysis, visual recording, diaries and more. Singer also points out that in media studies it is possible to incorporate content analysis of the final outputs created by the people being examined (ibid). Therefore, a methodological triangulation comprising in-depth interviews, observation and content analysis has been adopted in this dissertation. As Singer highlights, "such triangulation increases confidence in the interpretation of the findings; it is particularly useful for exploring the "why" as well as the "what" of a subject" (p.91). Observation was used in this research to fill the information gap and strengthen the interview findings. This was supported by the

content analysis of programmes and segments using participatory or citizen journalism content, as well as documentation that related to the integration of this content, such as editorial guidelines, plans and policy documents.

#### 4.2.2 Observation

Observation has a long tradition in the social sciences; according to Marshall and Rossman (2016) Observation is defined as " the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" . In particular, the observation is a classic form of qualitative research in which a researcher gathers observational data in a group or organisation, following access to their research site. Musante and DeWalt (2010) argues that observation offers researchers a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study. It enables them to look beyond the participants' responses to the interview questions and to observe and analyse the organisation's decision-making processes through an observation (ibid). This could provide valuable insights into how the research participants are behaving and interacting, especially regarding new practices or phenomena. It offers an effective way to conduct this research, which explores participatory and citizen journalism as a new practice in Arab broadcasting media.

According to Paterson and Domingo (2008), 'any technological development is embedded in an adoption process where subjects make conscious or unconscious decisions that only close observation can trace' (p. 1). A significant discussion on the value of the observation method in newsrooms to study how news is produced was presented by Hansen et al. (1998), who argue that observation goes "behind the scenes of media output to help reveal the complex of forces, constraints and conventions that inform the shape, selections and silences of media output" (p44). This view is supported by Harrison (1995), who suggests that observation is "the only method by which the normally invisible world of journalistic activity and media production can be recorded and analysed" (p180).

Thus, to examine the dynamics of participatory and citizen journalism adoption in newsrooms and interactive programmes, an observation was conducted in the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath

newsrooms. The observation process focused on production dynamics, the decision making inside the newsroom, and programmes that adopted UGC and audience interactivity. The observations focused particularly on how these contents are obtained, chosen, verified and filtered by journalists and editors in the newsroom. Additionally, they attempted to identify the gaps between what the journalists stated in the interviews and what the decision-making and production realities appeared to be. Finally, the data analysis process for data from the interviews and observation was carried out using atlas.ti software, which supports both English and Arabic language. The aim was to create an integrated body of work that could be used and disseminated in several forms.

### **4.3 Procedure and Fieldwork**

The research uses a qualitative case study of Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews with journalists, producers, editorial management and social media creators from both channels. It also includes major observation in the channels' headquarters in Dubai. Yin (2003) highlighted the need for researchers to review the relevant literature and structure a theoretical framework on the case study prior to any data collection. This differentiates case studies from other methodologies such as ethnography and grounded theory. This view is supported by Merriam (1998), who suggested a step-by-step guideline for case study researchers which also includes identifying the research problem, formulating the research questions and selecting the purposive sample.

In this dissertation, the research design, methods and procedure were decided prior to the actual fieldwork. This included a data collection plan, a summary of the interview process, a question guide, consent form and information sheet. One of the main challenges when conducting fieldwork research in news production is gaining permission to observe the work inside the news organisation (Paterson et al., 2016). Therefore, a formal request was sent to the MBC Group (Middle East Broadcasting Centre), which manages the two news channels, in order to gain access to the newsrooms and authorise the researcher to conduct observations and interviews with network staff. The request was emailed to Human Resources, including a formal letter from the research supervisor, the university's ethical approval and a document

explaining the research purpose and procedure. The permission process took longer than expected but it was finally approved by the Editor-in-Chief. Fieldwork arrangements were made after permission was obtained, including flights and accommodation at Dubai Media City next to the network headquarters. This allowed more time and access for the observation.

#### 4.3.1 Fieldwork Observation

With the time given to the researcher, the focus was on cases that dealt directly with the recent shift in newsgathering towards adopting UGC. A two-week observation period allowed the researcher to view the work up close with different teams and departments in the case study, such as Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath newsrooms, the Al-Arabiya website, the social media team and the Persian team. It highlighted the collaboration and interaction in the newsroom, editing area and control room at both primetime and off-peak news times. The researcher also joined in the daily news editorial and social media team meetings, which were recorded with a prepared observational note sheet. The observation included observing the preparation and live broadcasting of programmes such as Al-Arabiya Morning, Your Interaction, the fourth and fifth newscasts at Al-Arabiya and daily newscasts at Al Hadath. All of these were connected to the research on the integration of participatory and citizen journalism.

During the observation, the researcher examined the general workflow, the news production dynamics, the decision-making processes and the interactions between journalists within newsrooms. The researcher reordered observation notes on how the teams of the newsrooms and programmes interacted, with a particular focus on the use of social media and the adoption of UGC. The observations also included an assessment of the transformative processes and key factors involving the integration of UGC within each newsroom and programme. Finally, the observation sought to identify the gaps between what the participants put forward in the interviews and what the production and decision-making realities seemed to be.

A strict protocol was applied during the fieldwork, including a security check and being given an access card to the newsroom on a daily basis. Taking photographs during the observation also required permission from the observed participants, all of which are understandable in a broadcasting environment. Obtaining organisational documents such as editorial guidelines, plans and policy documents was difficult.

Patton (2005) points out that analysing documents in particular can present challenges such as gaining access to the documents, understanding how these documents are used and produced, and connecting documents with other data from interviews and observations. The researcher aimed to conduct document analysis as part of the observation process. However, access was also denied to certain documents including the newsroom guidelines. Only one document could be obtained and that focused on the personal use of social media by the newsroom staff. There were no clear guidelines on the use of social media or UGC as newsgathering tools. A number of practices pointed to the fact that the guidelines at both channels were general and did not include new topics such as verification on social media or journalists' work with UGC. This generated discussion during the interviews on the significance of guidelines and it helped the researcher to understand the risks and challenges that journalists faced without this guidance. This will be discussed in depth in the analysis chapter.

#### 4.3.2 Fieldwork Interviews

DeMarrais (2004) points out that 'qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experience' (p.52). Therefore, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with journalists, editors and social media specialists at the two main channels in order to examine and comprehend, in depth, the ways they dealt with the integration of participatory and citizen journalism in their work. By conducting these interviews, the researcher aimed to understand and identify the main challenges, issues and opportunities facing participatory and citizen journalism as a practice in these news outlets.

The data collocation took place over two connected weeks and it was divided between the interviews and observation. The researcher used the first two days to become familiar with the channels' departments, the newsroom settings and the daily workflow. This helped to identify which cases fitted the research aims and questions. A timetable was drawn up based on this information in order to make the observation phase short and productive. The morning slots were a chance to observe and interview journalists from editorial departments such as the social media unit and website management, while the afternoon slot focused on the programmes such *Your Interaction* that ran from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm. The last week was dedicated to interviewing the journalists who worked closely with UGC and citizen journalism.

Gathering accurate data was challenging at the beginning, especially regarding journalists' daily routines and their processes for verification and identifying mistakes. Some were suspicious or tended to be defensive of their work. They gave general claims about the accuracy of UGC they provided in the news. No major criticisms were heard of the process or workflow from the participants inside the newsroom. This was understandable due to the sensitivity of their news work. With time, more details appeared from the interviews, supported by examples and cases they faced when dealing with citizen journalism or activists on the ground.

At the beginning, the data were rather limited due these concerns. A decision was made by the researcher to postpone some of the interviews in order to first gain an in-depth understanding of the newsroom practices. Interviews with head executives, for instance, were carried out on the last days of the fieldwork because of their busy schedule. However, this helped the researcher to formulate better interview questions, linking journalists and producers' respondents and presenting critical examples to be discussed with them. It also helped to provide smoother and more productive interviews with the management. This method allowed the participants to deal with the researcher as "a person who can comfortably participate in 'normal' conversations" (Murchison, 2010 , p.102). The journalists' understanding and trust in the research increased with time. The observation period also helped to build better communication with the journalists and to ease their concerns. On

several occasions, the participants were very cooperative, offering their explanations and opinions on the newsroom workflow.

As part of the observation aims, the researcher requested to attend the daily editorial meeting, normally attended by channel departments and led by the General Director. The researcher was granted permission to attend the main editorial meeting along with a number of staff meetings. This helped to generate useful information for the research and to create a clearer understanding of the way that the network departments interacted and the news was produced. The meetings were documented using traditional note taking as permission was not granted to record them with a recording device. As the researcher had himself worked previously as a news reporter it was not difficult to navigate the newsroom structure and department. The management also helped to facilitate this step by introducing the researcher to the social media unit at first and he went from there to other departments and units in the channels. The choice of the unit was based on its connection to the research's aims and questions.

#### 4.3.3 Interview guide and schedule

Designing the interview guide and questions was a significant step prior to the actual fieldwork. The interview guide helped to standardise the interviews in order to gain similar responses from the participants on each aspect of the research (Seale et al., 2003). The guide included a summary of the interview process, background information on the research, and a set of structured interview questions. The questions were developed based on the main research questions and the themes that had emerged through the literature review (see Table 4.1). During the interviews, all of the participants were asked a set of structured questions regarding the investigated topic, while other parts were unstructured and were designed to explore the participants' views and experiences in detail. This interview method allows for "probing of views and opinions where it is desirable for respondents to expand on their answers" (Gray, 2019 ,p.409). Face-to-face semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions, were consciously adopted to prompt a flow of meaningful answers and

information with the participants. In-depth interviewers are in general likely to “probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions” (Lune and Berg, 2017 , p.69).

**Table 4.1: Operationalisation of research questions**

Research questions	Areas covered in the interviews	Examples of corresponding questions in the interviews
RQ1/1 RQ1/2	Citizen journalism understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your understanding of the terms: ‘citizen journalism’, ‘networked journalism’ and “user generated contents”?</li> <li>• How common is Al-Arabiya adopting these kind of journalism practices?</li> </ul>
RQ1/3 RQ2/4	Describing the relation with the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you describe Arabiya and your relation as journalist with the audience?</li> <li>• How did the social media change the way you deal with the audience?</li> <li>• To what extend does the audience contribute of contents creation?</li> </ul>
RQ1/5	Networked journalism elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why these types of contents are used? Is it Journalist or editorial choice?</li> <li>• In details, as possible: what is the process of adopting citizen journalism / user generated contents in Al-Arabiya?</li> <li>• To what extend do you depend in these contents?</li> </ul>
RQ1/3 RQ1/4	Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the main motivations for adapting networked journalism in Al-Arabiya?</li> <li>• Do you think that the audience increase interest in social media forces news channel to change the way they deal with them?</li> <li>• How does Al-Arabiya encourage the collaboration with the audience?</li> </ul>
RQ2/2	Advantages and disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the main challenges / barriers of adopting networked journalism or user generated contents in Al-Arabiya?</li> <li>• Do you think adopting networked journalism process with the research and section and verification are time consuming for journalists? Worth it?</li> </ul>
RQ1/6 RQ2/5	Reshape the newsroom and journalists’ practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the implications of adopting networked journalism on the newsroom routine / on journalists?</li> <li>• What are the criteria which used in Al-Arabiya to choose certain user generated contents or collaborating with the audience?</li> <li>• What does the journalists add to these contents?</li> </ul>

<p>RQ2/1 RQ2/2</p>	<p>Verification</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you verify citizen journalism materials / user generated contents?</li> <li>• Is it a journalists' task or the social media team?</li> <li>• Do you think the adoption could allow spreading fake news?</li> <li>• To what extend do you think the adoption risk the credibility, objectivity?</li> <li>• What are the ethical boundaries you take in consideration in the adoption?</li> <li>• Does the channel provide journalists with guideline to deal with the audience, user generated contents, and social media?</li> </ul>
<p>RQ2/3 RQ2/5</p>	<p>Gatekeeping role and agenda setting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How could the relation with audience be more collaborative?</li> <li>• Did journalists' control of the news flow change with networked journalism?</li> <li>• What is the role of a journalist of adopting user generated contents?</li> <li>• How much control needed to deal with networked journalism?</li> <li>• To what extend you think that working with the media audience threat the traditional gatekeeping role of broadcasting journalist?</li> <li>• To what extend you think that selecting trending topic, hashtag, videos would change the agenda setting from the media provider to the users?</li> </ul>

Babbie (2010) showed that the researcher plays a role in setting the time and agenda for the interviews, guided by an interview schedule. Therefore, the times for the interviews were based on a schedule, along with the observation period. However, coordinating some interviews was difficult due to the participants' availability, such as those with the head of the newsroom and some news presenters. The interviews focused on three main areas: the participatory and citizen journalism elements integrated into news coverage and programmes; the verification process and challenges of using these contents in 24-hour news channels; and finally, the impact of this integration on journalistic practices and newsrooms.

#### 4.3.4 Research Sampling

A combination of purposive and snowball or chain sampling was used for the data collection. This procedure allows the researcher to focus in depth on the topics and issues that are important to the study. Purposive sampling is "one of the most common sampling strategies, it groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research

question" (Mack, 2005 ,p.16). Snowball sampling is used when the research participants recruit or recommend other potential participants for the study. The research started with the social media team, which is closely connected to citizen journalism and UGC.

Observations and in-depth interviews with these team members led to the recruitment of other possible participants who were related to the topic. Prior cases were selected for the research, such as the Your Interaction programme and the I see project with purposive sampling. However, participants' responses regarding examples of the use of citizen journalism and social media in news coverage led to other examples such as the Al-Arabiya morning show, and the fourth and fifth newscasts, which were also suitable cases for the research.

All of the interviews were conducted face to face with thirty participants between 26 June 2018 and 9 July 2018. All of these were organised inside Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath's headquarters, except for one extensive interview with the I see app founder, which at the interviewee's request was conducted in a suitable coffee shop nearby (see Table4.2). Creswell et al. (2007) suggested that researchers should determine a quiet location to conduct interviews in order to minimise distractions. This was highly important as the research was conducted within a busy newsroom environment, therefore such pre-recording procedures were followed.

The participants were asked to choose a suitable time and location for the interviews. These included empty meeting rooms or editing and sound recording areas, all of which were free to be used during the interview period. Most of the participants were pleased to choose one of these locations for the interviews as they were away from distractions and enabled the recording of a clear sound. Others preferred to record the interview at their work station including the newsroom and they were asked to keep the recording device at a short distance. No major distractions happened during these interviews, however in some cases the participants spoke with other newsroom members on an urgent matter and in these cases the recording was stopped for ethical and confidentiality reasons.

In-depth interviews have been described as "one of the most powerful methods"" in qualitative research as they allow the researcher to "step in the mind of another person to

see and experience the world as they do themselves" (McCracken, 1988 ,p.9). However, one of the challenges with conducting one-to-one interviews is getting the participants to speak freely without hesitation, as otherwise this could impair the quality of the data (Creswell et al., 2007). Therefore, each participant was provided with an overview of the research purpose, the uses of the interview data, and the measures adopted by the researcher to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. All of this helped to minimise the participants' hesitations and they were comfortable to answer most of the interview questions, even in sensitive areas of the research such as challenges and mistakes. Some interviews were paused or interrupted due to the participants' tasks in the newsroom or sudden requests from other staff members. However, all of these interviews were continued and a note was made of these pauses.

#### Table 4.2 : Overview of the interviewees

##### 5: Editorial Management

F.B : Editor-in-chief at Al-Arabiya newsroom / Saudi nationality  
 M.A: Editor-in-chief of Al-Arabiya website / Saudi nationality  
 N.A: Head of programs for Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath / Lebanese nationality  
 F.A: Social media manager for Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath / Saudi nationality  
 H.A: Media management at Al Hadath / Egyptian nationality

##### 5: Social media Staff

M.J : Senior writer reporter and I see app founder / Saudi nationality  
 D.A : Senior social media producer / Syrian nationality  
 D.H : Social media producer / Egyptian nationality  
 A.A : Social media producer / Emirati nationality  
 A.E : social media content creator/ Lebanese nationality

##### 20 : Editorial Staff

M.A : Senior editor and Head of the Iranian desk / Iranian nationality  
 M.S : Senior journalist at the Iranian desk / Iranian nationality  
 A.A : Writer reporter / Al-Arabiya newsroom/ Sudanese nationality  
 I.K : Senior producer / Five o'clock news bulletin / Egyptian nationality  
 A.F : Iraq and Kurdistan Al Hadath reporter / Iraqi nationality  
 Z.R : Senior Writer reporter / Your interaction program / Jordanian nationality  
 A.A : Interview producer at Al-Arabiya newsroom / Saudi nationality

M.I : Senior producer / Four o'clock news bulletin/ Saudi nationality  
A.K : Senior producer / Jordanian nationality  
MA : Gulf breaking news editor / Saudi nationality  
F.H : Syrian desk journalist / Syrian nationality  
S.D : News presenter of Your interaction program / Saudi nationality  
K.M : News presenter at Four o'clock news bulletin / Saudi nationality  
R.M : Senior producer of Morning show / Lebanese nationality  
Z.A : Senior producer / Al Hadath / Lebanese nationality  
A.A : Senior producer / Al Hadath / Jordanian nationality  
T.E : Producer at Al Hadath / Lebanese nationality  
A.A : journalist / / Egyptian nationality  
H.M : Producer / Your interaction program / Saudi nationality

#### 4.3.5 Recording and Transcription

A digital voice recorder was used to record the interviews. It was chosen because it allowed for continuous conversations while taking notes would have interrupted the flow of the interviews. Grinnell Jr and Unrau (2005) point out that using a recorder during an interview helps the researcher to focus on the interview process and observing the participants' reactions and non-verbal communication.

The interviews in this research had no specified time limit and varied from one participant to another, based on their responses and their involvement with the research topic. The contents from the interview were transcribed and translated from Arabic to English, coded and reviewed after the data collection. The researcher chose to transcribe and translate all the interviews by himself to ensure that the translation was genuine and that the data remained confidential. It also provided an opportunity to be immersed in the data and to experience emergent results (Patton, 2005).

#### 4.4 Ethical Considerations

Any social science investigation may involve many ethical considerations. However, ethical requirements become especially significant when the study includes research participants. By drawing on the ethical guidelines set by Drotner et al. (2003), the needs and considerations of the participants were regarded as being of paramount importance, including treating them equally, respecting their values and decisions, and most importantly, avoiding causing them

harm. As ethical approval is essential prior to any fieldwork, an ethical review was submitted and included detailed research steps and the methodology.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to sign an informed consent form prior to their participation in the research. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2008), 'Informed consent entails informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participants in the research project' (p. 266). It is also a significant way to ensure that research interviewees are informed regarding the research which they contribute in (Wiles et al., 2007). Therefore, the participants were made aware of the research procedures and their rights to be involved voluntarily or to withdraw from the study at any time. Each participant was given an information sheet and consent form to be signed. The information sheet provided the participant with the details of the study and how the data from the interviews will be used. The respondents were asked to sign the consent form after reading the information sheet. Form to make sure that they understood their involvement in the research. Most of the respondents did not spend much time reading the information sheet and they approved by their signature as it could find in the Appendix.

The researcher chose to anonymise the research participants, which means that their names and personal information will be kept confidential. Each interview was recorded with a specific code, and categorised based on the interviewee's initials, their job, the place, the interview duration, and the interview date. There will be no further identification of the interviewees in either the analysis process or the findings. This choice was made to encourage the journalists to speak openly about their experiences and views on the research topic. Some of the participants even asked if the information they provided would only be used for research purposes, which made anonymity an important step.

#### **4.5. Interview Data Analysis**

The research used thematic analysis techniques to analyse and interpret the research data. This approach became widely acknowledged as a valuable method of qualitative data analysis. It is one of the most common analysis tools used and tested by many researchers in

psychology, management and media studies, along with many other subjects (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis permits “identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning themes across a dataset” (Braun and Clarke, 2012 ,p.2). The aim of this process is to identify themes or patterns within the data that could be considered noteworthy or important to interpret and answer the research questions.

This process, according to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), goes beyond simply summarising the data or considering interview questions as themes. Thematic analysis good practice should interpret and establish a meaningful sense from the research data. In 2006, Braun and Clarke introduced a six-phase guide for conducting thematic analysis in qualitative research. It advised researchers to be familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review the themes, define the themes and finally write up the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process, according to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), “is arguably the most influential approach, in the social sciences at least, probably because it offers such a clear and usable framework for doing thematic analysis” (p. 3354). Therefore, to achieve good insights from the thematic analysis in this research, the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed manually and coded into themes using these stages.

During the first stage, the transcription was read by the researcher several times to obtain familiarity and determine aspects that were relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The coding process then started by using ATALS.ti, a software that supports coding large sections of qualitative data analysis by allowing the researcher to highlight key features or aspects from their own interpretation of the data. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), the coding process reflects the way that researcher relates to the data through their own ideas, allowing them to organise, process and interpret such information. The third stage in this process is categorising these codes into suitable research themes and subthemes according to their similarities and significance for the research questions. These initial themes are then reviewed by the researcher to check their relevance and significance to the whole dataset. The research follows in this case a bottom up or inductive approach in thematic analysis, which means that codes and themes are generated from the research data contents. Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiate between a theoretical or top-down thematic analysis, which is determined by specific research questions or the researcher’s focus, and an

inductive or bottom-up approach, which is driven by the research data itself. Once the themes and subthemes are generated, the researcher defines each one, to be prepared for the writing phase.

#### 4.6 Content analysis

Having gathered qualitative data search from in-depth interviews and newsroom observation, a decision was reached to involve a contents analysis of news programs and segments using UGC and citizen journalism in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. This aims to connect the research field data to the news outputs. According to Paterson and Domingo (2008) analysing news contents could reveal significant influences on news production and helped to examine the journalists' daily routines and shared work environment. Content analysis is adopted to examine a broad range of contents from "transcripts of interviews and discussions in clinical and social research to the narrative and form of films, TV programs and the editorial and advertising content of newspapers and magazines" (Macnamara, 2005, p.1). Although content analysis is usually used as a main method for research, it also could be used to support other research methods (Helland, 1993). After the qualitative observations and interviews had been collected and analysed into themes, it was significant to support these findings with qualitative content analysis to address the research questions.

Content analysis can embrace multiple contexts and address several research questions. Neuman (1997) defined contents analysis in media studies as: "a technique for gathering and analysing the content of text. The content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated. The text is anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication" (pp. 272–273). However, unlike other qualitative methods that open up to the data, qualitative content analysis narrows the material that the researcher needs to focus on by selecting aspects related to the research question (Flick, 2013). Therefore, the content analysis in this research take in consideration three news programmes: Your interaction, I see and the fourth newscaster especially tweet of the day segment. These cases were clear examples of the adoption of citizen journalism and UGC in the news production and coverage. A number of journalists and

producers from each programme were also interviewed and observed during the fieldwork. Content analysis in this case is used to examine the result of this adoption and link between journalist views and practices and their media outcomes. Contents were gathered from both Al-Arabiya and Al-Hudth website and the official YouTube channel. This help to ensure that content was authentic and complete without any edit.

Media content analysis was initially introduced as a systematic quantitative method to examine media contents and study propaganda by Harold Lasswell in 1927. Nowadays, content analysis is well established method in journalism and communication along with other disciplines such as social science, psychology and business, and displayed steady growth during the last few decades (Neuendorf, 2017). The content analysis also evolved towards qualitative analysis which help the researcher to examine theoretical issues in the research and enhance understanding of the data. Unlike quantitative method which numerical oriented, the qualitative content analysis focuses contexts. It targets element such as the speaker viewpoint or factors such as the position and credibility of spokespersons or sources which would be useful in this research (Macnamara, 2005) . However qualitative content analysis faces some criticisms as it depends heavily on the researcher interpretation of media texts. It is also intensive and time-consuming which force qualitative content analysis to adopt small samples of media content (ibid). In the same vein, Miles and Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that sampling in qualitative content analysis should be determined by a conceptual research questions, not by concern for “representativeness” like systematic quantitative method. They suggested instead, three sampling techniques that could be combined enrich the results which include typical or representative examples; negative or disconfirming examples and exceptional or discrepant examples (ibid). When creating a content analysis plan, the researcher chose different samples and time periods from each case. For example, three different samples were gathered for “I see” program, the first were from the app lunched during the Yamen war while the second after the app expanded to different countries and the final sample included the last segments aired before the project became inactive.

The researcher also created a coding frame prior to the analysis which includes topics such contents type, presentation, verification and audience collaboration. All of which include

examination questions associated with the main research questions. This were influenced by Schreier (2012) step by step framework for researchers to conduct qualitative content analysis which include: deciding the research question, selecting material, building a coding frame, segmentation, trial coding, evaluating and modifying the coding frame, Main analysis and finally presenting and interpreting the findings. Mayring (2004) also developed a number of processes for qualitative analysis which is divided into inductive and deductive analysis. Inductive analysis includes working from specific patterns or cases to establish a theory or conclusion. While deductive approach means starting from a broad theory or wide position to specific result. Both inductive and deductive approach however include three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. The contents analysis in this research would adopt the deductive approach as it linked the fieldwork results with the news outputs in order to enhanced the researcher ability to answer the research questions

#### **4.7 Summary**

This chapter has described the research design and the methods used to address the research's main questions. It has also outlined the sampling process, research procedures, ethical considerations and practices during the fieldwork. This qualitative case study in the form of interviews and observation enables the researcher to redefine the integration of networked and citizen journalism in Arab media, based on facts gathered from everyday journalist situations and settings. This followed by content analysis that help to reflect on these findings.

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## Chapter Five: Observation and Interviews Finding

### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the analysis process and the results of the research data in order to establish valid themes for further exploration in the Discussion chapter. The first set of analyses will examine the emerged forums and cases of networked journalism integration in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. It will demonstrate the nature of journalists' work under this adoption based on the interview and observation data. The second part moves on to the findings from the research data in the form of categorised themes and sub-themes. Each of these themes will be defined, labelled and described in this section.

These findings are essential as they provide insight into the convergence environment of modern newsrooms in the age of digital media – this is an environment to which researchers are rarely given access. The result of this investigation into the integration and verification processes, risks and challenges could be particularly significant for broadcasting journalists, in order to deal with audience interactivity and UGC in the digital age. The research was carried out using a series of mixed research methods, including interviews, observations and contents analysis, outlined in the Methodology chapter.

### 5.2 Initial observation

As previously explained, the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels are both part of the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) Group. It was the first to provide free-to-air broadcasting in the Arab region and it was launched back in 1991, based in London (Al-Jaber, 2012). In 2002, almost a decade after the launch, MBC Group moved its headquarters to Dubai Media City, United Arab Emirates (mbc, 2019), which is considered to be one of the main regional and global media hubs (Chiba, 2012). This step came after the station had conducted studies and market analysis on this move.

This helped the station to come closer to the Arab audience and it improved the production process due to the technical features and infrastructure of the new site, which is capable of meeting market needs. The headquarters is the base for a large part of the group's TV and radio broadcasting, including the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels. CNN Arabic and Asharq Al-Awsat, a pan-Arab daily newspaper, are also housed in the next building as Dubai Media City includes about 928 media firms, and more than 40 of these are satellite TV channels (Al-Awsat, 2005). In 2020, the media group started a five-year plan to move the main headquarters, including Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, to Riyadh's new media city as part of the cultural change in the country under Vision 2030 (Alkhereiji, 2020).



Figure 5.1: MBC group main building

The five-story building is fully managed by MBC group staff. Visitors and staff need to follow security procedures when entering the premises, by using an electronic key card. Each level contains offices, newsrooms, editing rooms and live studios, divided between network channels. The ground floor contains three sections. The first is an open set used for the *Morning Show* (Sabah Al-Arabiya), which takes advantage of the lake as a background. The show, as described on the Al-Arabiya website, gives audiences an inspirational start to the morning and it highlights soft and social news, which includes segments like sports and weather. Presenters use interactive touch screens for the news and social media segment, sharing content such as audience tweets or videos, which have started to be an essential part of the show. The other studio was established in 2016 with high-tech features such as augmented reality (AR), which allows the anchors to interact more with graphics and

enhance the storytelling. This new set is used primarily for the *Your interaction* programme to show live graphics, contents and poll results from the audience through Twitter (Figure 5.2). The third section is dedicated specifically to the Al Hadath news channel, and it requires a different access card. The Al Hadath newsroom is much smaller than the one at Al-Arabiya as it focuses more on news bulletins and extended coverage than live programmes.



Figure 5.3 Use of Interactive studio for poll results

The second and third floors contain management spaces such as human resources and media departments such as MBC radio, archives, and a number of editing and control rooms. The Al-Arabiya newsroom and offices occupy the fourth and busiest floor. The newsroom is recognisable by the curved news studio, the large digital wall behind the news anchors and the assignment desk. The area also includes a number of vital structures such as the production control room, the voice recording studio, the guest coordinators' desk and the editor-in-chief's office. The newsroom is connected to cubicle work spaces for different supportive units such as the Al-Arabiya website and the social media unit. Finally, the last floor houses the management offices and a large meeting room, which are used mostly for the daily editorial meeting.

In 2020, the network started a rebranding plan that was described as new, organic and younger branding. This included new logo and graphics used for both the TV and digital platforms. This plan also included rebuilding the previous newsroom and studios, incorporating new technologies such as AR and a video wall, with the aim of providing the audience with a more interactive experience (Cherian, 2020).

As stated earlier, the researcher scheduled the observations prior to the interviews by a few days in order to gain an understanding of newsroom segments and routines. The researcher

took into consideration the newsroom's busy schedule and the times available for the newsroom journalists and editors. The researcher was allowed to spend two weeks in the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadith newsrooms and departments. The two weeks' observation included attending the live show of the *Your interaction* programme, the four o'clock and five o'clock bulletins, a number of social media unit meetings and the main editorial meeting, as well as exploring the newsroom's daily routine. It was intended that during this period the researcher would review any supporting documents related to the journalists' adoption of UGC or social media. However, documents were limited and difficult to obtain.

### 5.3 Al-Arabiya stylebook and editorial guideline

An editorial guideline is the set of rules and policies that guides news organisation staff and details the standards and values that they must follow. It represents a code of conduct that encourages journalists' practices to follow high standards of ethical journalism. Many news guidelines include rules on aspects such as objectivity, accuracy, fairness, conflicts of interest, roles and responsibilities. During the fieldwork, the researcher also faced difficulties with obtaining official documents such as editorial guidelines, plans and policy documents. These documents could help us to understand the way that UGC and social media are integrated into the newsroom.

The request to obtain the above documents was repeatedly declined by a number of editorial managers, who described them as confidential and sensitive to the work. Instead, the researcher asked the interviewees about the status of the guidelines and how they included them in their daily work. The stylebook – which includes some general rules for newsroom staff - was obtained in a later phase of the research and it confirmed the participants' answers. The stylebook contained 35 pages and included eleven sections, starting with the general background of the network and its principles. This was followed by definitions of news sources and an introduction to some rules regarding source accuracy. The guidelines seem to be combined with the stylebook, but it did not provide many details about UGC, the personal use of social media or collaboration with citizens and viewers. Under the internet and Social Media Platforms section, the stylebook stated that:

The internet has become a source of news items, but we have to cautiously deal with the information provided by various internet sites and social media platforms. Despite the fact that these sites and platforms may be a great source of news items, images, etc. they also unfortunately transmit a lot of baseless and harmful vindication-motivated rumours. When we use information taken from the internet, it is essential that we ensure that the source is official and that its authenticity is undisputable. Reference to source as indicated in this example lifts the responsibility from Al-Arabia, as such sites change continuously and news items transmitted on them may be deleted or amended after only half an hour. Furthermore, we should carefully deal with the sites that declare themselves as speaking in the names of religious militant movements (AlArabiya, 2013a).

During the interviews, some participants argued the need for updates or separate guidelines regarding social media use, collaboration and ethical considerations, as the stylebook was last updated in June 2013. In response to a question regarding the rules about using social media content, a interviewee explained:

There are no specific rules, but it is something to be expected and known by every journalist. We have a Book of Conduct, but I don't think it deals with such a thing because it was written a while ago and was not updated (D.A.: social media producer, 2018).

This view was echoed by another informant who said:

As for social media, it is considered new for us, we have a Department of Social Media and some specialists, so if I face difficulties with the verification process, we could ask their opinions and discuss the topic, but no specific guidelines (Z.R.: Senior Writer reporter, Your interaction programme, 2018).

Furthermore, the stylebook did not include any mention of UGC or integration cases, which will be highlighted in the next section of the research. Much of the rest of the document focused on the news styles and writing techniques for broadcasting TV, as this is what the stylebook seemed to be intended for.

## 5.4 The integration cases

This study seeks to obtain data that will help the discussion about the adoption of citizen and participatory journalism in the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels. The fieldwork therefore helped to unravel some of the mysteries surrounding this integration. Two main cases were chosen prior to the data collection that showed clear patterns of integration, such as adopting UGC and collaborating with the audience. Those cases were the *Your interaction* programme and the *I see* app. Other integration examples emerged from the interviews and observations such as the newsroom desk, the *Morning Show*, the social media unit and Al-Arabiya's website.

### 5.4.1 "Your interaction"

*Your interaction*, *Tafaolcom* in Arabic, is a daily news programme that, over the course of half an hour, reviews the most prominent events and developments from topics that people have interacted with or that have aroused controversy on social media. The programme was mentioned frequently when the interview participants were asked to give examples of social media and UGC adoption in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. Some considered the programme as a link between the screen and social networking sites. It focusses mainly on trending topics and interaction on social media, including news, tweets and videos that include UGC. As one interviewee put it:

The main concept is trending. Sometimes we find a good story but it's not trending in social media so we do not take it because it's not the programme concept. It needs to explain why people are interested in this topic, even if we feel that it is insignificant. Still, people care about it and that is what makes it worthy (A.A., journalist and presenter with the *Your interaction* team, 2018).

The programme started as a short segment between the news, highlighting social media interaction at the beginning of the Yemen war in 2015 (Figure 5.4). It was then extended to focus on any trending topics and coverage on social media, be they political, social, sport or non-news content. For instance, the programme hosts celebrities and social media

influencers in the popular segment called "25 Questions", which includes quick and bold questions. This form of interviewing and the guests allow the programme to harvest millions of views on YouTube. This change over the last few years led the show to become one of the most well-known programmes on the channel, with strong interactions on social media, especially on Twitter.



Figure 5.4: Screenshot from the first segment in 2015

Despite this success and the quick-paced nature of the show, it is still managed by a small team, including two main editors and the presenter. This was highlighted by the interview participants as a significant challenge. Preparing content for the daily programme starts each morning in order to focus on the current trending topics or news from social media. The team usually choose three main topics for the daily show, which could be of a political or social nature. They also post a poll question to the audience via Twitter that relates to the main topic. With the help of the interview desk, the team hosts guests who speak about these topics. They are often content creators or eyewitness to a viral video. They regularly encourage the viewers to send comments or questions for the programme's guests via Twitter. The aim is to expand audience interactivity through Twitter polls and questions. However, these questions, comments or tweets are reviewed and selected carefully by the team members prior to the show. Editors tend to double check the contents of these comments and users' accounts, especially regarding political or controversial issues. There is no evidence that these are compulsory procedures but they seem to be encouraged by editorial management.

### 5.3.2 The “I see” service

The research participants identified the *I see* service as an early example of citizen and participatory journalism adoption in the channel. According to the project founder, the service aims to embrace the concept of ‘citizen journalist’, and it supports activists to deliver what they see around them to people across the Al-Arabiya platforms, including TV channels and social networks. This Al-Arabiya initiative offers the audience the chance to capture and upload UGC using an interactive phone app and website, and then display these contents on the TV segment and the Twitter account.

It was suggested by the participants that the Arab Spring uprising represented a turning point in the way that Al-Arabiya adopted and dealt with UGC. One individual stated that the channel did not intentionally attract such massive UGC during the Arab Spring, but it was an important opportunity that could not be missed. Many contents such as an exclusive clip of Al Gadhafi’s death were received through citizens during the Arab Spring. This was a turning point for some of Al-Arabiya’s journalists towards citizen content. It encouraged the editorial management to also support the launch of the *I see* website then app, as an interviewee stated:

During the Arab Spring uprising, people were expressing their voices and creating local media in the form of citizen journalism. And it was really strong media from the ground so we thought we would attract and work with it instead of waiting for the content. We are not like YouTube or any other video platform; we are a news channel so we needed some moderation. We needed to look for people who were interested in content curation and had credibility, to ask them to participate with us. It worked to some extent but we expected more (N.A.: Head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

The *I see* service has faced ups and downs, witnessing important events such as the Arab Spring, and the Syrian and Yemen wars. This experience could be summarised into five phrases, each representing a significant aspect of the service (Figure 5.5). First was the phase that was essentially prior to the Arab Spring. In 2009, the Al-Arabiya team asked their viewers

to contribute any video content that they considered as newsworthy to the channel. The team created an official email for this purpose. However, the initiative did not match their expectations according to the *I see* founder. Despite the promotions on the channel, the participation was limited to just a few contributions, which he attributed to the technological complications back then and the fact that few people had a laptop or the technical expertise to participate. The initiative did not have a certain name back then and was soon deactivated.

The idea returned with the Arab Spring uprising in 2011, with the name the *I see* service. It allowed activists to send pictures and videos through Al-Arabiya's official website. Most targeted content came from Egypt as this was part of the channel's coverage of the Arab Spring. This phase could be described as the adoption phase. Conditions were different to in the initiative phase, as a result of the advances in newsgathering tools in the form of digital cameras and smart phones. Furthermore, the mentality of Arab citizens related to participation in the media had also changed.

According to a TV interview with Faraj Ismail, the managing editor of Al-Arabiya net at that time, the website launched the service with the name *I see* two days after the "Battle of the Camel" in Egypt, which was described as "the final straw for Mubarak's regime" (Kortam, 2013).

There also followed a wave of arrests of journalists and several were prevented from entering Tharir Square, where most of the uprisings occurred. This urged the Al-Arabiya team to pursue this step, according to Faraj Ismail. He adds that everybody who owned a mobile device became a potential journalist or reporter working in the field. They received around 100 videos in just a few hours and 2,500 videos within a few days of the site's launch (Alarabiya, 2011).

However, a number of research participants argued that the interaction reached a peak during the Arab Spring but then it decreased when the uprising started to decline. According to a member of the media management team:

Conflicts have diminished compared to the beginning when people needed to send what is happening on the ground to the world to see. Gradually people were sending content than is not that serious and may not be seen as newsworthy (H.A.: Media management, Al Hadath, 2018).

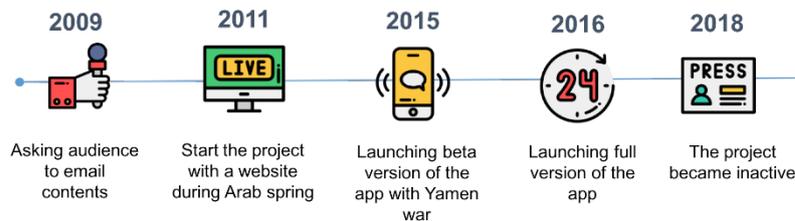


Figure 5.5: Timeline of the / see service

In 2015, the service team decided to return and improve the experience with the audience in the form of interaction via a phone app. This step corresponded with the Yemen war declaration and the closing of Al-Arabiya's offices in the capital Sana'a for security threats. This increased the need for UGC from the ground even more than before. With editorial encouragement, the team quickly launched a beta version of the app. TV and online campaigns were used to target Yemeni citizens as users in order to compensate for the lack of war coverage content. This third phase could be described as a dependency phase as the channel relied heavily on content coming from the citizens on the ground. A week after launching the app, the service gained 3,000 active users. Each user had a profile page with an account name, photo and location, which saved their rights as a user when they submitted content. Commenting on this phase, one of the interviewees said:

There were no correspondents inside Yemen so we needed to launch the application so that people could provide us with what they saw inside Yemen. We received dozens of messages every day and this increased to hundreds and thousands, which helped our coverage through that time (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

The fourth phase was the expansion of services to other Arab countries and users with the release of the full version of the app in 2016. New campaigns targeted all viewers despite

their location, encouraging them to contribute with their own raw footage of events and to upload UGC. The contents continue to be shown on the website, Twitter account and TV segments on both the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath channels (Figure 5.6). This helped both channels to gain access to areas where there were no news correspondents, especially Syria and Yemen.



Figure 5.6: Screenshot of “I see” TV segment, Twitter account and app interface

With time, the app started to form a community of citizen journalists and content creators. Some users started to document content especially for the app and to speak as if they were actual news reporters. There were no payments or actual rewards for the users, but the app team introduced digital badges to encourage them to participate. The new feature divided users into different levels based on their contributions, with the app as part of this encouragement. They could also compete to a higher level and assignment features were added to the app, to give users notifications about certain events such as the Mosul humanitarian crisis; this encouraged users to cover it if they were in the vicinity. The application included nine sections where users could participate: politics, sports, community, style, food, movies, technology, comedy and music. The app thus created content diversity, for example on occasions like the “Eid” celebration, which is celebrated in every Arab country. News editors at the channel received celebration contents from different Arab countries, which helped them to create a special news report about the celebrations.

Three years after the app's launch, the channel management chose to temporarily suspend the services and search for better future options. Many suggested during the research interviews that this step was related to the verification process. Talking about this issue, an interviewee from management said:

We faced an administrative and physical challenge to personally verify all these significant contents because some came from different regions and geography and some information was inaccurate or the videos were very old too. We did not have the power on the ground to verify more. So, we chose to display very little, which did not exceed 3 to 4 videos a day after we checked them thoroughly in this process. It was a new idea for us as well as for the users, who could pass false news or unverified videos. Some users were victims themselves to false contents so we did not want to also become victims (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

The interviews show that a number of team members started other tasks in the newsroom as part of job rotation, as work expanded in the verification segment.

### 5.3.3 Newsroom and news bulletins

The Al-Arabiya newsroom is the central hub for the network's journalists, editors, producers and reporters. It is managed directly by the Editor-in-chief and News & Programmes Director. In 2015, the newsroom created a new position, that of the Editorial Director. This new position helped to coordinate the Director General, the News & Programmes Director and executive editors (Alriyadh, 2015). The newsroom is divided into several sections, with main section being occupied by the newscast producers. The 24-hour newsroom provides news content for different sections of the channel, managed by the editing team and News & Programmes Department. It runs 25 round-the-clock bulletins with a number of newsfeeds. The bulletins are named by their time slot, such as the four o'clock, five o'clock and midday bulletins. The newsroom also manages a number of TV news-based programmes, which range from documentaries and current affairs to sport, travel and social media (Figure 5.7).

Like other broadcasting news networks, the newsroom is divided into different desks, including the assignment, interview, programmes and special desks. Here there are news desks that focus on certain regions of the Middle East such as the Syrian, Iranian and Gulf desks. Some desks are appointed to a certain programme or news bulletin; the four O'clock News, for instance, is managed by the Gulf desk as it focusses on Saudi and Gulf region news. These divisions helped the researcher to understand the nature of each desk and their news outlets during the interviews and observation.



Figure 5.7 Screenshot from channel website under programmes section

In-depth interviews were conducted with a number of newsroom staff, including producers, editors, writers, reporters and anchors, in order to gain a perspective on the integration of UGC into the newsroom work. The majority of participants agreed that adopting UGC had become a common practice for Al-Arabiya newsroom staff. They pointed out that these contents are progressively embedded into their work, and that they range from a significant news source to a feature story or an additional supplement. Their selection of such content depends on the news value of the content and the availability of other news sources. For journalists and producers working on the Syrian and Iranian files, these contents signify a vast percentage of their journalistic work. They both argue that limited media access to government authorities and the measures taken to prevent news correspondents from entering both Syria and Iran caused their increasing dependence on UGC from the ground as an alternative journalistic method. As one interviewee put it:

The Syrian regime prevented in general any foreign journalist from entering the Syrian territory unless they were under its jurisdiction or protection. Of course, they allowed certain journalists to convey their own message to the world (F.H., Syrian journalist, 2018).

This view was echoed by a senior editor in the Iranian department who pointed out that:

We have felt the importance of citizen journalism because we work in Iranian affairs. It plays a key role in transferring the news in the light of the censorship imposed by the authorities on the media. Therefore, citizen reporters or citizen journalism played a key role in Iran (M.A.: Senior editor, 2018).

Their work goes beyond gathering UGC from social media, to collaborative work with activists and citizen journalists in the form of crowdsourcing. According to Van der Haak et al. (2012), crowdsourcing practice “extends beyond citizen journalism and covers a wide range of practices that make use of collective intelligence to gather and check information, tell stories, or make choices in news production”. For instance, Syrian journalists use the so-called “Tansqyat”, a coordination group of activists and citizen journalists who emerged from a number of neighbourhoods in Syria at the beginning of the uprisings, such as the Al Zahra neighbourhood in Aleppo. On the other hand, an Iraqi correspondent used this communication on the ground to train 22 Iraqi activists who were interested in media and journalism. This network of collaborative citizen journalists helped develop his coverage, and it saved time, as he described.

I began to benefit from this experience in my work, after providing training courses for citizens who love filming and documenting. I trained them to shoot video contents suitable for TV. And they could use the right format to store these contents in order to be sent as soon as possible. They managed to send clips with high resolution by WhatsApp for example. In some hot zones, there is no internet so they needed to reach other areas to send the materials. They were well aware of the importance of these contents to the news as they came from a hot and unstable area. Some of these

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people were security men so they were already close to the events (A.F., Al Hadath correspondent, 2018).

The integration of audience participation includes Al-Arabiya news bulletins. This position was also supported by the editorial management, which encouraged news producers to provide a more interactive version of news. According to the Al-Arabiya stylebook:

We at Al-Arabiya Channel consider that news reports are a fascinating, live, renewed, diversified, modern and light body, with no immoral tendencies. In other words, we define the news report as a beautiful product to the viewer and useful and entertaining to the listener; it respects the intellect of the receiver and submits hour after hour a new dose of information and news about life and what revolves about it (AlArabiya, 2013a).

Among the around-the-clock bulletins at Al-Arabiya, two were chosen for the research as they embrace citizen journalism and social media more than the others. The four o'clock and the five o'clock news bulletins both introduce different methods of interactivity and social media integration. The four o'clock News team uses Twitter to gather and interact with recent political and social affairs, focussing specifically on the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia. Recently the team introduced a new segment called "tweet of the day". In two minutes, the segment creates a short news story based on viral or trending tweets. The contents selected by the segment presenter aim to show the story or dialogue behind a tweet. The tweets range from political to social and controversial issues. According to the bulletin's producers, "social media and Twitter in particular are a mine for news stories but it requires a journalists' good sense to choose and feature the right one. The tweet of the day segment is an example used for this purpose" (M.I.: Senior producer, four o'clock bulletins, 2018).

This is followed by the five o'clock news bulletin, which mainly focuses on the humanitarian aspect of the news, especially in the Arab region, such as the Syrian refugees' crisis, and this is what distinguishes it from the other news on Al-Arabiya. The production team asks the audience to send their choice related to a daily topic through Facebook and Twitter, and to

submit their opinions to be displayed as part of the dialogue regarding the topic. One participant commented:

When questions affect people directly, the interaction is greater, especially controversial issues we will major discussion and debated in the comment section. Despite the importance of other issues, many viewers do not interact with them such as the controversial. We also notice that the level of interaction increased since the process of voting and questions started about a year ago and we try to increase the audience role even more (A.K.: Senior producer in the five O'clock news bulletin, 2018).

#### 5.3.4 Social media unit

The unit is a new addition to the network with new members and management. The previous team was called "Multimedia" and it had fewer staff and tasks. The current social media unit comprises 14 members, most young and newly graduated with media and journalism majors. The unit's tasks can be divided into four main parts: managing social media accounts, content curation, analytics for editorial purposes, and digital training and consulting.

One of the team's main responsibilities is to manage the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath accounts professionally on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The research shows a growing interest in Al-Arabiya's social media presence. The network has multiple accounts on social media, each dedicated to a specific news purpose. Al-Arabiya's main account, for example, posts news reports, website links and programme contents and it has more than 14 million followers on Twitter, 26 million likes on Facebook, 3.2 million followers on Instagram and more than 8 million subscribers to its YouTube channel. Al-Arabiya's breaking news account bypasses the main account, which has 20.3 million followers on Twitter as it dedicated to breaking news in form of short tweet with the specific hashtag: #breaking\_AlArabiya.

The network also has a variety of social media accounts, some targeting news users from different countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq and Syria. It also broadcasts in several languages including English and Farsi. Other categories focus on news formats that match individual interests such as breaking news, weather, health, sport, economics and lifestyle. Some examples are given in the table below.

Table 5.1 Overview of Al Arabia and Al Hadath social media accounts

		Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube
1	Al-Arabiya main account	14.5 M	26.0 M	3.2 M	8.6 M
2	Al-Arabiya breaking news	20.3 M			2.1 M
3	Al Hadath main account	9.2 M	11.9 M	1.4 M	
4	Al-Arabiya Saudi Arabia	1.0 M	891 k		
5	Al-Arabiya Egypt	1.4 M	1.4 M		
6	Al-Arabiya Iraq	2.9 M	1.1 M		
7	Al-Arabiya English	880 K	1.4 M	8.5 k	
8	Al-Arabiya Farsi	330 K	319 K	10.2 K	
9	Al-Arabiya sport	4.3 M	1.0 M		
10	Al-Arabiya economic	2.2 M	305 K	8.2 K	

Unlike Twitter accounts, each channel has a singular YouTube channel that includes live streaming and playlists based on a number of the channel's programmes and news bulletins.

According to the social media unit, the channel gained 1.7 billion viewers in 2018 through its online platforms. It is also ranked 48th worldwide for social media video views and first in the Middle East among news channels. This is according to the website Tubular lab indicator, as stated by the General Manager of Al-Arabiya News channel, Turki Aldukil (Mbcmasr, 2018). The network also won the Arab Social Media Influencer Award for the media organisation category in 2018 (AlArabiya, 2018). Talking about this change in the unit's responsibilities and duties, the social media team manager explained:

The social media team were part of the newsroom and it provided services for both Al-Arabiya net and the TV. Their work was to cut and paste links from the website to social media platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook. When you came to the unit we noticed that most of the social media accounts were linked to the Al-Arabiya net and there is little specialised content on these platforms. But with the changing media market and platforms, we needed to change as well and come up with tools to keep users interested like Facebook diaries and Snapchat Discover (F.A.: Social media manager, Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

In 2017, the unit added content curation for social media to their duties. Content curation includes creating dedicated news content for social media. They created short clips in Instagram, Tweet moments and Snapchat segments as a part their renovation of Al-Arabiya news in the digital age. During that year, the Snapchat platform opened its first Middle East office in Dubai and expanded to work closely with media organisations in the region. This resulted in a partnership between the Snapchat platform, the MBC and Al-Arabiya to create content for Snapchat Discover, which was becoming increasingly popular with youth users (Radcliffe and Lam, 2018).

Some of these news and contents contain UCG that is mostly gathered from social media, especially if it is viral or trending. When team members choose UCG to create a news post, they usually contact the poster, asking their permission to use it. They also credit the clip with their name, unless the content is viral with no chance of knowing the original creator. The team plan to create a UCG hub where social media users can submit their content to the channel. The plan seems to be similar to the previous experience with the *I see* app but the use of these contents is limited to social media only.

The social media unit also uses “Twitter Moments”, a social media feature in Twitter that enables users to combine multiple tweets together into slideshow-like stories. According to Twitter’s official website, “Moments are curated stories showcasing the very best of what’s happening on Twitter. Our Moments guide is customised to show you current topics that are popular or relevant, so you can discover what is unfolding on Twitter in an instant” (Twitter, 2015). The social media unit in Al-Arabiya creates Twitter Moments based on users’ tweets that speak about certain viral news or topics. The team created more than 100 moments in a year, posted on the channel’s official account. Commenting on the experience, one of the interviewees said:

We noticed that the number of interactions and re-tweets increased for those people selected in the moment as they got more exposure and they felt part of Al-Arabiya. (A.E.: Social media content creator, 2018).

In their daily routine, social media editors collect daily news from news sites, agencies and social media. They consider their work as journalism with the addition of technology. The team works independently from the main newsroom but they have a direct connection via the editorial meeting. They also communicate with other units and journalists in the network directly or by email. There are two daily editorial meetings: the first is exclusively for the unit members at 14:00 and each social media editor presents possible news stories for the Snapchat and Instagram posts. This meeting is followed by a main editorial meeting for all departments, which is considered to be an opportunity to exchange news, as well as to discuss important topics and sections of the media. The first meeting is usually attended by the social media director and around five social media editors. The team provides some social media courses to the channel's staff but these are training courses, not specifically on UGC or content verification, according to a number of interviewees.

In addition, the team depend on social media metrics to track interaction and performance. This is for several social media platforms, as well as the Al-Arabiya website; they track engagement such as likes, comments, shares and clicks. They then provide the network with a daily and monthly report that is presented in the editorial meeting. The social media unit benefits from metric analysis tools such as socialbakers and Google analytics. According to the research interview with the unit manager:

That changed the way we approached the news. UGC attracts large numbers because it is from people to the people, especially in social media, because you will choose something that is a trend, so it always brings us numbers, so we give it priority over anything else (F.A.: Social media manager at Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

#### **5.4 Participation taxonomy**

In November 2006, Alfred Hermida and Neil Thurman studied twelve UK newspaper websites and found that all of them offered some tools for reader participation. The researchers identified nine different formats that were used by the newspaper websites to encourage contributions from the audience. These formats were: polls, message boards,

comments on stories, Q&A, blogs and reader blogs, your media and your story (Hermida and Thurman, 2008). The researcher used a similar classification based on this taxonomy for UGC initiatives at Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath (see **Table 5.2**).

**Table 5.2 : User-generated content initiatives at Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath**

Format	
<b>1. I see</b>	The channel offers the audience the chance to upload UGC using an interactive app. These contents are displayed on the website, TV segment and Twitter account.
<b>2. Comments on stories'</b>	Viewers can comment or share their point of view on a Al-Arabiya net or through social media.
<b>3. Twitter Moments</b>	A new feature in Twitter that enables users to combine multiple tweets together into slideshow-like stories, managed by journalists from the social media unit.
<b>4. 'Polls'</b>	News bulletins or programmes integrate relevant questions during the programme to generated interactions.
<b>5. 'Q&amp;As'</b>	Audience could participate in interviewing guests before or during the live programmes by submitting their questions to the team.
<b>6. Hashtags</b>	Some breaking news written in form of hashtags in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath's official Twitter accounts and on TV to allow more interaction. This allows the audience to contribute their views and contents, some of which trend on Twitter.
<b>7. 'Your media'</b>	Social media unit encouraged photographers and contented creators to president their work specifically on Instagram.
<b>8. Assignment</b>	A feature within the I see app that gives users notification about certain events to participate with the content.
<b>9. Crowdsourcing</b>	Cooperation with the activist or citizen journalists specifically from conflict zones to cover story, or check information or provide eyewitness statements.

## 5.5. Analysis and findings

Seven broad themes emerged from the analysis, including perceptions of citizen and participatory journalism, motivation, content verification, risk and challenges, content selection and the impact of participatory culture.

### 5.5.1 Understanding and perceptions of the participatory culture

Citizen journalism is a new media concept that refers to a number of journalistic practices performed by ordinary citizens. It has enabled people to create their own alternative media contents. These content creators are, thus, termed as citizen journalists and these contents are commonly referred to as UGC. The research examined the way in which Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath journalists understood and interacted with citizen and participatory journalism as a new practice.

During the interviews, the participants were asked a series of introductory questions to examine their understanding of citizen and participatory journalism. In general, they demonstrated a good understanding of what citizen journalism means based on their daily journalism work. The interview results show that journalists in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath use the term 'citizen journalism' to mean different things and that these could fall into four broad categories: social media platforms, news sources or eyewitness, networked collaboration and audience interactivity. A number of participants expanded their understanding of citizen journalism to include any content from social media that was referred to as UGC. Others saw citizen journalism as a new kind of source that could enhance the news coverage as well as presenting different sides of events. The third perspective was the collaboration aspect, which includes any collaboration between the news channel and activists or citizen journalists on the ground. Others believe that citizen journalism means building a relationship with the audiences and including any kind of collaboration such as news gathering or interactive participation such as polls or comments on current events.

A common view amongst the interviewees was that social media platforms had become an integral part of their daily routine and a substantial source of news and information. This finding emphasises the role of social media in news production. Journalists' understanding of citizen journalism and UGC seemed to reflect their work experience, as they explained the

term by giving examples that they dealt with in the newsroom. Frequent examples included the Arab Spring and Syrian conflict, then Iran, Iraq, Sudan and natural disasters. Interestingly, the term 'citizen journalism' seemed to be the most common term used by the participants rather than other synonyms such as public, networked or participatory journalism, crowd-sourced journalism or collaborative journalism. Therefore, many did not see any difference between gathering citizen journalism contents from social media and collaborating with citizens to create an original news story. Also, the term UGC was difficult to explain to some participants as there is no agreed-upon synonym in the Arabic language. Still, a number of participants, especially from the social media unit, were familiar with the term and its use.

Considering the impact of social media as a newsgathering tool over the last few years, anyone with the right tools could be a potential citizen journalist and a vital participant in the news cycle. Therefore, a variety of perspectives was expressed on what defined a "citizen journalist". Different descriptions were given by the participants of citizen journalists' work, such as voluntary work, act of citizenship, reliable source under certain conditions, and eyewitness to important events. Some differentiated between citizen journalists who regularly contributed to the news and created contents, such as activists in Syria, and eyewitnesses to a singular case. These descriptions resembled a classification proposed by (Ross and Cormier, 2010), who introduced three categories of citizen journalists in their *Handbook for Citizen Journalists*. The first type is accidental journalists, who they defined as:

People who are caught unexpectedly in the middle of an event and take photos or videos and upload them to either social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, or news websites such as CNN's iReport or Fox News' uReport (p.85).

The second type is citizen advocacy journalists, who engage in citizen journalism in order to express their perspectives on political, social or religious issues. Finally, there are citizen journalists who commonly express an interest in news reporting from their surroundings (ibid). This classification seems to influence the way that journalists engaged with each type of citizen journalists and to what extent they trusted their contents.

There was a sense of positivism amongst the interviewees towards citizen journalism and the role it plays in news coverage. Some positive descriptions included: world phenomenon, speed coverage, exclusive contents and citizen voice or role in society. Journalists in the Iranian department, for instance, recognised citizen journalism's importance to breaking through the media blackout and censorship in Iran. Similar recognition appeared in the newsroom with journalists who worked closely with the Syrian file. They credited the role of eyewitnesses in their coverage in locations where they have no formal correspondents. Many considered UGC as a new tool that forced itself upon journalism, not only in the Arab region but worldwide. Some quote examples of using UGC in networks such as the BBC and news agencies like AFP and Reuters. However, this positivism seemed to decrease when the interviewees went into detail about the daily routines required to adopt such contents, and topic such as credibility and accuracy.

During the observation, journalists used a wide range of social media platforms in their journalistic work. The majority preferred using Twitter in order to monitor trends and hashtags, especially regarding breaking news. Some used Twitter directly on their phones and desktops, while others, like the social media unit, used tools such as TweetDeck. This tool, created by the Twitter company, allows users to view multiple timelines at the same time, which became useful for searching and observing several accounts and news sources. The participants also reported using other social media services, such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.

They also used instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook Messenger to communicate with activists and citizen journalists. However, while WhatsApp is commonly used, some journalists from the Iranian department preferred to use Telegram. This could be explained by two main factors: the encrypted security of the app, which allowed the exchange of censored content in Iran, and the fact that the app is one of the most-used applications among Iranian citizens and activists – it has an estimated 50 million users (BBC, 2018).

#### 5.4.2 Motivation to adopt networked journalism in the newsroom

It has commonly been assumed that UGC and audience collaboration are a valuable strategy for news organisations. This research aims to identify what motivates journalists to adopt UGC and how they encourage the audience to collaborate. The interviewees mentioned different factors that encouraged them to adopt UGC in their work, some of which amounted to personal motivation whereas others were an editorial choice. The research identifies four main factors as having contributed to the increased adoption of citizen journalism and UGC in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath.

The first motive is the editorial position. Many journalists suggested that they were motivated by the channel to benefit from social media content and interaction in their daily workflow. It was also the network's target to change from a traditional channel to one more modern and digitally oriented. For instance, an annual report from the social media team about the interactivity of each programme and department encourages journalists to focus more on digital interactivity. This was noticed during the newsroom observation and in the editorial meeting where trending topics and contents were identified via the social media unit and journalists were encouraged to pursue them.

A management executive commented on this topic by saying:

We need to face the truth – our audience is no longer sitting close to the TV for six hours like before. The viewing rates have decreased, but this audience has not disappeared from the news. They are still interested in the news but they have started to use other means of accessing it like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. We should not lose them, so we have to move our content to these platforms and take advantage of it. This gradually began to be realised by our colleagues, albeit to varying degrees (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

This position is driven by the change in the media industry and the impact of digital and citizen media, as one interviewee put it:

It is not the case of what we want anymore. Whether this is in Al-Arabiya or any other news channel, citizen journalism forces itself. When I get the news about an explosion somewhere, the first footage we receive is from phones, not news agencies. This has become the normal case (Z.R.: Senior writer reporter, Your interaction programme, 2018).

Another interviewee further mentioned the increased attention paid to the target audience and their interests and age group:

There is a tendency from the channel to keep up with what's happening around the world, we cannot be a purely traditional channel that relies only on television. There is a young audience still interested in the news but from social media. So, we needed to win them back by introducing projects such as the *I see* application (A.A.: Social media producer, 2018).

The second motive for using UGC in the newsroom is to create diversity. According to (Beckett, 2010b), the use of citizen journalism helps news organisations to obtain diversity in their editorial content by introducing many information sources and points of views to support their news reports. The participants suggested that adopting citizen journalism helped them to create more interaction with the audience and keep up with the innovations in the media industry. This means reducing the dependence on news agencies and expanding their news sources and live coverage from the ground in conflict zones, allowing Arab citizens from different backgrounds to participate. One individual stated that:

It has given us more space to be creative, you are not stuck to one kind of routine of news making, which is the traditional way, we are not in the traditional era anymore. Personally, you kind of reach out to people and I like that you communicate with them (A.A.: Social media producer, 2018).

Newsroom journalists and editors were also keen to use social media in order to gather relevant content. They suggested that such platforms connected audiences to news that had the most relevance for their own lives and concerns. As Al-Arabiya is pan-Arab, this means that contents need to focus on different Arab nationalities and backgrounds. Talking about

this topic, an interviewee said: “We do not adopt the tweet immediately but it gives us a guide or key to search more about the subject or other aspects”. In summary “It gives us a hint to a story”. This view was echoed by another participant, who pointed out that:

It gives us as a TV channel an idea of the capabilities of some content creators and what the people are interested in through trends. So, we produce content that is appropriate for the Arab public and we rely on it if there is another source as mentioned (N.A.: Head of programmes, Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

One of the journalists’ motivations to adopt UGC and citizen journalism is to generate interaction with the audience, especially from the perspective of social media unit members. As the participants stated:

We benefit from news or content that could generate high interaction in our account on social media. It is also a chance to interact and represent people’s interests. It diversifies our resources and prevents boredom with the news coverage (D.A.: Social media producer, 2018).

A variety of perspectives were also expressed regarding ways to encourage audiences to participate in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news. Some suggested that sharing the behaviour of social media users helped to encourage their collaboration in newsgathering. As one interviewee put it: “people want to share what they see”. A similar concept was used during the marketing campaign of the *I see* app release. This campaign encouraged Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath viewers to download the app and share their contents. It used different slogans to encourage the audience, such as “download the app and be an Al-Arabiya reporter”. The campaign was also launched on social media through the official accounts and even staff personal accounts. Some suggested that mentioning the contributors’ names and their social media accounts could encourage them to participate, especially if done by Al-Arabiya, as this would provide them with more social media interactions. Other content creators prefer to share the content from their own personal accounts for exposure. Commenting on the reasons behind the recent suspension of the *I see* app, one of the interviewees said

I expect there are several reasons linked to each other. It may be a matter that people prefer to display their content or clips on their accounts instead of sharing them with the channel. They probably believe this to be more influential and practical. I think that citizens at some point, especially at the beginning of the conflicts, were racing to share content, but today when the conflict has become a routine and inseparable of their everyday lives, they no longer believe that sending such content will make any difference (K.M.: News presenter, 2018).

Some journalists argue that the case itself plays an important role in encouraging citizen collaboration with the media. This could be seen in the cases of activists in Syria, Iran and Iraq who want their voice and cause to be heard; they can expand their impact through media organisations, including social media. Others felt that the audience's attitude towards journalism is an important factor. People who are open towards journalism tend to share their contents with the media in order to support their case.

On the other hand, some felt that the audience's opinion and attitude towards the channel could affect how they participate and their willingness to contribute. In the five o'clock news bulletin, producers allow the audience to comment on current affairs via Twitter and then present the comments on the show. Speaking about the selection process for these contents, one interviewee said:

Sometimes people mix up their political position and the daily issues we present. They need to understand that we are a news station and we have no direct influence over what is happening in the region (I.K.: Senior producer, the five o'clock news bulletin).

He adds that he frequently encounters Twitter comments that are irrelevant to the programmes or the presented topic. In the same vein, some complained about backlashes from people who had a presumptios on Al-Arabiya as a news channel. As a result, this made it more challenging for them to create interactions and it increased the time needed to select relevant content.

The research also reported limited cases where the channel encouraged journalists to use their personal accounts to share news content or to participate in a campaign. The use of journalists' personal accounts to share content or communicate with the audience was a choice, not obligatory, but still, there was uncertainty among journalists and editors about this practice, especially for personal branding and promoting their work. This use of personal accounts will be explored further in a later section.

#### 5.4.3 Content verification

Although the use of citizen journalism and UGC in the mainstream media is considered to be a form of audience empowerment, it raises many concerns within news organisations regarding the journalistic standards of accuracy and objectivity (Harrison, 2010). These concerns underscore the significance of verification and fact checking for journalists who work with these contents. This research investigates the methods used by journalists to verify UGC in Al-Arabiya's newsroom.

During the interview, a common view amongst participants was that adopting UGC or citizen journalism required verification to ensure its credibility. However, the majority of participants agreed that there are no fixed processes or steps adopted by journalists to verify UGC; nor is there a specific unit dedicated to this purpose in Al-Arabiya. Instead, each editor or journalist is responsible for verifying their own contents. Some embrace traditional methods of fact checking such as personal communication and contacting authorities, while others use some technological support such as Google pictures or maps. The research, therefore, found that journalists in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath had no fixed systematic procedures or checklist for the verification of UGC. Practice varied from one journalist to another and from different departments with regard to verification methods.

##### 5.4.3.1 Verification in the social media unit

This contradiction could be seen clearly in the case of the social media unit, which is the unit best able to take responsibility for verification since their content is generated from social media. However, a number of research participants in the unit pointed out that they referred some content to the newsroom desk pertinent to a specific region, such as the Syrian or

Iranian desks, as they were more likely to possess knowledge about the source of the news. One individual stated:

It differs from one case to another. If posting the content was our choice, like trending or viral videos, it would be our task to also make sure that it is verified, but in many cases, we consult the newsroom as they would have more expertise in that (D.H.: Social media producer, 2018).

The team gather such contents from social media and repost them again on these platforms as short-texted videos or reports suitable for Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter users. This step aims to attract the youth audience to the news, according to the unit. Furthermore, journalists claim that social media increases the possibility of finding news sources and stories more than ever before, but they are also required to question these sources more than ever before. In many cases, they depend on other trusted sources such as news agencies or other well-known news outlets. A social media producer spoke about using certain UGC in an Instagram post during the observation by saying:

We quoted the clip from the BBC, which quoted it from the local news agency in Malaysia. I did not need to spend much time on verification as it came from a trusted organisation. So, if I find interesting or viral content on social media, one of my choices is to find a confirmed source and mention that in the content (D.A.: Social media producer, 2018).

#### 5.4.3.2 Verification in the newsroom

As well as traditional newsgathering methods, producers and journalists in the newsroom stated that they needed to be more active and aware when searching for content on social media platforms. They emphasised the role of journalists' skills in fact checking by looking into details such as culture, language, geographic information, time of the event, and weather. According to Wardle et al. (2014), there are four main factors that journalists need to bear in mind when verifying UGC: provenance, source, date and location. In other words,

they should verify who created the material, whether it is indeed their original work, and where and when it was created (p.26).

Journalists from the Iranian desk utilised analysis methods to verify the contents they received from inside Iran; this included analysing the language and accents to make sure that they fitted the location. The visual analysis of clothes, buildings and landmarks, timing and weather also played a significant role. These methods were used, according to the team, in order to determine the authenticity of UGC. Interestingly, there was no in-depth description of the use of such methods by other journalists during the interviews. Although journalists in the newsroom were undergoing regular training sessions, including ones on social media, there was no focus on the verification techniques. Therefore, most journalists' verification work was based on their own previous experiences. Some liked to contact people personally, for example by phone, in order to verify information, while others preferred to rely on what they described as "journalistic common sense".

An Iranian producer who dealt with UGC in the Al-Arabiya coverage of Iran spoke about journalists' verification skills by saying:

Of course, intuition and journalistic knowledge are very important, but there is also an important factor which is the build-up of information about an event. This information could be geographic, cultural or a certain event. Such information could help you to complete the picture. If you watch a video, for example, which stated that an Iranian bank was under attack by protesters, but you notice people's clothes as a starter are not usual Iranian clothes based on your previous knowledge, here you would stop and question the accuracy of such information. It's vital things that allow you to make sense of the information and materials you receive to make sure it is correct (M.A.: Senior editor, Head of the Iranian desk, 2018).

However, most of the interviewed journalists used traditional verification techniques such as personal contacts, double-checking social media accounts or Google search. While such approaches differed based on the type and the importance of the contents, many still felt

that it was time consuming and a distraction from other tasks. This was explained by the head of programmes by saying:

When we find a particular news item from the social media, the producer or journalist will try to investigate it by themselves or by means of the help of another colleague from that region, trying also to make contact with the same place where the news happened. In the case of images, we use Google images for reverse searching to check whether these images were published before or not. Videos however could be much harder. When that is done, our work will be to expand the information and enhance the content (N.A: Head of programmes, Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

On the other hand, a number of participants argued that personal connections play a vital role in enhancing the coverage and provide a sustainable source of news and information. This also includes verification, by contacting correspondents on the ground or the content creator, to find out more about the story. Communication also extends to officials or to other journalists who could verify the truth and provide more detail about it. This was the case with the Syrian journalists, who used WhatsApp groups or Skype, not only to gather UGC but also to ask others to verify it. A common practice amongst journalists is to use crowdsourcing for verification, especially with cooperatives who are activists or citizen journalists working with the Arabiya and Al Hadath in conflict zones such as Syria, Iran and Iraq. This approach was used mostly through closed channels such as WhatsApp and Telegram groups but not through a public such as Twitter.

This was clear from an interview with an editorial manager, who suggested that,

The personal factor and personal relations helped us to verify more videos. Our Syrian journalists in the newsroom were very confident that the people who send them the videos will not cheat us as they have created a good relationship with them (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

During the research interviews, a Syrian journalist suggested that his connections with activists and citizen journalists from within Syria had led him to work for Al-Arabiya in the first place, pointing out the importance of personal connections.

I began my work with the Syrian file for the Al-Arabiya Channel in 2011 because of my contacts on the ground since the beginning of the Syrian revolution. I had a lot of contacts with young political activists inside the Syrian territories and opposition activists outside when I started working for Al-Arabiya with this file (F.H.: Syrian journalist, 2018).

However, during the research there was no mention of other collaboration with external partners such as fact-checking services provided by Storyful or FactCheck.org or any fact-checking websites in the region. During the last few years there has been an increase in fact-checking initiatives and services around the world in order to combat the spread of misinformation. In 2019 there were around 200 fact-checking organisations, according to the Duke University Reporters' Lab (Bell, 2019). Storyful, for instance, is known for verifying viral videos and pictures from social media and it is used by many news organisations around the world such as the New York Times, Washington Post, ABC News, Reuters and Bloomberg.

News reporters on the ground work both ways, receiving exclusive content from their region and verifying content for the newsroom. Also, the diversity of journalists' nationalities in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath's newsrooms seems to help the verifying process. Commenting on this diversity, one of the interviewees said:

This is a new story for us and we have high flexibility with our colleagues. There is freedom of thought and research. We do not belong to a single school. In the newsroom, there are more than 15 Arab nationalities, ages from 22 years to 65 years old. It's a multinational newsroom and there are different cultures and education. So, it is difficult to put them all in one pattern. This difference is healthy for us because it adds new ways of thinking and searching for information (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

Commenting on this point, some participants defended this variation of procedures in news gathering and verification as part of the news world, which required freedom and thinking outside the box. On the other hand, some saw it as a skills gap that needed to be improved.

Furthermore, some technological support is used to help journalists verify content; this provides details about the date and location of content and further information. The verification tools mentioned most frequently during the interviews were Google images and maps, which were used by journalists. However, media management, an editorial management branch, also helps newsroom staff by reverse searching using the AVID media centre programme. This is a programme used by the news channel to store archive footage and it can also help to determine whether or not certain content has been used before. It helps to check the content history and whether it has been used before by a news organisation. Some of the interviewees used tools such as Google Image Search and TinEye for photo authentication. Both apps use reverse search recognition to find matches of the uploaded image and determine the first time that content was created. However, this is not necessarily a straightforward process as very specific knowledge may be required.

For most journalists, this seems to be only supportive tools and depending on a certain programme or application for verification is difficult. A news producer added that “we need to make sure we communicate with people on the ground or our branch in that region; we need to question and research more” (A.K.: Senior producer). This supports the claim that no technological tool is able to directly verify UGC with one-hundred-percent accuracy (Brandtzaeg et al., 2016).

#### 5.4.3.3 Verification in the *I see* service

As stated before, the *I see* service passed through different stages from its initiation phase through to its final form. The analysis results suggest that verification practices were modified over these stages. In the early stages, journalists’ role was to gather UGC via the Al-Arabiya website. However, these contests were displayed without any filtration or verification, according to a TV interview with the managing editor of the Al-Arabiya website at that time, Faraj Ismail. He pointed out that the channel had to cope with a massive

amount of content, especially from Egypt, and that this prevented them from properly verifying the location and dates of each piece of footage (Alarabiya, 2011). However, warnings were clearly issued at the beginning of the daily TV segment, which focused on the Arab Spring uprising. The presenter had to state that

we need to remind our audience that these pictures and comments reflect only the owners' views of and we did not have the chance in Al-Arabiya to verify the place and time of these contents. And showing it today does not mean it occurred today or during the uprising in Egypt.

There was no assigned team for UGC in the *I see* service during that period and dealing with these contents was part of the website's editorial tasks. Furthermore, this warning for the audience shows how journalists were cautious during that period, especially with the overflow of content coming in about the Arab Spring. However, at the same time, the teams needed to fill the gap between the news coverage and the social media, which were flooded with footage from Egypt on a daily basis.

When the service returned in 2015 in the form of a phone app, a new team was assigned for the service and a number of changes were made to create an interactive experience for the users, according to the research interviews. One of the new features was live posting, which means that users could capture live footage at the location of events, either photos or videos. They also had to be connected to the internet, which prevented the posting of any inaccurate information or locations. As a result, the team were able to determine the validity of the location details of such content. According to the app founder, this feature could prevent fabrication and make the verification process much easier and accurate for the team. However, the team faced a dilemma since live posting required internet connections and presence at the exact location of the events, which unexpectedly limited users' participations and interactions. He talked about this issue by saying:

We designed the application firstly like Snapchat live posting so we can only upload from the same site. But we found many complaints from users saying, for example, I don't have internet. So, we have modified the app so that users could save the clip

until the internet was available but that did not work. We still found complaints from users saying I received important content from friends in the Houthis territories and I want to share it and that's the case for many users. So, it was modified to allow anyone to upload newsworthy contents. We had people who lived in Saudi Arabia, but they could have important content that came from someone or a relative inside Sanaa, which is a big deal (M.J., Senior writer, 2018).

The app therefore had two modes, live posting and a sharing mode, which means that users could post live streaming from the app or share any content they had, adding descriptions about the location and events; the team were responsible for verifying the contents (Table 2). In the verification process, the team divided the content based on the location and then searched for any confirmation or other leads to verify the contents. Speaking about this process, the app founder commented:

If someone says that there is a bombing in a certain place, for example, firstly I will contact our correspondents in that area to confirm that. Or I could send an assignment via the app to see who is close to that area to confirm. But this does not work all the time as we would be in a hurry in view of such breaking news. As a news channel, we have two standards we are interested in, which are speed and credibility (M.J., Senior writer, 2018).

Table 5.3: Comparison between *I see* app features

	Live posting	Sharing contents
<b>Location</b>	Determined exactly by the app	Provided by the user
<b>Verification</b>	Easily verified because of the live posting	Hard to know the content's source
<b>Speed</b>	Speedy coverage from the ground	Takes more time to be uploaded
<b>Users</b>	Less participation (No internet)	Everyone can do it

However, as the service relied directly on UGC and dealt with issues and conflicts from different Arab regions, this brought some risks. The main risk emerging from this step was the possibility of spreading unverified contents and misinformation through the app. In a TV segment aired on the 25th of April 2015, a picture was used with a description “Yemeni citizen left his car and went to work on donkey as a result of the war and lack of money and fuel”. The picture was uploaded by a user named “Sufyan” from Yemen. Later on, it transpired that the picture belonged to “Romel Alswati”, a Palestinian journalist who, it appeared, had posted the picture as an objection against the Palestinian government’s plan to increase gasoline prices back in 2012. The picture was then circulated back on social media by a Yemeni citizen in 2015, due to a similar fuel crisis in Yemen, and it was uploaded to the app. After this appeared on the TV segment, the Palestinian journalist contacted the channel asking for an apology and a number of websites and online newspapers used this story to criticise Al-Arabiya’s coverage and to question its credibility (Figure 5.8). The team explained the picture’s origin in the next TV segment but did not give a clear apology. Speaking about this incident, an interviewee said:

We came up with the picture during the fuel crisis in Yemen and we received similar pictures and videos regarding the crisis by other users. But in the end, it appeared that that pictures belonged to a Palestinian journalist who was protesting against a specific issue, he contacted the channel and we faced some criticism. This was our biggest incident. Certainly, we searched before but we had no results. Also, the quality was low, and it resembled many images we received from Yemen with poor quality so it made sense” (M.J., Senior writer, 2018).



Figure 5.8 Screenshot of I see TV Segment and the case of “Romel Alswati”

Although this was a significant incident for the team, it apparently was not the only one. Journalists and social media producers spoke about responses they received to some UGC:

We had a problem with the accuracy of some sources, when we post contents from the *I see* app on Twitter. For example, we noticed comments saying this video isn't from this city, or the information is wrong and that put us in a sensitive position and we needed to stop and evaluate the experiment (F.A.: Social media manager, Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

This view was echoed by another informant, who said, "*I see* has a dedicated team to check the sources but it does not always work, it is still a difficult task".

As previously stated in the literature review, there are three types of common false or misleading content, according to the UNESCO handbook on journalism: fake news and disinformation, which include the wrong time/wrong place, manipulated content and staged content. Most interviewees agreed that the most common of these mistakes is the wrong place/wrong time type. This could occur for several reasons, including the low quality of the contents and the similarity between languages and places in the Arab region. A number of interviewees stated that mistakes could occur when dealing with such contents, but they had different views on how they were dealing with these mistakes. When one manager was asked whether errors occurred in their displayed content, he answered:

Yes, it happened during the Syrian revolution several times, people sent us pictures and we found that these pictures were old. In this case we review the content and investigate to see what happened. If there was an issue with our process, we gradually fix it as we go (N.A., Head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

Sending internal emails and memos or having a discussion during the editorial meeting is a well-known procedure in such cases. These notes became an unwritten role for the journalists, according to participants. Speaking about such events a newsroom staff member pointed out that:

There are no rules, I did not receive such a rule, but we regularly receive instructions via email relating to a specific incident (A.A.: Newsroom journalist, 2018).

Another interviewee alluded to the notion of the apology policy by saying the following about mistakes:

The first action is to stop the video immediately and search for an alternative video. It's rare in Arab media to apologise for one wrong video but instead we address the situation with a new correct one for the viewers (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

Returning to the stylebook, under the correction of errors it stated that:

When a mistake occurs in giving information, and that it is detected, we should hasten to clearly and frankly correct it. Rectification of the situation should take place as soon as possible by announcing the correct information. We need to emphasise that correction is not motivated by fear of blame or accountability, but that it is founded on the channel's respect for the viewer and it is keen to present in all circumstances the correct information (AlArabiya, 2013a) .

It also states under the Right of Response that:

Every individual, group or commission which considers that a relevant, incorrect or out-of-context news item was transmitted on the screen of Al-Arabia, has the right of correction and response. Despite the fact that it is essential to positively deal with this right, we should observe the maximum degree of preciseness regarding the news items as well as dealing with serious responses. Expression of this right may take different forms; the following are some of them:

- To be sufficed with correction the text of the news item in the context of the news item reports.

- To allow the concerned individual, or representative of the concerned institution, to appear on the screen of Al-Arabiya during the time of either the news report or news programme to clarify his point of view.
- To transmit the response of the concerned individual or representative with due apology. However, in this case Al-Arabia is not obliged to read out the whole text of the response for many reasons, the topmost of which is the time factor. The channel may opt to select a certain salient and significant portion of the response that adequately elucidates the intended idea. Furthermore, the whole text of the response should be referred to Al-Arabiya Site for transmitting it as a whole. In all cases, the body that presents the response, scrutinising the content of the response, and deciding in what shape it will be transmitted are all matters that require special meticulous care, and are decided by the chief editor (editor-in-chief) of the news reports at Al-Arabiya.

It was suggested that challenges increase for journalists if they face information and content overload, because of time limitations. According to Wardle (2012), “Verifying UCG is considered a most pressing challenge, particularly in the pressured context of breaking news”. In their accounts of the verification process of the *I see* service, an interviewee pointed out that filtration was time consuming as they could receive 2,000 posts per day from which to choose suitable contents. This required a team of journalists to filter and then verify photos and videos so that they could be presented on TV and the social media accounts. However, the network management priorities changed over time and the team members were relocated to the newsroom. This had an impact on the time available for and the quality of the verification. In their accounts of the events surrounding the app, participants from Al-Arabiya’s editorial management pointed out that:

A lack of human resources could be the reason. This is a new experience for us. In traditional journalism, we were working on specific news sources, either the news agency or your correspondents. But now there is a rich third source, which delivers information fast and provides visual footage quickly, but still its jeopardy is that there is no evidence to verify it because this person is not your employee nor is it a legal

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source but a person who carries a camera and has an internet connection. That's the story (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

One of the main challenges facing a 24-hour news channel is maintaining speed and accuracy, especially in breaking news. This puts journalists in an occupational dilemma as their newsrooms face severe competition to report the news first (Van der Haak et al., 2012). Commenting on time given for verification, an editorial staff member said:

It is available contents that we didn't have in the past and what is important is that it is available for all media platforms. That means If you didn't pick it up on time, your competitor can pick it up and you will lose your audience's interest if you don't deal with it correctly (N.A.: Head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

In the case of conflict zones, another participant pointed out that:

We do not have the legal or professional tools to verify because this is a moving war day by day. The standard verification that is required by the international press will delay the video maybe five days. We are a news channel covering war and delaying a video five minutes would be problem, not hours or days (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

This could also be seen in *Your interaction*, which as a daily programme faces the pressure of time and trending topics in social media. When asked about the impact of daily programmes selecting UGC from social media, a team member of the show answered:

Sure, it affects us because the programme is daily and sometimes if we do not catch up with today's topic, it will be burned or the second day something else will be more important than this topic. Programme time, let us say that there are three or four topics worth highlighting, but we have to delete some and keep others because the time we have is very tight (S.D.: News presenter, *Your interaction* programme).

Journalists also took into consideration the type of UGC and how significant it was to the news coverage. In the *I see* app there were nine sections where users could participate:

politics, sports, community, style, food, movies, technology, comedy and music. However, most of these contents did not require a lot of effort on verification. As a team member explained:

We look at the significance of the subject, for example, if someone posts a rainy weather video or a nature photo I do not put a lot of effort into verifying as it will not affect my credibility. You have to realise that some users consider their page in / see like their own social media accounts. We focus more on the political section, which is usually more interactive and has the important content (M.J.: Senior writer, 2018).

## 5.5 Risks and challenges

Since the role of journalists in the digital media age has changed to include news tasks and new participants in news gathering, there has been a corresponding rise in the risks faced by journalists. This research aims to identify possible threats and challenges for UGC adoption or citizen collaboration with Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. The research participants recognised a number of risks, including low-quality contents and privacy issues. However, most of the participants argued that the spreading of fake news, misinformation and hoaxes is seen as the highest risk of adopting UGC. This can occur when mainstream media embrace this adoption without proper fact checking, and it could have a great impact on the channel's credibility and reputation. (Knight and Cook, 2013) argue that news media's credibility in the digital age depends on effective verification practices. Talking about this issue, an interviewee said:

People don't understand the complexity of UGC or citizen journalism – if a content is published by you and it turns out to be false, that's your fault (A.A.: Social media producer, 2018).

Verification errors and mistakes can occur when dealing with UGC, which confirms the challenges facing journalists in the digital age, especially with the lack of other sources or alternative access to information (Silverman, 2014). A prime example of this was the Arab

Spring uprising. Many posts appeared on social media that were unverified and very often inaccurate – shared between activists, they were often selected by news networks and published as if they were true (Schiffers and Newman, 2013). During the Syrian war, the BBC was caught out by this practice when they broadcast a photograph showing bodies of dead children, supposedly after the Houla massacre. However, this image had been circulated by activists and did in fact show an earlier event, thought to be from the 2003 Iraq war (Brandtzaeg et al., 2016).

A similar case happened in Al-Arabiya when the newsroom team published a photograph circulated on Twitter describing a destroyed military convoy at the beginning of the Yemen war – this in fact was from the Iraqi war in 1991. Several Twitter users responded to the tweet and explained the misinformation, which forced the content to be deleted from the official account. The picture was also labelled with “Al-Arabia private sources”, which should indicate that that the content had been verified and processed by the newsroom.



Figure 5.9 Screenshot of Al-Arabiya tweet and the original photo

This problem has attracted the attention of researchers as it represents a real threat to the practice of journalism. According to (Newman et al., 2013), with many changes in the media industry, many news organisations aim to “normalise” the use of social media in their converge by adopting best practices, introducing new roles for networked journalism, improving journalists’ skills via training programmes, and publishing and updating guidelines and codes of conduct (p.15) . Some took this further by designing social media guidelines separated from the main codes of conduct and training their journalists to face the growing changes and risks (Lee, 2016).

In the case of Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, some participants raised the fact that journalists use a stylebook in their work but it has not been recently updated to include new trends such as UGC. This view was echoed by another informant, who said:

I find it important to rewrite the editorial policy for each media or station to cope with the change in social networking sites and digital media. Because it is no longer a marginal thing that you put at the end of the stylebook, but it overlaps with every daily aspect. This is what we aim to do in Al-Arabiya, but it is certainly not an easy task (A.A.: Senior producer, 2018).

Some journalists also argue that more could be done to improve and develop the adoption of social media in newsrooms and create suitable guidelines for this daily practice. Others are worried that this lack of standard practice creates a gap between journalists who deal with citizen journalism and UGC. This was introduced by one participant in the form of the case of “Sahar Tabar”, an Iranian girl who claimed to have gone through at least 50 surgeries to look exactly like her idol Angelina Jolie. The girl was the talk of the international media when she posted pictures on her Instagram account resembling the famous American actress. The participant questioned the authenticity of these posts and whether it could have been photoshopped or fabricated, which a week later actually turned out to be the case. Interestingly, the story was used in different programmes on the channel, including *Your interaction* and the Al-Arabiya website. However, while the first episode, which included the hoax, had already been viewed by over 3.6 million people, the true news story only reached just over 7,600 views.

I had my doubts about the clip of an Iranian girl who performed plastic surgery to resemble Angelina Jolie, and which spread widely. It felt fabricated, like a Photoshop or a certain trick and that is why I did not take it in my segment. There are colleagues in other programmes who used it, even in our channel. A week later we found out that she had deceived everyone and I was glad that I did not take it (R.M.: Senior producer, *Morning Show*, 2018).

Also, when she was asked about the discrepancies in each team’s verification process, she responded that: “Yes, we do not have a specific mechanism that fits everything. You could ask the social media team, it is a big gap”.

A common view amongst participants was the desire for supporting tools when struggling with a flood of content and facing time pressures on such tasks



Figure 5.10 Screenshot of *Your interaction* TV programme

The dangers of using UGC include other life-threatening risks for citizen journalists and activists who collaborate with the media, including threats, arrests and assassination, especially in regions with political unrest such as Syria. Fear for activists’ lives forced the administration to stop collaborating and training citizen journalists in Syria when an activist named “Mohammad Saeed” was murdered by ISIS in Aleppo while collaborating with Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath (CPJ, 2013). The participants used the term “cooperative” to describe activists or citizen journalists working with Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath in conflict zones such as Syria, Iran and Iraq. Collaborating with citizens on the ground was an essential step after international journalists were banned from entering Syria by the Syrian regime. This and other reasons forced many news organisations to collaborate with independence activists or activists’ media groups such as Shaam News for exclusive coverage.

According to The Committee to Protect Journalists, Mohammad Saeed started working as a media activist at the beginning of the Syrian uprising. He then worked as an official spokesman for the Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC) in Aleppo, and appeared

regularly on international news channels such as Al Jazeera. He went on to report for Orient News, a popular media group in Syria, and reported for Al-Arabiya from Aleppo (Refworld, 2014). Personal connections with the Syrian desk journalists were a significant factor in the choice of him as a cooperative, according to the research interviews. Saeed's coverage highlighted the humanitarian crisis in Syria and it was reported by the Associated Press that he was an important source of information for both its own journalists and those from other international news organisations (ibid). Al-Arabiya mourned the activist through one of its own newscasters (Figure 5.11) and a segment on the official website and stated that:

Mohammed Saeed was not the first, dozens of journalists were killed in Syria, especially in recent months by extremist groups, led by ISIS, which was accused of intimidating journalists and removing them from their positions of control in Syria (Alarabiya, 2013b).

The circumstances of Mohammed Saeed's assassination forced Al-Arabiya's management to suspend cooperative collaboration or training citizens to work for the channel. In response to the question of whether this type of content risked the name and reputation of the channel, a journalist from the Syrian desk explained:

Nothing directly will affect the channel but we felt that the real risk would be for the activists. In our meetings with the former director of Al-Arabiya channel at that time, Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, he was saying that he had no problem dealing with the activists, but that he feared that they were being targeted because they worked with Al-Arabiya. Extremist groups such as ISIS often regarded us as a tendentious channel.



Figure 5.11 Screenshot of a TV report on Saeed's assassination

Over the last ten years, the brutal war in Syria has forced millions to flee their homes with more than 6.2 million people internally displaced and 5.3 million registered as refugees in countries as Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. Also, many inside Syria are still in the need of humanitarian assistance according to a report by the Human Rights Council within the United Nations (UN, 2021). The report also spoke of journalists' risks and the challenges of reporting the conflict:

Journalists and media workers, and their activities, were targeted, threatened, harassed, arrested and murdered by government elements, as well as by armed groups and terrorist groups. Attacks on journalists and the pressure placed on the media also compounded the difficulties of documenting violations and abuses (p.9).

The crisis made Syria out of reach, especially for news reports and journalists as the situation posed major safety threats; they could subject to death or torture by regime forces or extremists group such as ISIS (Lebowitz, 2020). According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 137 journalists have been killed since the Syrian war started. In addition, a shocking report from the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) stated that 707 citizen journalists had been killed since 2011, 78% by Syrian Regime forces (ibid). During the research interviews, the participants spoke about these risks, as citizen journalists and media activists are still subjected to threats when they gather or send their contents to international news outlets:

Certainly, they were subjected to many assassination attempts by the regime and they were being pursued through electronic chips to detect their location when they were connected to the internet. At least 400 to 500 media activists have been killed by the regime during the past seven and eight years.

Similar risks can be seen in Yemen as, according to an eyewitness, Houthis militias used to track citizens' phones as they were looking for *I see* app at check points. This could put users in risk, and forced many to delete the app (Figure 5.12). An online campaign against the app also intimidated people from using it. It was claimed that the app could be used for spying

and that it could hack users' phones. The app team displayed these eyewitness claims as a sign of success for the application but without clear warnings to users on personal safety and privacy. This was mentioned during an *I see* TV segment dated 10 June and a newscaster report on 11 June, 2015. The narrative in both of these reports promoted the app and mentioned what they described as "intimidating actions" from Houthi militias against the use of the app but without mentioning the risks for the users.

The assignment feature in the app could also be risky for some users as it could encourage them to pursue dangerous places and events. A team member responded to the question of whether they considered the risks to the users from an assignment notification by saying:

No, when you register with the application there are terms that you have to read and approve. I am not responsible for users' content or if they face a problem. In the end you are not an employee and I do not tell you or force you to do anything. I'm not giving you an assignment but just information and you have the choice. (M.J.: Senior writer, 2018).



Figure 5.12 Screenshot of eyewitness tweet and circulated warning against the app

Other concerns centred on complications with using such content, especially regarding accountability and privacy issues. As one participant commented:

It's adopted widely in the news, still I believe it gave the power to anyone to become a journalist, some misuse this power and confused between news gathering and breaking through people's privacy. Unfortunately, we gave them the chance to control others' lives unfairly (A.A.: Writer reporter, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

Journalists were overwhelmed with the huge amount of content and different news tasks.

## 5.6 Content selection

One of the research objectives is to determine the criteria used to select and integrate UGC. A common view amongst interviewees was that their use of social media on a daily basis helped them to recognise the trending topics and news. Journalists who deal with social media in a daily programme such as the *Your interaction* programme and the *Morning Show* found that it gave them insights into possible content to be used in the show. The interviewees identified a number of sources used to gather news through UGC, including news agencies such as Reuters and AFP, known news outlets such as the BBC, trusted citizen media channels such as Sham, crowdsourcing and networked connections in cases like Iran, corporate citizen reporters in the case of Syria and Iraq and finally circulating content on social media. Shaam News (SNN) has become an important source for international news organisations of activists' footage from Syria, as it has had a dedicated Facebook page and YouTube channel since the start of the Syrian war (Harkin et al., 2012).

The selection criteria for using UGC are different, according to a number of factors including general criteria, editorial policy and newsworthiness. The general criteria referred to a number of informal rules between journalists, for instance when audience tweets or questions are selected for TV, ensuring that proper language without attacking individuals is used, as the tweet would be posted on live TV without any correction. These informal rules extend to the identity of citizen journalists and content creators. Some stressed the need to contact the content creator for their permission or to ask them for more details during the show. Others pointed to the fact that reaching them could be difficult in some cases, especially if it went viral and circulated without a known source.

Concerns were also expressed regarding the identity of content creators, especially when selecting opinions on live TV and especially when they are anonymous. Many social media users tend to have anonymous accounts for different reasons. Editors in the social media team, *Your interaction* programmes and the five o'clock bulletin sometimes do background

checks on the accounts before using their content or tweets. They even scroll down to make sure that the creator does not have any radical views, or posts cursing or insulting government agencies or the royal family. In response to the question 'How do you deal with anonymous accounts?' an interviewee explained:

There are basic signs, for example if the user's name is strange or has many characters, which could suggest that it is new or it does not have a formal picture and uses a Twitter default profile photo. Such signs could give you an indication of whether the account is real or not (M.J.: Senior writer, 2018).

This practice is mostly used when the topic is political, which makes journalists more careful about what to select compared to other contents that contain daily topics or views. There is no rule for this practice but it can be explained as part of self-censorship. Some journalists did this out of a sense of caution as they described it, which is important in this social media age when there are different kinds of content creators. According to a research participant:

It is dependent on the subject in the end, for example, when we ask what you think about the World Cup, here is a normal topic and everyone is talking about, but when the issue is of substance or political, and the said words or opinion is illogical, I am limited in what I can show on the screen (Z.R.: Senior writer-reporter, 2018).

There is also clear control over the information and content flow. Many programmes on Al-Arabiya use pre-recorded content, prepared to be presented rather than live interaction such as phone calls or streaming. Commenting on that, an executive from the editorial management said:

We may be criticised because we don't have direct communication with viewers within programmes, such as phone calls on air. But If we have such programmes, some viewers will mostly be speaking out of disappointment or anger and we are a news channel not a platform for expressing anger (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

Therefore, Al-Arabiya mostly uses pre-recorded shows, which differentiates it from Al Jazeera's trademark programmes that depend on live calls. According to Kraidy (2009), the Saudi-owned channel banned live call-ins on TV programmes after a number of "angry calls during a heated discussion of a salary raise for civil servants in Saudi Arabia, which many callers considered insufficient"

The editorial line or policy is also an important factor for a number of respondents. UGC should also correspond to the editorial policy of the channel. An example was given from one participant saying that:

There is a specific editorial policy regarding the "Houthis" or the "Hezbollah" issue or on specific topics. So, we need to choose certain tweets that are compatible with our editorial policy (N.A., head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

The third point is newsworthiness, based on the editor's belief of whether or not a certain tweet or content adds a certain angle to the news. Some participants differentiated between different types of contents and whether they were hard news like political items and conflict or soft news like daily entertainment and lifestyle. This classification of contents creates a dialogue regarding newsworthiness. According to the interview with a senior producer in Al-Arabiya newsroom:

This could relate to them or to the editor-in-chief himself, who is able to estimate whether this news is worth airing or not according to the audience and how it's relevant. Also, it depends on whether you have other news or not. Sometimes you have a busy day with news, so there is no room and sometimes there is a quiet day and it could be newsworthy at that time (A.K.: Senior producer).

## 5.7 The impact of participatory culture

Online media and digitisation have influenced the media industry and altered media workers' routines in several ways. Journalists rely on social media platforms for several key tasks. They use them to carry out research on topics that are potential news (Hermida 2012); they communicate with audiences by publishing their own opinions on social media and asking for

audience feedback (Spangenberg and Heise 2014); and they can conduct interviews with witnesses and identify sources through these platforms (Wardle 2014). This segment aims to examine the general impact of UGC adoption on newsroom and journalists' routines.

The comment below illustrates the impact of social media on the journalism routine for the morning programme (Sabah Al-Arabiya):

I was a combat correspondent and used to begin my morning with news sites or newspapers. But in recent years the first thing I open is Twitter. I can see what the world is saying even before the media. In our preparation for the programme it's possible to check social media a day ahead to fix the themes and plan the show. We try to integrate any significant topic or content on social media and always these topics achieve the highest viewing rate (R.M.: Senior producer, *Morning Show*, 2018).

Another interviewee, when asked if trending topics influence their choice of news, said:

Yes, certainly because it helps us to draw the map of the day, along with materials from news agencies and correspondents. The trending topics now on Facebook or Twitter tend to be non-political. Political news accounts for 60 to 70 percent of Al-Arabiya's contents. So, in the last third we cover non-political topics from what is trending on social media. We have two daily programmes, *Your interaction* and *The Morning Show*, with non-political content and we benefit from the many trends on Twitter and Facebook. We figure out what is at the centre of public dialogue via hashtags and we benefit from these hashtags when we write our breaking news. Other than the breaking news, we see where the audience is heading and what they are interested in, but it doesn't control us. (F.B.: Editor-in-chief, Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

The integration between professional and citizen journalism has helped to reshape media agenda settings by focussing on those areas that prompt public interest. According to Chaffee and Metzger (2001), this outcome has changed the agenda setting of new

organisations. No longer able to influence what the audience thinks, agendas have shifted to 'what people tell the media they want to think about' (p.375).

The participants highlighted the impact of technological convergence on the news industry. They argued that there should be no separation between social media and traditional media content in this new media age. The newsroom, website and social media units have what they described as a 360-integration system that allows the information and news to be circulated between them, with each covering a news piece. They also allow the social media unit to coordinate and decide what contents are suitable for each social media platform. In a recent TV interview with the General Manager of Al-Arabiya News channel, Turki Aldukil, he pointed out that:

We don't consider ourselves as a channel anymore, with the challenges facing the media today we work news network with different platforms in social media. We create an integration by gathering ever aspects in Al-Arabiya to be on the same page. We try not to copy the same news to every platform, but rather create specific contents for each one (Mbcmasr, 2018).

Speaking about how social media changed Al-Arabiya's relationship with the public, an interviewee explained:

We change our programmes set because of the audience. For example, *Your interaction* created paragraphs on the morning of the Arab and others. because of the audience. This is expensive and not easy because you talk to the whole team about this content and to the audience in the social networking sites and interested in it and if we were not interested it would have been one-way media but we adopted Conversational media (M.J., Senior writer, 2018).

This view was echoed by the social media producer who pointed out that:

The viewers has fled to social media from TV, it is impossible to follow them with the same news and the same style on the screen. We began to see this and impacted by increasing the number of views (A.E.: Social media content creator, 2018).

(Kperogi, 2011) investigated the adoption of the iReport platform by CNN journalists and argued that the collaboration approach with citizen media could ultimately blur the line between professional and citizen journalists. Similar concerns were voiced by a number of research participants in response to the change in the role in the media of citizens and journalists. They made clear the need to distinguish between the way professional and citizen journalists work, in a way similar to the 'us and them' dichotomies. One interviewee, when asked about her understanding of citizen journalism, said:

Anyone who has a camera and has writing and reading skills can produce content but still they are no match for the people who have studied and worked in media for a long time. It's like someone who gives his opinion on a medical subject, but in fact he isn't a doctor (N.A.: Head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

Another interviewee did not hide his worries:

Years ago, we felt that journalism was the profession of a professional journalist who was paid a salary and had a career certificate. But now anyone can become a journalist by phone and computer and become an informal media outlet, competing with other well-known professional news sources. Even we as journalists may resort to these sources to get the news or to start a news story, when clearly it used to be the other way around (A.A.: Senior producer, Al Hadath, 2018).

Another felt more satisfied with this change by saying:

It has become somewhat obligatory to do it but I am fine with that as long as it serves my professionalism and my station. At first, I felt sceptical of all these contents and topics driven by social media trends, but in the end, I say we must address people in their language and about their interests. Some of these topics are controversial but they still maintain our role as an active media player, especially Twitter, which I think changed me as I saw what people were actually saying (H.A.: Media management, Al Hadath, 2018).

This skills gap between journalists, which could also be referred to as a generation gap, along with differences in background and experience, are just some of the factors explaining these concerns. However, the editorial management seem to “push towards the change” as the Editor-in-chief explained:

The newsroom is divided into several sections, the main one of which has the newscast producers and they are colleagues aged 30 years to 60 years. They are used to traditional journalism but in recent years they discovered the modern model. Now they begin to change and respond to what happens in the social media. They became users but different in each person and their interests. They began to notice what’s trending on these sites and try to keep up with them in the news. Today they are closer to social media than two years ago (F.B.: Editor-in-chief in Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

Although training could help to bridge this gap, there is little special training for fact checking or verification, according to many respondents. One particular initiative was mentioned and this included training through the Google news initiative. The purpose of this initiative, according to Google, is to work with the news industry to help journalism thrive in the digital age (Initiative, 2019). The course had 50 participants and it lasted two to three hours but it was not repeated, according to the management. Sustaining such partnerships could provide Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath with significant training and innovative programmes.

## 5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed an investigation into the way that UGC is integrated into the television news channels Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath . The data in this chapter emerged from research interviews and newsroom observation. Using qualitative data, the analysis explored the methods used by journalists to adopt UGC and build networked journalism practices.

The first section of the chapter examined the developed forums and cases of integration of UGC in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadith. It also demonstrated the nature of journalists' work under this newly adopted approach, based on interviews and observation data. The research findings show that the newsrooms continue to rely heavily on social media and UGC in programmes and news bulletins. Two main cases were chosen prior to the data collection, chosen because they showed clear patterns of integration, such as adopting UGC and collaborating with audiences. These cases were the *Your interaction* programme and the *I see* app. Other integration examples emerged from the interviews and observations, such as the newsroom desk, the *Morning Show*, the social media unit and the Al-Arabiya website. In addition, the section focused on Al-Arabiya's stylebook and the need to introduce clear transparent guidelines to navigate this transition.

The second part moved on to the findings from the research data that were categorised into themes and sub-themes. These themes included journalists' perceptions of the participatory culture, their main motivations, content verification, risks and challenges, content selection and the impact of the participatory culture. These findings are essential as they provide an insight into the convergence environment of modern newsrooms in the age of digital media – an environment that researchers are rarely given access to. The results of this investigation into the integration process, the verification of content, and the risks and challenges to incorporating UGC into news programmes could be particularly significant for broadcasting journalists who need to deal with audience interactivity and UGC in this digital age.

## Chapter Six : Content analysis findings

### 6.1 Introduction

This research chapter aims to outline the main findings that emerged from the content analysis and which will be expanded on in the discussion. A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in the content analysis. As previously explained in the Methodology chapter, after having gathered qualitative data from in-depth interviews and newsroom observation, the decision was made to include a content analysis of news programmes and segments using UGC in Al-Arabiya and Al-Hadath. The content analysis focusses mainly on two programmes that the research has shown to be highly dependent on UGC. These programmes are *I see* and *Your interaction*.

The timeframe for the analysis spanned a period of two months and it incorporated a total of 50 news segments for each programme. In the case of *Your interaction*, the analysis timeframe started from 26th June to 6th September 2018; this included the research fieldwork period. This timeframe helped to connect the content analysis to the research interviews and observation. However, considering that the *I see* programme was suspended before the fieldwork, the analysis period for this programme was different and it focused on the programme's last phase. As previously mentioned, the programme contained four phases, the last of which was the release of the full version of the app, which supplied the programme with UGC from all of the different Arab countries. The selected analysis period for *I see* was 30th November 2015 to 31st January 2016. All of the content under analysis was gathered from the Al-Arabiya official website, which includes news archive for different programmes supported by details such as air dates (Figure 6.1).

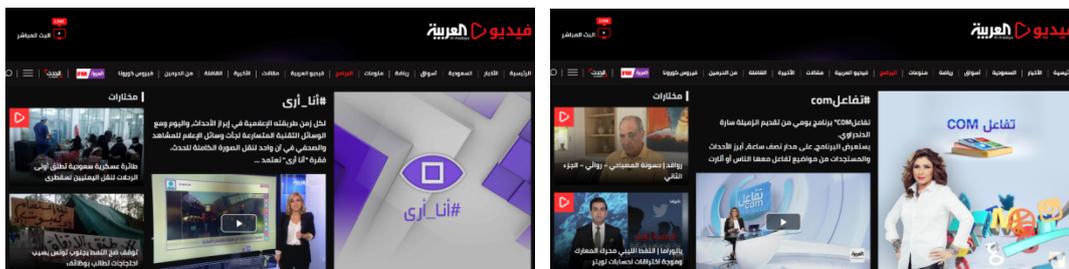


Figure 6.1 Al Arabiya website and the analysing contents

In order to ensure that the analysis was accurate, a coding form sheet for each segment was used throughout the analysis process. The form was designed horizontally to include five columns for each UGC in a single episode in order to facilitate the analysis (see Appendix). The coding form included six attributes for analysis: the content type, location, contributor information, verification signs, additional information and the content theme (hard or soft news). For example, if a clip or picture was identified as UGC, the researcher would fill in the content type column with the correct values, which were coded as 1 for video, 2 for picture and 3 for other. This was followed by a question about the location of the UGC, where different countries each had a unique coding number. Following this there were three yes/no questions regarding contributor's name and information, verification signs in the UGC and any additional information provided with the content. Finally, the theme of the UGC was noted, such as politics, war, weather, sports and other types of themes.

The form also includes general information about the segment such as the channel and the date when the segment was aired. This numerical coding in the form matches the codes used by the researcher in the SPSS program. The qualitative content analysis, on the other hand, was used to identify non-numerical aspects of the segment, such as phrases used to introduce the UGC to the viewers and additional information provided with the contents.

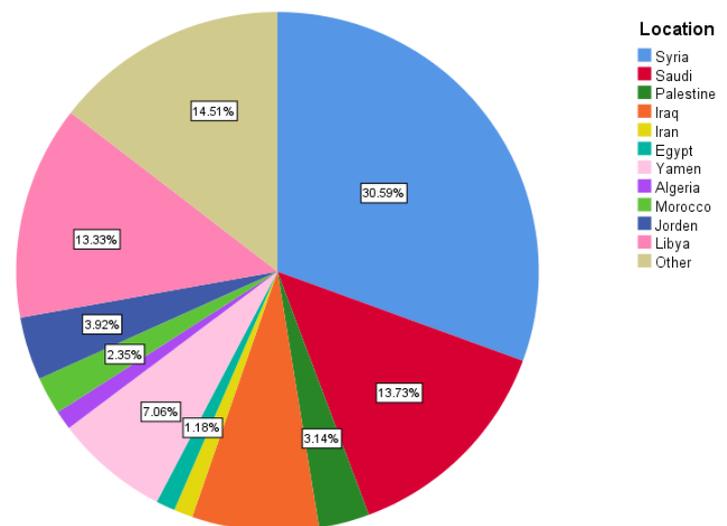
## 6.2 The *I see* programme

On the *I see* programme, over the analysis period, 255 news stories were presented that used elements of UGC. This included 50 news segments, 13 of which were broadcast on Al-Hadath while the rest were on Al-Arabiya. The segments broadcast on Al-Hadath tended to include war or political content as the channel targets current events in the Arab region, while Al-Arabiya broadcast a mix of political materials and some soft and human-interest stories. Broadcasters usually use the phrase "and away from politics" when transferring the content from war and politics to other themes. On average, the programme was shown to employ five UGC clips per segment. Overall, 56% of these were pictures and 44% were videos. No other types of UGC content such as tweets were spotted in this period .

The first set of analyses examined UGC locations, which also could be linked to current affairs in the region. Nearly one-third of the analysed content in the programme came from Syria and it mostly focused on the political unrest in the country and the humanitarian crisis, especially in the refugee camps. Besides the civil war in Syria, the programmes shed light on other conflicts in the region such as in Iraq, Yemen and Libya. Users from these areas contributed almost one-third of the broadcast content (see Table 1). The analysis also shows that content from Saudi Arabia and Libya used in the programme during the analysis period was much higher than that from other countries such as Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Algeria, which had low levels of participation. No significant content had been received from Iran as the app targeted Arabic-speaking users.

Table 6.1 : I see news coverage of Arab countries (30th November to 31st January 2016)

Country	Counts	Percentage
Syria	78	30.6
Saudi	35	13.7
Palestine	8	3.1
Iraq	20	7.8
Iran	3	1.2
Egypt	3	1.2
Yemen	18	7.1
Algeria	3	1.2
Morocco	6	2.4
Jordan	10	3.9
Libya	34	13.3
Other	37	14.5
Total	255	100.0



Closer inspection of the table shows that almost 15% of the content displayed in the programme during the analysis period emanated from non-Arab countries that have many Arab immigrants such as Sweden, Germany and the United States. This helped the programme to expand into audiences outside the Arab region, which in turn helped the channel to achieve its diversity aim. A number of diaspora users expressed political views on current affairs in their homeland countries such as Yemen and Iraq. The Arab diaspora is

widely used to refer to Arab immigrants and their descendants who emigrated from their native lands voluntarily or as refugees to non-Arab countries, mainly to Europe and to North and South America.

The analysis also shows that 60% of the UGC presented in the segments provided additional information to the viewers. Pictures tend to be very descriptive and they bring extra information that can build a news story such as background on the issue. This is different to videos, which mostly appeared in their raw version with no more than a title and the contributor credits.

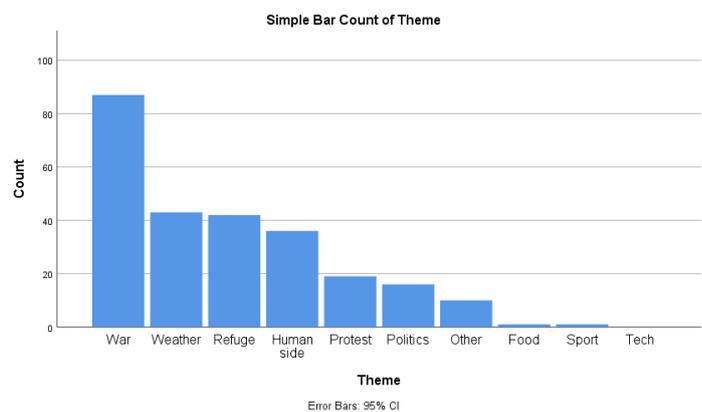
The second set of analysis examined the topics covered by the programme using UGC during the analysis period. Table 2 presents the number of news topics covered in the programmes by UGC during the period analysed. The findings show that the percentages of different news topics that used UGC were as follows: war news 34.1%, weather 16.9%, refugee and immigration issues 16.5%, human interest 14.1%, protests 7.5%, and political views from the contributors 6.3%. On the other hand, soft news topics such as 'art/sport/tech/food' combined accounted for less than 1% of the whole UGC used by the programme during the analysis period. In the research interviews, the Editor-in-chief was asked about the amount of war content in the "I see" app compared to the other eight categories such as sport, art and general soft news. He responded by saying that:

We are a news channel that focuses more on the political situation in the Middle East, and the application was born in the middle of battles and wars in the region. Al-Arabiya launched it in 2015, but it was practised by Syrian and Libyan activists from 2011 on social media. Current conditions made an app associated with battles and not with peaceful activities or events. We have switched today to other forms for this kind of content such as Twitter and YouTube from which we could draw a lot of information and videos suitable for programmes such as *Your interaction* or our social media platform F.B.: Editor-in-chief in Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

From the chart, it can be seen that by far the most significant use of UGC was to cover ongoing wars in the region. This included the Syrian civil war, the Yemen war and the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Libya, all of which fall within the same timeframe. These contents ranged from war videos to pictures that showed either military action, strikes or troops taking control of conflict areas. In some cases, the military content could be seen as part of propaganda, such as a Libyan soldier encouraging others to join the fight against ISIS or Yemeni signing poems about the war against the Houthis militias. These contents were shown as part of the audience participation through the app.

**Table 6.2: I see news topics (30st November to 31st January 2016)**

Topics	Counts	Percentage
Politics	16	6.3
War	87	34.1
Protest	19	7.5
Weather	43	16.9
Sport	1	.4
Food	1	.4
Human interest	36	14.1
Refugees	42	16.5
Other	10	3.9
Total	255	100.0



Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of the statistics was the high amount of weather content in the programme. Many clips and pictures were shared from users in different Arabic countries; some of these contents tended to be personal captures of the weather while others were linked to current affairs such as showing snow in refugee camps. Furthermore, the issues of refugees and immigration were a significant part of the programme's coverage, which could be linked to the high level of content about political unrest and wars. The analysis shows that there are regular contributors to the programmes, especially from the Syrian or Iraqi refugee camps. Citizens from these camps used the app to document the daily struggle of the refugees, the humanitarian aid and the weather on some occasions. These regular contributors have become familiar with the *I see* team and they have gained their trust, according to a research interview. Their aim is to draw the world's

attention to their cause through emotional messages and videos. This was confirmed by the broadcaster using the clip shown in (figure 6.2) as an example. This clip was entitled “A Syrian child has not eaten for seven days” and it captured a dialogue between a Syrian citizen journalist and a child who showed signs of extreme hunger. However, no details were provided about the time when the clip were captured or the child’s location. The immigration coverage was not only limited to the refugee camps; it also used UGC to show the danger the refugees faced in their migrant journeys to other countries such as Europe and their emigration lives in these countries.



Figure 6.2: Screenshot of analysis content

*I see* is driven by content uploaded by the app users, thus the UGC verification steps are considered critical to capturing credible information. Verification is “a normative practice by which journalism has sought to differentiate itself from other forms of public communication” (Zeller and Hermida, 2015 , p.111). The content analysis found that while the majority of content that was coded as UGC had credited a source on-air, almost 40% of the content did not have any clear name or personal photo that referred to the contributor. As the app users could sign up using any name or details, a number of cases during the content analysis showed that data to identify the contributors were missing. Their names appeared on the screen as random letters or they used aliases in their accounts. The broadcaster in these cases had to clarify that to the viewers. For example, in one case she said “we received this video from a sender who chooses to use the name of dream catcher” or “went by the name Baz”. Identity is a problematic issue for many users, according to the participants in the interviews. This can also be seen on social media and among the web community where there is resistance to the idea of ‘real-name’ usage (Boyd, 2011;

Doctorow, 2011). The analysis shows that the programme used different crediting techniques as the name or credit tabs appeared onscreen and were mentioned by the anchor. However, no credit was shown as being burnt or watermarked onto the content.

The way in which UGC comes into the hands of the *I see* producers is through the dedicated application. Staff interviewed as part of this research stated that there two ways in which users could send their content via the app: live posting or sharing materials from the users' camera roll. These two paths are handled differently during the verification process as live posting is considered a reliable source by the team since it is uploaded directly via the app. As explained earlier in the previous chapter. However, there were no signals to the viewers to indicate whether the content they were seeing had been uploaded from the user's camera roll or had been exclusively captured to the programme. A number of cases have shown a conflict between the contributor's location and the location of the exact event or action. For example, a clip was shown on Al-Hadath that captures a missile that landed in one of the conflict areas in Yemen but the sender was shown to be in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (figure 6.6) In another case, footage entitled "the first moments of an explosion in the centre of the Turkish capital" showed that the sender was in Hamburg, Germany. Such cases were repeated in different contexts across the programme.



Figure 6.6: Screenshot of analysis content from I see TV segment

Despite the fact that the programme presents UGC and collaborates with citizen journalists, there were no clear verification labels in the content. The single most striking observation to emerge from the data is that more than 80% of the content did not contain any verification signs or labels that indicated whether or not the footage had been verified. Surprisingly, the content presented in the programme lacked dates indicating when the videos or photos had been taken. It is clear that this practice is entirely different from that which was adopted

when the project started. At the beginning, the presenter clearly warned viewers by saying that “we need to remind our audience that these pictures and comments reflect only the owners’ views and we did not have the chance in Al-Arabiya to verify the place and time of these contents. And showing it today does not mean it occurred today or during the uprising in Egypt” (YouTube, 2013). Some interview participants pointed out that news anchors tend to use verbal signs to express the validity of the source. During the content analysis, the researcher counted 14 verbal signs or expressions used to suggest whether or not the presented content was verified. The terms used by broadcasters to confirm the validity of the content were, for example: “Our correspondent at the heart of the action” and “The user documents for us” or “photographed with his lens”. Other phrases that could refer to uncertainty included “according to the sender” or “according to his expression” or “what he described as a moment of a car explosion”. Besides such terms, the findings suggested that there were no clear verification warnings that allowed the viewers to determine the verification status of UGC.

The results of the quantitative content analysis suggest that the *I see* programme helped to enrich Al-Arabiya and Al-Hadath’s news coverage by bringing in new perspectives, footage and content. The use of networked journalism practices allowed the programme to diversify its coverage from different locations inside and outside the Arab world, which served the channel’s image as a pan Arab news outlet. It also created a new kind of relationship with viewers and regular contributors to the channel. The findings also highlighted a dependence on UGC in the programmes and the value of crowdsourcing in the news.

### **6.3 The *Your interaction* programme**

*Your interaction* and *I see* share the common characteristics of integrating UGC and being short, interactive programmes. However, the initial most obvious difference observed between them during the content analysis is the duration of their segments. While *I see* usually has a short segment range from 2 to 3 minutes, *your interaction*, on the other hand, has segments that are 20 minutes long. Over the analysis period, which included fifty episodes, the programme presented 211 news stories that used elements of UGC. On average, the programme selected 4–5 UGC per episode which means that more time is spent

on each news story compared to *I see*. The programme appeared only in Al-Arabiya, which provides a mixture of political materials and soft and human-interest stories.

Since the TV programme *Your interaction* has been dedicated to social media audience interactions, it is not surprising that UGC is firmly embedded into the programme's daily routine. Therefore, the first set of analyses examined the type of UGC used in the programmes. The analysis showed that 46% of the presented content was videos, 36.5% was tweets and only 17.5% was pictures. Unlike *I see*, which encourages citizens to send their own content, the team at *Your interaction* searches for and gathers UGC on their own. Some interviewees argued that this process provides what they described as sustainability for the program. This means that journalists are not dependent on the UGC provided by the audience to produce the programme; instead they take control of the selection and filtering based on trending and viral content on social media. This may include viral videos that become popular through the internet and unintentionally receive a massive number of views in a short time. Viral videos shown in the programme could be controversial or amusing or they could be linked to a news story that the team followed up with an interview. For example, on July 11, 2018, the programme pursued the story of the heroic act of a Saudi female nurse who saved a family from a car accident, using a viral video that had gained social media attention via a trending hashtag on Twitter (Figure 6.7)



Figure 6.7 : Screenshot of analysis content from Your interaction program

Twitter has become a significant source of material for journalists in their daily routine, especially for breaking news (Broersma & Graham, 2012). The Pew Research Centre reports that between 2013 and 2015 there was an increase in the number of new media users relying on Twitter as a primary source of information – from 52% to 63%. This social media

platform has therefore become a means of keeping up to date with unfolding events. According to the interviewees, team members use Twitter more than any other platform to understand the trends and to gather UGC. A trend on Twitter refers to a hashtag-driven topic or a phrase that is immediately popular at a particular time and these trends have led the programme to many news stories. Hashtags are, therefore, an essential aspect of the programme. Some argue that these trends and UGC reflect public opinion to some extent, and that this therefore helps to build further meaningful public participation in the programme. As one interviewee put it: "In some cases, looking online gives us a hint and a reflection of the public sphere" (N.A., head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

Furthermore, journalists use the programme's Twitter account to set a daily poll and questions connected to one of the topics presented. It then shows the results live during the segment. They also embed tweets that, according to the team, represent different perspectives and opinions on the news story. However, the analysis shows no significant distinction between opinion, news and information when the tweets are embedded and presented to the audience.

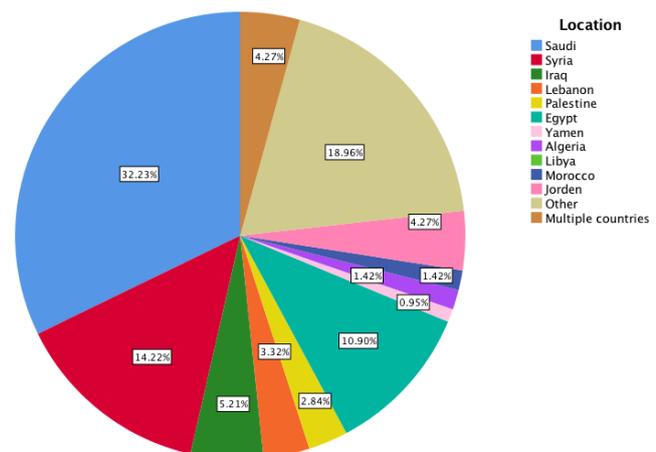
During the chosen timeframe, a significant number of written tweets were embedded in the show, accounting for more than one-third (36.5%) of the UGC used in the programme. This included tweets that were grouped together and presented in the form of a story; a conversation such as replies to a trending tweet; history such as tweets over a period of time; details about the writer; annotations regarding the events surrounding the tweets or general public opinions and reactions. The team picked tweets and used them to cover an ongoing news story, to explain a phenomenon, to obtain an official response or as stand-alone quotes. Although most of the content came from citizen users, in some cases, the programme relied on government sources for its news stories, such as official accounts on Twitter by Trump, The Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia, The Ministry of the Interior of Egypt, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (Prime Minister of the UAE) and many other official accounts. The analysis shows that all of the embedded tweets were in Arabic and in different dialects, depending on the country where the story was based. The programme shows the tweets without any editing, even if they include grammatical and spellings

mistakes. However, it hides insults if the tweet is vital to the news story, according to one of the interviewees. Although most of the content was sourced from Twitter, the programmes try to change and use other platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. Facebook in particular is used for MENA countries, such as Egypt, Libya and Morocco, as the platform is more popular there than in Gulf courtiers, according to a team member. The show uses the platform logo with each news item as a label for the source.

Turning now to the exact location of UGC used in the programme during the analysis period, the pie chart below shows that the vast majority of content used or topics presented in the show were from Saudi Arabia, followed by countries such as Syria and Egypt. It can also be noted that some countries contributed much less content than any others, such as Algeria, Morocco and Yemen. One participant commented on this issue by saying “We need to keep in mind that our audience is mostly in Saudi Arabia and that they are highly engaged in social media. That is why they appeared more in the program. This will be clearly different in the newsroom because we depend entirely on the audience”. This focus could also be seen in the programme, which regularly introduces the most searched words in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, using Google analytics, a web tool offered by Google that helps rank and report website traffic. With this tool, it is possible to shows where interactions are heading.

**Table 6.3 : Your interaction news coverage of Arab countries**

Country	Counts	Percentage
Syria	30	14.2
Saudi Arabia	68	32.2
Palestine	6	2.8
Iraq	11	5.2
Lebanon	7	3.3
Egypt	23	10.9
Yemen	2	0.9
Algeria	3	1.4
Morocco	3	1.4
Jordan	9	4.3
Other	40	19.0
Multiple countries	9	4.3
Total	211	100.0



Closer inspection of the table shows that 19% of the content displayed in the programme during the analysis period referred to non-Arab countries. Much of this content was related to international trending news stories such as the one relating to the Tham Luang cave rescue in Thailand. This was covered for a few days from international source and Arab users' interactions on social media. In some cases, the programme used content and tweets from different countries to cover a singular story such as the World Cup. This helped the programme to expand its outlook by targeting national, regional, and international news from a social media perspective, using UGC and trending topics. According to Bardoel and Deuze (2001), new communications technology allows for the formation of new, virtual communities on a global, local or individual interest basis, thus blurring the boundaries of the nation state.

Further analysis revealed that 90% of UGC broadcast in the programme provided the audience with additional information. It also showed that almost 70% of the content was labelled with details of the UGC creator such as name and picture. The other 30% did not provide such information or some of it was missing. Journalists preferred to lead with stories that were suitable for a full news segment. The programme provided more details and depth to each segment by using methods such as interviews, tweet chains and quotes explaining the content.

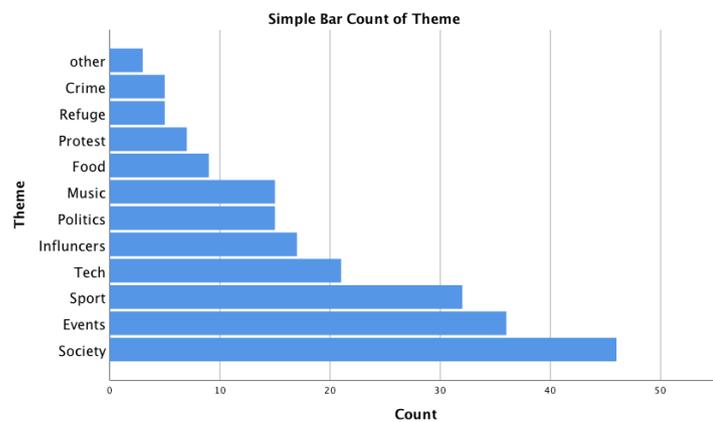
During the observation period, journalists were keen to add at least two interviews to each episode, whether from inside the studio or by phone call/Skype. This became a pattern in the show as one interviewee added that they may be forced to pull a new story if they could not find any lead or interview on the same day. This needed to be done a couple of hours before the show, which put a lot of pressure on the journalists, who were also often challenged by the vast amount of content that had to be handled in tandem with other daily tasks (Boberg et al., 2018). One of the interviewees spoke about this challenge by saying: "Since we are a daily program, it's hard sometimes to reach people on time or find a suitable guest to speak about the topic. So, if I want to give a certain story much space, a longer segment in the show, I need to have more details for the viewers, or it will have a shorter slot or even be ignored". In some rare cases, the programme interviewed an on-the-ground reporter about a news story but mostly the content was sourced from social media.

These interviews with guests also helped the journalists working for the programme to verify their content or add information or details to the story. They used their social media accounts as resources for leads and the identification of stories, as sources of content and to facilitate the verification of content that had itself appeared on social media. Therefore, they sourced information from social media posts, officials and news agencies. In many stories, the team combined different sources, but the main focus is the social media and interactive work. Still, the programme gave no clear verification warnings for the content as in the case of the *I see* programme. Besides UGC that was supported by interviewing creators or contacting officials, 40% of the material did not have any verification signs or labels that indicated whether or not that footage had been verified. When a participant was asked about the verification process, she explained that “There are no clear and explicit steps for fact-checking but each content goes through several stages before it comes out. For example, if I choose a content that was sent by an account, I do a quick verification to see if this account is active. Is this person authentic? A verified account will help because it increases its credibility. Also, I see who retweeted and shared this content or whether it was used by other news outlets or not”. (Z.R.: Senior writer-reporter, 2018).

Overall, more than 20 per cent of the stories in the programme were devoted to ‘society’ content, i.e. dedicated to social and cultural events, human-interest stories and trending issues on social media. The programmes also brought to light human-interest stories that had gained some attention on social media. These stories focused on human achievements or concerns, and they interviewed such stories on the show on many occasions, primarily through satellite. This followed by event contents such as the Hajj and Eid celebrations, which were converged in the programme through pilgrims’ phones and camera lenses. Table 4 presents the number of news topics covered in the programme during the period analysed. The following percentages were found: society 21.8%, events 16.9%, sports 15.2%, tech 10.0%, influencers (8.1%), politics and music each 7.1%, and Food 4.3%. What is striking about the figures in this table is the value of soft news compared to hard news. For example, topics devoted to ‘protests/ refugee crimes’ amounted to only 8% of the whole UGC used in the programme with an absent of war contents during the analysis period.

Table 6.4: Your interaction news topics

Topics	Counts	Percentage
Politics	15	7.1
Music	15	7.1
Protest	7	3.3
Influencers	17	8.1
Sport	32	15.2
Food	9	4.3
Tech	21	10.0
Society	46	21.8
Refugees	5	2.4
Events	36	17.1
Crime	5	2.4
other	3	1.4
Total	211	100.0



Al-Arabiya appears to have taken a different direction with *Your interaction* programmes. The show focuses less on political issues, refugees and protests. Instead, there is a clear use of soft news, social dialogue and topics that are trending on social media; these accounted for a significant percentage of the content, followed by events shared by the audience. Although political issues and protests were given less attention, the programme shed light on the Iraqi protests when they were trending. The research findings suggest that journalists in the programme were more open to users' contributions to news content, particularly concerning soft news, than before. Harrison (2009) argues that this change of selection criteria is a worrying threat to the quality and standards of broadcasting. She highlighted that the growing trend to utilize audience content, often for convenience, risks an increase in "soft news" at the expense of quality journalism, and worse, the degradation of public knowledge.

It is interesting to note that sport represents 15% of the content topics. This is perhaps unsurprising as the analysis period corresponded with the 2018 World Cup. The programmes covered the World Cup from different perspectives as it was a world event. However, the coverage was mostly linked to the internet and social media, for instance by focusing on the most-used internet meme in the World Cup. The programmes showed great interest in youth and digital culture, such as memes, gaming, internet challenges (the Kiki challenge) and social media events such as the World Emoji Day. The show also focused on other sport- related

topics such as women's sport in Saudi Arabia or athletes' interactions on social media with their fans. Examples included Cristiano Ronaldo or Arab footballers such as Mohamed Salah, who plays as a forward for the Premier League club Liverpool. Both represent two themes of content: sport and influencers.

A quick glance at the analysis results shows that the programme paid some attention to celebrities and influencers using UGC. The programme also broadcast a weekly separate pre-recorded segment from interviews with many celebrities and social media influencers. This was entitled *25 questions* and it was no more than 5 minutes long, but it had millions of views on Al-Arabiya's official YouTube channel. The segment was not included in the analysis as it was TV interview footage, not UGC.

Technology and photography were one of the topics frequently targeted in the show. The programmes usually introduced tech content creators such as Abdullah Alsabe and Faisal Al-Saif, both well known on social media, with each having more than 1 million followers on Twitter and Instagram. Photography appeared in form of vloggers or content creators such as the story an Egyptian vlogger in Japan.

During a research interview, the show's presenter showed an interest in media literacy, especially in the digital age. This interest could be seen in some news segments and topics about the effect of gaming on children, Instagram images and the popularity or credibility of news, which the show encouraged the audience to verify before sharing on WhatsApp, for example. The programme also covered digital campaigns and social movements such as sexual harassment in Arab countries through a movement inspired by the *#MeToo movement* in the US.

## 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided the main findings of the quantitative and qualitative content analysis in the research. It explored the extent to which user generated content is perceived and conducted in respective television news programs. The content analysis focusses mainly on two programmes that the research has shown to be highly dependent on UGC. These programmes are I see and Your interaction. The analysis included a total of 466 news segments that incorporated UGC in the converge.

The results support some of findings emerged from the research interviews and newsroom observation regarding the content and national diversity that user generated content could provide to the news converge. It also shows the increasing dependence on soft news and viral contents in social media.

The content analysis looked as well into some of the issues regarding verification and accurate crediting and labelling to the contributors. And although many interviewees from Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath stressed the importance of verifications, the two programs fail to provide audience with the verification *status* as 80% of content used in I see and 40% in your interaction program did not contain any verification signs or labels to confirm whether the footage were properly verified or left unverified. The analysis shows missing information and accurate crediting when presenting UGC on air. This could have some implications into the accuracy of news converge and the copyright of contributors which would expand in the discussion chapter.

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## Chapter Seven: Discussion

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to critically analyse and discuss the findings from the research data and contrast them with the literature reviews and latest advancements within the journalism field. This chapter will be divided into five main sections, each of which presents the results relating to one of the research questions. The first section discusses the main patterns and stages of UGC integration in the news process. The second section moves on to examine the main factors influencing UGC integration. The third section explores the verification methods and other issues that emerge from integration. The final section considers and reflects on the implications of UGC integration for news organisations in the Arab region.

The discussion in this chapter is based on the data generated through the fieldwork: newsroom observations in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, and in-depth interviews with journalists, executive editors, management staff and the social media team at the two channels. It further reflects on the findings from the quantitative and qualitative content analysis of two main programmes that use UGC in their news coverage. The discussion builds on the relevant literature about citizen journalism, newsroom convergence, and its implications for the media's gatekeeping role, which were introduced in Chapter Two.

This study set out with the aim of assessing the practice of networked journalism and how Arab newsrooms use UGC in news coverage. It identified administrative, political, social and cultural factors shaping the adoption of such content in Pan-Arab media such as Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. It also explored key motivations for the adoption of UGC and the ways in which journalists deal with UGC in their daily routine. In particular, two sets of research questions were formulated at the start of the thesis as follows:

RQ1: What are the fundamental patterns of the integration of networked journalism into Arab newsrooms and programmes?

- How does networked journalism change the relationship between Arab news channels and their audience?
- What is the motivation of Arab media to adopt networked journalism and to encourage audience engagement?
- How does networked journalism reshape Arab newsrooms and programmes?

RQ2: How do Arab news channels interact with user-generated content?

- What are the challenges and benefits related to integrating user-generated content into Arab news programming?
- What criteria and gatekeeping processes are used to determine whether user-generated content meets established news standards in Arab media?
- How do Arab news channels verify user-generated content and deal with credibility issues and ethical boundaries?
- What are the broader implications of this integration for journalism practice and professional journalists in the Arab media?

The research used both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in the form of semi-structured interviews with journalists and news-editorial level staff, as well as newsroom observation and the content analysis of news reports. With these methods, the researcher hoped to gain a better understanding of how and why UGC was adopted by Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. Furthermore, a full breakdown of research methods and processes was expanded on in depth in the Methodology chapter.

## 7.2 Stages of UGC and networked journalism integration

The first aim of this research was to identify the most important strategies used to integrate networked journalism and UGC into the newsroom. The Arab Spring in 2011, followed by the Yemen civil war in 2014, played a vital role in the acceptance of more collaborative and networked journalism. The research findings indicate that these events accelerated initiatives towards audience collaboration in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath.

This finding sheds some light on the development of the integration; it seems that UGC adoption started as supplementary content for breaking news and crisis reporting during and after the Arab Spring, as will be discussed in further detail later on. Wardle et al. (2014) argue that the use of UGC appears to be a familiar practice in the modern newsroom. Data from previous studies suggest that it is only used as a supplement when there are no alternative means of telling the news story, as it may otherwise jeopardise the editorial practice of the news organisation.

The research shows that while many journalists in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath adopted UGC as a supplement when there were no other sources, the use of UGC has expanded and taken on many different forms. The value of audience participation and content has increased, especially when journalists have limited access to sources and information. The speed of events appears to have encouraged journalists and newsroom editors to adapt quickly to social media and UGC. This requires a new set of skills and new ideas for programmes; new segments were also introduced based on audience and activists' participation. The research identified several programmes and TV segments that depend fully or partially on UGC. The research also indicates that networked journalism has been used frequently by Al-Arabiya journalists to cover news stories with potential safety risks, like conflict zones such as Syria and Yemen or countries with massive media censorship such as Iran. Networked journalism is also used to improve a news story and cover missing pieces. Some of these cases relied entirely on social media and UGC, while others were developed with some element of audience participation, such as live polls and comments.

While the process of adopting UGC or citizen journalism contents differs depending on the department in question or on journalists' preferences, this chapter adopts Hermida's (2011) classification of the news production process, which was mentioned in the literature review chapter. The research concludes that UGC integration has an impact on newsgathering in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath at the following stages:

**Access/Observation:** this is the primary stage for the gathering of information and news from source material such as eyewitness accounts or visual contributions. The research concluded

that social media plays an important role in newsgathering. The research participants admitted to checking and monitoring social media platforms on a daily basis, looking for news stories, topic ideas and trending dialogue, especially from Twitter hashtags. This allowed journalists to observe and approach potential news stories that could not be accessed elsewhere. This is consistent with Hermida (2010) description of Twitter as an social awareness system "that provides journalists with more complex ways of understanding and reporting on the subtleties of public communication" (p. 297).

This could be observed from journalists and news editors' daily use of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as discussions of recent trends and developments on social media. A number of journalists reported being more experienced now in monitoring social media such as Twitter trending topics and hashtags. Many argued that not every hashtag or trend is useful or reflects reality. Such trends could be manipulated by Twitter bots for political or commercial purposes, so they had to be selective. Some also developed checking techniques, such as background checks, which seemed to be informally encouraged by the editorial management. Background checks of accounts included name, bio, joining date and tweet history; this information was used to help journalists decide whether or not the information was credible. Some participants agreed that background checks are more important for news and information than for opinions or soft news contents, which could be obtained from anonymous accounts. Speaking on this issue with regard to gathering Twitter Moments, a content creator from the social media unit pointed out:

When we select a topic for a Twitter Moment, the first thing we try to observe is trending tweets and if it is enough to tell the whole story. We check up on the users' accounts and we prefer them to not be politically or ideologically involved in a way that causes any threat (A.E.: Social media content creator, 2018).

**Selection/Filtering:** This is considered to be the gatekeeping stage, which includes journalists and editors' decisions for news reporting. The research results suggest that UGC and audience contributions tend to push some topics and contents to be covered and change the journalist's role as gate watcher. This will be expanded upon more in this chapter.

Processing/Editing: This is the stage when the news story is created and formed, which includes writing or editing any news contents. The research findings show that UGC integration alters the way that journalists write or edit some of their news to fit the social media narrative and audience. Journalists were encouraged to integrate visual content and to use short headlines in *Your interaction* and *I see* to enhance storytelling and make it more appealing to social media users, and thus generate interactions. A senior writer spoke during the research interview on this transformation in the social media unit by saying:

Our job at the beginning was coordinating between different Al-Arabiya platforms, including social media. Not every news content that appears on TV is directly suitable for social media platforms. We needed to edit and select carefully what attracted users and choose the right titles for social media specifically. After we changed our strategy, we noticed an increase in views and clicks on our account. I then made a small file on how to write and create headlines for social media and it was sent to different journalists and producers because your mission on social media is to get views and clicks through users' interactions, which should reflect what is broadcast on TV (M.J., Senior writer, 2018).

Distribution: This is the stage at which a news story is circulated and made available for the audience. In many cases, journalists gather UGC from social media and then distribute it back, dubbed, with more details and headlines suitable for the digital platform. This means that news content moved both ways from input to outputs. A good example of this is the use of Twitter Moments, which journalists gather from users' tweets; they reorder them to create a short news story and interaction. With video becoming the most consumed content on social media, the channel invested more in visual content and disseminated content in different formats, suitable for the nature of each platform. One of the common video formats used is the short-texted video form. According to Argila (2017), short-texted video is "a video less than 4 minutes long where graphics and/or text narration is used over a sequence of images, without voice narration. This format, with subtle differences, is shared by all the news organisations we talked to and is becoming almost a standard" (p.10)

Interpretation: The final stage is the one at which a story is opened for comments and discussion after it has been produced and published. The research showed failings at this stage, which is sometimes neglected by journalists and producers, who rarely return to audience comments and feedback on social media. Journalists spoke of a lack of time to view such feedback, and some questioned the value of such comments after the news content has been produced, especially if it mostly represents personal opinions. On the other hand, the social media unit argued that they benefitted from users' feedback and because monitoring social media platforms is part of their job. They spoke of the value of this check to improve the contents or in some case edit and delete misleading contents. Users' comments helped to verify UGC from the *I see* app that contained inaccurate information. This helped the *I see* team to withdraw and edit some of the UGC presented from Yemen that eventually appeared to be misleading, according to the research interview with the head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, N.A.

While creating effective communication channels with the audience is the goal, the reality is far different for a number of journalists. Journalists are cautious about their audience interaction. Some believe that it still a one-direction flow. This could be seen from limited engagement in their social media accounts as many prefer to send private messages and to monitor social media feed from a distance instead of entering in a public dialogue or asking people to participate. A number of participants reported that they faced trolls and backlashes from people who had a preconception of Al-Arabiya as a news channel. This, in many cases, complicates the interaction, especially if it includes political and ideological issues. For example, in her response regarding the channel's relationship and communication with the audience, a social media producer responded:

I think our communication with the audience has improved with social media, but I still consider it as a one-way street. It is hard for us as a news organisation to respond to any comments that we receive on social media as some are ideological and political, and some are against our policy or they include insults and outrage about some topic. That is why the interaction is challenging. Sometimes the comments section is messy. Therefore, we use indirect engagements such as polls that we put on Facebook and Twitter to know people's opinions" (D.H., social media producer, 2018).

The findings suggest that newsroom digitalisation and the adoption of social media and UGC has contributed to reshaping news productions and to altering the way that journalists interact with the audience. This will be explained in the following section, which is dedicated to analysing the main factors affecting UGC integration.

### 7.3 Main factors influencing UGC integration

The second objective of the thesis is to identify some of the key factors shaping the integration of networked journalism in the newsroom and how these factors reinforce or restrict the integration process. The research findings uncovered several factors, both internal and external, that influence UGC integration. These are discussed below.

#### 7.3.1 Internal factors

Internal factors refer to the organisational or individual factors that influence integration. Several internal factors were identified during the research. One of these findings highlights the role of editorial position towards digital convergence, which drives the integration of UGC in news bulletins and programmes. New visions and a pressing desire for digital transformation from key change agents such as the senior management at Al-Arabiya seem to push journalists towards integration. This was clear from a public statement by the General Manager of Al-Arabiya News channel and from the research interviews (Mbcmasr, 2018).

Journalists emphasised during the interviews the impact of digital convergence on their daily routines. They argued that no separation should happen between social media and traditional media contents in this new media age. The newsroom, website and social media units have what they described as a 360-integration system that allows the information and news to be circulated between them so that each can participate in covering a news piece. They also allow the social media unit to coordinate and decide which contents are suitable for each social media platform.

The other relevant finding of this part of the study is related to the understanding and perception of audience involvement in the news. These results are consistent with those of other studies and suggest that journalists' perceptions influence their use of networked journalism and UGC. Boczkowski (2004) considers journalists' representations of users as a significant factor influencing digital adoption in the newsroom. He argues that journalists' interaction and collaboration with the audience depends partly on their perception of them, and on whether they see them as news producers or consumers (ibid). This is echoed by Hänska-ahy and Shapour (2013), who argue that the tension between professional and unprofessional citizen journalists could limit the adoption of networked journalism practices in mainstream media. While attitudes towards the audience's participation vary between journalists within the newsroom, some participants consider the adoption of audience contents to be a positive change, helping to maintain a trusting audience. This could be observed in some positive descriptions of citizen journalism in the interviews, with interviewees referring to it as a world phenomenon, and extolling the possibility of speed coverage, exclusive contents and the citizen voice or role in society. They invite audience participation as eyewitnesses, commentators or reporters. Although the majority of participants showed a positive perception of networked participation in the media, some were concerned about the power it gave untrained and unprofessional individuals with regard to privacy and accountability. Therefore, the research confirms the idea that journalists' perceptions of their audience play an important role in the adoption of networked journalism.

A possible explanation for these variations is the gap in age and digital expertise. The research found that age and digital expertise are key internal factors that influence whether journalists are predisposed towards digital transformation and UGC. While social media has become an integrated part of the newsroom, in a number of cases, young journalists seem to be more enthusiastic about social media and new collaboration initiatives with the public than their older colleagues. On the one hand, older journalists prefer to reinforce newsroom norms and to focus on the daily news tasks while using social media and interactions come second. Young journalists in the social media unit, for instance, regarded UGC as a communication channel with the audience and not just free content. They are open to new

experiments with UGC in the future, following in the steps of the *I See* app, which is seen as an opportunity for experimentation from their perspective.

Browsing social media comes naturally to young journalists as they are 'digital natives', a term used to describe the new generation of young technology users who were born into the digital age, whilst the term 'digital immigrants' describes the generation that has learnt to use digital technologies throughout their adult life (Wang et al., 2013)p.409). Talking about the division between young and old journalists, an interviewee said:

You always notice that the young journalists or the younger group tend to break the rules and introduce something new, but the older ones resist it at first but then accept it, but slowly (D.H.: Social media producer, 2018).

This finding supports previous research into the influence of the digital era and the use of social media by young journalists. In their research focusing on conceptualising citizen journalism, Chung et al. (2018) concluded that senior journalists with longer journalism experience tend to embrace traditional newsgathering techniques that they are most familiar with and they feel sceptical about alternative methods, like social media and citizen journalism. Rogstad (2014) also suggested that younger journalists are more engaged in social media activities than their older colleagues. These results were explained by Brandtzaeg and Chaparro Domínguez (2018), who pointed out the younger journalists are more likely to be open to untraditional methods in journalism practices and recognise the networked and interactive environment of digital media as they also use these platforms for sharing and self-expression. They also suggest that journalists with more experience in digital media tend to be open and to develop a proper understanding of the participatory culture and audience engagement in their work.

Furthermore, the research interviews and observations show that the channel, including the newsroom, is divided into several sections with journalists and news editors from different age groups and educational backgrounds. The editorial management seem to be aware of this division of thought and they have made efforts to minimise any resistance to change in the newsroom. This was previously explained by the editor-in-chief in the Al-Arabiya

newsroom, who very much wished to "push towards the change" and bridge the views and experience of the two generations (F.B.: Editor-in-chief in Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

Workload, time pressure and deadlines during the news cycle are the main characteristics of broadcasting newsrooms. These factors also play a significant role in journalists' decision to adopt UGC. Several research participants confirmed that time pressure in 24-hour news channels could obstruct their search for audience content or collaboration in the face of other urgent tasks in the newsroom. Journalists who work directly with social media trends such as those featured in *Your interaction* have an expectation pressure to provide live and up-to-the-minute coverage of trending issues and topics before the end of the day. They also expressed their concerns about available time and human resources for such news tasks. A social media producer stressed this challenge and explained the reason why the social media unit cannot manage all the UGC in the channel:

There are other jobs and tasks and the number of employees is limited. There are only five of us, so we do not have enough employees to work on these ideas. It is necessary to devote at least three or four people to them, so this is one of the challenges. As I said, it takes more time to ensure that the content owners have credibility, their orientations, and it takes more time and effort to create content from citizen journalism. It's a process, and it takes effort and time, but it's worth it definitely if we can (A.S.: Social media producer, 2018).

### 7.3.2 External factors

External factors refer to political, social or other factors shaping the adoption of UGC in Pan-Arab media such as Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. The current study suggests that the political unrest in the Arab world, starting with the Arab Spring uprising, signified a turning point for Al-Arabiya to open up to new experiences with audience collaboration and contents.

Crisis reporting in the region has posed physical and practical difficulties for news correspondents. Therefore, many journalists use crowdsourcing or networking to get news content either directly or through social media. Al Hadath correspondents in Iraq use

networks of citizens and activists to get exclusive content from different regions in Iraq. The Iranian team in Al-Arabiya use Telegram and Facebook to get updates on protests in Iran. Crisis reporting expanded after the Arab Spring, which means that the newsroom authorises many initiatives based on UGC and social media, such as the *I see* and *Your interaction* programmes. As previously explained in the content analysis results, the use of UGC helped *I see* to cover different wars and crises in the region.

The content analysis also shows that more than one-third of the analysed UGC in the programme was categorised under war news. Most of these contents were related to the Syrian case, and they mostly focused on the political unrest in the country and the humanitarian crisis, especially in the refugee camps. Besides the civil war in Syria, the programmes have shed light on other conflicts in the region such as in Iraq, Yemen and Libya. Contributors from these countries contributed more than half of the broadcast content. F.B., the editor-in-chief in the Al-Arabiya newsroom, commented on the use of the app in crisis reporting by saying:

The political unrest and circumstances facing the region are what made the application suitable for crisis reporting rather than peaceful activities or events (F.B.: Editor-in-chief in Al-Arabiya newsroom, 2018).

These findings further support the idea that crisis events drive media organisations to adopt digital transformation and innovations. It also pushes journalists to adjust quickly to the change as many who engage regularly with UGC have developed a new set of skills that they need to conduct such news tasks.

The research also suggests that journalists and editorial management are under market pressure to incorporate social media and UGC into their programming. This need to get a head start in the competition with other news organisations was mentioned in several research interviews and it can be summarised in an editor's explanation: "If we don't take it someone will" (N.A., head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018). This competition emerged from the rapid change of technology, which forced media

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organisations to rethink audience preferences and give them more space and control over their relevant content (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001).

Furthermore, this competition is not limited to other news outlets but it also extends to other non-traditional news sources as audience's news preferences and consumption behaviours are changing fast. They are moving away from traditional news cycles managed by professional journalists towards a complex news and information cycle that integrates ordinary citizens within the process. This new participant, who is often an amateur and uses anonymous names, challenges professional journalists for consumers' and advertisers' attention by creating content (Deuze, 2008).

This competition is also connected to another factor which is the target audience, specifically the youth, who represent a wide range of consumers of media content. According to Cervi (2019), the television industry has unavoidably lost millennials and the digital native generations that were born between 1980 and 2000. The global data show that millennials watch weekly less than 20 hours of TV, compared to more than 34 hours in the case of adults; the reason for this is that younger people prefer mobile devices and digital platforms (ibid). The reality in the Arab region is no different, especially regarding TV as a news source. A number of reports have revealed that social media has become the top news source for young people in the region. In 2019, the annual Arab Youth Survey concluded that:

Social media is now more popular among Arab youth than traditional media; it is also viewed as more trustworthy, has become their dominant source of news, and has overtaken TV as the most important news medium among the 18 to 24 year olds in the Arab world. This is in stark contrast to just a few years ago, when the consumption of news was still dominated by television (p. 9).

According to a top-level news manager, broadcasting is still resistant to decline but has to change in order to attract viewers. It needs to offer added value to the audience, whether by way of exclusive information, new interviews or analysis. (N.A., head of programmes in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018). One vital contribution that news organisations could make is

the fulfilment of their verification role in the face of fake news and misinformation on social media, in order to regain audience trust.

#### 7.4 Verification practices in Al Arabiya and Al Hadath

One purpose of this study was to assess the methods with which journalists in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath verify and authenticate UGC. This includes factors that should be taken into consideration when dealing with eyewitness footage and audience materials. Prior studies have highlighted the importance of verification and fact checking in the journalism field, especially when adopting UGC in the newsroom. Verification is considered to be one of the main disciplines in newsgathering, as it safeguards journalists' credibility.

Finding reliable sources and providing accurate facts enables professional journalists to claim an authority that distinguishes them from any other content creator. Shapiro et al. (2013) also argue that the journalism norms of accuracy and objectivity require attention to fact-checking sources and verifying any social media content. Verification practices are vital in order to tackle misinformation in the digital age as well as to reclaim audience trust.

As the global media landscape continues to transform, news organisations also need to step up to the expectations. According to a global survey conducted by the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) and Georgetown University in 2019 with 4,100 journalists and news managers in 149 countries, one-third of news organisations have engaged fact-checkers in order to deal with verification. The study also showed that more than twice as many journalists used social media verification tools in 2019 compared with 2017 (ICFJ, 2019).

While social media has, without a doubt, created a large space for both media and the public to exchange information and news, it has also raised questions about the accuracy of such contents. In the course of the research, most of the interviewees insisted that verification is an essential aspect of the UGC adoption process. However, the research findings raise significant questions about the observation of verification practices. This next part of the discussion will be divided into two sections, the first focusing on the verification process itself and the second covering issues including crediting, labelling and copyright.

#### 7.4.1 Verification process

Verification is a complex process in the digital age because of the large amounts of UGC received, with live feed flow, and different forms of content such as images and videos (Brandtzaeg et al., 2016). However, the research found that there were no fixed systematic procedures or checklist used by journalists at Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath for verification. Practices varied from one journalist to another with regard to verification methods. Taken together, the results suggest that there are six main factors potentially relevant for the verification process in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. These factors are: content type, verification time, human resources, personal connections, journalists' skills and technological support.

Verification was described by several interviewees as "time consuming ". The time factor forced some participants to use fewer problematic contents, such as politics, and to cover more soft news and audience comments that did not require as much verification. These findings are congruent with Schifferes and Newman (2013), who identified two challenges for journalists integrating citizen and traditional media. First, the overflow of information and content, especially from conflict areas like Syria, could burden journalists in their selection and verification process. The second issue is the verification process itself, which is time consuming as there is no fixed way to verify videos, and they must be checked from different standpoints.

During the observation period, online tools such as Google Image Search, Tin Eye or video verification tools – which were explained earlier in the analysis chapter – were not frequently used by journalists in the newsroom, or in any case they were mostly not their first verification option. The research findings show that most journalists rely on traditional methods. Journalists choose different approaches to authenticate UGC and social media sources. They follow an investigative process to assess whether the news is valid. This includes obtaining confirmation from other sources such as officials or personal connections. Journalists and reporters, whether in the newsroom or the field, create their own contact circles to help them gather news and contents. In many cases, these people become trusted sources that could be vital for the newsroom, and they may be invited as interview guests or

be asked to help verify contents. Many still favour direct face contact or phone interviews when verifying their sources. This explains why networking plays a significant role in their job.

In this regard, the widespread posting of UGC on social media platforms could alter journalists' tasks so that they are built on digital detection. This requires journalists to strengthen their contacts with on-the-ground sources and news staff from other departments. The channel's national diversity helps to achieve this verification approach. Al-Arabiya journalists are able to benefit from their colleagues with in-country information and background, as the channel includes 15 Arab and other nationalities, such as journalists from Syria, Yemen and Iran. They help to translate content from different languages or dialects as well as providing background context and information that could be vital for verification. Therefore, they are mentioned frequently during interviews as information verification guides. A good example of this is the work of the Iranian desk:

We depend on our knowledge of the Persian language first, and then various dialects and the cultural interaction with Iranian people. There are tools such as geographical information and ethnic background, all of which help us to determine what is correct. For instance, we came across a video of an incident from a certain city, and it was circulated a lot on social media. But apparently, the video was old and from a different location as we noticed that people in the video spoke with a certain accent which was not from that city. That's why we didn't use it (M.A.: Senior editor, 2018).

The research finding also supports the importance of sense-making and critical questioning, which are crucial for journalists to perform their jobs effectively. The research participants described personal knowledge and previous expertise in verification as "journalistic common sense" tools. This approach included tracking down the content source, searching for any clues that supported the information or checking the weather or geographical landmarks. However, some participants spoken about the need for supporting instruments to navigate their work when there is a flood of UGC on social media platforms. This also highlights the importance of sharing experiences with the different departments and journalists to formulate a common best practice in the newsroom.

#### 7.4.2 Crediting and labelling issues

According to Wardle et al. (2014), crediting means providing accurate details about the content's creator, whereas labelling content is acknowledging to the audiences that the content is user-generated. Their research on the adoption of UGC and verification practices in several TV channels found that these practices were inadequate and that there was a large amount of UGC without accurate labelling or crediting that was presented like any other content. They concluded that media organisations "need to understand the full implications of integrating UGC, and do so quickly. We say this particularly with regard to the impact on their staff, their audiences, and the people who are creating the content in the first place" (p. 121).

The content analysis findings in this research raised similar concerns regarding crediting and labelling. They showed the absence of verification warnings or UGC labelling to the viewers that explained the origin of the UGC and its verification status. In a number of cases, the two programmes, *I see* and *Your interaction*, did not provide any explanation about whether the UGC used had been vetted by the channel. The content analysis for *I see* clearly shows that the programme failed to address the audience about the verification status. For example, the findings show that more than 80% of the content did not contain any verification signs or labels that indicated whether or not the footage had been verified. Also, there was a notable absence of the terms "verified" or "unverified". The *Your interaction* programme had the chance to provide some UGC with details about interviews and official reports that supported the content's validity, but it also lacked labels, which gave the impression to the viewer that it had all been verified.

In the case of the *I see* programme, the analysis also showed cases of what could be seen as inaccurate or unclear crediting, where there was a conflict between the original source information about, for example, the location, and the content uploaded via the app. One of the significant risks emerging from inaccurate or unclear labelling or crediting is confusion over whether the content was obtained by Al-Arabiya journalists or whether it came from other unspecified sources. Taking into consideration the fact that Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath reporters have adopted mobile journalism in their reporting, the lack of labelling and

sourcing could increase the viewers' confusion. Therefore, the correct crediting and labelling would have ensured that the audience was accurately informed. This is supported by Johnson and Dade (2019) argument that news organisations "risks keeping its audience in the dark on how it decides what the appropriate mix of professional and amateur content is for its audience, which can lead to alienation of the audience and diminishing trust" (p.14). This issue should have encouraged mainstream media to follow a transparent approach to limit any possible risks and issues emerging from adopting UGC in news coverage.

Transparency is a key element in journalism as it allows news organisations to build up credibility. It is good professional practice to stress the reliability and truthfulness of the information presented. This includes giving the public clear and dependable information about their sources as part of news trustworthiness. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014):

Transparency also helps establish that the journalists have a public interest motive, a key to credibility. The willingness of the journalist to be transparent about what he or she has done is at the heart of establishing that the journalist is concerned with the truth (p.318).

Transparency is vital when conducting proper verification in the digital age, which is overflowing with misinformation. According to Wintterlin et al. (2020), transparency with regard to UGC should include clarity about the original source or contributor, thus making the audience aware of possible issues or hidden agendas in the citizen contribution.

Transparency is also required in the verification process, which means explaining the way that the contents have been verified in order to ensure the legitimacy of the news provided (ibid).

Some journalists were more aware of the significance and complications of crediting and labelling than others. They admitted to facing problems when using UGC without proper credit to the content creator. Some acknowledged the difficulties with tracing the UGC's origin as the uploader is not necessarily the content creator. With no supporting information,

such as date or location, research is nearly impossible in some cases, similar to looking for a needle in a haystack.

Accurate crediting is also linked to obtaining permission and securing rights to use UGC. With the expansion of social media platforms and video hosting websites like YouTube, there has been an expansion of UGC and content creators. Many prefer to preserve their intellectual property and inform media organisations of this. However, little was mentioned during the research interviews about gaining permission. While contents from the *I see* app are used with permission, based on the terms and conditions of the app, during the observation the researcher found that there were no common forms or techniques used to obtain permission for using UGC.

Ways of gaining permission also varied between the participants. Members of the social media team seemed more aware of the significance of permission and crediting than other journalists. Some journalists admitted during the research interviews that in the past they had had cases of content creators objecting to the use of their content on the channel. However, failures in crediting and permission could lead to the channel facing lawsuits or damage to its reputation. Such legal implications should not be ignored.

The result of any mistakes in verification and fact checking could therefore have wide-reaching implications for Al-Arabiya or Al Hadath. As Al-Arabiya targets audiences with different demographics in various Arab countries, this could increase the number of times they face issues over copyright. According to the verification handbook, copyright laws differ from one country to another, and the terms and conditions also vary on different platforms and services. However, obtaining permission to use UGC such as images, videos or any other content should be obligatory (Silverman, 2014). This strategy could also reinforce journalists' professional identity by giving them influence over the content creators if they want their content to be presented on the news channel and it would preserve their copyright, benefitting both parties (Johnson and Dade, 2019).

In a recent case, the Public Authority for Intellectual Property in Saudi Arabia (SAIP) fined a TV channel that had published a video clip filmed and produced by an individual with their

name and logo removed, without obtaining their written permission or approval, for violating their intellectual property rights. The penalty included compensation for the amount of 58,000 riyals and a fine of 51,000 riyals, with the channel being obliged to remove and delete the video clip (Okaz, 2020b). Therefore, crediting and gaining permission to use UGC or social media content should be a common practice among newsroom journalists. The channel stylebook also states under section one on copyright and intellectual property that:

The Al-Arabiya TV channel respects the right of intellectual property and it does not use at all the product or work of another, whether partially or wholly, without their expressed permission or reference to the source. It also follows all relevant human rights covenants and laws that are applied nationally and internationally (AlArabiya, 2013a) .

These results suggest that the expansion in the adoption of audience content has not been matched by an improvement in editorial procedures and codes, and that there has been inadequate training for this transition. The research findings show that there has been some hesitation over updating rules and guidelines regarding UGC and audience collaboration. With more programmes and news segments embracing audience participation, this gap will increase with time. Therefore, the research stresses the significance of establishing updated and consistent guidelines that help journalists to deal with issues such as verification, labelling and permission. Traditional guidelines and policies might need to be updated in order to handle this change in the newsgathering process. Journalists and news editors also should rethink their actions with regard to ownership, permission and copyright, and their implications. This finding supports Kröll (2015), who stated that many media outlets need to realise that adopting networked journalism and audience collaboration requires investment in infrastructure, which enables the outlet to maintain credibility. This investment should also take into consideration human resources and developing the staff's skills, which is vital if the channel is to navigate this change successfully.

## 7.5 Gatekeeping impact

This segment of the discussion will focus on the effect of UGC and networked journalism integration on the gatekeeping and gatewatching functions, which were explored in the literature and theoretical framework chapter.

The theoretical approaches to this thesis focus on journalistic practices and issues occurring when journalists adopt networked journalism and UGC in their newsroom. It focuses in particular on the hierarchies of influence, newsroom routines and workflows (Reese and Shoemaker, 2016). As mentioned in the literature review, part of the change brought about by the participatory culture in the media is a reduction in journalists' control over media contents.

According to Bruns (2005a), the journalist's role in the age of new media has changed from strict gatekeeping to what could be described as gatewatching. The difference between these terms is explained by Stanoevska-Slabeva et al. (2012), who state that “while gatekeeping was born due to the scarcity of conventional media, gate watching reflects the changes and new possibilities for audiences to participate in the news generation process enabled by the internet and new media” (p.7) . With the impact of social media and news flow, media organisations are required to open the gates to unprofessional news (Van Leuven et al., 2014).

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) developed a theoretical framework that analyses news media on several levels. They analysed gatekeeping across five levels: individual, routine, organisational, institutional and ideological or sociocultural. As previously explained in the literature review chapter, this framework is referred to as the hierarchy of influences and it describes different factors that influence news content, from the micro-individual level to the macro-social system (Reese, 2019). The framework was developed by the researchers over time and it has become an important analysis tool to understand newsroom routines and editorial decision making. The updated framework recognises the emergence of digital media and social media platforms as a new factor that could have disturbed the hierarchy of influences (Reese and Shoemaker, 2016). This study will now focus on the discussion of three levels, individual, routine and organisational, which emerged from the research findings.

The individual level in this research examines journalists' reflections on their role as gatekeepers and how it has been challenged by the integration of UGC and networked journalism practices. During the research, a number of interviewed journalists acknowledged that transformation in the digital era influenced their flexibility and their gatekeeping control over media content, as they were pressurised to deliver what the audience expected. They were aware of the convergence influence that imposed changes and challenges in the newsroom, redefining their work and relationship with the audience. A writer-reporter at Al-Arabiya newsroom tried to summarise this change by saying:

It's not the seventies and eighties anymore where you'll have one or two channels that impose on the audience what they want. The audience is now arranging priorities, and many media platforms are looking for audience satisfaction (A.A.: Writer-reporter, 2018).

However, some participants argued that the aim should be balanced between opening up to audience participation and keeping their right as traditional gatekeepers, as losing all control meant losing their journalistic identity. They stressed that they had the last word when it came to selecting and filtering the content. As Z.R., a senior writer-reporter in *Your interaction* programme, stated:

I still consider myself a gatekeeper, because even if a story gains many views on social media, it is up to the producer to decide what suits the programme, even if it means less interaction. The journalist or the producer is still a gatekeeper and will always be a gatekeeper (Z.R.: Senior writer-reporter, 2018).

On the other hand, the research found a number of cases that combined traditional newsgathering with "gatewatching" practices, which depend on citizen and audience collaboration. A good example of this is the work of A.F., an Al Hadath correspondent in Iraq, who gathered together a group of voluntary activists to discuss and supply UGC via a WhatsApp group. In many cases, he integrated their contents into his news reports, which helped to expand his coverage to large areas of Iraq and the Kurdistan region, which might otherwise have been difficult (A.F.: Al Hadath correspondent, 2018).

Other examples include journalists from the Syrian and Iranian desks who used blended forms of newsgathering, a traditional method based on news agencies, official reports and networked collaboration with activists and well-known sources on the ground. While these cases are still limited, they show that Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath journalists can be open to networked journalism when it is needed. This could be described as a push-pull relationship cycle that depends on journalists' needs and motivation for audience collaboration. This finding is in agreement with Beckett and Mansell (2008), who point out that traditional mainstream media would benefit from networked journalism and improved journalist skills. "Successful networked journalism providers might offer the premium service of skilled journalistic functions: editing, analysis, technical support, and information packaging but this would become integrated into the flow of information from users" (p. 97).

The second level is routine journalistic work. As Reese and Shoemaker (2016) explain, this "is concerned with those patterns of behaviour that form the immediate structures of media work including unstated rules and ritualised enactments that are not always made explicitly" (p. 399). This level is connected to daily practices and journalists' routine. This includes selecting news agenda and stories in relation to the use of UGC and the audience's participation. One of the significant factors that emerged from the research observation and journalist interviews was the influence of the editorial meeting on the news selection process.

As was described earlier in the analysis chapter, the main editorial meeting includes all departments in Al-Arabiya and it is an opportunity to exchange the news agenda as well as important topics and media content. Several journalists suggested that they were persuaded by the editorial board or social media unit to utilise social media content and its interaction in their daily workflow. This could be observed at the beginning of the editorial meeting, which starts with the social media team presenting what is trending today on social media and the top stories that have been viewed live on the Al-Arabiya website. While this presentation from the social media unit does not necessarily drive the news agenda, it is surely influential as the discussion between journalists and the editor plays an important role in the decision making.

The social media unit also benefits from metrics analysis tools such as Socialbakers and Google analytics. F.A., a social media manager in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, pointed out that:

We spend much of our time studying and analysing audience numbers on a daily basis. We use the 'Socialbakers' program, which gives us an insight into our social media performance, such as on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, in one place. And so, we collect these numbers, and we learn from them, and we send a report every two weeks to different sections of the channel to stay relevant (F.A.: Social media manager in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, 2018).

These results are consistent with other studies which suggest that online journalists or gatekeepers are very interested in monitoring web metrics and tracking audience behaviours, in order to shape relevant content (Vu, 2014). Nguyen (2013) argues that this new paradigm could alter the way that journalists think about their content and allow the rise of a 'click-thinking' journalism culture (p.147). According to Loosen and Schmidt (2012), social media and web analytics tools have created new means for the mainstream media to rediscover their audience. Web metrics have also become a vital indicator of how well newsrooms perform (Peters, 2010). While web metrics are often thought of as influencing online journalists, the research suggests that this analytical approach also influences the broadcasting of TV news.

The third level of the framework focuses on organisational influences such as internal structure, ownership, goals and policy (Vu, 2013). Such factors are more related to editorial-level staff such as news editors, executives and media owners (Örnebring, 2009). The observation revealed that senior editors and editorial management had a common interest in integrating social media and creating an interactive relationship with viewers. This request to interact with the public has become more common in mainstream media as editors strive to attract a loyal audience in the current competitive media environment.

The research found that audience collaboration created a new kind of relationship with viewers and regular contributors to the channel via social media. This explains journalists' use

of different digital platforms to monitor and gather news and information, such as Twitter for the Gulf region countries and Facebook for then MENA and North Africa audience. A study by the Northwestern University in Qatar (2019) concluded that:

Egypt is the largest market for Facebook in MENA. It is home to 38 million daily users and 40 million monthly users. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are the fifth and sixth largest markets for Twitter globally. Over 10 million users are active on the social network in Saudi Arabia, and 8.3 million in Turkey (Dennis et al., 2019 ,p.6)

One of the challenges that face Al-Arabiya as a Pan-Arab channel is that of addressing a wide range of audiences from different backgrounds and Middle Eastern nationalities. The research findings suggest that the use of UGC and audience collaboration helped the channel to diversify its coverage by bringing in new perspectives, footage and content from different locations inside and outside the Arab world.

The content analysis findings show that there is a diversity of contributors to the *I see* programme. They represent 11 different Arab and non-Arab countries, many being Arab immigrants from countries such as Sweden, Germany and the United States. This helped the programme to expand into audiences outside the Arab region, and as a result it contributed to achieving the channel's mission statement, which is to "deepen understanding of Arab societies, cultures and economies" (Al-Arabiya News, 2013). This is also manifest in the vision of MBC, Al-Arabiya's mother company: "With our heart in the Arab world, we are forging a global media group that enriches people's lives through information, interaction and entertainment". (n.d)

## 7.6 Managing the implication and risks

This section focuses on how the channel deals with some of the risks to activists in conflict zones and to journalists who deal with traumatic imagery such as crime scenes, natural disasters and war images, which could lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As the research shows, social media is currently an integral feature of the newsroom. A number of journalists reported dealing with UGC on a daily basis, and some of these contents contain

disturbing and traumatic imagery from war and conflict areas. The research findings show that little attention was paid to journalists' well-being regarding violent imagery in UGC. There is therefore a need to train journalists on trauma and the way to deal with it. The mental and physiological impact of dealing with this trauma should not be overlooked.

According to the Al-Arabiya stylebook, the channel gives due attention to the feelings and sensitivities of the viewer. Hence, it subjects material that comprises scenes of violence or incitement to violence, hatred or religious or ethnic discrimination to minute and thorough investigation in a manner that affects neither the news value of the material nor the right of the viewer to know the truth. While the content analysis results show no use of traumatic footage or images in the research sample, the greatest burden may lie on journalists' shoulders as they are required to deal with and edit any traumatic material. F.H., a Syrian journalist, explained this effect by saying:

I personally receive many tragic contents every day and I even cry while I edit some of the videos because of the sound of screaming from a mother or a father while they were crying with their dead children in front of them. I also receive disturbing videos of detached corpses, and we can never show them, not even discuss this topic (F.H., Syrian journalist, 2018).

According to Specht (2018), the effect of viewing violent and traumatic content from UGC is becoming an increasingly significant topic in journalism and psychology. For instance, Feinstein et al. (2014) examined the effect of witnessing images of extreme violence on journalists from three different newsrooms who interacted with UGC on a regular basis. They found that the frequent exposure to traumatic content from UGC is a strong factor in PTSD-type symptoms, such as anxiety, depression and heavy alcohol consumption. They also advised that: "given the changing nature of the newsroom since the studies outlined above were conducted, there emerges a pertinent need to examine the risks of vicarious trauma in relation to validating, editing and sanitising violent eyewitness media or user-generated content" (p.1).

These factors could easily go unnoticed within the daily routine and pressure of working on an 24-hour news channel, and they could have large implications for the mental and

psychological health of journalists. They could also threaten the success of any collaboration with activists and citizen journalists.

The second aspect that needs to be tackled in a news organisation is ensuring the safety and security of citizen journalists or activists collaborating with the media, especially when covering a crisis or conflict, which put them at risk of being captured or killed for their coverage. Syrian journalists spoke about activists having been a target and assassinated in Syria, either by the Syrian regime or militant groups. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, a non-governmental, independent group, more than 700 citizen journalists have been killed during attacks in Syria, and at least 1,169 have been arrested or kidnapped since the beginning of the civil war in 2011 (SNHR, 2020).

This research found a couple of examples where citizen journalists working with Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath were killed, such as the case of Mohammad Saeed in Syria, or arrested as in the case of *I see* users in Yemen. Such cases need to be tackled by management to assess the risks for citizens and activists. They should also be advised and trained on how to stay safe and how to deal with violence and threats so that no life is jeopardised in the process. It is also vital to ensure the privacy of contributors and to secure communication with activists and citizen journalists in countries such as Syria, Iran and Yemen. Citizen journalists and content creators should also be informed about their privacy and anonymity rights. Digital awareness and literacy have become vital in media and audience relations, and they should be specifically promoted in order to preserve online safety.

This is very important in the case of Al-Arabiya, which, as previously highlighted, has been a main target for extremist groups. It also operates in different conflict zones in the region, all of which should encourage the network to pay great attention to the safety of both citizen journalists and their own news correspondents. A risk assessment strategy, to take place prior to any collaboration on the ground, could be one of the solutions to minimise such risks.

## 7.7 Journalists' changing role in the digital age

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This segment will focus on some of the practical implications of UGC integration. It looks in particular into journalists' role in the digital age and how integration could blur the boundaries between professional and citizen journalists.

During the last decade, social media platforms have progressed from being communication tools into an integral part of nearly every aspect of people's lives, which as a result has contributed to reshaping the global media landscape. The rise of citizen and networked journalism in particular means that journalists' role is destined to change. Instead of being the main source of news and information, they will be obligated to create more space for the audience to tell directly their own stories and participate in current events. According to Kröll (2015), this opportunity should encourage journalists to discover new ways to get closer to the public and collaborate with them, as they may have more direct access to information and current events than journalists do.

Therefore, news organisations must overcome these challenges by deciding how to manage this change in the best way. The majority of those who took part in the research interview observed this change as a strength, a chance to be open to the public and create a two-way communication that has not existed before.

The research results reveal that social media platforms, followed by instant messaging apps, are a key tool for Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath journalists. Their use of such platforms ranges from simple tasks such as mentoring trending topics and hashtags to more advanced tasks based on their digital expertise and needs. The research also shows that social media platforms were used for both the curation and distribution of news and contents. They create a chance to interview positional guests on TV programmes such as citizens, eyewitnesses and experts, which was not possible before. A number of participatory practices are embedded into journalists' daily routine. This, however, involves a large number of tasks and a particular set of skills.

One of the main implications of adopting UGC and social media platforms is the need to develop a new set of skills to complete the emerging tasks. The research findings suggest that job rotation between departments and deadline pressure are linked to the ability to

conduct proper verification and build collaboration on the ground. This forces journalists and news editors to be multi-skilled and multitasking. According to Reese and Shoemaker (2016), "technology has brought new pressures on information workers in general, increasing the velocity of incoming information and need for multitasking, but it has also given them the ability to create a personal brand apart from their employer, using social media such as Twitter" (p.399). Some journalists were open about their concerns regarding the extra workload and skills required to perform effectively. Other also did not hide their worries about the future of their profession and the journalistic legitimacy.

The research findings show that Al-Arabiya is no stranger to multi-skilled journalists or what they prefer to call 'comprehensive' journalists. However, in terms of broadcasting news, their understanding of a multiskilling journalist seems to resemble video journalism, which is "the process by which one person shoots, writes, and edits video for broadcast or the web ... a form of newsgathering taking hold in newsrooms of all kinds, by professionals and would-be citizen journalists around the world" (Bock, 2012). In response to a question regarding journalists' concerns over the impact of social media on their work, a research participant explained:

I'm not worried about the effect of social media on our work, as the audience develops on these platforms and can create their own content, so we must develop as well. You'll need to deal with these changes or you will remain in the same place. We are developing in Al-Arabiya, and we could notice a difference in this regard. We had a term in the channel 10 years ago, which is a 'comprehensive journalist', this journalist could work online, or in the field, or in the newsroom. He would have the capabilities to write, edit or broadcast radio or television. It is the abilities of a person who learns them and adapts to the change (M.A.: Saudi breaking news editor, 2018).

In general, the participants also spoke of the need to incorporate new journalistic skills into their work. Some of these news skills included mobile journalism, crowdsourcing, digital verification tools, social media engagements and storytelling in the digital age.

Crowdsourcing, for instance, is a vital tool in interactive programming, particularly if it involves trending or public interest stories, as quoting from the audience's perspective

increases their trust. Furthermore, mobile journalism or what is known as ‘mojo journalism’, involving the use of smart phones, is at the centre of the convergence change. Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath journalists encouraged their correspondents to use mojo journalism and their phones to document reports especially for social media. One interviewee stated that “Now we have correspondents who favour the mobile phone, register, produce and share it with you live via an internet connection” (A.K.: Senior producer in the five O’clock news bulletin, 2018). A number of the participants confirmed that this had become a common practice between journalist, especially news reporters.

These changes seem to be linked by the whole convergence process in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, not only the influence of social media and UGC. While traditional journalism skills such as research, news writing and reporting, are still very highly regarded in the newsroom, previous research suggests that journalists nowadays are expected to bring a resourceful set of skills to their work in the digital age.

The research also shows that networking skills and the ability to create collaboration with citizens could be a hiring advantage to modern journalists, as in the case of Syrian and Iranian journalists. Digital knowledge, skills and educational background are also vital to this collaboration. Quinn (2005) pointed out that convergence in the news production process could have the greatest effect on journalists’ role, especially “information gathering convergence”, which requires modern journalists to be multi-skilled when presenting a news story on multiple media platforms (p.6).

The convergence approach in the network led to the establishment of a social media unit, a dedicated team so social media platforms and content curation after it was a general multimedia unit. This was a response to the rise of competing content creators and social media influencers. Furthermore, the unit has introduced the social media editor position in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, which requires both technological and journalistic skills. According to Wasike (2013), social media editors could be generally defined as “tech savvy journalists appointed by news agencies to act as the newsroom liaisons to the digital world, also called the social media sphere” (p.6). Such news tasks could come in different forms such as social media editor, social media strategist, content creator, digital editor, social media manager,

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social media producer and digital news editor, but the main task of all of them is to link the news organisations to the digital world (ibid).

Most of the social media editors or content creators in the unit had a media background and education, except for two technical experts who helped the team with the technological aspects. The team are currently carrying out multiple tasks that can be summarised as follows: managing the channel's social media accounts, content curation, including adopting UGC, using analytics tools to measure audience engagement, and engaging with audiences in the digital sphere.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed and discussed the research results in light of developments in the Arab media landscape as well as research in the field. The findings and discussion particularly focus on the processes and factors influencing UGC integration. They also shed light on verification practices and issues in the case study. The chapter then demonstrated the theoretical aspect of gatekeeping and gatewatching in the newsroom, as well as risks for journalists and activists. It will be followed by the discussion of the study's limitations, practical recommendations and direction for further studies in the conclusion chapter.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

This final chapter aims to summarise the main findings and recommendations that emerged from the research and its key contributions to the field. This research focuses on a relatively new area of news production that has emerged from the rise of citizen journalism, and its influence on mainstream media. The study's main motivation is to understand the growing use of social media and user-generated content (UGC) in news media organisations, especially in the Arab broadcasting news. The investigation takes the form of a case study with the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news networks. The study focused on the *I see* and *Your interaction* TV programmes, along with several news reports that embrace audience collaboration, in order to investigate how traditional media organisations collaborate and interact with audiences. It addresses journalists' perceptions and attitudes towards UGC and collaboration with the audience to form networked journalism practices. It sheds light onto the main factors that motivate or pressure journalists and editorial management to adapt and deal with the digital media influence that has given ordinary citizens a means of participating in newsgathering.

Moreover, the study goes much further to explore the way that journalists and news editors deal with UGC and social media content in their daily routines. It explores the methods used to verify and integrate such content into news bulletins and programmes. This thesis also studies the implications of UGC integration for journalists' gatekeeping processes and ethical considerations. This thesis consists of eight chapters: introduction; literature review and theoretical framework; media and broadcasting in the Arab context; research methodology; Observation and interviews finding; content analysis results; discussion; and conclusion. This concluding chapter will begin by reviewing the objectives of this study and by addressing the main findings. It then considers the importance and contribution of this research in both

theoretical and practical terms. The next section provides several practical recommendations regarding how journalists and news organisation could navigate and manage UGC in the newsroom. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the research limitations and proposals for future research directions.

## 8.2 Main Findings of the Study

This research has investigated the integration of UGC and networked journalism into newsrooms in the Arab world and the factors that shape this integration process, by way of a mixed-methods approach comprising semi-structured interviews, newsroom observation and content analysis. The summary of the main findings will be linked to the overarching objectives of the research.

### 8.2.1 Perceptions and responses to digital media

The first objective of this research was to explore journalists' perceptions of and responses to the integration of UGC and networked journalism into the newsroom. Technological innovations and developments in digital communication have offered journalists many opportunities regarding news production. This research has shown that the Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels are prime examples of news networks that adopt UGC and benefit from networked journalism practices in the newsroom. Journalists have embraced social media platforms and digital communication in news production and distribution.

This integration of UGC is accompanied by a positive perception of the audience's role in news production. Journalists and editorial staff acknowledge that digital media adoption has become an inevitable choice for media organisations in order to remain competitive and viable. Many consider UGC as a new tool that has forced itself upon journalism, not only in the Arab region but worldwide. They also describe it as a global phenomenon, a vehicle for speedy coverage and exclusive contents and a mouthpiece for citizens' voices in society. They credit the role of eyewitnesses in their coverage, especially in regions with a media blackout and censorship that are inaccessible for news reporters, such as Syria and Iran. The research

shows that many journalists in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath have adopted UGC as a supplement when there are no other viable sources, and that the use of UGC has expanded and taken on many different forms. The value of audience participation and UGC has increased, as many programmes and news bulletins now depend fully or partially on social media trends and contributed contents. Gathering UGC has also become a common approach for collecting information and building news stories in the newsroom. The speed of events in the region and the public shift towards digital platforms as main source for news seem to have encouraged journalists and newsroom editors to adopt social media and UGC.

Furthermore, the research identified different cases that embrace this news practice in the form of TV programmes and reports. They share similar patterns of interactivity and participatory purposes. However, they vary in the extent to which they depend on UGC and audience collaboration. These cases are the following programmes: *I see*, *Your interaction*, and the four and five o'clock news bulletins. A number of journalists were also found to be engaged with networked journalism practices that depend on activists from regions such as Iran, Syria and Iraq.

The case of *I see* provided a great avenue to study and examine the use of networked journalism in the newsroom. The research shows that *I see* is an innovative project that embraces the concept of citizen journalism by creating a platform where any user can submit and report any news contents to Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. The app helps to create a community of non-professional contributors who report from different countries inside and outside the Arab region. Their contributions became the source for a regular news segment on air for both Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath, and a Twitter account that attracted thousands of followers. However, the project went through different phases according to technological advancements and political change in the region. These phases show the transition from just corresponding email established to receive audience participations to a website that allowed any visual materials to be uploaded during the Arab Spring uprisings. The project expanded afterwards to include an official app for users to provide the channel with exclusive coverage, starting with the Yemen war. The app also introduced an assignment feature that encouraged users to contribute to breaking news. This call to action is one form through

which journalists encourage audience participation. Others include the use of crowdsourcing via personal connections and networks.

In contrast to the *I see* app, which encourages users to contribute their own content, the team at *Your interaction* monitors social media as part of their daily routine and gathers trending news and UGC relevant to the programme. As it is a daily programme, the team found it difficult to depend on audience contributions and content, which as they argued could threaten the sustainability of the programme. This means that journalists were not fully reliant on the UGC provided by the audience to produce the programme; instead, they took control of the selection and filtering based on trending and viral content on social media.

News bulletins also integrate some form of audience contribution to provide interactive and diversified news reporting to viewers. Therefore, the news editors in the four and five o'clock news bulletins used polls and asked the audience to choose news topics and to comment on current events. They also benefitted from social media to create news stories. For instance, they also used Twitter to encourage audience participation in the form of comments and polls. This could be observed in special segments such as the tweet of the day in a news bulletin and Twitter Moments, produced by the social media unit; both used audience tweets to create an interactive news story.

### 8.2.2 Main motives and influencing factors

The results of this study suggested that there are five factors related to the adoption of UGC and networked journalism. They can be divided into: internal factors, such as personal perceptions; editorial direction; the impact of deadlines and workload; external factors including crisis reporting; and the pressure of competition.

The research argues that crisis reporting pushed newsrooms to embrace digital change and adopt UGC. This could be seen in the case of the Yemen war coverage, as the closing of the Al-Arabiya offices at the start of the war forced the newsroom to speed up the launch of the *I see* app and introduce the *Your interaction* programme in order to offer an alternative coverage based on social media and citizens' collaborations on the ground.

The newsrooms also varied in the way they handled UGC depending on individual conditions and perceptions of audience contributions. The research found that age and digital expertise were key internal factors that influenced the journalists' predisposition towards digital transformation and UGC. The research findings suggest that young journalists and reporters are more likely to embark on digital media initiatives and to engage with the audience on social media than older colleagues. Number of older journalists in the newsroom remained conservative or resistant to change, which could cause an experience gap.

Workload and time pressure during the news cycle play a significant role in journalists' decision to adopt UGC. Several research participants confirmed that time pressure in 24-hour news channels could obstruct their search for audience content or collaboration in the face of other urgent tasks in the newsroom. Journalists in news programmes such as *Your interaction* adopted multiskilling as they worked under time pressure to find trending topics on social media. They expressed their concerns about the available time and human resources for such news tasks. One of the main challenges emerging from this was maintaining news accuracy, which increases for journalists if they face information and content overload. The research findings suggest that job rotation between departments and deadline pressures also contribute to the inability to conduct proper verification and to build collaborations on the ground.

The findings reveal that modern newsrooms face strong market pressures to integrate UGC into their newscasts and to increase audience interactivity. This competition is with other news organisations as well as with digital media platforms, which has contributed to this pressure. The research observation and interviews show that the news editorial team pays close attention to the media convergence on multiple platforms, TV, websites and social media accounts in order to stay ahead of the competition. Professional journalists reported facing unprecedented pressure to maintain audience attention and trust in the digital media era. However, this desire to compete could force newsrooms to be lured into chasing views and trends rather than adhering to news values.

### 8.2.3 The verification process and challenges

The third objective of the thesis is to study the verification process and to identify the challenges regarding the use of audience materials and the ethical issues that emerge. The research findings emphasise the significance of verification and fact-checking in the digital age. Most journalists depended on traditional verification tactics, while others employed additional advanced digital verification tools, combining a high level of digital capability with background knowledge. The research findings underscore the importance of sense-making and critical questioning, which are crucial for journalists to perform their jobs effectively.

With regard to the verifications process, the research found no fixed systematic procedures or verification checklist used by journalists at Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. Verification practices varied from one journalist to another. This is in sharp contrast to the practice of other news organisations such as the CNN or the BBC, which have clear UGC guidelines in place. Taken together, the results suggest that there are six main factors that are potentially significant for the verification of UGC in Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath. These factors are: content type, verification time, human resources, personal connections, journalists' skills and technological support. Yet, there are no shared strategies or verification guidelines in these channels. Embracing the digital culture also means that journalists need to develop a new set of skills that help them to overcome verification challenges. A number of the participants pointed out that visual materials like photos and videos were particularly challenging to verify, and they still struggled to identify possible tools that could assist in the verification process.

These results suggest that the widespread adoption of audience content has not been matched by an improvement in editorial procedures and codes, or the provision of adequate training for this transition. The research findings show that there has been some hesitation in updating rules and guidelines regarding UGC and audience collaboration. With more programmes and news segments embracing audience participation, this gap will increase with time.

Journalists in the modern newsroom need to be digitally savvy and they need to be able to quickly gather sources and data for the verification process. Therefore, job training is crucial

for this digital transformation. The research shows the need to update the training of the journalists at Al-Arabiya to include the digital skills required for media convergence, such as online verification, crowdsourcing and data analysis. This has become critical, especially with the spread of fake news and misinformation on social media.

Three main issues were identified with regard to verification, namely permission, crediting and labelling of UGC. The research showed that there was an absence of verification warnings and labelling for viewers, to explain the UGC's origin and its verification status. The content analysis revealed instances of inaccurate or unclear crediting, along with UGC that could mislead the audience and raise potential risks. These risks include the spread of misinformation and audience confusion about the accuracy or authenticity of presented contents, which could also harm the organisation's reputation.

Other challenges and risks that emerged from the research included the life-threatening risks to citizen journalists and activists cooperating with the mainstream media. Threats, arrests and assassination could not be ruled out, especially in regions rife with political unrest such as Syria and Yemen. The research shows that, fearing for activists' lives, the Al-Arabiya administration was forced to stop collaborating with and training citizen journalists in Syria.

#### 8.2.4 Gatekeeping and agenda-setting impact

The research suggests that journalists remain protective of their role as traditional gatekeepers. However, the research found a number of cases that combined traditional newsgathering with "gate watching" practices, which depend on citizen and audience collaboration. This could be observed in the case of Syrian and Iranian journalists who used blended forms of newsgathering, a traditional method based on news agencies and official reports, as well as networked collaboration with activists and well-known sources on the ground. While these cases are still limited, they show that Al-Arabiya and Al Hadath journalists have the tendency to open up to networked journalism when it is needed.

Building on the hierarchy of influences model, the research identified a number of factors that affect editorial decision making, journalists' role and gatekeeping, beginning from the

journalists' individual level to the organisational social system. This study focused on three levels, the individual, routine and organisational levels, in line with the updated framework established by Reese and Shoemaker (2016).

The research findings indicate that social media has become an integral part of the daily newsroom routine, playing an important role in newsgathering. The research participants admitted to checking and monitoring social media platforms on a daily basis, looking for news stories, topic ideas and trending dialogue, especially from Twitter hashtags.

The findings also suggest that digital media has contributed to reshaping the programmes and news bulletins as well as the organisational structure of the newsroom by way of the addition of the social media unit. The newsroom observation and interviews underline the role of the social media unit in editorial decision making. The use of metrics and data analytics has been transformed; while these are still more likely to be connected to web content, they also appear to influence what is presented on air. This practice has been embraced by the network management as editorial analytics help to prioritise newsroom goals and they give journalists an insight into trends and topics.

Most of the unit staff come from a journalistic background, which allows them to create news stories fit for social media audiences. This shows the need for specialised journalists with particular roles, who could be described as content creators or social media editors. There is also increasing attention paid to the use of social media platforms, not just for providing breaking news but also for engaging audiences and enhancing the digital presence. Data analytics and merits are therefore an important aspect of modern newsrooms.

The idea of integrating UGC and audience contents into the broadcasting newsroom is becoming the centre of attention for news editors and editorial-level staff at the Al-Arabiya network, but it has so far been implemented to varying extents. Journalists are encouraged to create networks of activists and sources on the ground. This also includes any kind of collaboration, such as newsgathering or interactive participation by way of polls or comments on current events. The research findings show that UGC has increased journalists' exposure to public affairs and created forms of content and participation diversity. Journalists tend to use Twitter more than any other platform for personal preferences or the ability to observe

and monitor trending and hashtags. The target audience also plays a role in such preferences. Facebook is thus particularly used for content from the MENA region.

The editorial meeting provides an opportunity to exchange news agendas as well as important topics and media content. A number of journalists suggested that they were motivated by the news management to make the most from social media contents and interaction in their daily workflow. This became evident during the editorial meeting, which started with the social media team presenting what was trending that day in social media and the top stories that were being viewed live on the Al-Arabiya website. While this social media unit presentation does not necessarily drive the news agenda, it could be an influential factor for decision making on news contents. Together, the research findings confirm that UGC and social media newsgathering have become incorporated into journalists' daily routine and the broader newsroom culture.

### **8.3 Contributions of the Study**

This research aims to add to the growing area of research on citizen and networked journalism by exploring its value for mainstream media. The current study contributes to knowledge by addressing four important aspects. First, the findings are essential to give an understanding of the transforming environment of a broadcasting newsroom in the age of digital media; this is an area to which researchers are rarely given access. The research focuses on broadcasting television media from the Arab region, which still remains less portrayed in the literature, despite the political and economic significance of this region to the world.

The research also adds to the literature on Al-Arabiya news production, which is limited and less than other news organisations such as Al Jazeera and the BBC. The research spoke about some of the implications and practical challenges facing journalists and news editors during this change. Some of these risks, such as the collaborations risks in conflict zones and the well-being and mental health of newsroom journalists who deal with traumatic UGC in their

day-to-day routine, are overlooked by news organisations and could have major consequences.

Secondly, the main aim of the research is to revisit the concept of networked journalism and the adoption of UGC, which are under rapid development in the media industry. So far, most studies, especially in the Arab media, have focused on the occasional use of UGC in news reports and bulletins such as the Arab Spring. In this study, the researcher has tried to shift the focus to trending programmes and applications that depend on UGC, rather than using such content as supplements. Therefore, the research pays much attention to such programmes, which have increasingly become a common production choice, not only for broadcasting news but also for TV channels such as entertainment, sports or lifestyle.

Thirdly, this research uses qualitative and quantitative content analysis, which allow the research to reflect on some of the interviews and observation results and connect the research field data to the news outputs. This has helped identify some of the overlooked areas regarding verification, crediting and labelling of UGC. Finally, the research sheds light on the emerging role of the social media unit regarding news production and distribution and well as the metrics value in Arab broadcasting news., as broadcasting news is still recognised as one the key significant source of local, regional and international news for Arab audiences.

#### **8.4 Limitations of the Study**

One of the main challenges when conducting fieldwork research in news production is gaining permission to observe the work inside a news organisation (Robinson and Metzler, 2016). As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the researcher faced difficulties in gaining access to news networks to conduct observations and interviews with network staff. The permission process with Al-Arabiya took months before being finally approved by the network. The fieldwork, including the observation period, had to be completed within the timeframe agreed with the channel.

Other broadcasting news were considered at the beginnings of this research, such as Al Jazeera and BBC Arabic. In the case of Al Jazeera, the Gulf diplomatic conflict that continued for more than three years prevents any possible access to the channel neither to the

newsroom staff. Furthermore, the BBC Arabic were exempted in the research after multiple attempts to access the newsroom and interview journalists for the research but at the end the administrations were not keen to accommodate the research. Such broadcasting news channels could fit for future research to explore the change in its newsroom when dealing with networked journalism and UGC.

The researcher also faced difficulties with obtaining official documents such as editorial guidelines and policy documents. The request to obtain such documents was repeatedly declined by a number of editorial managers who described them as confidential and sensitive to their work. Instead, the researcher asked participants about the status of guidelines and how they included them in their daily work. The stylebook – which includes some general rules for newsroom staff - was obtained in a later phase of the research and confirmed participants' answers.

Another consideration is that while most journalists were open to research participants, others had reservations when asked about problems with UGC integration, red lines and censorship in the network. In many cases, they were very guarded in their responses and often hesitated to provide detailed answers. Surprisingly, officials in the administrative levels were more open to such questions and provided a significant input to the research. Therefore, an advice for future research is to formulate indirect interview questions when investigating sensitive issues in order to obtain more informative answers.

A further difficulty arose from the fact that one of the main cases chosen prior to the research was suspended. When the fieldwork started, the researcher was informed *that I see*, which included the app and the TV programme, had been recently suspended. This prevented the researcher from observing the teamwork around the app. Instead, the researcher had to rely on the research interviews and content analysis to understand the merits and demerits of the *I see* app experiment and the reasons for its sudden suspension.

## 8.5 Practical Recommendations and Implications for the Industry

In spite of the above-mentioned limitations, certain practical recommendations can be offered and strategies suggested on the basis of this study that could benefit news organisations.

Media management and news editorial staff must ensure that editors and journalists are aware of the significance of guidelines and their core values. Clear and transparent UGC integration guidelines need to be made available to news teams. News organisations should also provide journalists with practical measures and advice on how to deal with digital media in order to ensure accuracy and reflect the values of network journalism. Such codes and guidelines could also be reinforced and revisited through the network department and editorial meetings.

The research revealed the importance of close collaboration between different TV network departments, including media management and the newsroom. This could foster exchange in order to create commonly shared practices that would limit mistakes and bridge the expertise gap. Furthermore, it is important not to underestimate the role of digital training, which would equip journalists with the skills required to deal with challenges in the digital age. The training courses should be expanded to cover some overlooked issues such as the safety and privacy of citizen journalists on the ground. Such practical techniques could be shared among news contributors in order to establish working standards and minimise any potential risks.

News organisations should assess and reevaluate their previous experiences with audience collaboration and UGC adoption to find elements of strength and weakness. Collaboration with citizens, especially in conflict and unstable areas, should be approached with caution, and it should be based on solid risk assessment procedures to evaluate threats, values and vulnerability. Such procedures allow journalists to reach sound decisions that do not jeopardise anyone's life.

Online verification and fact-checking have become vital skills for journalists and media workers, not only in broadcasting organisations but in any institute that deals with news and information in the digital world. News organisations could make the most of a partnership with journalism schools and dedicated fact-checking initiatives in order to raise digital literacy and provide verification resources and tools. During the last few years, these initiatives have grown and become tools used by social media users to check the verified news. There are a number of fact-checking initiatives across the Arab region such as *AkeedJo* in Jordan, *Matsadash* and *Faloo* in Egypt, and *No Rumours* in Saudi Arabia. Each of these initiatives is followed by thousands of Arab users on different platforms (Flamini, 2019). For example, the *No Rumours* initiative was established in 2012 as an independent anti-rumours network in Saudi Arabia. According to their account, the initiative's aim to address rumours and contain them so that they do not constitute harm to society. In 2017 the initiative team won the Minister of Culture and Information award for digital media achievements.

The research findings suggest that transparency is the best policy when it comes to adopting UGC and audience collaboration. Transparency is essential for correct verification in the digital age, when there is an overload of misinformation. This should include clarity about the original source or contributor, in order to make the audience aware of possible issues or hidden agenda in the citizen contribution. It also involves transparency regarding the verification process, i.e., explaining the way the contents have been verified to ensure the legitimacy of the news provided. This approach could contribute to increasing audience trust and sparing mainstream media the consequences of mistakes.

## 8.6 Directions for Future Research

The Arab region faces rapid change in the media industry. However, research into Arab media organisations is still limited. More in-depth studies are required to explore the changes and challenges that Arab news faces in the digital age.

Future research could focus on other cases of news outlets such as print or digital media, as well as other broadcasting news outlets. Further studies could explore the changing

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relationship between content creators and broadcasting media. This research shows that networked journalism blurs the line between journalists and citizens. Influencers and citizen journalists are given the chance to be a news reporter or to collaborate on news reports. This raises questions about the upcoming role of professional journalists. Future research could focus on media consumption from an audience perspective. It could explore attitudes towards a participatory culture that encourages the audience to share and collaborate with the mainstream media.

With fake news and misinformation remaining the main challenge to the news media industry, more research on this topic needs to be undertaken by media researchers in the region. This could help to assess the verification and fact-checking practices in Arab newsrooms that are needed to combat the wave of misinformation. Such research could focus on the growing challenges in the digital age, especially the spread of fake news on social media platforms and the use of fabrication tools and artificial intelligence such as deep fake. Other researchers could focus on fact-checking initiatives, which have started to be more commonly employed in the region, and their role in media and digital literacy. Furthermore, this research shows that there is an increasing interest in metric and data analytics. This could resume in a further investigation into the outcomes of this analytical approach in journalism practices. There is abundant room for further progress in determining the effect of this news approach on media agenda settings and news production.

With more interdisciplinary research focusing on the mental health of journalists and media workers, researchers in psychology and journalism could tackle the effects of psychological trauma in Arab newsrooms and fieldwork in hostile and conflict environments. This is a newly emerging and important issue for future research.

Finally, most research participants recognised that social media has become a key newsgathering tool. However, there is scope for journalists to become more engaged with social media and to allow more interactivity via their personal accounts. Branding in social media is important for gaining trust and building loyal collaboration. Further studies are

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needed into journalists' personal accounts and the use of personal branding in order to gather news and create collaboration networks.

## 8.7 Summary

This research is an investigation into the integration of UGC and networked journalism into newsrooms in the Arab world and the factors that shape this integration process. By adopting a range of mixed methods, including semi-structured interviews, newsroom observation and content analysis, the research sheds light onto the way that journalists and news editors preserve networked collaboration with their audience and adopt UGC from social media. It also highlights the main motives and influencing factors that encourage or discourage journalists from adopting UGC.

It also offers an insight into the growing challenges of verification and fact-checking in the digital age. The research results emphasise the importance of clear practical guidelines and codes of conduct for journalists and newsrooms in the digital age. The findings also prompt re-thinking of potential risks for journalists and citizen collaboration, especially in conflict zones.

Furthermore, the research explores the role of UGC adoption in gatekeeping and decision making in broadcasting newsroom. It also highlights the emergence of social media units and the use of editorial analytics metrics to track audience interactions and to monitor trends and UGC relevant to journalists and news programmes.

The results of this study suggest that there are five factors related to the adoption of UGC and networked journalism. They can be divided into: internal factors, such as personal perceptions; editorial direction; the impact of deadlines and workload; external factors including crisis reporting; and the pressure of competition.

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## Appendix

### The Ethical approval letter for the research



Downloaded: 05/12/2017  
Approved: 17/10/2017

Aiman Alsaeedi  
Registration number: 160125832  
Journalism Studies  
Programme: Journalism Studies

Dear Aiman

**PROJECT TITLE:** The integration of user-generated content and networked journalism within professional journalistic frameworks at the Arabic news channels

**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 016170

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 17/10/2017 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 016170 (dated 25/09/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1035775 version 2 (25/09/2017).
- Participant consent form 1035776 version 1 (24/09/2017).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Emma Shelton  
Ethics Administrator  
Journalism Studies



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

## Participant Information Sheet

### Research Project Title:

The integration of user-generated content and networked journalism within professional journalistic frameworks at the Arabic news channels

You are being invited to take part in a PhD research project. Before making a decision on whether or not to take part, please read the following information surrounding the research project. If anything is unclear please do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

### The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to examine the integration of citizen journalism into Arab news networks by using the audience engagement and user generated contents to create networked journalism practices. The aim of the project is to understand and identify the main challenges, issues and opportunities facing networked journalism as a practice in these news networks. Also, addressing the motivations, verification techniques, ethical implications, and gatekeeping process to adopt the audience contents and engagement in the newsrooms and programs in Arab media. The project shall last until April 2018.

### Participation

The reason why you have been chosen is because this project seeks to explore journalists/editors/social media experts' opinions and practices on the adoption of audience engagement and user generated contents in the Arabic news networks.

It is your decision whether or not you wish to take part. If you do decide to take part then you will be given this information sheet, alongside a consent sheet that you shall be asked to sign. You may withdraw from the study at any given time.

If you decide to participate, an interview will take place to discuss your thoughts on the integration of user-generated content and networked journalism within Arabic news channels. The interview shall be semi-structured, which means that the questions shall be open ended, allowing for you to give your opinion. The questions would focus mainly on challenges, issues and opportunities facing networked journalism. The questions also target the motivations, verification techniques, ethical implications, and gatekeeping process.

All responses shall be anonymised so that no one can identify you in the study. While the interview shall be recorded. I will also keep all transcripts safe and confidential. The data shall predominately be used for my research contributing to my PhD. You shall be asked for your consent to share this data on the consent form. The data will remain anonymous should it be shared with other researchers.

While there are no benefits from taking part in this study, it is hoped that this research will contribute to academic debate in the future.

If you have any queries or concerns then my supervisor, Dr. Irini Katsirea can be contacted at: [i.katsirea@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:i.katsirea@sheffield.ac.uk)

This project has been approved by the ethics approval board in the Department of Journalism Studies

If you have any other questions then please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor (Details below)

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Should you agree to take part in this study, a signed consent form shall be given to you alongside a copy of the information sheet.



## Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: The integration of user-generated content and networked journalism within professional journalistic frameworks at the Arabic news channels

Name of Researcher: Aiman Alsaedi

Number of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet related to this project.
2. I can confirm that I have had a chance to ask questions relating to this project.
3. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time with no consequences.
4. I understand that my responses will be kept anonymised.
5. I give permission for the anonymised data to be used in future research.
6. I agree to take part in the research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

A copy of this form will be given to the participant

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## Interview Guide and Checklist

### Summary of the process:

1. General information of the research and interview :
  - Explaining the research and aims
  - Pointing the interviews purpose and significance
  - Clarifying the Interview process (period, questions, recording...)
  - Highlighting consent form and research confidentiality
  - any questions?
2. Providing information sheet
3. Signing Consent form
4. Questions
5. Conclusion

### Question guide

Name:

Current job title:

Age:

How long an employee in the channel:

How long as a journalist:

### Defining the common terms

1. What is your understanding of the terms: ‘citizen journalism’, ‘networked journalism’ and “user generated contents”?
2. How common is Al-Arabiya adopting these kind of journalism practices?

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### **Describing the relation with the audience**

1. How do you describe your relation as journalist with the audience?
2. Al-Arabiya relation with the audience?
3. How did the social media change the way you deal with the audience?
4. To what extend does the audience contribute of contents creation?

### **Networked journalism elements**

1. What types audience contribution in Al-Arabiya (newsroom, TV programs, apps, interactive segments ...)?
2. How common is these contributions / collaborations with audience?
3. Which category do you think the audience participate more (e.g. political, information, entertaining or soft news)?
4. Does the channel label these contents in any form (citizen journalism, audience contents, UCG ....?)
5. Why these types of contents are used? Journalist choice / editorial choice
6. In details, as possible: what is the process of adopting networked journalism / user generated contents in Al-Arabiya?
7. To what extend do you depend in these contents?

### **Motivations**

1. What are the main motivations for adapting networked journalism in Al-Arabiya?
2. Do you think that the audience increase interest in social media forces news channel to change the way they deal with them?
3. Do you think that adapting networked journalism help to increase audience trust in the news channel?
4. How does Al-Arabiya encourage the collaboration with the audience?
5. Why do you think the audience choose to participate?

### **Advantages and challenges**

1. What are the main challenges / barriers of adopting networked journalism or user generated contents in Al-Arabiya?
2. Main benefits?
3. Do you think adopting networked journalism process with the research and section and verification are time consuming for journalists? Worth it ?
4. To what extend you think that the audience participation valuable?
5. Can you think of an example of a story where you/ your colleagues have collaborated closely with the public?

### **Reshape the newsroom and journalists' practices**

1. What are the implications of adopting networked journalism on the newsroom routine / on journalists?
2. What are the criteria which used in Al-Arabiya to choose certain user generated contents or collaborating with the audience?  
(e.g. picture, videos, tweet, and hashtag ...)
3. Is it Journalist choice or editorial choice? Facts affect the selecting?
4. Do you think that journalists are depending more in user generated contents and trending topics in social media to get the news?
5. Does it affect the journalists view and skills?
6. What does the journalists add to these contents?
7. How do you evaluate the audience reaction regarding this collaboration?

### **Verification**

1. How do you verify citizen journalism materials / user generated contents ?
2. Is it a journalists' task or the social media team?
3. Did you face in difficulties in the Verification process?
4. Do you think the adoption could allow spreading fake news?
5. How do you deal with:
  - Video from unknown source.
  - Trending hashtag or topic.
  - Opinion, tweet or post from anonymous accounts.
6. To what extend do you think the adoption risk the credibility, objectivity?

7. What are and ethical boundaries that you take in consideration in the adoption?
8. Does the channel provide journalists with guideline to deal with the audience, user generated contents, and social media?  
(Could you please provide a copy)
9. Does the channel provide journalists with training regarding these topics?

### **Gatekeeping role and agenda setting**

1. Do you think Arab journalism is becoming more collaborative?
2. How has journalists' control over the news changed with networked journalism?
3. What is the role of a journalist of adopting user generated contents?
4. How much control needed to deal with networked journalism?
5. To what extend you think that working with the media audience threat the traditional gatekeeping role of broadcasting journalist?
6. To what extend you think that selecting trending topic, hashtag, videos would change the agenda setting from the media provider to the users?
7. Will there always be a role for journalists?

### **Case 1 : “I see “ app and program**

1. Tell me more about “I see “app experience with citizen journalism?
2. To what do you think it succeeded?
3. How did the audience react on the experiment?
4. Why did it stop or inactive in tweeter and the channel?
5. What could be changed?

### **Case 2: “Your interaction” program**

1. Tell me more about “Your interaction” experience with the audience?
2. The program based on interactivity do what extend is the program interact with its audience and allow collaboration?
3. What are factors involved select topics? User generated contents?
4. Does the show focus more on the trending topics and videos on social media? and do you think that categorized the show in a certain way?

5. The program is daily providing different type of topics e.g. Political, technological, social and soft news, but why there is more focus on soft news?

**Case 3: Tweet of the day**

1. How “Tweet of the day” segment is selected?
2. The segment is part of the fourth newsletter, do you consider it as news?
3. How to deal with anonymous accounts tweet?

Anything more would like to add

Summarize topics

Open questions for points need more explanation

### Content analysis form ( example filled)

Program: I see	No. 3	Date: 1/12/2015	Channel: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 AI Arabiya	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 AI Hadath	Duration:
Type of content	1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Video <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Picture <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Tweet <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Other	2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Video <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 Picture <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Tweet <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Other	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Video <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 Picture <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Tweet <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Other	4 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Video <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Picture <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Tweet <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Other	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Video <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Picture <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Tweet <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Other
Content location	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Syria <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Saudi <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Palestine <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Iraq <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Iran <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Egypt <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Yemen <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Algeria <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Morocco <input type="checkbox"/> 10 Jordan <input type="checkbox"/> 11 Other .....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Syria <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Saudi <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3 Palestine <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Iraq <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Iran <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Egypt <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Yemen <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Algeria <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Morocco <input type="checkbox"/> 10 Jordan <input type="checkbox"/> 11 Other .....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Syria <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Saudi <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Palestine <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Iraq <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Iran <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Egypt <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 7 Yemen <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Algeria <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Morocco <input type="checkbox"/> 10 Jordan <input type="checkbox"/> 11 Other .....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Syria <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Saudi <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Palestine <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Iraq <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Iran <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Egypt <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 7 Yemen <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Algeria <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Morocco <input type="checkbox"/> 10 Jordan <input type="checkbox"/> 11 Other .....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Syria <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Saudi <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Palestine <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Iraq <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Iran <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Egypt <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Yemen <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Algeria <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Morocco <input type="checkbox"/> 10 Jordan <input type="checkbox"/> 11 Other .....
Label: contributor information	<input type="checkbox"/> Name and Picture <input type="checkbox"/> No name or picture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No name and picture</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Name and Picture</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No name or picture <input type="checkbox"/> No name and picture	<input type="checkbox"/> Name and Picture <input type="checkbox"/> No name or picture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No name and picture</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Name and Picture</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No name or picture <input type="checkbox"/> No name and picture	<input type="checkbox"/> Name and Picture <input type="checkbox"/> No name or picture <input type="checkbox"/> No name and picture
Any sign that the content was verified?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 2 No
Any added information was presented?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 2 No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 2 No
Content Type	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Politics <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 War <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Protest <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Weather <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Art <input type="checkbox"/> 6 food <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Tech <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Sport <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Refuge <input type="checkbox"/> 10 other	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Politics <input type="checkbox"/> 2 War <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Protest <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4 Weather <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Art <input type="checkbox"/> 6 food <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Tech <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Sport <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Refuge <input type="checkbox"/> 10 other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Politics <input type="checkbox"/> 2 War <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Protest <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Weather <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Art <input type="checkbox"/> 6 food <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Tech <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Sport <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Refuge <input type="checkbox"/> 10 other	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Politics <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 War <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Protest <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Weather <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Art <input type="checkbox"/> 6 food <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Tech <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Sport <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Refuge <input type="checkbox"/> 10 other	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Politics <input type="checkbox"/> 2 War <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Protest <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Weather <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Art <input type="checkbox"/> 6 food <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Tech <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Sport <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Refuge <input type="checkbox"/> 10 other
Notes :	The presented didn't mentioned if the content were verified but pointed out that the content details are "According to the sender".				