

Podcast Initiatives in the Arab World



Podcasts initiatives in the Arab World

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Podcast initiatives in the Arab world

Study Framework

Podcasts are witnessing rapid growth worldwide, as they are a form of providing a diversified media material that meets the interests of the audience, and they can listen to it whenever they want. This type of media content has been circulating in particular through the smartphone, which allows the audience to listen individually and freely choose what they want from the media content. The last five years have been a great starting point for it, as international media platforms, media outlets and commercial production companies have resorted to using its various specialties. It seems that the podcast will shrink the radio share in listening rates and attract an audience of different ages and backgrounds¹.

On the level of the Arab world, the importance of podcasts is gradually increasing, and the interest of content makers and journalists in this form of media is growing rapidly, as the number of active podcast programs in the Arab world has reached 413 programs in the last three months and more than 40,000 podcast episodes in the year 2021, according to the statistics of the podcast platform El-Arabi.

The content of Arab podcast platforms and programs vary between social, cultural, historical and entertainment content, while the political content in podcasts is less, and that is due to the limited freedom of opinion and expression that journalists and citizens suffer from in general at the Arab level.

Despite the Arab demand for the production and consumption of visual content, podcasts are finding their way to the audience, due to many factors, the most important of which is to gain time, as it is possible to listen to programs while driving a car, on public transport, while exercising, or even cooking, therefore, it does not require concentration since it works in the background of the mind during routine activities.

Arab podcasts face many challenges despite the growing interest in them, including censorship (whether it is self-censorship or imposed by official authorities), the lack of media consumers' knowledge of podcasts, and the chaos of the emerging podcast companies sector, according to the CEO of Sawt Network, Ramzi Tesdal, due to the great challenge embedded in the economic model of production companies in order to ensure its success and continuity.

¹ In 2004 there were about 3000 podcasts in the world, mostly in English. The latest statistics, published by Podcast Insights, counted nearly two million podcasts that have run over 45 million episodes.

<https://www.lunio.fr/id232997/article/2021-02-23/podcast-cest-quoi-exactement>



Study Objective

The interest in podcasts in the Arab world has grown in the recently, as a new form of digital storytelling, and the public's demand for it has increased. Therefore, this field study came to recognize the reality of this new form of media publishing, and to see the most prominent podcast initiatives that provide professional journalism, creative content, viable media initiatives, and the extent of financial sustainability, in light of a major economic crisis hitting the traditional media sector in the Arab world.

The study sheds light on a number of topics that revolve around podcasts: founders of podcast initiatives, the type of journalism presented, the audience of Arab podcasts, business models (funding) adopted in the initiatives, issues covered, success stories, challenges they face, and recognition of the extent of interest in podcasts, in media faculties in the Arab world as a new form of digital media.

The study analyzed models of podcast platforms in the Arab world that provide professional content. It also presented the conditions of its inception, its structure and the difficulties it faces, in addition to the economic model it adopts for its continuity.



Study Sample

The sample consisted of 18 podcast networks and programs as follows: 100 Watts- Reflections with JadGhosen, Kabsa, Podcast 11, Rahba, The Lebanese Political Podcast, Jalsa, Talatha Belluz, Sada podcast, Jana podcast, Aswatuna podcast, Inkifada podcast, Pioneers of Civilization, Voice



of Women, Yemen Steps, El- Sikka, Sawt Podcast, Podcast Polytalks. They are distributed in a number of Arab countries as follows: Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Iraq, Oman, and Algeria.

Interviews were conducted with the officials in charge of these platforms and podcast networks in order to shed light on these initiatives that provide professional journalism and identify their ability to continue and sustain and develop the journalistic model on which they are working on. These interviews allowed the following achievements:

- Getting to know these platforms and initiatives in their surroundings and the countries to which they belong to,
- View the content they provide,
- Determine the economic model on which they are based on to obtain funding,
- Get to know the challenges they face,
- Acknowledge the editorial policy and administrative structure of these platforms.



First: Models of Arab podcast platforms and networks



Challenges of Arab Podcast

The challenges facing podcast platforms and programs in general vary according to the different Arab countries from which these initiatives are launched. Among the most prominent common challenges of the platforms:

The financial sustainability of the podcast: especially the initiatives that carry the burden of having employees and high production costs, and the legal environment that includes loopholes that do not allow registering this type of initiatives.

Attracting the audience: It is a major challenge that most platforms share, which is how to attract the audience to podcasts, which requires changing their habits of interest in watching, so several platforms have tried to film podcasts and broadcast episodes on YouTube as well.

Choosing topics: Another challenge for producers is to choose topics of interest to the audience, which was indicated by the organizers of the Jalsa podcast, as there is a need to



define more for the audience and choose topics that are important and close to the listener, and talk about problems experienced by young people in the Arab world².

Compatibility with the public: It is a significant challenge represented in the negative responses of part of the public to raising sensitive issues related to women's rights, marginalized groups, liberation issues, religious issues, and others.

Censorship: It is of two types, governmental censorship by the authorities, or self-censorship carried out by those in charge of these initiatives out of fear of legal prosecution, especially when political issues, that the regimes of power in Arab countries consider sensitive or threaten their security, are raised.

In Egypt, for example, the presenter and producer of "Podcast 11" Sulafa Salem discusses the constant security restrictions that media content producers suffer from, which poses a challenge to freedom of expression and debate on controversial topics, as the period between 2013-2017 witnessed threats, abuse and attacks against journalists, during which the number of detained journalists reached 25, and more than 600 news websites have been blocked in Egypt, hence making it impossible to address the topics related to the revolution, the women's movement, the economic situation, the justice system, and the restrictions on civil society as addressed by "Podcast 11" without the podcasters being outside Egypt³.



Initiatives to launch Arab podcasts

The Arabic podcast platforms, programs and networks that provide journalistic and professional content vary in terms of the types of content and the affiliation of these initiatives. Through this research, which deals with 18 pillars of podcasts, it is clear that most of them tried to take advantage of this new media type in order to carry social and national issues, and this may be a common denominator for them despite the diversity of their projects and forms and who is behind their launch. Every project carries a societal issue that it tries to market.

Three types of podcast programs and networks have been monitored, depending on the party that launched them, but they meet openly or implicitly with a commitment to carrying out social issues.



² An interview with Saeed Haddadi, Publications and Communications Officer at the Arab Reform Foundation, which incubates the podcast "Jalasa"

³ Interview with Solafa Sallam, presenter and producer of "Podcast 11"



A-Individual initiatives

Among the platforms and programs that were launched from an individual initiative:

◦ "Pioneers of Civilization"

Muhammad Al-Khalawy founded the "Pioneers of Civilization" podcast in August 2020, as a completely independent Egyptian podcast that is not affiliated with any network⁴, with the aim of showing examples of Arab youth and their life experience, through their main field of work, whether they work inside or outside the Arab world. Tell the audience about their experiences with immigration and the social life they lived, and show their experiences with entrepreneurship and the establishment of companies within the Arab world, and learn from the experiences of failure and success.

The podcast publishes its episodes on average twice a week in Arabic to address issues related to technology and entrepreneurship with specialized guests. Through the podcast, al-Khalawi aspires to provide a series of filmed documentaries documenting prominent scientific figures in the Arab countries, and striving to be a video podcast.

The podcast mainly focuses on Egypt, then some Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria and Arab immigrants.

The podcast reaches the audience through YouTube as a primary platform, although it is a visual medium, but in the opinion of the podcast owner it is effective, in addition to Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, the Bodio platform and through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

◦ "Rahba"

The "Rahba" podcast is part of an independent news website founded by the Algerian journalist, editor and writer Mohamed Alaoua Hajji at the end of 2020, early 2021⁵. Hajji chose the podcast format as one of the templates adopted in the production of content on the site, to allow preferred access to the audience who prefer audio content over readable or visual content, and some articles were attached to an audio version.

At the start of the site's launch, the pace of publication was daily, and one of the programs was supposed to be published weekly, but due to the financial factors and the situation of the site, the publication became indefinite within a specific time period, and it is also concerned with social, political, cultural, and literary issues (Algerian - Arab - International).

The podcast targets the Algerian realm, with some presence in some Arab countries such as Tunisia, and Western countries such as France, but the largest part of the audience is Algerian.

⁴ Interview with Muhammad Khalla, presenter and creator of the podcast "Pioneers of Civilization"

⁵ Interview with Mohamed Alawa Hajji, journalist and founder of the podcast "Rahba"



◦ “Yemen Steps”

The “Yemen Steps” podcast was established on May 22, 2021 on the occasion of Yemeni Union Day as an independent project that is not affiliated with any media organization or media network. It is the first Yemeni podcast concerned with childhood, motherhood, heritage and Yemeni arts.

The podcast publishes its social and economic content in general, and it is directed towards childhood and motherhood in particular, on a weekly basis in Arabic, but there is a potential to publish in English, French and Dutch in the future.

The founder of the “Yemen Steps” podcast, Abdo Mahmoud Baghel⁶, says that the choice of the podcast came for several reasons. First, the audio content is more powerful in questioning and it is easy to return to it in case of download. Second, the podcast constitutes a new and attractive way of raising issues, and it can be presented as audio and visual content, Third, the use of podcasts or audio notation as a means of digital marketing has become very popular recently in the Arab world, and there are still many individuals and companies that are thinking about the trend towards podcasting and audio notation because of the features and benefits of several podcasts, and this is what can be worked on in the future to provide more income.

◦ “Reflections with Jad Ghosson”

The Reflections podcast with Jad Ghosson was established in October 2020 and is produced, supervised and hosted by the Lebanese journalist Jad Ghosson⁷. The content of the podcast varies between social, economic and political, and it is presented in Arabic and is soon to be produced with subtitles written in a foreign language.

This podcast has a special vision and is in principle the opposite of traditional media, creating content according to what is important and not according to what people see as important which is the case in traditional media. Time is not essential, but content, as the episodes do not include fixed axes for dialogue.

The choice of topics usually depends on the timing. According to Ghosn's point of view, depending on the importance of the topic and whether it has an impact on society.

◦ “The Lebanese Political Podcast”

The Lebanese Political Podcast initiative was established in 2018 before the Lebanese parliamentary elections to cover the atmosphere of the elections. The content is published in English on a weekly basis⁸.

The goal of the podcast is to provide information for English-speaking people, so it targeted researchers, institutions, foreign embassies and international organizations operating in Lebanon,

⁶ An interview with Abdo Mahmoud Baghel, founder of the podcast “Yemen Steps”

⁷ Interview with Jad Ghosson, founder and host of the podcast Reflections with Jad Ghosson

⁸ Interview with Nizar Hassan, founder of The Lebanese political podcast



and those who want to know about the political events in Lebanon, in addition to the Lebanese expatriates.

The podcast was chosen as a platform because it is a space that allows expression and analysis with guests, according to the program's directors. It also does not require much equipment and was not known in 2018, as it was a new form of media, and it is commensurate with the content provided by the program.

◦ Podcast “Polytalks”

The "Polytalks" podcast was established in Lebanon during the period of the October 17, 2019 uprisings with the widespread popular wave and opposition to the ruling class that led the country to economic, political and social collapse.

The platform's organizers⁹ consider it a free space in which opinions can be expressed freely without claiming objectivity. In each episode of the podcast it is assured to host an expert on files presented on the Lebanese scene.

Previously, the podcast used to publish two episodes a week, but today, with the presence of a funding party, the production of content has become a biweekly episode, and the “Polytalks” podcast is keen to highlight the political and economic issues that the Lebanese youth are concerned with in Arabic, i.e. the Lebanese dialect, and that the questions asked are common and close to what the Lebanese youth is wondering about.

B - Initiatives of civil society associations and institutions

Among the platforms and the programs that were launched as an initiative of civil society associations and institutions:

◦ “Kabsa”

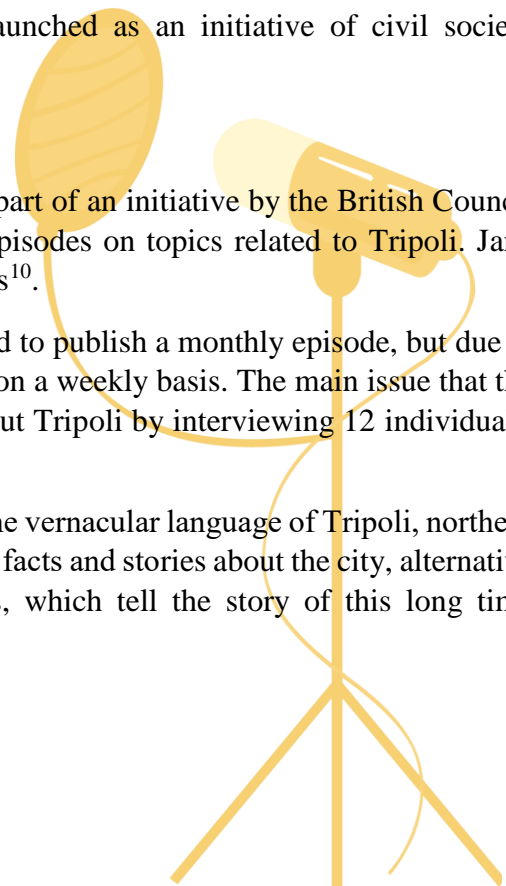
The "Kabsa" podcast was established in April 2021 as part of an initiative by the British Council in Lebanon. The program consists of 12 specialized episodes on topics related to Tripoli. Jana Dhaibi manages, prepares and conducts press interviews¹⁰.

The podcast uses the Arabic language and was supposed to publish a monthly episode, but due to the situation in Lebanon, it was publishing the podcast on a weekly basis. The main issue that the podcast revolves around is changing the stereotype about Tripoli by interviewing 12 individuals, including people who discuss about cultural issues.

Kabsa has a clear vision, for the expression “kabsa” in the vernacular language of Tripoli, northern Lebanon, is “a cup of coffee.” There are many unknown facts and stories about the city, alternative narratives, and different points of view and opinions, which tell the story of this long time

⁹ Interview with Layal Khoury presenter of “Polytalks”

¹⁰ Interview with Jana Dhaibi, hostess of the “kabsa” podcast





marginalized city in Lebanon, which is considered. And it is considered the first podcast program to be launched from Tripoli.

○ "Jana Podcast"

"Jana Podcast" was established in 2021 and is affiliated with the Jana Center, a Lebanese organization that focuses on refugee issues in Lebanon, and its content focuses on how to create safe and diverse societies for all. It presents youth related topics that concern the Lebanese society in general, and Beirut, the South, and Mount Lebanon in particular. However, the podcast's topics affect all regions of Lebanon, of course.

The podcast is published on a daily basis in Arabic, and it produces several programs aiming to the participation of young people in building a better future for marginalized and refugee communities, including the podcasts "Bila Kadir", "Clean Air", "Diary of a Survivor" and "Fasila".

Jana Podcast has 13 freelancers, editor and editor-in-chief and full-time staff¹¹.

○ "Jalsa"

The podcast "Jalsa" was established on August 25, 2021, and is an initiative launched by the Arab Reform Foundation, which deals with the rights of women and youth, and considers them an essential player in politics. There is a journalistic team working from Beirut, Tunisia, and France¹².

The issues that the podcast deals with differ according to the sections, a section on youth in wartime (Syria, Iraq and Libya), what they have experienced in wars, and their aspirations and fears for the future. This section consists of five episodes, and it brings together several voices that talk about the problems and issues of the Arab region, economically, politically, and on a gender level. They are diverse and do not cover a single issue. It also aims to be a voice for effective personalities in the future, such as activists and others.

The podcast has a vision that includes highlighting various issues including environmental policies and alternative economies, women and youth as political actors, the reality of field research in crisis situations, and other topics. It interviews key change agents in the region about their experiences, stories, hopes, and frustrations as they attempt to navigate transformational contexts in their specific areas.

○ "Talatha Belluz"

"Talatha Belluz" means a tradition of drinking tea in Libya, so the host asks the guest to sit down and enjoy the hospitality. "Talatha Belluz" is an independent podcast program that was started by the Libyan Association "1,8" at the end of 2020 and was worked on from March to September in 2021, and the show was launched at the end of October 2021¹³.

¹¹ An interview with Hisham Kayed, manager of Jana podcast.

¹² An interview with Saeed Haddadi, Publications and Communications Officer at the Arab Reform Foundation, which hosts the podcast "Jalsa"

¹³ An interview with Wanes Al-Aqel, presenter and producer of the podcast "Talatha Belluz"



The organizers used the podcast format, because there is no precedent for a podcast in Libya, and it talks about Libya and Libyan culture. It sheds light on social, cultural and awareness issues related to the Libyan culture and the social conditions in Libya, as well as introducing Libya.

The vision of the podcast "Thalatha Belluz" is to extract the Libyan identity and put it in front of the community, because there is no program that talks about the Libyan identity, national culture and the issues raised by society today. In addition to the objective of introducing non-Libyans to Libya. The language used is Arabic in the Libyan dialect, but there are explanations for non-Libyans, and the frequency of publication is weekly.

○ "100 Watts"

The "100" Watts podcast was launched as a project within the ARIJ Foundation on December 6, 2020 for a period of 3 years. ARIJ chose to work on producing content in the form of podcasts, because it is the easiest way for the journalist to acquire journalistic professional skills, according to those in charge of the podcast¹⁴, especially since ARIJ is an institution that trains male and women journalists, which contributes to raising their capacities to conduct investigations in the future. The publication takes place two days of the week.

In terms of the topics and issues that the podcast deals with, they fall into four axes: human rights, religious rights, digital freedom of expression, and accountability. A fifth axis was added through people's interest in the repercussions of Corona virus on their lives.

○ "Aswatuna Podcast"

The "Aswatuna" podcast was founded in October 2020, and is based mainly in Germany as part of the "nahostcast and mitost" foundation, which is registered as a non-governmental organization in Germany¹⁵. The project aims to connect and support podcasters within the region (North Africa and West Asia) and Germany. The overarching goal is to create a transnational network of Arabic-speaking podcasters to exchange experiences and ideas.

The podcast publishes content focused on gender and social sensitive issues twice a month in Arabic as the primary language, with translation in English and German.

The format of the podcast was chosen, according to the organizers of "Aswatuna Podcasts", as a democratic tool that allows content creators and journalists the freedom to create content and cover the issues they want, as well as easy production and low material costs compared to other media platforms. The podcast also gives guests a convenience to tell their stories, especially sensitive issues such as violence against women, as being an audio platform, the ability to record material and refer to it when we want, as well as its advantage that it is audible, as the listener does not focus on the guest's appearance but on the content.

¹⁴ Interview with Farah Jallad, Project Coordinator of "100 Watts"

¹⁵ An interview with Rasha El-Deeb, Communications Officer for the Arab Region, at "the Aswatuna podcast"



○ “Podcast 11”

Podcast 11 was founded in 2019 by the Women for Justice Foundation, and is registered as an association in Toronto - Canada, and its name symbolizes February 11, 2011, the date of the resignation of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak from ruling Egypt in the wake of the January 25, 2011 revolution¹⁶. The podcast, launched in its third season, sheds light on the most important concerns of Egyptian society in a number of different social, political, economic and feminist issues, through meetings with politicians, artists and human rights advocates who speak boldly and from an unconventional perspective. The podcast is based in Arabic, and is published weekly on Facebook, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts.

○ “Inkifada podcast”

The Tunisian “Inkifada Podcast” platform is part of the “Al Khat Association”, and the podcast and audio media adventure was launched in 2017 as the first digital platform of its kind dedicated entirely to the original productions of podcasts in Tunisia. Launched by the “Inkifada” website, in cooperation with “Inkilab”, its digital research and development laboratory¹⁷.

Choosing the podcast format to provide information came for several reasons, including that it constitutes a space of freedom to raise issues and gives importance to sympathizing with the voice without the image, and the ability to hear the podcast during work or in any circumstances as it is an audio material, in addition to a lower material cost for content production compared to other forms of media materials.

The Inkifada Podcast focuses on many political, social, feminist, and gender issues in Arabic (Tunisian dialect), with translations available in Arabic, French, and English at different rates. There is content that needs a month preparation before publication, and other are published weekly.

The Inkifada Podcast doubled its productions of documentaries, programs and audio articles combined with background music, and other stories dealing with various topics related to the current problems in Tunisia. The platform cooperates closely with journalists, women journalists, artists, designers, musicians, and various content creators, with the aim of presenting various publications and in order to support the artistic community.

○ “Voice of Women”

The Iraqi “Voice of Women” network began its media work in 2017, with a primary goal of diving into digital media through digital media production such videos for social campaigns. Then it began producing programs for digital media on YouTube, and producing radio programs for other organizations as well as content that expressed network trends. In 2021, the “Voice of Women” podcast was launched¹⁸.

¹⁶ Interview with Sulafa Sallam, presenter and producer of “Podcast 11”

¹⁷ Interview with Rime Amami, programming officer of “Inkifada podcast”

¹⁸ An interview with Suha Audi, supervisor of the “Voice of Women” podcast.



The choice fell mainly on podcasts because the network's work depends on digital media, and podcasts are part of the new media, and also because digital media gives a much wider area of freedom than traditional media.

The "Voice of Women" podcast publishes its content on a weekly basis in Arabic, and focuses on political, socio-economic issues.

C-Initiatives of companies

The companies' initiative in launching podcasts is distinguished by the large size of audio production and its diversity in the programs presented to the public. Such as:

○ "Sada Podcast"

"Sada Podcast" was established in January 2021 within the "Audible Story Foundation" in Jordan. The Founder Suleiman Awad chose the podcast because it is a relatively new form of media production that lacks diversity in the Arab world as there is a need for rich content in the Arab world.

"Sada Podcast" publishes its content in Arabic on a weekly basis, and the general framework of the issues it deals with is human rights and all sub-issues such as gender issues and issues related to people with special needs¹⁹.

The selection of content in the podcast does not depend on public interest, but the "Sada Podcast" Network produces according to the need to raise awareness about specific issues and important immediate topics. In the future, the network will produce a fact-checking program on a weekly basis.

○ "Sawt Podcast"

"Sawt", a company specialized in audio notation and podcasting, started its work in 2016 based on the idea of creating a podcast platform for the Arab audience that provides content in the Arabic language. The podcast format was specifically chosen for several reasons, such as the fact that this format is not widely spread in the Arab world, and its advantage is by allowing the listener the freedom to choose the content and the freedom to choose the listening time, for example during work or sports, in addition to the interest of large companies in publishing podcasts such as "Apple Podcasts" and "Google Podcasts". and "Anghami" and other companies.

In its humble beginnings, "Sawt podcast" focused on a few programs on social issues, especially issues that are subject to censorship, such as sex, women's rights and harassment, for example.

From there, the project began to take a larger trend and today it has 12 podcast programs²⁰, including the "Tiki Taka" sports podcast, "Dam Tek" which deals with musical matters, and "Eib"

¹⁹ Interview with Suleiman Awad, founder of the "Sada Podcast"

²⁰ Interview with Bassem Daoud, Business Development Officer at "Sawt"



(shame) which is the company's largest podcast in terms of seasons and listening, which deals with topics that are considered a taboo that traditional media avoids addressing, yet "Sawt" considered that its role is complementary, according to those in charge of it, for everyone who dared to raise these issues on the traditional media.

○ "El-Sikka"

The Omani "El-Sikka" podcast was launched in 2018 within the "umedia" Foundation as a basic podcast that presents social and political issues, in which journalist Turki Al Balushi interviews one person for an hour in an interactive and in-depth manner and tries to raise new questions, especially in Oman and the Gulf due to the lack of political podcasts²¹.

The podcast publishes its political and social content on a monthly basis in Arabic. As for the reason why it is monthly, the in-depth conversational content requires extensive research and preparation. Accurate content is more important than speed, according to those in charge of it.

The "umedia" Foundation, which includes the "El-Sikka" podcast, aims to address the issues related to Arab youth in the entire Arab world, and this is the mission and vision of the Foundation. This mission and vision is translated by a team consisting of the podcast founder and a technical production team including 3 full-time employees working in the company, and their job fall within producing podcast episodes.

The dialogue issues in the podcast are chosen on the basis of seriousness and a new angle that "serves the victims of the regimes". The selection is also made according to the timing factor, as people are hosted at a specific time, for example receiving specific journalists to speak about the Gulf crisis at the height of the Gulf crisis period. The content reaches the audience through El-Sikka website and through pages on Facebook, Instagram, Spotify, Soundcloud, iTunes and Apple Podcasts.

Podcast name	owner	Country	Field of interest	Year Founded	Funding	Target audience	Publishing frequency	Declared Objective
Reflections with jad ghosn	Jad Ghosn	Lebanon	Social Political Economic al	2020	Youtube, Patreon for donations	There is no specific audience or age group, but the	No fixed publication dates	Playing an opposite role to traditional media

²¹ An interview with the journalist Turki Al-Balushi, founder of the podcast "El-Sikka"

						audience as a whole		that creates content at the expense of the viewer
Jana Podcast	Hisham Kayed	Lebanon	Social youth subjects	2019	External funding association DCA	Youth all over Lebanon	daily	Creating a safe society by addressing youth issues
Polytalks podcast	Nayla Khoury	Lebanon	Political Economic al	2019	NGOs	Youth group aging 18 to 35	Bi-weekly episode	Reach a Lebanon , that young people dream of, and development in the state's sectors
Inkifada podcast	El khat Association	Tunisia	Political Social Women and Gender issues	2017	Internal activities and services (training courses, graphic designs, website development...) Donors (AMS, OSF 40% of the income)	Different age groups due to the diversity of topics	Different pace depending on the topic	Intensify ing the producti on of audio content in Tunisia
Pioneers of Civilisation	Mohamad Khalawi	Egypt	Technolog y and Entrepren eurship	2021	Self-funding	Youth group aging 15 to 40	Twice a week	Demonst rate the experien ces and leadershi p of Arab

								youth in their fields of work
Voice of women Podcast	Voice of Women network	Irak	Social Political Economic al	2021	Non-governmental organizations (Friedrich Effert, Germany), counseling provided to media platforms	From 17 to 50 years of all those interested in political affairs	weekly	Content that creates equality between men and women, eases tensions in the region, and presents approaches to reach solutions
Yemen steps Podcast	Abdo Mahmoud Baghel	Yemen	Social Economic al	2021	تمويل ذاتي	Young people across Yemen	weekly	Raise issues of interest to society and youth and focuses on developing it

Sawt Podcast	Sawt Compagny	Jordan	Diverse (Sports, cultural, social)	2016	Non-governmental organizations, selling content, training programs related to the content industry, the sawt plus subscription form, advertisements	The Arab public in all its categories	Depending on the program	Raise sensitive social issues, spread podcast culture, and work on producing high-quality content
Aswatuna Podcast	nahost cast and mitost Association	Germany	Social and gender sensitive issues	2020	German ministry of foreign affairs	The first category (the podcast community and audio media through workshops and training), the second category, the youth aging from 18 to 30	Twice a month	Raise sensitive social issues of interest to the public and seek to link and support podcast providers within the "Wana" region, and seek to establish a transnational network for Arabic podcast

								provider s
El-Sikka Podcast	Umedia Association	Sultanate Oman	Social Politics	2018	Media consulting, content sales, short-term advertising and audio ads	Youth group aging over 21 years old at the regional level: Oman, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Emirates, Tunisia	monthly	Reach all youth issues in the Arab world and put them in the podcast
100 watts Podcast	ARIJ Foundation	Jordan	Human rights, religious rights, digital freedom of expression and accountability	2020	donors	Jordanians, all age groups	Twice a week	Promoting a culture of accountability and an investigative culture in the Arab world
Kabsa Podcast	British council	Lebanon	Cultural Social	2021	british council	Young people over 18 years old in all of Lebanon	Bi-weekly episode	Changing the stereotype about Tripoli by hosting cultural figures
Rahba Podcast	Mohamad Alawa	Algeria	Social, politics, cultural, literature	2020	Self-funding	Youth group aging 18 to 60 who follow the alternative media and have a minimum education	No fixed pace	Content that the listener enjoys within professional controls

The Lebanese political podcast	Nizar Hassan	Lebanon	Political	2018	Self-funding	English speakers Lebanese youth	Weekly	Analyze political topics with guests without any restrictions
Jalsa Podcast	Arab Reform Foundation	Lebanon and Tunisia team and France team	Economic Social Gender	2021	international donors + specific donors	Active youth audience in the Arab region	Weekly	Raising and addressing the problems and issues of the Arab region, to be a voice for active personalities in society
Talatha belluz Podcast	Association “1,8”	Libya	Cultural Social	2020	Institutional Funding, an association affiliated with Peace Against Violence	Young people, university graduates and ordinary people aging 20 to 45	Weekly	Spreading Libyan culture, raising social issues, and introducing people to Libya
Sada Podcast	Suleiman Awad	Jordan	human rights, gender issues	2021	Eligible Institutions , CFI, UNESCO	Jordanian, Saudi, Egyptian audience between 16-45 years old	Weekly	Raise human rights issues
Podcast 11	Women for Justice Foundation	Egypt	Social Political Economic al	2019	Funding depending on donors	Primary local Egyptian and	Weekly	Shedding light on human rights

						expatriates , and there is also a target for all Arab audience		issues in Egypt, from freedom of expression to restricting civil space and women's issues
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Second: The reality of podcasts in the Arab space

The forms of displaying media content vary between video, articles and multimedia, but in recent years there has been an increase in media platforms that use podcasts (audio) as a form of content presentation. There was also a demand from the public for this type of media.

Arab platforms and podcast networks agree that their preference for this type of content presentation is due to its low production costs compared to other forms, in addition to the freedom to create content through audio storytelling, and the increasing public demand for this type of media presentation.



Some platforms and podcasts mentioned that this format is distinguished by its ability to provide comfort to guests while telling their stories, especially when it comes to sensitive issues such as violence against women and diverse self-expression. Also, government censorship of content is reduced because the medium of publishing is via the Internet, unlike traditional media.

Another aspect that some platforms considered important and made them prefer podcast formats, which is the nature of podcasts in terms of allowing the listener the freedom to choose the content and the freedom to choose the listening time, for example during work or sports, in addition to the interest of large companies in publishing podcasts such as “Apple Podcast” and “Google Podcast”, and “Anghami” and other companies.



Sustainability of the platforms and economic model

The use of audio notation or podcasting as a means of digital marketing has become very popular recently in the world and has recorded great successes. In the Arab world, there are many individuals and companies who are thinking of moving towards audio notation and podcasting due to the features and benefits of multiple podcasts and its emerging market, which can provide sustainability for many of the media platforms in the Arab world.

Initiatives to create Arab podcast platforms and networks highlight economic and legal dimensions. In the economic dimension, the study of the monitored podcast programs and networks shows that most of them lack a successful media business model, except in rare cases, which are clearly represented by what the “Sawt” Network, which operates from Jordan, adopts.

a- Donation models

10 platforms and podcasts, out of the 18 platforms that were contacted during the research, depend on a business model that depends on grants (donations), and this model is not considered a successful model because it may be subject to the conditions of the funder and is not sustainable. The reliance on this model comes from the platforms, the majority of whose founders are journalists or activists close to civil society, and therefore they are familiar with the work method and the donors.

While 4 programs of the monitored podcast platforms do not have a business model, and they are continuous because they often depend on one person who is the founder of the platform, and therefore there are no expenses or costs that affect the continuity of the platform’s work.

As for the business model based on advertisements, providing services and media consulting, there is an important experience provided by the “Sawt” network and the “Inkifada” podcast, which will be presented in detail during the research.

b- Subscription models

In transforming the business model into a subscription model in media platforms, there was a majority confirming that this model is unsuccessful in the Arab world due to the culture of free



media content among the Arab public, and that this model imposes exclusive content for the media and this violates the values and objectives of providing information and media content to all without discrimination under the light of financial ability to afford it, but there is an exception with an audio network that will be shown later in the research framework.

The other model, which is more receptive than the subscription model, is relying on the support of the public, and this example is evident in the podcast Reflections with JadGhosson, where the platform depends on income from YouTube or Patreon, where Lebanese contributors who want the independent press to continue, will donate, as Ghosn asserts.

Digital payment systems facilitate the process of audience donation or subscription to the platform, which provides a financial return for podcast initiatives. The fact that these platforms have accounts on the platforms of Patreon and PayPal entitles them to receive a monthly or one-time donation that covers some of the costs of the platform.

c- Business models

The business model is the strategic design of how a company or organization seeks to profit from its operations and activities. Also, the business model is a new or developed way for the company to do business in a way that achieves an advantage in the market, or improves its current advantage and thus increases its market share. The reality shows that the media markets have become more complex than before, and this is embodied in the challenges faced by institutions thanks to the increase in competitors, and due to their suffering to produce multiple services and products²².

Therefore, any new business model must take into account that technology has become the competitive agent in the field of media creativity, the function of technology is no longer only to reduce costs, but its role goes beyond to help the organization (in terms of product specifications, service, price and quality) to survive and grow in the competitive domestic and international environment. In addition, any new media business model must be based on effective networks. Information technology and communication systems today have a direct impact on the behavior of consumers, as the traditional impact of networks depends on the consumer of a particular product being affected by the behavior of other consumers.

Modern networks have multiplied this effect as search engines and site directories have provided the tools for group interaction. In all cases, any business model is directly related to the profit, given that the effect of networks depends on the value of the profit or service versus the number of consumers.

In sum, any business model must be based on five critical trends that are currently contributing to changing the media environment and pushing media institutions to change their ideas and methods of work and develop themselves. These directions are:

- the diminishing power of the traditional media,

²² Maharat study on emerging media companies in Lebanon, 2018 <https://bit.ly/2SEa07u>



- The abundance of media, websites and platforms, i.e. the high supply and thus competition.
- Increasing fragmentation of the audience segment, which requires a good selection of the target segment and identification of its needs and tastes.
- Developing special investment files for media products in order to reduce risks,
- The transfer of forces in the communication process²³.

d- A successful podcast business model

There are podcast platforms that have managed, during their work, to reach a diversified media business model capable of ensuring its continuity and financial independence, including the “Sawt” Network, which represents a media business model that includes a diversification of income sources through advertising, providing consultancy and media services, in addition to financial donations from donors.

○ “Sawt” model

At the beginning of the establishment of the Sawt Company that owns the “Sawt” podcast network, the funding was limited to some NGOs and those concerned with freedom of the press, and this funding developed until it became 50% of the company's income. And then began requests to create content from non-governmental organizations, international organizations, United Nations organizations and large companies such as "Facebook" and "Deezer" and others²⁴.

Following the development of the business model by selling content, the company classified its projects as follows: The first category is "white label projects", where the customer comes and asks the company to produce specific content that he publishes under their name and across their platform.

The second classification is "sawt origins", which expresses the company's vision. Any of the international organizations may show their interest in issues such as domestic violence, women's rights and workers' rights, and support programs at “Sawt” company that address these issues, and seasons and episodes are produced under the name of “special season” in which the name of the supporter is announced while “Sawt” maintaining the ownership of Intellectual Rights and Copyrights.

The sale of content constitutes 45-50% of the company's income, according to those in charge of it, and the rest is from funding NGOs, and does not constitute a profit as it is spent on a specific project, unlike the sale of content that generates profits.

²³ Previous reference

²⁴ Interview with business development officer at “Sawt” company, Bassem Daoud



In 2021, the company focused on 3 funding sources, the first being the training programs concerned with the content industry, production and audio engineering in podcasts, and the second source being “sawt plus” on Apple Podcasts, which depends on the subscription model so that the listener can hear the content without advertisements and can get access to the content even before it is published.

As for the third source of income, it is acquired by advertisements, as the company attracts advertisements, mostly from Gulf countries. It is agreed to deliver this advertisement to a certain number of the public during a certain period of time without entering into long-term contracts. The company also serves up “advertisements” for other podcasts, a process called “Cross Promotions.”

In the context of advertisements, “Sawt” also has a different model (Add Market Place), which is the “Zamakan Network”, a network that includes selected independent podcast programs from the Arab region, aiming to achieve financial returns for producers. This project, launched by “Sawt”, has received funding from the “Google News Initiative” under the Innovation Challenge Fund.



Development of podcast initiatives

The structural work of podcast platforms is rapidly evolving: vision, mission, editorial policy, and target audience. Although many of them started out voluntarily and unprofessional, they have begun to professionalize their work.

a- Administrative structure

In the editorial structure, it appears that 11 platforms and monitored programs have a clear and written vision and mission, and most of them are published on the websites of these media. On the other hand, there are three podcast platforms that are still trying to establish a vision and mission for them.

Meanwhile, the “100 Watt” podcast, for example, does not have a code of conduct, nor a written vision and mission, because it follows the policies and vision of the ARIJ Foundation, the incubating institution.

The vision of the majority of the platforms includes a human rights approach that aspires to change and shed light on youth issues, and this was clearly expressed by the vision of the “Jalsa” platform, which indicated that “the podcast brings together diverse voices to conduct important dialogues on topics related to the Middle East and North Africa, and covers various issues that include environmental policies, alternative economies, and women and youth as political actors.” “We will also speak with key change agents in the region about their experiences and stories of their hopes and frustrations as they attempt to navigate transformational contexts in their specific fields,” the platform adds.



Despite the fresh experience of many of the monitored podcast platforms and programs, a large number of them have full-time employees to produce podcasts with a variety of jobs between editing, montage, and program presenters.

An example of this is the "Sawt" network that has 18 full-time employees so far, with a very large network of Freelancers in different countries. The editorial team constitutes the largest team in the company, and this reflects the great interest in content, as it is out of the total 18 employees 9 of them form the editorial board with Tala Al-Issa, managing editor. "When the customer requests specific content, the company tries to make the content consistent with its editorial policy, so it tries to round out some angles and give these touches, but we do what the customer wants."

The tasks of the company's employees are distributed, as the business development department researches financial affairs and how to develop sources of income, and the project management department receives contracts with clients and passes the project to the editorial team, that implements the project, and then the publishing and distribution department is responsible for publishing content and following up with it on social media.

b- Professional journalism

The monitored podcast initiatives seek to provide professional journalism that keeps pace with the social and economic issues related to the youth group. Therefore, on a number of platforms, an editorial board discusses ideas and approaches the topics and materials presented professionally, whether they are directed to the public or the podcast community.

Some platforms share a clear editorial policy, for example, "Inkifada Podcast" adopts permanent editorial policies without the need for support from external experts, and the platform chooses issues and news subject matter of coverage according to importance and priority, dismantling it and presenting it from a new angle and condemning the hegemonic regime.

As for "Sawt Podcast", its editorial policies depend on presenting topics in a professional manner while expressing the company's opinion clearly on some issues, for instance the Palestinian issue, also presenting one opinion and the other's opinion on all the issues raised, openness to raising all social issues such as religion and politics, and those that some consider as Taboo such as harassment, sex and women's rights, as well as fully supporting freedom of opinion and expression²⁵. Meanwhile, the "Rahba" podcast focuses on an editorial policy based on quality and adherence to professional journalistic standards.

Podcast writing is characterized by quality, originality, information reliability and smoothness, and the presence of an objective narrative thread. The topics are chosen as a mixture of current and old topics, and the dialogue takes place with active personalities and there are not many presences of them on other media stations.

²⁵ An interview with Basem Daoud, Business Development Officer at "Sawt" Company - Jordan



On the other hand, there are platforms and initiatives that do not have an editorial policy but are in the process of developing it, either because of their recent creation or the lack of staff. Individual podcast initiatives such as the Jad Ghosn initiative depend on one person, and therefore does not require a declared editorial policy.

c- Code of conduct

In addition to the editorial policy, platforms and podcast initiatives are divided in terms of having a code of conduct that contributes to organizing journalistic work within these initiatives, as well as gender and ethnic discrimination.

The organizers of the "Kabsa" podcast in Lebanon state that the code of conduct emphasizes no incitement, choosing guests who are not affiliated with political parties, and not promoting parties.

A number of initiatives go to adopting the code of conduct of the incubating institution, such as 100 Watts, affiliated with the ARIJ Foundation in Jordan, and "Talatha Belluz" affiliated with the Libyan "1 Comma 8" association.

d- Podcast audience

The monitored podcast programs and networks are distinguished by their ability to identify the audience they are targeting, as 10 of the monitored platforms are directed to young people of both genders with a good level of education capable of absorbing information, aspects of discussion and issues raised.

Also, there are 12 platforms and programs that are directed to a local and national audience, while there are 4 platforms with an Arab orientation, which are "Sawt" Network that is based in Jordan, "Sada" podcast based in Jordan, "Aswatuna" podcast based in Germany, and El-Sikka based in the Sultanate of Oman.

On the other hand, journalist Jad Ghosn did not specify the target audience, because he is trying to target the audience in general, and anyone who is interested in political issues that are discussed in depth, so the program is not subject to audience criteria, according to Ghosn²⁶.

The "Yemen Steps" podcast targets the local and Arab audience, and the platform's organizers are looking to make the podcast international in case of funding opportunities.



Legal environment

The legal environment is an important factor for the success and growth of podcast initiatives in the Arab world, but this environment lacks legislation and legal practices that have sometimes

²⁶ Interview with Jad Ghosn founder and host of "Reflections with Jad Ghosn" podcast



contributed to obstructing these platforms or their success. In fact, most Arab countries lack laws that allow the legal registration of media platforms, including networks and podcasts. Therefore, most of these initiatives resort to alternative solutions in order to practice their work legally, allowing them to open bank accounts to obtain grants or funding.

Through the initiatives perceived in this research, it was found that the "Sawt" network and the "El-Sikka" podcast through "UMEDIA" and "Sada Podcasts" were registered as limited liability companies that provide media services.

As for the rest of the monitored initiatives, the vast majority work within institutions and non-profit organizations registered in the Arab countries or abroad, as in Germany, France and Canada, such as the "Nahostcast And Mitost" Foundation, which is registered as a non-governmental organization in Germany and the incubator of the "Aswatuna Podcast" initiative, and the Arab Reform Foundation, legally registered in France, Lebanon, Tunisia and the incubator of the podcast "Jalsa", and the Women for Justice Foundation registered in Canada and the incubator of "Podcast 11".

Some initiatives consider that legal registration can limit the development of the platform or diversify sources of income. For example, the registration of a "limited liability company" does not grant the "Sawt" Network the right to issue sealed certificates of appreciation to the participants in the trainings it conducts in the field of podcast training.

While some platforms consider that there are difficulties that may arise as a result of legal registration, the authors of the "Rahba" podcast in Algeria assert that legal registration results in financial burdens and taxes, in return it is impossible to obtain support from donors due to the practices of the political authority and the law criminalizing foreign funding.



Podcasts in the curriculum of media colleges

Shedding light on modern techniques in the field of journalistic storytelling has become a requirement in university curriculum to keep pace with the development of electronic storytelling templates, and new emerging forms, including podcasts. However, it seems that this development has not been accompanied by media colleges in the Arab world, where it has not been able to develop university education curriculum and programs in many media colleges.

Many media colleges in the Arab region suffer from outdated curriculum, which are not up to date, and are predominantly theoretical. Even in the audio-visual field, the forms of storytelling dominate in a classic way, as in Iraq, where the forms of storytelling and modern production techniques such as podcasts are not addressed. And some Iraqi private media colleges still depend on the traditional forms of storytelling from the basics of news, news editing and visual media. The entry into the field of digital media is still in its beginning, despite its presence in the world for more than 10 years²⁷.

²⁷ An interview with Muhammad Al-Momen, a journalist and trainer in the digital content production field.



In Algeria, there are faculties of media in public universities, and these faculties adopt a unified curriculum in all universities in Algeria, which is old and lacks development. As for modern forms of storytelling, such as podcasts, its presentation to media students comes superficially and through the diligence of some media professors and in specific subjects such as "audio-visual".

This is the same in Jordan, where there is no university major in media colleges that tackles podcasts or methods of production, but its teaching comes within digital media curriculum, practical materials and graduation projects, where students are required to produce podcasts and use mobile journalism and data journalism²⁸.

In Morocco, media faculties and institutes, especially the state's Higher Institute for Media and Communication²⁹, lack any reference to podcasts, for several reasons, including that podcasts are a new form of journalistic storytelling, while attention is still focused on visual media, and media platforms that offer Podcasts are not for the most part open and accessible platforms, as certain applications must be downloaded to listen to podcasts.

It seems that the future of podcasting in Morocco will be promising in the coming period, with the two experiments of the Moroccan National Radio and Radio Mediterranean, that transformed two radio programs into podcasts.

In Lebanon, most media colleges lack podcasts, but there are universities that teach it alongside other storytelling arts, where the Lebanese University sheds light on podcasts through the course "Web Media" for master's students.

The absence of a specialization for podcasts in media colleges is explained by the fact that this form of storytelling is new, and the specialization must include 900 hours of instruction, while the master's degree reaches 300 hours of instruction, and therefore teaching podcasts in its current form does not require all these hours, and even so there is difficult for it to be given in a specialized way for a full semester, ie 40 hours of instruction, so it is integrated and taught among other courses that require highlighting modern techniques in journalistic storytelling³⁰.

²⁸ An interview with Ziad Al-Shakhanbeh, Professor of Mass Communication at the University of Petra - Jordan.

²⁹ An interview with Mahfouz Ait Saleh, a journalist and director of a media training institute in Morocco.

³⁰ An interview with Ali Ramal, professor of media at the Lebanese University.



Conclusion

Despite the limited launch of podcast platforms in the Arab world, the models under study confirm the importance of this new media form in view of the expansion of the phenomenon at the Arab level, which heralds an increase in its spread at the next stage, especially given the importance of the topics it deals with, and in view of the podcast character and its features that allows a great deal of freedom for the audience to follow it.

The models reviewed by the study succeeded in presenting a new form of journalism with creative content, which presents the audience with information material that differs from that provided by traditional media.

The study showed that these platforms are committed to community issues, and address topics that are important and respond to the expectations of large groups of people, such as issues related to youth, women, religion, gender, and others. It also sometimes raises issues that are prohibited to the media in some countries due to the censorship exercised by Arab regimes over their media.

However, this censorship also applies to podcast platforms that are produced locally, while platforms concentrated in Western countries escape from it and broadcast their contents through sites that violate censorship and reach the Arab audience.

The biggest challenge, which exceeds the challenge of censorship, is the issue of sustainability, that is, the economic model that these platforms adopt to ensure their financing and continuity. The field study showed that there are three economic models on which these platforms operate: the donation model, the subscription model, and the business model. The first model is weak and does not guarantee stability and growth. The second is not widespread among the Arab public, because the latter is not yet accustomed to paying a fee in exchange for media content. While the third model is the successful model, as it secures continuous self-financing. However, the vast majority of platforms rely on one of the first or second models, which means their weak ability to continue and develop.

Added to this challenge are the difficulties of the Arab social environment that does not accept discussion on some topics, the difficulties of the political environment that defines red lines for journalists and producers, and the difficulties of a legal and legislative environment that restricts creativity in this field. It was also found that media colleges in the Arab world have not yet included this new media genre in their curriculum.

Despite these difficulties, there is an encouraging start for podcasting platforms in the Arab world, and it may be on the rise in the coming years because it responds to the need of an Arab audience eager to learn about new issues and topics from angles that differ from those presented to them by



traditional media. However, the success of these initiatives remains linked to finding an economic model for them that guarantees their independence, continuity and growth.



List of research interviews

- 1- An interview with Mohamed Alaoua Hajji, journalist and founder of the podcast “Rahba” – Algeria
- 2- An interview with Basem Daoud, Business Development Officer at “Sawt” Company - Jordan
- 3- An interview with Hisham Kayed, supervisor of Jana Podcast - Lebanon
- 4- An interview with Rasha El-Deeb, Communications Officer for the Arab Region, on the Aswatuna podcast - Germany
- 5- Interview with Layal Khoury, a podcast presenter, Polytalks- Lebanon
- 6- An interview with the journalist Turki Al Balushi, founder of the podcast “El-Sikka” - Sultanate of Oman
- 7- Interview with Reem Emami, Programming Officer for the “Inkifadah” podcast - Tunisia
- 8- An interview with Muhammad Khalawi, the presenter and owner of the idea podcast Pioneers of Civilization - Egypt
- 9- Interview with Suha Odeh, supervisor of the Voice of Women podcast - Iraq

- 10- An interview with Abdo Mahmoud Baghel, founder of the podcast “Yemen Steps” - Yemen
- 11- Interview with Sulafa Sallam, presenter and moderator of “Podcast 11”
- 12- Interview with Farah Jallad, Project Coordinator 100 Watts - Jordan
- 13- Interview with Jad Ghosson, founder and presenter of the podcast Reflection with Jad Ghosson - Lebanon
- 14- Interview with Jana Dhaibi, presenter of the podcast “Kabsa” - Lebanon
- 15- An interview with Nizar Hassan, founder of The Lebanese political podcast - Lebanon
- 16- Interview with Saeed Haddadi, Publications and Communication Officer at the Arab Reform Foundation, which incubates the podcast “Jalsa” - France, Lebanon, Tunisia
- 17- Interview with Wanes Al-Aql, presenter and producer of the podcast “Al-Talata Balaluz” - Libya
- 18- Interview with Suleiman Awad, founder of "Echo Podcast" - Jordan
- 19- An interview with Muhammad Al-Momen, a journalist and trainer in the digital content industry
- 20- An interview with Ziad Al-Shakhanbeh, Professor of Mass Communication at the University of Petra - Jordan
- 21- Interview with Mahfouz Ait Saleh, a journalist and director of a media training institute in Morocco
- 22- Interview with Ali Ramal, professor of media at the Lebanese University