

From Fushā to Arabizi: The Transformation of Journalistic Language and the Social Life of Arab Society in the Era of Electronic Media

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Abstract: Electronic media have fundamentally transformed the way societies including Arab societies access information, form opinions, and interact with one another. This article analyzes three issues: (1) the transformation of journalistic language accompanying the shift from print to electronic and digital media, with particular emphasis on the dynamics of digital Arabic in social media and online journalism; (2) the role of electronic media, particularly television and social media platforms, in the social life of contemporary Arab society; and (3) the theoretical frameworks relevant to understanding these phenomena. This study employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative method grounded in systematic library research of 21 primary and secondary sources published between 1978 and 2026, analyzed through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory. The findings indicate that electronic journalistic language is characterized by conciseness, speed, and interactivity, while in the Arab context specifically, phenomena such as Arabizi (Arabic-Latin transliteration), Arabic-English code-switching, and a shift in dominance from Modern Standard Arabic (Fusha) to colloquial dialects (Ammiyah) have emerged in informal digital communication. Electronic media were further found to exert a dual influence on Arab society: expanding access to information and facilitating social movements including their documented role in Arab Spring coverage while also contributing to the spread of misinformation, digital privacy concerns, and a potential erosion of formal Arabic language competence among younger generations. This article recommends strengthening both media literacy and digital language literacy in the Arab world as a mitigating measure.

Keywords: Arabic Journalistic Language; Electronic Media; Social Dynamics; Social Media; Television.

How to Cite?

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1. Introduction

Mass media have developed rapidly over time. Whereas in the eighteenth century CE media were limited to print media published and disseminated in the form of pamphlets, mass media today encompass not only print media but also far more complex forms of electronic media. This transformation has, in turn, exerted a significant influence on the life of society, particularly with regard to the patterns of thought and the dynamics of the views formed within it.

Mass media can generally be classified into three types: print media such as newspapers and magazines, electronic media such as radio and television, and online media such as news portals and social media (Nurhaliza et al., 2023). Of these three types, print media particularly newspapers were the first to emerge and develop. Newspapers became an indispensable medium for society owing to their speed and responsiveness in presenting information, employing language with distinctive characteristics: concise, dense, simple, fluent, clear, and engaging (Syukriady & Pada, 2022). The first Arabic-language newspaper itself was published in the nineteenth century, marking the starting point for the development of mass media in the Arab world (Al-Ahram Gate, n.d.).

The transition from print media to electronic and digital media in the Arab world has unfolded within a distinctive context. Current data indicate that the number of internet users in the Arab region has reached approximately 348 million people, of whom 228 million are active social media users, or approximately 46 percent of the total population (Arabian Business, 2025). This scale of digital adoption positions the Arab world as one of the regions with the fastest-growing internet user base, and simultaneously provides a rich context for observing how the language and communication patterns of society are transformed alongside digitalization.

Research on the transformation of the Arabic language in the digital sphere has developed quite rapidly in recent years. One consistent finding is the emergence of “Arabizi” the practice of writing Arabic using Latin letters and numerals to represent distinctive Arabic sounds as a digital linguistic phenomenon that is common among young speakers on messaging applications and social media (Yaghan, 2008, as cited in ICRRD, 2024). Other studies affirm that social media have driven a significant shift away from the dominance of Modern Standard Arabic (Fusha) toward regional dialectal varieties (Ammiyah) in everyday informal communication, accompanied by the phenomenon of code-switching between Arabic and English (ICRRD, 2024). At the same time, sociolinguistic research emphasizes the importance of adaptive strategies that integrate technological advancement without compromising the cultural and linguistic authenticity of Arabic (ResearchGate, 2026).

In the field of journalism, a comparative study of 54 print and online news sites in the Arab world found that although the internet has opened considerable opportunities for regional journalism, digital transformation has not yet fully succeeded in shifting communicative dynamics and journalistic practice toward the dialogical discourse and participatory communication that characterize civic culture and liberal democracy (Academia.edu, 2024). Another study documents the important role of social media in reporting and mobilization during the 2011–2012 Arab Spring, which stands as one of the pivotal moments for understanding the relationship between electronic media and socio-political change in the region (World Happiness Report, 2026).

Nevertheless, to the extent of the author’s review, these studies generally treat linguistic issues (digital linguistics) and social issues (the impact of media on society) separately, with little effort to integrate the two within a single coherent analytical framework, and rarely link them explicitly to classical communication theories such as Uses and Gratifications or Agenda-Setting. This article seeks to fill that gap by combining linguistic

and social perspectives simultaneously, employing communication theory frameworks as the analytical lens.

This study employs two communication theory frameworks as analytical lenses. First, Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, developed by Katz and colleagues, regards the audience as active participants who select and utilize particular media to satisfy personal needs whether for information, relaxation, or social interaction (EBSCO Research Starters, n.d.). This theory is relevant for explaining why Arab society, particularly the younger generation, actively chooses specific social media platforms (such as WhatsApp, Facebook, or TikTok) over traditional media to meet their information and social needs. Second, Agenda-Setting theory, which emphasizes how mass media direct public attention toward particular issues through the process of news selection and salience, although its influence may be constrained by media credibility and the values held by the audience (Basis Komunikasi, n.d.). These two frameworks are employed complementarily: Uses and Gratifications to understand individual motivations in consuming electronic media, and Agenda-Setting to understand how electronic media help shape public opinion and discourse in Arab society.

Based on this background, the present study formulates three research questions: (1) how does the development of electronic media influence the character of journalistic language in general, and what are its distinctive features in the context of digital Arabic?; (2) what role do electronic media, particularly television and social media platforms, play in the social life of society, including Arab society?; and (3) how can the Uses and Gratifications and Agenda-Setting theoretical frameworks explain these phenomena? This study aims to answer these three questions through a systematic literature review.

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method grounded in systematic library research. Data sources were traced through academic databases (Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, Academia.edu) as well as reports from credible research institutions (DataReportal, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, World Happiness Report) addressing three main themes: the transformation of journalistic language in electronic media, the dynamics of the Arabic language in digital space, and the social impact of electronic media, with emphasis on the Arab-world context where available. The inclusion criteria comprised: (a) publications in Indonesian, English, or Arabic; (b) publication within the 1978–2026 range, accommodating both classical references on Arabic linguistics and current data on digital trends; (c) direct relevance to one of the three research themes. The exclusion criteria comprised sources lacking clear credibility or affiliation, as well as opinion content without a data basis.

The analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis comprising the following stages: (1) data reduction grouping sources into the themes of journalistic language, social dynamics, and digital Arabic; (2) data display narrative synthesis of the findings for each theme; and (3) conclusion drawing cross-verification among sources and

interpretation through the lenses of Uses and Gratifications and Agenda-Setting theory as outlined in the theoretical framework section.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Development of Electronic Media and Journalistic Language

Electronic media have developed significantly over the past several decades, evolving from simple instruments for conveying information into integrated platforms that leverage cutting-edge technology to broadcast news and engage audiences around the clock. The origins of electronic media can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century, with the introduction of satellite-based television and radio broadcasting, before the internet gained widespread popularity in the 1990s and gave rise to news websites and digital content that has continued to evolve to incorporate multimedia. Over the past two decades, the proliferation of smartphones and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), YouTube, and Instagram has become an important factor in the evolution of electronic media, giving rise to social journalism, interactive-visual content, and mobile journalism.

This transformation has also substantially altered the character of journalistic language: conciseness, speed of reporting, interactivity, multimedia integration, content personalization based on big data and artificial intelligence, and a tendency toward informal and sensational language have become prominent features of contemporary electronic journalism in general. Viewed through the Uses and Gratifications framework, this shift in linguistic style can be understood as the media industry's response to the audience's need for information that is fast, easily digestible, and suited to their digital lifestyles (EBSCO Research Starters, n.d.).

3.2. The Dynamics of Arabic Language in Digital Space

The Arab-world context exhibits distinctive digital linguistic dynamics that merit particular attention. First, there is the emergence of the phenomenon of Arabizi the practice of writing Arabic using Latin letters and numerals (for example, the number "3" to represent the letter 'ain and "7" to represent the letter ha) to represent distinctive Arabic sounds that have no equivalent in the Latin alphabet. This practice is popular especially among young speakers on messaging applications and social media platforms, and tends to be regarded as a transitional phase for the younger generation, one that may diminish as more accessible Arabic-keyboard technology continues to develop (ICRRD, 2024).

Second, research indicates a shift in dominance away from Modern Standard Arabic (Fusha) which is traditionally used in formal, educational, and official news contexts toward regional dialectal varieties (Ammiyah) in everyday informal digital communication, accompanied by increasing code-switching between Arabic and English on social media (ICRRD, 2024). This phenomenon is consistent with the earlier observation regarding the absorption of foreign terms such as "event," "hashtag," and

“trend” into contemporary Arabic-language journalistic products, as a consequence of the influence of global culture and internet reach.

Third, recent sociolinguistic research affirms that although social media drive linguistic innovation and flexibility, this phenomenon also raises concerns about the potential erosion of formal Arabic-language competence, particularly among the younger generation, who are becoming increasingly accustomed to informal digital communication styles (ResearchGate, 2026). That study recommends adaptive strategies that integrate technological advancement for instance, through the development of more inclusive Arabic-language keyboards and digital tools without compromising the cultural and linguistic authenticity of Arabic (ResearchGate, 2026).

In the domain of professional journalism, a comparative study of dozens of print and online news sites in the Arab world found that digital transformation, while opening substantial opportunities in terms of reach and speed, has not yet fully succeeded in driving fundamental change in journalistic practice toward more dialogical and participatory communication (Academia.edu, 2024). This finding is significant because it shows that the digitalization of Arab media has altered the form of delivery more than it has changed the essential nature of the relationship between media and its public.

3.3. The Role of Electronic Media in Social Life

Journalistic language has a significant impact on how society understands, obtains, and responds to information. The evolution of electronic media carries important social consequences, including changes in news consumption patterns, an increase in the diversity of media sources, and, at the same time, the risk of the spread of erroneous information.

3.3.1. The Role of Television

Television has a major impact on communication, culture, education, and the social transformation of society, and to this day remains one of the primary sources of information, although recent studies show that half of young Arabs now obtain their daily news from Facebook, surpassing online news portals, television, and newspapers alike (The Arab Weekly, 2026). This phenomenon marks a significant shift in media consumption patterns in the region, even though television continues to retain an important role in shaping culture, public education, and social-awareness campaigns.

Beyond its informative function, television also plays a role in shaping culture. Programs such as dramas, comedies, and reality shows frequently reflect the dominant cultural values within society, while also potentially introducing foreign cultural elements that influence audiences' ways of thinking and behaving. Viewed through Agenda-Setting theory, television plays a major role in determining which issues the public regards as important through the process of news selection and salience, although its influence is likewise constrained by the credibility of the source and the extent to which the values conveyed align with the audience's own values (Basis Komunikasi, n.d.).

On the other hand, television also helps shape social behavior and public beliefs, and serves as a forum for social movements and change campaigns. Nevertheless, television

is not without criticism: a tendency toward subjective or selective presentation of information has the potential to distort public opinion, while sensationalized coverage can exacerbate social tensions.

3.3.2. The Role of Social Media Platforms

The rise of electronic media particularly the emergence of the internet, social media, and mobile technology has had a significant impact on the life of Arab society. Recent data show that the average social media user in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region spends approximately three hours per day on social media, exceeding the global average (World Happiness Report, 2026). WhatsApp is recorded as the most popular messaging application across Arab countries, used daily by more than eight out of ten Arab internet users, far outpacing Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube alike (Go-Globe, 2026).

Viewed through Uses and Gratifications theory, the high intensity and duration of social media use in the Arab world can be understood as a manifestation of society's active need particularly among the younger generation for social connectivity, information, and entertainment that cannot be fully met by traditional media (EBSCO Research Starters, n.d.). Nevertheless, Arab public opinion research from the 2024–2025 period also notes growing concern regarding misinformation, censorship, and the potential cultural harm arising from the massive use of social media, although support for content regulation is likewise fairly high among Arab society (Doha Institute/Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2025).

Social media have also become an important catalyst for social movements and activism in the Arab world. One of the most significant examples is the role of social media in reporting and mobilization during the 2011–2012 Arab Spring, which stands as an important reference point in the literature on the relationship between new media and controversial socio-political movements in the region (World Happiness Report, 2026). This phenomenon underscores the relevance of Agenda-Setting theory in the Arab context: social media serve not merely as a space for sharing information but also help shape the public agenda and drive collective action on a scale previously difficult for conventional mass media to achieve.

Although it brings benefits in terms of connectivity and social mobilization, intensive social media use in the Arab world as in other regions is also associated with a range of risks to psychological wellbeing, including a potential decline in life satisfaction resulting from social comparison and exposure to idealized, curated content, as documented in research on wellbeing and social media use in the MENA region (World Happiness Report, 2026).

4. Conclusion

Based on the discussion presented, this study answers the three research questions as follows. First, with regard to the question concerning the influence of electronic media on journalistic language, it was found that the transformation of media from print to

electronic and digital forms has given rise to journalistic language that is more concise, rapid, interactive, and integrated with multimedia. Specifically within the Arab context, this transformation has given rise to distinctive linguistic phenomena in the form of Arabizi, Arabic-English code-switching, and a shift in dominance from Fusha to Ammiyah in informal digital communication which, on the one hand, reflects linguistic creativity and adaptability, but on the other hand raises concerns about the potential erosion of formal Arabic-language competence among the younger generation.

Second, with regard to the question concerning the role of electronic media in social life, it was found that television and social media platforms exert a dual influence on society, including Arab society: on the one hand, expanding access to information, democratizing communication, and facilitating social movements as seen in the role of social media during the Arab Spring while on the other hand contributing to the spread of disinformation, concerns over privacy and censorship, a decline in the quality of face-to-face interaction, and various risks to psychological wellbeing.

Third, with regard to the relevance of the theoretical frameworks, it was found that Uses and Gratifications theory is relevant for explaining the active motivation of Arab society in selecting and using electronic media to meet their informational and social needs, while Agenda-Setting theory is relevant for explaining how electronic media help shape public discourse and agendas in the region, including in the context of socio-political movements.

As electronic media continue to develop, their impact on the social life and language of Arab society will be strongly determined by how individuals and communities adapt combining the benefits of technology with the need to preserve linguistic authenticity and meaningful human relationships. Accordingly, strengthening both media literacy and digital language literacy in the Arab world stands as the primary recommendation for maximizing the benefits of electronic media while minimizing its risks. Further research based on primary data for example, a quantitative corpus analysis of digital Arabic or a survey of young Arabs' perceptions of Arabizi is recommended to deepen the findings of this literature-based study.

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