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Arab Media Systems

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7. United Arab Emirates: Media for Sustainable Development

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Since the formation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1971, media have been key forces of socioeconomic development and nation building. During the almost 50 years of the UAE's post-independence history, the UAE media and communications sector has been entrusted by the state with supporting the nation's political orientations, promoting economic growth, fostering national identity, and strengthening international cooperation. But, while huge investments in this sector have indeed turned the UAE into a global media hub that boasts world-class infrastructure and human talent, an updated media regulation, the Emiratization of the communications sector, and a smooth transition into the digital mediascape remain major challenges to address.

Background

The UAE is a federation of seven emirates situated in Southwest Asia, bordered on the north and northwest by the Arabian Gulf and on the east by the Indian Ocean. The UAE Federation, comprising the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al-Khaimah, Umm Al-Quwwain, Fujairah, and Ajman, occupies an area of 83,000 square kilometers. Founded in 1971 by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan and other Emirati leaders of the time, the UAE Federation replaced the old association of the Trucial States with Britain, which, for decades, had defined colonial geopolitics in that part of the world. By mid-2019, the

UAE population was estimated at 9.7 million inhabitants, and about 1.2 million of them were UAE nationals, while the remaining 7.5 million was composed of foreign expatriates from around 200 nationalities attracted to the country initially by the discovery of oil, and later by a booming diversified economy. While Arabic is the official language of the UAE, English is the number one international language spoken alongside other languages by the country's large expatriate communities. Islam is the official religion of the UAE, but members of other denominations, such as Christianity and Hinduism, are granted full freedom to practice their faiths. In 2016, the UAE established a Ministry of Tolerance, and 2019 was officially declared as the "Year of Tolerance" to emphasize the country's commitment to international and intercultural coexistence and diversity.

While the UAE hereditary monarchical system may be described as politically conservative, the country's socioeconomic and cultural policies, as defined by free market practices, the empowerment of women, world-class education, and inclusive international and intercultural engagements, have been hailed as highly progressive. The UAE political system, as defined by the country's constitution, guarantees all UAE citizens equal rights and opportunities, safety and security, and social justice. Article 45 of the constitution identifies five federal authorities: the Federal Supreme Council, the President and the Vice President of the UAE, the Cabinet, the Federal National Council, and the Federal Judiciary. The UAE Supreme Council, chaired by a UAE President and composed of rulers of six emirates, is the highest policymaking body while the Federal National Council (parliament) serves numerous oversight and legislative functions. In 2010, the UAE government launched UAE Vision 2021, which set the key themes for the country's social and economic development, calling for a shift to a diversified and knowledge-based economy. The UAE National Agenda, resulting from Vision 2021, incorporates a set of national indicators, including a cohesive society and preserved identity, competitive knowledge economy, world-class healthcare, first-rate education system, sustainable environment and infrastructure, a safe public, and fair judiciary (Vision 2021, 2019). At the local level, each emirate has its own functions and socioeconomic development agendas that are aligned with federal policies and strategies. Local policies and institutions

cover areas such as socioeconomic development, media, culture, urban planning, industry, services, and education, while national defense and foreign relations are an exclusive concern of the federal government.

As the second largest economy in the Arab World (after Saudi Arabia), the UAE pursues a knowledge-based strategy that has won significant international recognition. In 2018, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast the UAE's nominal gross domestic product (GDP) would grow 4.7% to AED 1.673 trillion (USD 455.8 billion) in 2019, which is close when compared with the actual GDP figure of AED 1.589 trillion (USD 429.45 billion) in that year (WAM, 2019). Though the UAE economy has traditionally been driven by oil and gas exports, the country's economic diversification strategy has effected significant shifts in the economy. The UAE per capita income was put at around USD 43,000 in 2018. In early 2017, 70% of the UAE's GDP was derived from non-oil sectors, such as extractive industries (29.50%), wholesale and retail trade (11.70%), financial and insurance activities (8.60%), and construction and building (8.40%) (UAE Government, 2018a).

Historical Developments

While some scholars trace the history of media in the UAE back to rudimentary publications in the late 1920s and mid-1930s, the real history of that sector began only in the post-Federation years (Tabour, 2000). The rise of the UAE in 1971 as a sovereign state marked a comprehensive process of socioeconomic development, driven by both the discovery of oil and the promise of a knowledge-based economy. The former Ministry of Information and Culture was established in 1971 to oversee information and communication activities in the country. In those formative years, the press, bolstered by expanding nationwide education and literacy strategies, was driven by a developmental approach to socioeconomic transitions. The launch of numerous Arabic-speaking publications across the country underscored the belief at the time in the power of the press to effectively communicate official views and positions on national development to growing local and expatriate populations. On 19 October 1970, *Al-Khaleej* newspaper was launched in Sharjah by brothers Taryam and Abdalla Omran. *Al-Khaleej*'s critical approach to British policies in the region at the time led to its closure in

1972, and it did not resume publication until 5 April 1980. On 22 April 1972, *Al-Ittihad* (formerly *Al-Ittihad Al-Dhibyanieh*) changed its format to a daily publication with the declared aim of promoting the principles and values of the emerging Federation (Nouwais, 1984). *Al-Bayan* daily newspaper was launched on 10 May 1980 as a Dubai government publication with a focus on economic and business news. English language newspapers that appeared in the UAE during the first three decades of the Federation included *Khaleej Times* (1978) and *Gulf News* (1979). The UAE national news agency, *WAM*, was launched in 1976 as the official voice for the UAE government, providing news services in several languages. Among other things, the first two decades of the UAE Federation also witnessed the institution of Federal Law (15) in 1980, commonly known as the Press and Publications Law, to regulate media functions across the country.

During the UAE's early years, broadcasting became an important facet of the emerging media landscape, with numerous radio and television stations carrying news and current affairs, entertainment, cultural and religious programs, and sports and talk shows on matters of interest to local communities in Arabic and in other languages. While some of those services were broadcasting to a pan-Arab audience on short-wave, most radio operations were using medium-wave and later FM transmissions to reach local audiences. Radio stations included specialized broadcasters, such as *Qur'an Radio*, *Folklore Radio*, and *Classical Music Radio*, in addition to Western-style radio stations drawing on live talk shows and music programs. The Abu Dhabi-based radio stations were operating as part of the former Ministry of Information and Culture, while other radio services were affiliated with local emirates' information departments. Television was first introduced to the UAE in August 1969 in black and white from Abu Dhabi. In 1972, Dubai had its first channel, followed some years later by the launch of *Channel 33*, a foreign program channel that, along with Abu Dhabi's *2nd Channel*, was transmitting to the large UAE expatriate community with English-language programming. In 1989, Sharjah launched its own channel with mostly cultural and religious programming (Boyd, 1999). In those years, some programs such as news, cultural shows, and entertainment, were locally produced, while the bulk of the content was imported from Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan (Boyd, 1999).

The 1990s was a watershed decade for UAE media development, with the country's media landscape going through major transitions induced by the digital revolution and liberal-market policies. It was during the period of 1990–2020 that the UAE's media scene experienced major restructuring, new expansions, key regulatory changes, entrepreneurial media free zones, diverse players, and far more importantly, more advanced digital and networked technological infrastructures. In the early 1990s, the UAE joined other Arab states in embracing satellite television broadcasting, and by 2001, it had its first media free zones, in which different regulatory frameworks are enforced.

Political System and Legal Framework

When viewed through Rugh's (2004) Arab media typologies, the UAE media system seems to have features of the loyalist press model, in which communications operate in alignment with state orientations within broader national socioeconomic strategies. Indeed, media are meant to serve as a powerful voice of national identity and government orientation, but they are also seen as vehicles for education, entertainment, and cultural expression.

UAE-based media are subject to numerous legal and ethical regulatory frameworks, ranging from the 1980 Press and Publications Law to the 2018 Electronic Media Regulation, and from the Journalists Association's Code of Ethics to free zone policies and guidelines. Generally speaking, UAE media regulations seek to ensure media practices' alignment with the country's political, social, cultural, and economic strategies and agenda. Among other things, these regulations address potential abuses on a political level, such as disrespect for the state, national symbols, and the country's heritage and values, and incitement to sectarian violence and hatred, but also on an individual level, with regard to the invasion of privacy and intrusion on copyright. They also tackle potential violations entailing harm to the country's economy, children, women, and other social groups, especially those involving cyberbullying, extortion, and stalking. The common feature defining the regulations is a strong sense of social responsibility and a profound belief in media contributions to economic prosperity, social welfare, and cultural fulfillment by those making the rules. Generally speaking, UAE media regulations have

been highly responsive to national, regional, and international political, social, economic, and cultural developments relating to society and the state. The 1980s Press and Publications Law (Federal Law No. 15) that applies to the conventional press and media forms has prompted calls for further updates and enhancement to reflect expansions and changing roles within the UAE communications scene. The law reflects the regulatory spirit of the second half of the twentieth century, when nations of the Global South were going through postcolonial phases of development that required cohesive media attitudes towards nation-building. It regulates printing and publishing activities in the UAE, applying only to traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, book publishing, and film. It basically prescribes guidelines for materials prohibited from publication, and penalties imposed on individual and institutional violators. Federal Law No. 7 of 2002 on Copyrights and Related Rights protects all original works in the areas of literature, arts, or science, regardless of their description, form of expression, significance, or purpose. Federal Law No. 5 of 2012 on Combatting Cybercrimes, and its amendment by Federal Law No. 12 of 2016, address online communications issues relating to national security, privacy, public morality, financial communications, and others (Gibbs, 2019).

Secondary media regulations in the UAE cover a variety of functions related to advertising and electronic communications. In 2018, the UAE National Media Council began to implement a new regulation for all electronic and digital media activities on the mainland and in free zones. Electronic media activities addressed by the system include sites used to trade, present, and sell print, video, and audio materials, electronic publishing activities and on-call printing, and specialized websites such as the electronic advertisements, news sites, and any electronic activity that the council deems appropriate to be included in that category (National Media Council, 2018). One of the controversial aspects of the new rules relates to licensing social media influencers who make profit out of online branding and marketing activities. The National Media Council Chairman's Decision No. 20 of 2010 concerning media content standards is another secondary piece of regulation that emphasized content compliance with articles of the 1980 Press and Publications Law in both conventional and digital contexts. An updated regulation, in the form of an official advertising guide, was introduced by the National

Media Council in October 2018 to clarify standards for the advertising industry in the UAE and to protect the public from marketing promotions that do not conform to applicable standards. The document specifies the terms of licensing for advertising activities by individuals, companies, and institutions.

Media free zones across the UAE have been subject to special regulations. Dubai Technology and Free Zone Authority (DTFZA) does licensing and content regulation for hundreds of media and communications services based in Dubai Media City. Issued in 2001, DTFZA regulations cover a range of areas relating to registration, shares, management, and administration. The Abu Dhabi-based twofour54 Media Zone Authority Content Code sets out the editorial standards which must be maintained by entities established in the Abu Dhabi media free zone (twofour54) in the areas of publishing, broadcasting, and/or communication with the public. The Content Code requires compliance with generally accepted standards regarding the social, cultural, moral, and religious values that apply in the UAE. It prohibits the transmission of offensive content, including sexually explicit and violent content, unless it is generally appropriate due to its artistic or creative merit, beneficial to society, and factually accurate. The Dubai Internet & Media Free Zone (TECOM) Codes of Guidance require publishers and broadcasters to be mindful of and to take into account the prevailing social and religious customs of the UAE and the Middle East, and the Islamic religion generally. Examples of violations would include ridiculing religious practices and conventions, and promoting sectarian divisions in society.

Media in the UAE are also expected to comply with ethical standards established by the UAE Journalists Association (UAEJA), an independent professional body for UAE-based journalists and media practitioners whose members in April 2019 came to include digital media professionals with a minimum of one year of experience. The UAEJA is classified as a non-profit organization whose finances derive from membership fees, state subsidies, public donations, and other sources. UAEJA's code of ethics calls for respect of the truth and the right of the public to have access to true and accurate information. It also promotes values of journalistic freedom and professional integrity in news work. According to the UAEJA's code, a journalist is expected to serve as a

voice of "fair and neutral comments and criticism" (UAE Journalists Association, 2018). It also emphasizes accuracy in news reporting and editing, while maintaining fairness and objectivity towards all sides involved. A key value stressed by the code is privacy, where Article (8) states that:

> "Respecting privacy is a main principle in the profession, and journalists should respect the privacy of individuals and not expose it by publishing anything without the consent of those individuals. If personal conduct clashes with public interest, such conduct may be covered without violating the personal rights of uninvolved individuals" (UAE Journalists Association, 2018).

While there are no cases of journalists being sanctioned by the UAEJA, the Association's General Assembly may look into complaints from members regarding possible ethical or professional violations.

UAE media development has been supported by key professional and institutional structures to sustain a steady professional and commercial growth of media industries. An example is Dubai Press Club, whose mission includes promoting dialogue and exchange between Arab and international media, recognizing excellence in journalism, developing the skills and capabilities of journalists, and providing in-depth analysis of trends and developments in Arab media. Dubai Press Club publishes the *Arab Media Outlook* report and organizes the Arab Media Forum which annually brings together leading Arab and international media leaders to discuss important issues of concern to media practitioners and institutions. Dubai Press Club also oversees the Arab Journalism Award, designed to motivate creativity in journalism in the region across different genres. The Sharjah Press Club, launched in 2016, seeks to enhance journalists' skills and promote national and international networking among media professionals. The Sharjah International Government Communication Center offers a government communication award and organizes the International Government Communication Forum. The UAE media ecosystem also includes a wide range of university media education programs that offer degrees in journalism, advertising, public relations, digital marketing communications, media studies, multimedia, and new media and broadcasting.

Economy and Ownership Patterns

In the UAE, media also serve as key pillars of the country's progress towards a sustainable knowledge economy through enhancing content creation in conventional and digital formats and supporting public engagement in the knowledge sector. While national state media function as government communication outlets, private media (both on-shore and off-shore) operate according to commercial standards. Hundreds of media companies, digital start-ups, advertising and PR agencies, digital marketing firms, and publishing companies employ thousands of people in the different areas of communications at five media free zones across the country.

The UAE adopts a free-market economy with credible state welfare components. This feature has been reflected in the country's national communications system, where state-sponsored/subsidized media operate alongside profit-making ones. At the local level, media organizations, such as the Abu Dhabi Media Company, Dubai Media Incorporated, and Sharjah Media Corporation, function as local government-subsidized operations that also receive revenue through commercial sources such as advertising, subscriptions and sponsorships. Unlike traditional state-supported media organizations that offer protocol-oriented content and rigid formats across the MENA region, UAE state-subsidized media harness the latest technologies and provide audiences with high-quality content in news, public affairs, and entertainment. Whether originating from local production or from Arab or international television imports, broadcast content in the UAE, such as documentaries, reality TV, drama, and talk shows, maintain high standards in production. Many of these television shows are broadcast with commercials for local and multinational companies catering to a regional MENA market. Some of the channels such as *Dubai TV* use artificial intelligence in their operations relating to augmented reality, news verification, and communication with audiences.

By mid-2019, the UAE's on-shore media outlets included 23 television channels, 30 radio stations, 15 newspapers, five magazines and nine website portals. On-shore media services, such as the *Al-Khaleej* newspaper, Al-Sayegh Media, Dubai Media Incorporated, Abu Dhabi Media Company, Sharjah Media Corporation, and *Ajman Radio Four*,

reflect mixed patterns of ownership that include government-owned media, state-subsidized media, and private media. On the off-shore side of the media landscape, five media free zones host hundreds of international television channels, newspapers, radio stations, online news portals, PR agencies, advertising firms, film production houses, publishing houses, and digital communications companies with full private ownership zones: Dubai Media City, Dubai Studio City, Abu Dhabi twofour54, Sharjah Media City (SHAMS), and Fujairah Creative City. By June 2019, there were about 1,500 companies with over 25,000 workers of 142 nationalities operating from Dubai Media City, which was launched in January 2001. twofour54 aims to cultivate Abu Dhabi's media free zone and provide products and services to attract local, regional, and international media businesses to Abu Dhabi. SHAMS, Sharjah's media free zone, was launched in 2017 to attract small to medium enterprises (SMEs), entrepreneurs, and companies to start and grow their businesses in a creative Free Zone Hub in Sharjah. International media organizations such as *CNN International*, *Bloomberg*, *Reuters*, *Middle East Broadcasting Center Network*, *Sky News Arabia*, *Al-Arabiya TV*, and many others carry out their operations from UAE media free zones, attracted by its unique business opportunities. Dubai Media City, for example, offers media investors 100% foreign ownership, full repatriation of profits and capital, no personal, income, or corporate taxes (50-year exemption), exemption from customs duties for goods and services, world-class infrastructure to help support the growth of the cluster, and a 24-hour visa service.

Media convergence, which is defined as the blending of multiple media forms into one platform for the purpose of delivering a dynamic experience (Dwyer, 2010), is one common feature shared by UAE's on-shore and off-shore media. Ayish (2003) noted that the UAE was one of the earliest countries in the MENA region to apply convergence standards to its national media system. Operating with substantive state subsidies and advertising revenue, both Abu Dhabi Media and Dubai Media Incorporated stand out as examples of technological convergence, where media organizations serve as umbrellas for multiple communications functions and channels, generating wide-ranging content. Under Abu Dhabi Media there are four major publications: the *Al-Ittihad* newspaper, *Zahrat Al-Khaleej* magazine, *Majid* children's

magazine, and *National Geographic Al-Arabiya* magazine. Television channels include *Al-Emarat TV*, *Abu Dhabi TV*, *Abu Dhabi Sports 1*, *Abu Dhabi Sports 2*, *Yas*, *Majid TV*, *National Geographic Abu Dhabi*, and *Abu Dhabi Drama*. Radio stations include *Qur'an Kareem*, *Emarat FM*, *Abu Dhabi FM*, *Star FM*, *Abu Dhabi Classic FM*, *Radio Mirchi*, *Radio 1*, and *Radio 2*. Digital media platforms include *Ana Zahra*, *Zayed Digital TV*, and *Mohtawa*. In addition, Dubai Media Incorporated is an umbrella organization housing a range of publications, radio stations, television channels, and digital services, which includes five television channels, two newspapers, five radio stations, two online outlets, and two printing and distribution services. In 2019, Dubai was declared the media capital of the Arab World in recognition of its role as a regional and global media center. The Sharjah Media Corporation also houses four television channels, four radio stations, and one online news service. UAE-based media free zones also apply convergence practices as they operate in highly advanced networked and digital communications infrastructures.

Though the global financial crisis seemed to have cast shadows on commercial profits in the private media sector, communications companies, beefed up by a notable rise in entrepreneurial start-ups, have continued to provide communication services to corporate and government clients. Data from 2016 show that television ad expenditure in the UAE was estimated at USD 14 million, but was expected to experience some decline in the following years. Television has the highest weekly reach in the UAE across all ages. Among millennials, the second most frequently-used medium is the Internet, and for consumers aged 35 or older, it is the radio (Statista, 2016). *Emirates 24/7* reported that the UAE topped Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in terms of advertising in the first quarter of 2017, with the equivalent of around USD 400,000, accounting for 44% of total GCC advertising spending. The UAE is followed in second place by Saudi Arabia with USD 220 million, then by Kuwait with 191 million, Qatar with 70 million, the Sultanate of Oman with 35 million, and Bahrain with 29 million, respectively (Emirates 24/7, 2017).

Technology and Infrastructure

Media and communications in the UAE have evolved within the country's vision of technology as a key agent of positive social change. The UAE is one of only a few countries in the region with declared sustainable technology adoption and development strategies pertaining to space, artificial intelligence, and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR). The UAE was globally ranked second in 2018 on the Telecommunications Infrastructure Index and eighth on the UN E-Government Development Index Report (Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, 2019). In the country's duopolistic Internet and telephony market, the two telecom companies, *Etisalat* and *du*, provide a range of data, telephony, and cable television services to individuals and businesses. The International Telecommunication Union's (2018) statistics show that the UAE experienced exponential growth in mobile subscriptions, from 1.4 million in 2000 and 11 million in 2010 to 20 million in 2018. Internet subscription also experienced similar leaps, from 24% in 2000 and 68% in 2010 to 95% in 2017. In 2017, the UAE government launched the UAE Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution to strengthen the nation's position as a global industrial hub, and to increase its contribution to the national economy by means of advancing innovation and future technologies. The UAE Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution focuses on a number of key fields, embracing innovative education, adoption of intelligent and personal genomic medicine and robotic healthcare, and research in nanotechnology. The 4IR strategy also aims to achieve future security of water and food supplies by using bioengineering sciences and advanced renewable energy technologies, to enhance economic security by adopting digital economy and blockchain technologies in financial transactions and service, to optimize the utilization of satellite data in planning future cities, and to establish advanced defense industries by developing national capacities in the field of robotics and autonomous vehicle technologies (UAE Government, 2018b). In addition, the UAE has been the only country to establish a Ministry of State for Artificial Intelligence, which has evolved into the Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2031 "to enable the country to become a fast adopter of emerging AI technologies across government, as well as to attract top AI talent to

experiment with new technologies and work in a sophisticated, secure ecosystem to solve complex problems" (UAE Government, 2019).

Although the UAE media's relationships with the public continue to be under-investigated, a survey commissioned by the National Media Council (Al Bayan, 2017) on public trust of media outlets showed that mobile phones accounted for 97% of respondents' information sources, while traditional television accounted for 83%, newspapers 14%, home Internet service 76%, car radio 63%, and subscription television 27%. The results also showed that 42% of respondents use social media and the Internet to obtain information. While respondents' trust in newspaper coverage of local, national, and international events ranged from 12% to 26%, the range for television was from 29% to 43%, and for social media, it ranged from 25% to 51%. *Facebook* and *Twitter* stood out as the main sources of information for respondents on local events and issues, according to the survey. The public trust index developed by the study generated a score of 63% for reliance on local media, 86.3% for confidence in the most recently followed type of media, 93.4% for professional and ethical evaluation of practitioners, 78.7% for opinion and news analyses, and 69.6% for specialized media coverage. The overall trust index was 80.4% for all categories. A MENA media use study by Northwestern University in Qatar (2018) noted heavy UAE user engagement with new media to access news, play video games, and listen to podcasts, especially via mobile devices.

Challenges

It is clear that the UAE media present a unique case of a technological ecosystem marked by a strong sense of social responsibility, amicable state relations, significant technological innovation, mixed state-subsidized and commercial sustenance, and profound intercultural engagement. As elsewhere, the UAE media have challenges to address and opportunities on which to capitalize. The UAE public trust in media study (Al Bayan, 2017) identified UAE media challenges as including, among other things, incompetent practitioners, insufficient focus on regional issues, news credibility and transparency, an absence of Emirati media personalities, and a lack of discussion about issues relating to Emirati youth. The representation of UAE nationals in the

communications workforce has also been a controversial issue on the country's media development agenda. It is widely believed that, in order for UAE media to truly reflect UAE national identity and cultural heritage, a credible component of professional Emirati communicators is critically needed. Though there have been some National Media Council initiatives to integrate more Emiratis into the media market, more has yet to be done in this area. Factors impeding UAE nationals' integration into the media sector have ranged from lacking material incentives to competition from a burgeoning government communication sector that has lured a huge number of local talents with attractive employment packages. Over the years, the UAE has seen the rise of prominent media leaders and journalists, including Ibrahim Al-Abed (co-founder of the UAE News Agency), Abdul Hamid Ahmad (*Gulf News* Editor-in-Chief), Mohammed Al-Hammadi (Chair of the Journalists' Association), the late Habib El-Sayyegh, former Chair of the Arab Writers Union, and Aysha Sultan (columnist), who have all served as successful role models in their professional communities.

Another challenge faced by the UAE media sector is related to the outdated Federal Law (15) of 1980 that was enacted at a time when print media dominated the national communications landscape. The growing irrelevance of the law in respect to the emerging UAE digital and networked communications transitions has attracted much attention at official and media levels, with more voices calling for updates to the legislation to reflect the changing face of UAE media in the early part of the twenty-first century. At the Fifth Emirati Media Forum, held in May 2019, participants echoed the need to update the legislation by adding new provisions that reflect the huge transitions experienced by UAE media over the past four decades (El Emarat Al Yawm, 2019). The current law addresses media as print publications (newspapers and books), while visual media are addressed as film with a focus on ownership, imports, printing presses, distribution, and banned content. It is true that the UAE has initiated cybercrime laws (2012) and an electronic media regulation (2018) to address potential abuses online. But the emerging features of the country's journalism, as marked by mobile and online engagement, dictate the development of a new legislation that fully accounts for those transitions. It is widely believed that draft changes to Federal Law

(15) are awaiting the right political, national, and regional moments to be officially endorsed.

A third challenge facing UAE media is the declining finances of conventional media operations, as induced by global financial crises and regional conflicts. As the UAE online and networked communications experience greater expansions in technological sophistication, audience consumption, and global reach, conventional media stay on the losing end of the proposition. State subsidies are clearly keeping government print and broadcast media afloat, but the threat to the physical structures, distribution methods, and consumption patterns remains highly existential. To deal with this challenge, all UAE newspapers and broadcast outlets have launched their own online versions with a wide range of multimedia features that reflect the unique nature of virtual communications. Websites for television services post previously-broadcast shows online with full user access. Live audio and video streaming services have become standard features of the emerging online landscape. Newspaper websites show increasing levels of audience engagement as evident in social analytics relating to users' views, likes, sharing, and comments. All UAE media have also harnessed social media platforms to expand their reach and enhance engagement with Arab and global audiences. The online migration trend has been generally represented by the rise of fully dedicated online news services catering to local and regional audiences, such as *UAE-24*, *alain_4u*, *Sharjah-24*, *Mohtawa*, and *Dubai Post*.

Outlook

Media in the UAE have much to gain from the country's economic development, cultural diversity, and technological innovations. A robust economy would certainly provide sustainability for media industries, while demographic diversity would enhance cultural pluralism in the country's public sphere. In addition, further technological innovation would help media keep a strong competitive edge and foster engagement with local and international audiences, while quality media education would provide the media industry with young talent highly conscious of digital market dynamics. However, for UAE media to maintain their function as voices of national identity and tools for information,

education, and marketing, much has to be done with respect to the regulatory environment. The clear duality in the country's political conservatism and its progressive social and cultural policies needs to be addressed through incremental media transitions into more open and participatory governance options. The UAE media have been at the forefront of advocating womens' empowerment, human tolerance, and cultural diversity, but have taken a backstage position on critical conversations in the public sphere. New legal frameworks that enable media to accommodate greater political diversity and genuine engagement are indispensable for creating and sustaining economic, cultural, and technological momentum. As the UAE announced its preparations for the next 50 years, the development of the media sector, as informed by increasing regional competition and domestic indigenous representation in the public sphere, has been placed high on the nation's agenda.

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