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Article

Strategic Alignment, Emergent Practice: Institutional Decoupling and the Governance of Artificial Intelligence in United Arab Emirates Newsrooms

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Abstract: Newsrooms across the Gulf have actively aligned with national artificial intelligence (AI) agendas, yet little is known about whether that commitment reaches the desk where copy is written. This study surveys 336 practitioners drawn from the strategic core of the United Arab Emirates media system, including Dubai Media Incorporated, Sky News Arabia, Abu Dhabi Media Network, the Sharjah Broadcasting Authority, Emirates News Agency (WAM), Al Bayan, Al Khaleej, Sharjah Media City (Shams), the Dubai Government Media Office, and the Ministry of Defense media directorate. Combining partial least squares structural equation modeling with a thematic reading of qualitative responses from 291 practitioners, and organized through the Index of Media Innovation, the analysis identifies a structural paradox interpreted through the lens of institutional decoupling: organizations visibly align with the UAE National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031, while internal governance mechanisms and operational workflows continue to evolve to support that alignment. Professional skills exert the strongest influence on adoption depth ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$), marginally exceeding organizational culture ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .01$); together, they explain 42 percent of the variance in adoption. Usage robustly predicts media performance ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.39$). Discriminant validity was satisfactory (all HTMT < 0.85) and approximate fit acceptable (SRMR = 0.064). The decisive finding is that the model performs well despite uneven levels of institutional support across organizations. While 76.7 percent of respondents use generative tools daily, only 28.6 percent use AI for verification, and 12.5 percent for deepfake detection, and 38.5 percent report that formal organizational training has not yet been provided. As one respondent observed, "most initiatives are personal efforts, not institutional ones," highlighting the important role of individual initiative during this stage of organizational AI development. We characterize this pattern as productive decoupling: individual competence complements evolving organizational governance, delivering measurable performance gains while indicating opportunities to further strengthen institutional verification practices. Implications for media managers, regulators, and journalism educators are set out.

Keywords: Institutional decoupling; shadow AI; artificial intelligence; newsroom governance; Index of Media Innovation; PLS-SEM; Arabic natural language processing; United Arab Emirates; verification gap; augmented journalism

1. Introduction

1.1 An Inflection Point, Unevenly Absorbed

Journalism's encounter with artificial intelligence is no longer a matter of forecasting. Generative systems now participate in the framing, summarising, and translation of news rather than merely processing the data behind it (Diakopoulos, 2019), and global benchmarking suggests that roughly three-quarters of surveyed news organizations have integrated AI into their operations (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023). Such headline figures obscure the question that

matters most for media management: at what organizational depth has integration occurred? An organization that has purchased a license, a newsroom that has issued a policy, and a reporter quietly pasting copy into a consumer chatbot are three different phenomena, and conflating them produces adoption statistics that flatter the industry while explaining very little.

The distinction is not merely definitional. It reaches a long-standing problem in organizational sociology, the gap between what institutions profess and what they practice. Meyer and Rowan (1977) termed this gap decoupling, arguing that organizations under environmental pressure adopt structures that confer legitimacy while insulating their operating core from such pressures; four decades of subsequent work have refined but not overturned this insight (Bromley & Powell, 2012). AI adoption in the Gulf media sector, we argue, is an instructive contemporary case of the phenomenon, with consequences that extend beyond organizational efficiency to the epistemic quality of public information.

1.2 The Emirati Case: Alignment Without Regulation

Few states have committed to artificial intelligence with the political clarity of the United Arab Emirates. The National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031 established AI capability as an instrument of economic diversification and administrative modernization, and a dedicated ministerial portfolio signaled that the commitment was structural rather than rhetorical (UAE Government, 2021). Media organizations, most of which were state-linked or state-adjacent, responded as institutional theory would predict: rapidly, visibly, and at the level of announcement. AI presenters were launched, innovation units designated, and executive statements issued.

Our data suggest this alignment was achieved without a corresponding build-out of the mundane machinery by which technology is actually governed inside a newsroom: written usage policies, disclosure conventions, verification protocols, defined lines of editorial accountability, and structured training. Roughly a third of respondents (33.9 percent) report no formal AI guidelines at all; 38.5 percent report no organizational training. Against this, 76.7 percent use generative tools daily. The result is what information systems research calls shadow AI, though the term acquires a specific character here. This is not covert use by a deviant minority but the majority condition of the workforce, tolerated rather than prohibited, and invisible to the organization, chiefly because no one has built the instruments that would make it visible.

A senior practitioner in a national broadcast organization captured the arrangement when asked to describe institutional AI projects: "Most initiatives are personal efforts, not institutional ones." Another replied that there was "no clear guidance document, only whatever the editorial supervisors instruct." These are not complaints about scarcity but descriptions of a governance gap inside organizations that are, by any external measure, well-resourced.

1.3 Why the Paradox Matters: Verification as the Casualty

Decoupling is not intrinsically harmful. Organizations frequently profess more than they practice without serious consequence, and ceremonial conformity may even supply the slack that permits experimentation. The concern here is that the decoupling runs in a specific and consequential direction. Functions that AI performs cheaply, drafting, translating, summarising, and editing, have diffused rapidly through individual initiative, because individuals capture the productivity benefit directly. Functions that would protect the epistemic integrity of the output, provenance verification, synthetic media detection, automated fact-checking, systematic disclosure, are collective goods whose benefits accrue to the organization and the public rather than the reporter. They have not diffused. Only 28.6 percent of respondents use AI for verification; only 12.5 percent use deepfake detection.

We describe this pattern as functional bifurcation, and its logic is institutional rather than technological. Nothing prevents a newsroom from deploying verification tooling. What is absent is the organizational actor whose job it is to want it. One respondent identified the principal barrier to AI expansion as "the absence of any body supervising the matter within the organization," which names precisely this vacancy.

1.4 Contribution and Objectives

The study makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides the first path-analytic model of AI adoption in the Emirati media sector at this scale and level of institutional seniority, with participating organizations named rather than abstracted, allowing readers to assess the strategic weight of the evidence directly. Theoretically, it extends institutional decoupling into a domain where the decoupled element is not a formal structure but a technology of knowledge production, and identifies a variant, productive decoupling, in which the gap between policy and practice generates measurable gains and is therefore unlikely to close unaided. In practice, it converts diffuse anxiety about AI in Arab newsrooms into a specific, addressable governance deficit.

Three objectives organize the analysis: to establish the maturity of AI integration across the dimensions of the Index of Media Innovation, distinguishing individual proficiency from institutional readiness; to model the causal architecture of adoption, testing whether professional skills or organizational culture carries greater structural weight and whether governance exerts independent influence; and to locate the verification gap within that architecture, specifying what closing it would require.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature

What follows reads prior scholarship and present findings together, since the value of the theoretical apparatus lies in what it renders visible in the data. Institutional decoupling serves as the organising lens; sociotechnical systems theory, mediamorphosis, and diffusion of innovations supply complementary mechanisms.

2.1 Institutional Decoupling as the Organizing Lens

Meyer and Rowan (1977) held that organizations in institutionalized environments adopt rationalized structures because those structures signal conformity to prevailing myths of rationality, and subsequently buffer their technical core from the inefficiencies such structures impose. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) situated the mechanism within a broader account of isomorphic pressure, distinguishing coercive, mimetic, and normative pathways. Bromley and Powell (2012) later drew a distinction directly pertinent here, between policy-practice decoupling, where adopted policies go unimplemented, and means-ends decoupling, where policies are implemented but bear no demonstrable relationship to the outcomes they purport to serve.

Emirati newsrooms exhibit the first form with unusual clarity. Pressure to align with the national AI agenda is coercive in origin, given the sector's ownership structure, and mimetic in diffusion, as organizations replicate one another's visible innovations. What is adopted, however, is largely the announcement layer: the AI presenter, the innovation lab, the strategic statement. The regulatory layer that would constitute implementation has not been followed. The 33.9 percent operating without formal guidelines are not outliers within an otherwise governed sector but the visible portion of a broader absence, since our qualitative data indicate that organizations reporting guidance frequently describe informal editorial instruction rather than codified policy.

Two features distinguish the Emirati case from the classical account. First, the decoupled practice is not dormant. In Meyer and Rowan's canonical examples, the buffered technical core continues as it always did; here, the core has been transformed, but by its own occupants rather than by the organization. Second, and consequently, the decoupling is productive. It generates the efficiency gains that 85 percent of respondents report, meaning the organization receives the benefit of transformation without having paid the governance cost. This creates precisely the wrong incentive structure for reform, which is why we treat the paradox as structurally stable rather than transitional.

2.2 Sociotechnical Systems and the Failure of Joint Optimization

Sociotechnical systems theory supplies the mechanism by which decoupling becomes operationally consequential. Trist and Bamforth (1951) argued that performance depends on the joint optimization of technical and social subsystems, and that optimizing one in isolation degrades the whole. The Emirati configuration is a textbook case of asymmetric optimization: tool availability, infrastructure, and individual mastery have advanced substantially, while governance, norms, training regimes, and accountability structures have not.

The theory predicts that such asymmetry produces instability rather than simple underperformance, and the qualitative material bears this out. Respondents describe uncertainty about permissible use, anxiety about attribution of error, and uneven competence, generating friction between departments; one identified the core barrier as "employees' lack of awareness, misuse, and the absence of specialization," naming all three deficits at once. Instability is absorbed privately by practitioners exercising discretionary judgment, which works until it does not.

2.3 Mediamorphosis, Diffusion, and the Routinization Trap

Fidler's (1997) mediamorphosis thesis, framing media change as gradual co-evolution rather than displacement, remains useful in resisting the more excitable claims about journalistic obsolescence. The Emirati data support a co-evolutionary reading: professional identity is being reconfigured rather than eliminated, and most respondents describe AI as an assistant to editorial judgment rather than a substitute for it. Mediamorphosis is nonetheless descriptively rich and predictively thin, and cannot explain why co-evolution has advanced so much further in some functions than others.

Rogers's (2003) diffusion framework is particularly helpful, particularly its distinction between adoption and routinization. On knowledge, the sector has clearly succeeded, with 85.1 percent reporting medium or high awareness. What has not occurred is routinization in Rogers's full sense, the embedding of an innovation into organizational procedure such that it persists independently of the individuals who introduced it. We term the result the routinization trap: an innovation saturating individual practice while absent from institutional procedure, and therefore perpetually vulnerable to staff turnover, tool deprecation, and regulatory shock. That most initiatives are personal rather than institutional is, in diffusion terms, a statement that the sector has stalled between implementation and confirmation.

2.4 Shadow Practice and the Training Disconnect

Shadow information technology, developed in information systems research to describe unsanctioned tool use, transfers to the newsroom with one modification. Classical shadow IT is a minority practice concealed from management; shadow AI in Emirati newsrooms is a majority practice that management has neither sanctioned nor prohibited, largely because the categories required for such a decision do not exist. It is less concealed than institutional non-perception.

Its proximate cause is a training deficit; the data render it unambiguous. Ninety percent of respondents regard specialized AI competence as necessary for professional viability; 38.5 percent report that their organization provides none. Practitioner suggestions cluster overwhelmingly on this point, ranging from "intensive training programs in this field" and "specialized and periodic courses for all sectors" to the more structurally sophisticated proposal to appoint "an employee in each department responsible for transferring knowledge and assisting colleagues in the field of artificial intelligence." That last suggestion, offered by a practitioner rather than a consultant, describes a distributed capability model of the kind recommended in the change management literature, and its appearance indicates that diagnostic capacity within these newsrooms considerably exceeds the institutional capacity to act on it.

The consequence is auto-didactic innovation and, in its wake, didactic inequality. Where competence is self-acquired, its distribution tracks individual disposition, language proficiency, discretionary time, and access to paid subscriptions rather than organizational need. Several respondents named subscription cost in precisely these terms, one noting that "a paid subscription gives better results and unlimited interaction," a concise description of a stratified capability regime emerging inside a single newsroom.

2.5 The Verification Gap in Comparative Perspective

International scholarship has documented a comparable imbalance between generative and verificatory adoption (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2024; Sonni et al., 2024), so the phenomenon is not peculiar to the Gulf. What differentiates the Emirati case is the combination of a high-capability environment with a low-governance one. Where Western newsrooms have often met generative adoption with rapid, sometimes defensive, policy formulation, driven partly by unionized newsroom cultures and partly by exposure to public controversy, the Emirati sector has adopted

at a comparable speed without the accompanying policy reflex. The absence is best read not as regulatory laxity but as a consequence of decoupling: because AI adoption is not institutionally recognized, no institutional actor is charged with governing it.

Professional consequences are already legible. Fifty-seven point five per cent of respondents worry that automation is eroding creative practice, and respondents repeatedly invoke the necessity of preserving what several called the human element. One recommended, "limiting its use with sensitive and complex subjects and appointing a full team to review any content prepared through it." Another warned against "applying artificial intelligence and abandoning the human element, especially in official media institutions that represent the country's primary source of news." These are governance proposals arriving from the shop floor in the absence of governance from above.

2.6 Arabic Language Capability and Linguistic Sovereignty

A countervailing finding deserves emphasis, since a purely deficit-oriented reading would be inaccurate. Respondents rate institutional readiness for Modern Standard Arabic processing highly, and the sector has produced genuine, exportable innovation in Arabic-language media AI. Ahmad et al. (2023) argue that linguistic localization constitutes a form of informational sovereignty, insulating national media systems from the framing assumptions embedded in Anglophone models, and the Emirati investment can reasonably be read in these terms.

The capability is nonetheless bounded in ways practitioners identify precisely. Dialectal processing remains weak, with respondents citing difficulty "understanding expressions and terms in different dialects" and observing that "Arabic is not sufficiently supported." More seriously, one respondent connected the linguistic deficit to an editorial one, describing the problem as "the Arabic language issue, and the failure to observe the editorial policy of media platforms, particularly official ones." The observation is sophisticated: linguistic localization without editorial localization yields output that is grammatically Emirati yet institutionally foreign, suggesting that sovereignty claims resting on language capability alone are incomplete.

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The theoretical account developed above generates a specific empirical expectation. If Emirati newsrooms are decoupled in the manner described, then variance in AI adoption should be explained principally by individual attributes rather than organizational ones, governance should exert weak influence on usage, and performance gains should nonetheless materialize. Testing this requires modeling the constructs jointly rather than examining them in isolation.

3.1 Research Questions

RQ1. At what maturity stage does AI integration sit across the dimensions of the Index of Media Innovation, and how large is the differential between individual proficiency and institutional readiness?

RQ2. Do organizational culture and management support influence the depth of adoption more strongly than individual professional competence, or less?

RQ3. What structural relationship obtains between journalists' specialized digital mastery, particularly prompt engineering, and the institutionalization of algorithmic tools?

RQ4. Do formal ethical guidelines and governance frameworks exert independent influence on the frequency and character of AI usage, net of adoption depth?

RQ5. How does AI usage affect media performance, and does the performance gain extend to editorial integrity or remain confined to production efficiency?

3.2 Hypotheses

H1. Organizational culture positively predicts AI adoption. Derived from the social subsystem component of sociotechnical theory, this hypothesis holds that leadership encouragement of experimentation and cross-functional collaboration raises adoption depth. Under a decoupling reading, the path should be positive but should not dominate.

H2. Professional skills positively predict AI adoption. Grounded in the technical subsystem and in the early-adopter dynamics of diffusion theory, this hypothesis holds that individual AI literacy and data competence raise adoption depth. The decoupling thesis predicts that this path will equal or exceed H1.

H3. AI adoption positively predicts AI usage. Adoption depth should translate into the frequency and functional complexity of daily use, consistent with a mediamorphic reconfiguration of workflow.

H4. Ethics and governance positively predict AI usage. Formal guidelines should shape usage toward more structured and transparent deployment. Given the documented governance gap, the decoupling thesis anticipates a statistically detectable but substantively small effect.

H5. AI usage positively predicts media performance. Integration should yield gains in output volume and speed. The efficiency-verification argument predicts that these gains will be concentrated in production rather than integrity dimensions.

3.3 The Integrated Path Model

Taken together, the hypotheses constitute a diagnostic rather than merely predictive model. The relative magnitude of H1 and H2 adjudicates between top-down and bottom-up accounts of transformation; H4 indexes the operative force of governance; and the character of H5 indicates whether performance gains have been purchased at the cost of verification capacity. The model is designed less to confirm that AI improves productivity, which would be unsurprising, than to establish through which organizational channel it does so.

4. Methodology

4.1 Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, supplemented by a systematic thematic reading of open-ended responses. The quantitative strand supports structural inference; the qualitative strand supplies the mechanism and, importantly, the practitioner vocabulary through which the mechanism is articulated. We treat the second not as illustrative decoration but as evidence in its own right, since respondents' own diagnoses of institutional failure constitute data about the organizational field.

4.2 Sample and the Question of Strategic Authority

Purposive elite sampling recruited 336 practitioners between November 2025 and January 2026. Rather than seeking demographic representativeness across the whole media workforce, the study targeted personnel positioned to observe and influence institutional decisions, on the reasoning that decoupling is best assessed by those occupying the interface between organizational policy and daily practice.

Respondents self-identified their employing organizations, and the distribution directly reflects the sample's strategic weight. Participants were drawn from Dubai Media Incorporated and its radio division, Sky News Arabia, Abu Dhabi Media Network and Abu Dhabi Television, the Sharjah Broadcasting Authority and Sharjah Television, Sharjah Media City (Shams), the Emirates News Agency (WAM), the National Media Office, the Dubai Government Media Office, Dubai Digital, the Dubai Press Club, the Ministry of Defence media directorate, and the newspapers Al Bayan, Al Khaleej, Al Ittihad and Emarat Al Youm. Several international and regional communications consultancies operating in the UAE were also represented, including APCO Worldwide, FleishmanHillard, Burson, and MSL, alongside university media units and the Roads and Transport Authority's communications function.

This composition matters in three respects. It spans the full institutional spectrum of the Emirati media system, from a national wire service to a commercial satellite broadcaster to a government communications office. It includes

the organizations that set sectoral norms, so governance deficits observed here cannot be attributed to peripheral or under-resourced actors. And it reaches a defense ministry media function, an environment where information governance would ordinarily be assumed to be most rigorous.

Two-thirds of respondents (66.1 percent) report more than ten years of professional experience. This seniority profile produces what might be called a seniority paradox: the individuals best positioned to institutionalize AI governance are also those least likely to have acquired AI competence through initial professional formation. Several respondents named this tension explicitly, one remarking that AI "needs young minds, not old minds who write in the old ways and do not know the mechanisms of using artificial intelligence," another citing "the apprehension of experienced staff toward using modern technologies." Whether such generational framing is analytically sound is debatable; that it circulates as an explanation for institutional inertia is itself a finding.

Table 1

Professional and Institutional Profile of Respondents (N = 336)

Characteristic	Category	n	%	Interpretive significance
Gender	Male	202	60.1	Consistent with the regional media labor distribution
	Female	134	39.9	
Experience	Under 3 years	62	18.5	Minority early-career segment
	3-10 years	52	15.4	Transitional cohort
	Over 10 years	222	66.1	Editorial gatekeepers: source of strategic authority
Sector	Print and broadcast	202	60.1	Legacy institutional core
	Digital and news agency	77	22.9	Includes WAM and platform units
	Government media office	57	17.0	Includes federal and emirate-level communication bodies
AI awareness	High or medium	286	85.1	Knowledge stage of diffusion attained
	Low	50	14.9	Residual non-adopting segment

Note. Percentages calculated on the full analytic sample.

4.3 Instrumentation

The Index of Media Innovation (Mansoori & Darwish, 2024) provided the measurement architecture. The IMI standardizes practitioner perceptions across five weighted dimensions onto a 100-point scale, with weights reflecting each dimension's assessed contribution to newsroom transformation. Six latent constructs were operationalized from the instrument: AI adoption (three items), AI usage (five items), organizational culture (four items), professional skills (three items), ethics and governance (three items), and media performance (four items). Items were measured on five-point Likert scales. The questionnaire was administered bilingually in Arabic and English, with translation and back-translation conducted by two bilingual media scholars and discrepancies resolved by discussion.

Table 2

Operationalization of the Index of Media Innovation Dimensions

IMI dimension	Weight	Measurement focus	Hypothesis link
Technology adoption	30%	Technical maturity and depth of workflow integration	H1, H2
Journalist performance	25%	Output gains and augmented-practitioner status	H5
Ethical and cultural integrity	20%	Arabic capability and trust protocols	H4
Organisational readiness	15%	Formal policy and training provision	H1
Newsroom dynamics	10%	Editorial-technical collaborative workflow	H3

Note. Weights follow Mansoori and Darwish (2024).

4.4 Qualitative Strand and Coding

Four open-ended items invited respondents to describe current AI projects, workflow integration, operational challenges, and improvement proposals. 291 practitioners provided substantive qualitative feedback across these items, representing 86.6 percent of the analytic sample. The qualitative strand, therefore, rests on near-comprehensive rather than residual participation, which matters for the interpretive weight placed on it below. Arabic responses were translated by the research team and coded thematically following an inductive-to-deductive sequence, with two coders working independently across the corpus and reconciling divergent assignments through discussion.

Those contributing qualitative material span the full role spectrum captured by the instrument: reporters, correspondents and press photographers; editors and content writers; video producers and digital content creators; presenters and program hosts; and, of particular consequence for the study's diagnostic purpose, section heads, platform managers and digital projects managers. The presence of this last group should be underlined: where managerial respondents describe an absence of institutional AI policy, they report not a deficit observed from below but one they are in a position to remedy, which strengthens the inference that the governance gap is structural rather than a matter of limited visibility. Quotations are reported in English translation and, per the confidentiality undertaking given at recruitment, are attributed to no named organization or identifiable individual.

4.5 Analytical Procedure

Analysis proceeded in SmartPLS 4 and SPSS 28, following the two-stage protocol recommended by Hair et al. (2019). PLS-SEM was selected over covariance-based alternatives on three grounds: the model is predictive rather than confirmatory in orientation, several constructs depart from multivariate normality, and the analysis involves a relatively complex model with formatively conceived antecedents.

The measurement model was assessed for internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted), and discriminant validity, the last using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations rather than the Fornell-Larcker criterion, following Henseler et al. (2015), whose simulations demonstrate the superior sensitivity of HTMT in variance-based modeling. The structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, reporting path coefficients, significance, effect sizes, and explained variance, as well as blindfolding-based predictive relevance and the standardized root mean square residual as an approximate fit index. Common method bias was assessed via Harman's single-factor test and a full collinearity assessment.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and informed. Respondents were advised that organizational affiliation would be used to characterize the sample in aggregate but that no individual response would be traceable to a named institution, and quotations are reported accordingly. Approval was obtained from the sponsoring institution's research ethics committee.

5. Results

5.1 Adoption Depth and the Shape of Integration

The distribution of adoption maturity establishes the central empirical claim before any modeling is undertaken. Daily generative use stands at 76.7 percent, yet only 9.3 percent of respondents characterize their organization as having reached an integrated stage of institutional adoption. That gap of some 67 percentage points is the quantitative signature of decoupling.

What is being adopted, as distinct from how deeply, emerges from the project descriptions. These reveal a sector capable of genuine and in some respects, internationally notable innovation. Respondents described a fully AI-generated news presenter, identified in one response by name as "Salem, a presenter made from artificial intelligence, and many others," with a second respondent confirming that "we have an AI-generated presenter who delivers a news bulletin." A third referred simply to "the virtual presenter." One organization reported "producing real-time translation that makes our content available in 50 languages" alongside a "collaboration with Google's NotebookLM," a pairing that indicates simultaneous investment in proprietary multilingual infrastructure and in externally sourced generative tooling. Sharjah Media City's Create with Shams initiative was named directly, as was a project generating "Emirati images using artificial intelligence." Editorial automation appeared under the recurring label of the Smart Editor, described by one respondent as aimed at "editing journalistic material through the use of artificial intelligence" and by another as "summarising the news on the website." Others described robotic camera operation, automated news reading, short-form documentary production, digital archive systems, audience behavior analytics, and an integration in which "ChatGPT was introduced with specific configurations into the approved news operating system."

This is not the portfolio of a laggard sector. It is evidence of considerable technical ambition, which sharpens rather than softens the governance question. The same respondent pool that describes AI presenters and fifty-language translation pipelines also reports, with striking frequency, that no institutional framework governs the tools they use daily; many responses to the projects item consisted of some variant of "none" or "I do not know," and several respondents indicated they were not authorized to answer. One reply condensed the finding: "There is no specific initiative, only subscriptions to some assistive tools such as paid ChatGPT and Gemini."

The most analytically significant response was offered without prompting: "Most initiatives are personal efforts, not institutional ones." A second respondent made the same point with a qualification worth preserving: "to my knowledge, the initiatives depend on individuals, although the newspaper has provided specialized courses." Together, these describe a field in which training provision, where it exists, has been decoupled from any institutional program it would serve.

5.2 Measurement Model

All six constructs satisfied conventional reliability and convergent validity thresholds. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.79 to 0.89, and composite reliability from 0.84 to 0.92, each exceeding the 0.70 benchmark. Average variance extracted exceeded 0.50 for every construct, confirming that each latent variable accounts for more than half the variance in its indicators. Media performance and ethics and governance displayed the strongest psychometric properties, suggesting unusually consistent perceptions of both productivity and governance, the latter perhaps because what is being reported is a uniform absence.

Table 3

Reliability and Convergent Validity (N = 336)

Construct	Items	Alpha	CR	AVE	Assessment
AI adoption	3	0.81	0.87	0.56	Satisfactory
AI usage	5	0.79	0.84	0.53	Satisfactory
Organisational culture	4	0.84	0.89	0.59	Satisfactory
Professional skills	3	0.82	0.86	0.54	Satisfactory
Ethics and governance	3	0.88	0.91	0.62	Satisfactory
Media performance	4	0.89	0.92	0.67	Satisfactory

Note. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio. All HTMT values fell below the conservative 0.85 threshold recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), and bootstrapped confidence intervals for every construct pair excluded unity, confirming empirical distinctness. The highest observed ratio, between AI adoption and AI usage (0.71), is theoretically expected given their conceptual proximity and remains comfortably within acceptable bounds. The lowest ratios across the matrix involve ethics and governance, which relate only weakly to AI adoption (HTMT = 0.34) and, more weakly still, to media performance (HTMT = 0.29). This is a substantive result rather than a technical footnote. Discriminant validity is ordinarily reported as a hurdle cleared and then set aside; here, the margin by which it is cleared carries part of the argument. Governance in these newsrooms is not simply a weak causal force; it is very nearly an orthogonal construct, varying almost independently of how deeply AI has been adopted and of what that adoption yields. A sector in which governance was doing substantial work would generate moderate-to-high heterotrait correlations at these positions, because policy, practice, and outcome would move together. That they do not is the decoupling thesis expressed in a validity matrix.

Table 4

Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratios (N = 336)

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. AI adoption	-					
2. AI usage	0.71	-				
3. Organizationa l culture	0.63	0.58	-			
4. Professional skills	0.66	0.62	0.49	-		
5. Ethics and governance	0.34	0.31	0.42	0.33	-	
6. Media performance	0.57	0.68	0.52	0.61	0.29	-

Note. All ratios below the 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015). Bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals excluded 1.0 for all pairs.

Harman's single-factor test returned the largest single factor, accounting for 32.4 percent of total variance, well below the 50 percent threshold. All inner-model variance inflation factors fell below the 3.3 criterion, confirming the

absence of problematic collinearity among the predictor constructs. Common method bias is therefore unlikely to constitute a material threat to inference.

5.3 Structural Model

All five hypothesized paths were supported. The two antecedents of adoption jointly explain 42 percent of its variance, a substantial figure for behavioral research in an organizational setting.

Table 5

Structural Path Estimates (N = 336; 5,000 bootstrap resamples)

Hypothesis	Structural path	beta	p	f-squared	Result
H1	Organizational culture to AI adoption	0.38	< .01	0.15	Supported
H2	Professional skills to AI adoption	0.41	< .001	0.18	Supported
H3	AI adoption to AI usage	0.54	< .001	0.32	Supported
H4	Ethics and governance to AI usage	0.19	< .05	0.06	Supported
H5	AI usage in media performance	0.47	< .001	0.28	Supported

Note. Effect size benchmarks: 0.02 small, 0.15 medium, 0.35 large (Hair et al., 2019).

The ordering of H1 and H2 is the model's most consequential result. Professional skills (beta = 0.41) exceed organisational culture (beta = 0.38) as a predictor of adoption depth. The margin is narrow, and we would resist any strong claim that individual agency has decisively displaced organisational influence; a difference of this magnitude falls within the range where sampling variability cannot be dismissed. What can be said with confidence is the negative claim, which is the one the decoupling thesis requires: organisational culture does not dominate. In a sector where national strategy is explicit, ownership is largely public and leadership commitment is loudly professed, the failure of the organisational path to exceed the individual path is the anomaly institutional theory anticipates and technology-acceptance models do not.

The governance path (H4, beta = 0.19, f-squared = 0.06) is statistically significant and substantively small. Two readings are available and the data cannot fully adjudicate between them. The optimistic reading holds that guidelines work where they exist, the small coefficient reflecting the small proportion of the sample exposed to them rather than the weakness of governance as such. The pessimistic reading holds that what respondents identify as guidelines is frequently informal editorial instruction rather than codified policy, its influence correspondingly diffuse. The qualitative material leans toward the second, given responses such as "there is no clear guidance document, only whatever the editorial supervisors instruct." Either way the practical implication converges: governance operates far below its potential influence.

Mediation analysis confirmed that AI adoption partially mediates the relationship between professional skills and media performance (indirect beta = 0.22, p < .001, 95% CI [0.142, 0.301]). The confidence interval excludes zero, and the direct path remains significant, indicating partial rather than full mediation. Substantively, this means that individual competence improves performance both through and around institutional adoption. The portion that travels around it is the shadow AI ecosystem rendered as a coefficient.

Explained variance was substantial at both endogenous stages. Organizational culture and professional skills jointly account for 42 percent of the variance in AI adoption (R-squared = 0.42). In contrast, usage accounts for 39 percent of the variance in media performance (R-squared = 0.39). Both values fall within the moderate range for organizational behavioral research, indicating that the model captures a meaningful share of systematic variation rather than merely detecting significant but trivial associations. The approximate model fit was acceptable, with a standardized root mean square residual of 0.064, comfortably below the conservative 0.08 threshold. This figure is reported with the standard caveat that fit indices in variance-based modeling remain contested and should be read as consistent with, rather than as establishing, model adequacy.

5.4 The Efficiency-Verification Asymmetry

Performance perceptions are strongly positive on efficiency dimensions and markedly weaker on integrity dimensions. 85 percent of respondents agree that AI has accelerated production, and 77.5 percent report improvements in accuracy and quality. However, only 28.6 percent report using AI for factual verification, and the same proportion actively disagrees that it assists with verification.

Table 6

Perceived Impact of AI on Media Performance (N = 336)

Performance dimension	**Agree (%)**	**Neutral (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Interpretation**
Accelerated production	85.0	10.0	5.0	AI as efficiency engine
Improved accuracy and quality	77.5	12.5	10.0	AI as a reasoning partner
Decline in creative practice	57.5	20.0	22.5	Automation anxiety
Assistance with fact verification	28.6	42.8	28.6	Verification gap

Note. Agree combines strongly agree and agree.

The divergence between the second and fourth rows of Table 6 warrants comment, since 77.5 percent perceive improved accuracy while only 28.6 percent report verification assistance is at first sight contradictory. The reconciliation lies in what practitioners mean by accuracy. Read alongside workflow descriptions emphasizing proofreading, rewriting, transcription, and translation, the accuracy reported is textual rather than factual. One respondent described their use precisely: "I use it for rewrites, editing, proofreading my content, editing content for social media, never drafting new content at any point." AI is improving the surface correctness of copy while leaving its evidentiary basis untouched, a meaningful gain but not the one the accuracy figure superficially implies. Section 6.3 develops the consequences of that conflation.

Table 7

Functional Bifurcation: Production Versus Integrity Tooling (N = 336)

Function class	**Tool category**	**Usage (%)**	**IMI maturity stage**
Efficiency engine	Content generation and translation	76.7	Stage 4: Integrated
Trust infrastructure	Automated fact-checking	28.6	Stage 1: Ad hoc
Security protocol	Synthetic media detection	12.5	Stage 1: Ad hoc

Governance signal	Public disclosure of AI use	12.5	Stage 0: Absent

Note. Maturity stages assigned per the IMI scoreboard.

The disclosure figure deserves separate emphasis. That only 12.5 percent of organizations systematically disclose AI involvement to audiences means the decoupling extends outward as well as inward: the audience, like the organization, is largely unaware of the extent of algorithmic participation in the news it receives. Practitioners are alert to the risk. One recommended approach is to "develop and adopt a unified policy for how to use artificial intelligence and how to avoid the negatives, such as hallucination, with continuous training," naming both the technical failure mode and its institutional remedy in a single sentence.

5.5 Barriers, Training, and the Diagnostic Capacity of Practitioners

The reported barrier structure divides into four clusters: training and capability deficits, which dominate the coded responses; financial constraints, concentrated among smaller organizations and expressed as subscription and licensing costs; linguistic and technical limitations, principally dialectal processing; and cultural resistance, articulated as generational apprehension.

Table 8

Principal Barriers to Institutional AI Adoption (N = 336)

Barrier class	**Principal obstacle**	**Reported salience**	**Analytical significance**
Capability	Absence of structured training and specialist staff	Very high	Training disconnect
Financial	Licensing and subscription cost	Very high in small organizations	Digital divide
Technical	Dialectal Arabic and cultural nuance processing	Moderate	Localisation ceiling
Governance	No internal AI policy	33.9% report absence	Accountability gap
Cultural	Resistance among senior editorial staff	High frequency	Institutional inertia

Note. Salience derived from coded frequency across open-ended barrier responses.

The training data are unambiguous. 90 percent of respondents regard specialized AI skills as necessary; 38.5 percent report no organizational provision for them. Aggregating those reporting no training with those reporting that the provision they regard as insufficient yields a training disconnect affecting approximately 70 percent of the sample. The single most frequent word across the improvement-suggestions item, in both Arabic and English responses, was training.

Striking here is not the frequency of the complaint but the sophistication of the proposed remedies. Respondents did not simply request more courses. They proposed "formulating policies for its use and strengthening integration between it and daily operations to raise efficiency," "training and establishing a code of controls and rules for the use of artificial intelligence," "artificial intelligence governance," "testing new AI tools before officially adopting them," and "a clear institutional policy." One proposed "applied workshops linked to the work of each department, appointing an employee in each department responsible for transferring knowledge and assisting colleagues." Another advocated "working in parallel between conventional methods and the use of artificial intelligence, then comparing, to determine where the strengths of AI tools lie." These are recognizable as, respectively, a distributed champion model and a controlled comparative evaluation design.

The interpretive weight of this material should not be understated. The governance deficit documented here is not a knowledge deficit. Practitioners have accurately diagnosed the problem and, in several cases, proposed remedies that are credible in a management consultancy report. No institutional mechanism carries such diagnoses upward and turns them into policy.

Skill priorities reflect the same awareness. Prompt engineering leads at 90 percent urgency, but integrity competencies follow closely, with deepfake detection and fact-checking at 80 percent and bias auditing at 75 percent. Practitioners are requesting training in precisely the verification capabilities their organizations have not deployed.

Table 9

Prioritized Competency Requirements (N = 336)

Competency class	Specific capability	Urgency (%)	IMI focus
Technical integration	Prompt engineering and model customization	90.0	Technology adoption
Data journalism	Visualization and predictive analytics	82.5	Journalist performance
Integrity protocol	Synthetic media detection and fact-checking	80.0	Ethical integrity
Ethical governance	Bias auditing and algorithmic supervision	75.0	Newsroom dynamics

Note. Percentages report respondents rating the competency as high urgency.

6. Discussion

The findings describe an Emirati media sector that has achieved considerable technological capability and negligible technological governance, and that is performing well despite, and in some measure because of, that combination. This section develops four implications of that diagnosis and then considers what the case contributes to institutional theory.

6.1 Productive Decoupling and Why It Is Stable

Classical accounts treat decoupling as a cost borne for legitimacy: the organization purchases external approval at the price of internal inconsistency, and that inconsistency drags on performance until reformers correct it. The Emirati case inverts part of this logic. The gap between professed and practiced AI adoption is not costly in the short run; it is profitable. Individual practitioners have absorbed the transition costs, acquiring competence at their own expense and on their own time, and have generated the efficiency gains that 85 percent of respondents report. The organization receives the output without having funded the input.

We term this productive decoupling, and its significance is that it removes the ordinary pressure toward realignment. Where decoupling degrades performance, someone eventually notices. Where decoupling improves performance, the incentive runs the other way: formalization would introduce cost, procedure, and friction into an arrangement that currently appears to work. This is why we regard the Emirati configuration as structurally stable rather than transitional, and why the common assumption that governance will catch up with practice seems insufficiently supported to us. It will catch up only if something makes the current arrangement expensive.

Two things plausibly could. The first is a high-visibility failure: a hallucinated fact or fabricated image published by a national outlet, converting an invisible risk into a reputational cost overnight; the risk is not hypothetical, since respondents explicitly named hallucination as one of the challenges they face. The second is regulatory action. Media managers who wish to avoid being governed by the first should attend to the second.

6.2 The Locus of Agency: Bottom-Up Transformation and Its Limits

The path model locates the engine of transformation in individual competence rather than institutional design. We have already cautioned against over-reading the narrow margin between beta = 0.41 and beta = 0.38, and that caution stands. However, the qualitative material corroborates what the coefficients only suggest. When practitioners describe initiatives as personal rather than institutional, learn tools independently because no training exists, and purchase their own subscriptions, they describe a transformation whose locus of agency sits below the level at which organizational strategy operates.

This carries an underappreciated implication for sustainability. Competence held by individuals departs with those individuals. A newsroom whose AI capability resides in the tacit knowledge of a dozen self-taught practitioners has no capability in any organizational sense, only personal arrangements that currently coincide with organizational need. Rogers's (2003) confirmation stage, at which an innovation becomes independent of its original adopters, has not been reached and cannot be reached through individual initiative alone, since institutionalization is by definition an organizational act.

A distributional concern follows. Where capability is self-acquired, it is distributed along lines unrelated to editorial merit: respondents who can afford paid subscriptions outperform those who cannot; those with stronger English outperform those working primarily in Arabic, given the maturity differential in tooling; and those with discretionary time outperform those without. The resulting didactic inequality is a fairness problem inside the newsroom and, over time, a quality problem in its output.

6.3 The Verification Gap as an Institutional Rather Than Technical Failure

It would be easy to read the low uptake of verification tooling as a technology problem, solvable by better or cheaper detection tools. The evidence does not support that reading. Respondents rate integrity competencies as urgently needed at 80 percent; they are not indifferent to verification but are unequipped for it. The constraint sits at the level of procurement, workflow design, and accountability, all organizational functions.

The economics are instructive. Generative tooling delivers a private benefit to the user, who writes faster and finishes earlier, so its adoption requires no organizational decision. Verification tooling delivers a collective benefit, protecting institutional credibility and the public information environment, while imposing a private cost on the individual, who must slow down. No individual adopts it spontaneously. The verification gap, therefore, cannot be closed through the bottom-up mechanism that produced the generative surge, and its persistence is not a puzzle but a prediction.

The reconciliation offered earlier between perceived accuracy and reported verification deserves restatement here, because it carries more theoretical weight than a reading note. That 77.5 percent of respondents perceive AI as improving accuracy, while only 28.6 percent report using it to verify facts, is not an inconsistency in the data. It is a measurement of what practitioners understand accuracy to mean. The workflow descriptions make the referent unambiguous: proofreading, rewriting, transcription, translation, and tightening. AI is raising the surface correctness of copy, its grammar, register, structure, and internal coherence, while leaving the evidentiary basis of that copy exactly where it found it. Textual accuracy has improved; factual accuracy has not been addressed.

The distinction matters for three reasons. It explains why the verification gap has attracted so little institutional urgency: if practitioners experience AI as accuracy-enhancing, the absence of verification tooling registers as a refinement rather than a deficit. It identifies a specific hazard, since fluent, well-structured copy carries stronger credibility cues than rough copy, so generative assistance may increase the persuasiveness of unverified claims precisely by improving their presentation. Moreover, it complicates the sociotechnical reading because what appears as a straightforward optimization of the technical subsystem is, in fact, an optimization of one dimension of quality that obscures the neglect of another. Governance frameworks treating accuracy as a single construct will certify as improved a process that, in the dimension that matters most for public trust, has become no more reliable than before.

The disclosure finding compounds the concern. With systematic audience disclosure at 12.5 percent, the sector has adopted a technology that materially affects the provenance of published information while leaving the audience

largely uninformed of this fact. Whatever position one takes on the necessity of disclosure, the current situation is not the result of a deliberated editorial policy. It is the result of no policy at all, which is a different and less defensible position.

6.4 Linguistic Capability and the Limits of a Sovereignty Claim

The Arabic-language capability documented here is a genuine achievement and complicates any straightforwardly deficit-based account of Global South AI adoption. Real-time translation across fifty languages, Arabic-language AI presentation, Emirati image generation, and Arabic editorial automation constitute a portfolio that few media systems outside the largest Anglophone markets could match. The sovereignty argument, that linguistic localization protects national media systems from imported framing assumptions, has real force in this context (Ahmad et al., 2023).

It should nonetheless be advanced with more care than it usually is. Dialectal capability lags standard-Arabic capability, which matters for a media system serving audiences whose everyday register is dialectal. Several of the most visible capabilities rest on externally owned foundation models, so linguistic localization sits atop infrastructural dependence rather than replacing it; collaboration with a foreign platform's research tool is a sensible engineering decision but not a gain in sovereignty. Most importantly, the respondent who linked the failure to observe editorial policy to AI was correct to connect the linguistic and the editorial. A system that produces fluent Arabic while ignoring an outlet's editorial conventions has localized the surface rather than the substance. Genuine linguistic sovereignty would require that editorial norms, not merely vocabulary, be encoded in institutional practice, thereby returning the question to governance.

6.5 Theoretical Contributions

For institutional theory, the case extends decoupling analysis into the governance of knowledge technologies. It identifies a variant, productive decoupling, in which the misalignment generates rather than absorbs value and is therefore self-reinforcing. Bromley and Powell's (2012) policy-practice category anticipates the structure but not the incentive dynamic; the addition proposed here is that where the buffered technical core is itself the site of innovation, decoupling ceases to be a cost of legitimacy and becomes a subsidy extracted from employees.

For sociotechnical systems theory, the case demonstrates that asymmetric optimization can persist far longer than the joint-optimization principle would predict, provided the unoptimized subsystem is one whose failure is latent rather than immediate. Governance failures do not announce themselves through degraded throughput. They announce themselves through discrete, low-probability, high-consequence events, which is why they are systematically underinvested in.

For diffusion theory, the routinization trap refines the standard adoption sequence by showing that saturation at the individual level can coexist indefinitely with absence at the institutional level, and that the two must therefore be measured separately. Adoption statistics aggregating across levels, of the kind that produce the familiar claim that a large proportion of newsrooms have adopted AI, systematically overstate institutional maturity. For journalism studies more broadly, the case suggests the analytically productive question is not whether newsrooms use AI but who within them decided that they would. On the present evidence, hardly anyone in the Emirati sector did.

7. Practical Implications

7.1 For Media Managers

The first task is measurement. Organizations cannot govern a practice they have not observed, and the 67-point gap between individual use and institutional adoption indicates that most Emirati newsrooms lack any instrument to observe it. A confidential audit of actual tool use, conducted without disciplinary consequences, would establish the baseline governance requirements. Punitive framing would be counterproductive: shadow practice becomes more shadowed when penalized, and the objective is visibility rather than compliance.

The second is a minimal viable policy. A comprehensive framework is unlikely to be produced quickly and would date rapidly in any case. A short document specifying which tool categories are permitted for which task classes, what must be verified before publication, when disclosure is required, and who is accountable for algorithmic error would address most of the governance deficit at modest cost. Respondents have effectively drafted the requirement themselves in requesting "a code of controls and rules for the use of artificial intelligence."

The third is to convert individual competence into institutional capability. The departmental knowledge-transfer role one respondent proposed offers a low-cost mechanism: a trained AI liaison in each editorial unit distributes capability, creates an upward channel for practice intelligence, and reduces exposure to the departure of any individual expert. This is cheaper than centralized training and, based on qualitative evidence, more consonant with how learning currently propagates in these newsrooms.

The fourth is targeted verification investment. Because verification tooling will not diffuse through individual initiative, it must be procured, integrated into the workflow, and made non-optional. Given the disparity between generative uptake at 76.7 percent and detection uptake at 12.5 percent, this is where marginal expenditure reduces institutional risk most. The fifth concerns equity: when practitioners purchase their own subscriptions, the organization permits an unmanaged capability gradient to form among its staff. Enterprise access at organizational expense is both a fairness measure and a governance measure, since provisioned tools can be logged, configured, and audited in ways that personal accounts cannot.

7.2 For Regulators and Policymakers

The national AI strategy has succeeded in producing sectoral alignment at the level of intent. The evidence here suggests that intent alone generates symbolic alignment and that the next phase requires instruments to reach the workflow. Three warrant consideration. Sectoral disclosure norms for AI-assisted content would address the transparency deficit directly and, because they are observable from outside the organization, resist decoupling in ways internal policy mandates do not. Shared verification infrastructure provisioned at the sector level would address the collective-goods problem, preventing individual organizations from investing in it. Subsidized enterprise licensing for smaller outlets would attenuate the digital divide that respondents in small newsrooms describe as a very high barrier. One caution: regulation generating further reporting requirements without altering workflow would reproduce the phenomenon this study documents, adding a second layer of ceremonial compliance atop the first.

7.3 For Journalism Education

The competency profile respondents identify, prompt engineering, verification, and bias auditing, should be read as a curriculum specification produced by the field itself. Two features deserve attention. Integrity competencies are demanded almost as strongly as generative ones, contradicting the assumption that practitioners want only productivity tooling. The demand is for applied rather than conceptual instruction, with respondents repeatedly requesting workshops tied to their department's specific work. Arabic and Gulf journalism programs might therefore prioritize embedded, task-specific instruction over standalone survey modules, and treat verification not as an ethics elective but as a technical skill with its own tooling and procedures.

8. Conclusion

This study set out to determine whether the Emirati media sector's public alignment with national AI ambition extends into the newsroom, and found that it largely does not. The sector has produced AI presenters, multilingual translation pipelines, and Arabic editorial automation while leaving the governance of everyday algorithmic practice almost entirely unbuilt. Three-quarters of practitioners use generative tools daily; a third work without any written guidance; fewer than one in eight employ synthetic media detection or disclose AI involvement to audiences. Path analysis locates the engine of this transformation in individual competence rather than organizational design, and confirms that the resulting arrangement is genuinely productive. That is what makes it durable.

The theoretical claim advanced here is that this constitutes a distinctive form of institutional decoupling, productive in the sense that the gap between profession and practice yields value rather than consuming it, and stable for the same reason. Its cost is not borne by the organization in the short term. It is borne by individual practitioners, who absorb the training burden privately, and by the epistemic infrastructure of public information, which accumulates unverified algorithmic content without the countervailing apparatus that would check it.

Whether that cost becomes visible depends on events this study cannot forecast. What it can establish is that the deficit is neither technological nor a matter of professional understanding. Emirati journalists have diagnosed their situation with considerable precision and proposed remedies of real quality; the missing element is the organizational mechanism through which diagnosis becomes policy. Building that mechanism is a smaller and more tractable task than the sector's rhetoric of transformation implies, and considerably more urgent.

9. Limitations and Future Research

Several constraints bound these conclusions. The design is cross-sectional and captures a single moment in a volatile technological period; the patterns described may shift within the ordinary lifespan of a research publication. Measures are self-reported, and social desirability and automation anxiety may distort perceptions in opposite directions. The elite sampling strategy that gives the study its strategic authority also limits representativeness, since junior and freelance practitioners, who may experience the training disconnect more acutely, are underrepresented. The narrow margin between the two adoption antecedents supports a claim about the absence of organizational dominance but not a strong claim about individual primacy, a distinction we have tried to observe throughout. Finally, the UAE's combination of state investment, infrastructural quality, and media-ownership structure limits generalization to other Arab or Global South media systems. However, the decoupling mechanism is likely to travel more readily than the specific figures.

Four directions follow. Longitudinal tracking would establish whether productive decoupling is as stable as we argue or resolves over time, and would identify the events that trigger formalization. Organizational case studies that draw on newsroom observations and management interviews would test whether managers perceive the gap practitioners describe. Comparative work across Gulf states with differing regulatory postures would isolate the governance regime from technological capability. Moreover, audience-side research is needed to determine whether Arabic-speaking publics detect AI involvement in news content and how they evaluate it, since the disclosure deficit documented here rests on assumptions about audience indifference that have never been tested.

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Ethical Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments. Ethical approval was granted by the Zayed University Research Ethics Committee (ZU25_085_F). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained through pseudonymization.

Data Availability

Analysis scripts, the typology-validation suite, robustness analyses, the qualitative codebook, and the coding log are available as supplementary material. The anonymized dataset is available from the corresponding author on request.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no competing financial, professional, or personal interests that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

Acknowledgment of Use of Generative AI

The author used generative AI tools for language refinement, structural editing, and length adjustment. All conceptual development, theoretical framing, research design, data analysis, and interpretation remain the sole responsibility of the human author; AI tools were not used to generate empirical findings, citations, or substantive arguments. The author reviewed all AI-assisted output and accepts full responsibility for the content.

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