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Perceptions of AI Integration in the UAE's Creative Sector

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Abstract: This study explores the perceptions of artificial intelligence (AI) within the creative sector of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) based on 13 semi-structured interviews and a survey with 224 participants among media professionals and their stakeholders. The findings indicate considerable enthusiasm surrounding AI's potential to augment creativity and drive operational efficiency, a perspective that the study's participants share. However, there are also apprehensions regarding job displacement and the necessity for strategic upskilling. Participants generally regard AI as an unavoidable technological influence that demands adaptation and seamless integration into daily workflows. The study underscores the disparity between the UAE's government-led digital transformation objectives and the actual implementation within organizations, underscoring the urgent need for cohesive strategic alignment. The findings caution that the absence of clear directives and strategic planning may precipitate a new digital schism, impeding progress in the sector.

Keywords: AI perception; creative sector; UAE; digital disruption; techno-solutionism

1. Introduction

How is the future of artificial intelligence (AI) perceived in the Arab region? This question was posed by a recent report commenting on the perception of AI in the Arab region [1], and one finding was the dominance of Western perception of development and progress attributed to the use of technology. Another emergent theme was the perspective of automation as a potential remedy to the inequality in the region [1]. The report has only covered a small part of a rich but underrepresented research topic, and this study addresses this gap by investigating how AI is perceived, specifically focusing on the creative sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It investigates whether media professionals and their stakeholders perceive AI as a positive force or a technological threat.

Focusing on participants' perceptions, this study offers insight into a nuanced understanding of the relationship between technology and cultural practice. Thus, the study sees technology not as a mere product of engineering but as a manifestation of cultural values and assumptions intricately woven into the fabric of society by its creators, who are deeply influenced by cultural contexts. Indeed, technologies are not developed in a vacuum; they result from choices made by individuals and groups operating within specific economic, social, and cultural frameworks. The evolution of AI underscores a dynamic field that continually adapts and evolves, reflecting the profound and ongoing influence of the computer as a central figure in the narrative of new media and as a pivotal element in our collective technological mythos [2]. The ongoing debates about the feasibility and ethics of creating truly intelligent machines highlight the persistent intrigue and controversy surrounding AI [2]. This discussion underlines the importance of examining the AI discourse as an academic exercise and a call to critically reflect on how these technological narratives influence and shape contemporary digital technology and culture discourse. Such examinations are crucial for understanding the cultural dimensions of our technological future and encouraging a more nuanced engagement with the implications of AI in society, especially in the Global South. This oversight highlights the need for greater

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diversity in the global discourse about what AI is and what it should become, emphasizing that narratives from marginalized regions can offer valuable insights.

AI is defined here as the digital technology that can be utilized to perform tasks that typically require humans [3], and this study aims to explore how AI is perceived in the UAE, shedding new light on the specific factors that shape this perception. In so doing, it fills a major gap in the present research, which usually focuses on the English-speaking world [4] while neglecting AI narratives in non-Western countries. The selection of the UAE was due to several reasons: first, the UAE was the first Arab country to set up a Ministry of AI in 2017; second, it has poured many resources into the digitization of several sectors, including the creative sector; and third, the UAE seeks to promote itself as the technology hub of the MENA region.

The main research question is: how is AI perceived in the UAE's creative sector, and to what extent is this technology perceived as an enabler or disruptor of creativity?

2. AI Narratives: Literature Review

The above-mentioned report by Dihal et al. [1] presents insights gathered during a workshop focused on AI narratives within MENA, bringing together a diverse group of artists, technologists, academics, and journalists. The report underscores the powerful role that narratives surrounding intelligent machines play in shaping the development, adoption, reception, and regulation of AI, bringing much-needed attention to the region often marginalized in Western-dominated discussions about the future of AI. Indeed, there has been a limited exploration of cultural theories in the study of technological discourse in the Arab region, which underscores the necessity for deeper investigation into frameworks like culture industry and cultural globalization [5]. This calls for critically evaluating and validating Western theoretical frameworks while recognizing the distinct cultural and Islamic contexts shaping the Arab world's technological landscape. For instance, Alfaqeeh et al. [6] discussed the influence of Arab culture on managing an innovative work environment in an exploratory study conducted in the UAE, concluding that Arab cultural traits have an impact on innovation in the workplace. Specific traits include high collectivism, which, on the one hand, emphasizes group cohesion and cooperation, and on the other hand, can also reduce individual motivation to innovate; high power distance, which creates bureaucracy and limits communication, negatively affecting innovation; and poly-chronicity, which involves multitasking, leading to a lack of focus and reduced work quality.

In the media and creative realm, AI is set to significantly alter content creation and consumption, impacting several key areas, including automation. For instance, AI is revolutionizing content production within media outlets by automating and standardizing routine tasks such as composing basic news reports and conducting initial interviews. This automation significantly reduces journalists' time and effort expenditure, allowing them to focus on more complex and investigative tasks [7]. Beyond simple automation, AI applies intelligent analysis to vast datasets, parsing through social media trends and interactions to uncover patterns that can lead to more precise and insightful journalistic narratives. Another key area is the potential to enhance digital media experiences and how users interact with digital media platforms. Using sophisticated algorithms, AI systems personalize content delivery, tailoring news and information to individual preferences based on past behavior and expressed interests [7]. Finally, one of the most critical applications of AI in media is its role in identifying and combating fake news, although it can also be used as a tool to generate the same fake news.

A study by Al Adwan et al. [7] examined the impact of AI utilization on future anxiety among media professionals in Egypt, France, and the UAE, employing a quantitative survey across the three countries. It concluded that there is a significant correlation between AI employment in media and professional future anxiety, highlighting the use of AI for source verification, efficiency in news coverage, and the ChatGPT application. Unexpectedly, professionals in the UAE claimed to be more resistant to using AI, while those in Egypt

claimed to focus on the potential of algorithmic journalism. In general, media professionals in France, Egypt, and the UAE arguably share similar anxiety levels about the future due to AI technologies in media, embracing such techniques as verifying information accuracy and enhancing news coverage efficiency, with ChatGPT being a notable application.

Finally, one recent global survey [8] highlighted the varying levels of concern and optimism regarding generative AI across different regions. Notably, Middle Eastern employees exhibited relatively low levels of concern about the impact of AI on their jobs, with only 25% of employees in the Middle East expressing worry over AI's implications, a stark contrast to the over 40% seen in some European regions. In fact, the sentiment toward AI in the Middle East is predominantly optimistic, with a notable 58% of employees expressing positive views about the technology. This rate of optimism places the Middle East just behind India and Brazil in terms of positive outlook toward AI, while significantly ahead of countries like the United States, the Netherlands, and Japan. Despite this optimism, workers are calling for regulatory measures regarding AI and mitigating the digital disruption caused as a result of implementing AI.

3. Theoretical Framework: Digital Disruption in the Creative Sector

The discourse around technological innovation may be characterized by utopianism or dystopianism, shaping our understanding of new media technologies and positing technology as a beacon of hope for societal advancement or as a harbinger of doom [9]. However, the impact of technology can be more nuanced, influenced by a combination of technological, economic, and regulatory conditions. These forces collectively shape the media industries, their outputs, and the broader societal context in which these technologies are embedded. The reality is that technology alone does not drive change; it is deeply intertwined with cultural and societal dynamics.

Furthermore, as technologies are integrated into daily life, they are often adapted or modified, reflecting ongoing social processes that continuously redefine technology's role and significance within culture. This bidirectional influence underscores the techno-cultural nature of technology, emphasizing that while technology can influence culture, it is also invariably shaped by it, implied in the concept of technological imaginary [10] about the complex ways individuals and societies imagine and engage with technology. This includes practical interactions and the myriad expectations, hopes, and fears that people project onto technological artifacts. When we engage with technology, whether using it or merely contemplating its use, we imbue it with meanings and possibilities, often extending beyond its immediate functionality. These imaginings, whether they align with or contradict the actual uses of technology, play a crucial role in shaping how technologies are perceived and integrated into cultural practices. In essence, the interaction between technology and culture is dynamic and ongoing, with each continuously informing and reshaping the other.

The impact of digital technology in non-Western regions, such as the Arab world, highlights a significant digital divide, particularly in terms of digital skills. This imbalance raises urgent questions for researchers and governments regarding how digital technology contributes to the global digital divide and reinforces the dominance of American tech companies in the digital sphere [11]. For instance, the UAE's modernization efforts, a significant undertaking, have transformed the nation into a modern powerhouse with a diversified economy. These efforts, including constructing essential infrastructure, were propelled by the discovery of oil, increasing each emirate's capacity to attract foreign investment and expand international trade. Today, the UAE is a modern nation, firmly integrated into the global market [12]. This form of urban branding is prevalent across the Arabian Gulf, emphasizing the synergy between urban development and place marketing [13]. Dubai, for one, is often celebrated as an international brand that epitomizes diversity and serves as a nexus for a variety of services, ethnicities, and media channels [14]. However, the rapid expansion of Gulf cities has spurred tensions between economic growth and social adaptation, propelling a swift Westernization of urban spaces. This transformation is most visible in the enthusiastic adoption of advanced technologies, which are becoming symbols

of Gulf futurism, manifesting in ambitious architectural projects, grand museums, and the realm of digital art [13]. However, it is still crucial to shift away from the traditional view of technology as a neutral force for advancement and freedom, which often promotes the Western or American model as the ideal standard for the Arab region to follow [11].

It is important to remember that the argument in favor of innovation often inadvertently disempowers those it aims to assist by implying a global shortage of technological resources, creative vision, and agency. Consequently, it reinforces the notion that innovation should be the exclusive domain of [Western] experts and researchers, thereby diminishing local participation and self-determination in shaping technological futures [15].

Meanwhile, digital companies adopt a solutionist approach, which involves creating technological fixes for problems often generated by their own products. Morozov's [16] critique highlights this cycle, where companies first introduce platforms that may lead to addictive behaviors and then propose additional technology-based solutions to mitigate these issues. For instance, firms develop applications that track users' digital activities and suggest modifications to foster healthier engagement patterns [17]. Morozov [16] argues that this belief system simplifies complex social phenomena, reducing them to problems that can be solved with the correct algorithm or app, potentially overlooking more profound societal implications and the need for more substantive changes beyond technological interventions. This techno-solutionism narrative embodies the ideology that technology, particularly AI, is the panacea for complex social, economic, and environmental challenges. This perspective is marked by an over-reliance on technology, emphasizing tech-based solutions while underappreciating human judgment, creativity, and conventional methods. This mindset can diminish the perceived necessity for human intervention and expertise in areas increasingly dominated by technology, and it often overlooks deep-rooted structural and systemic issues, opting instead for superficial tech-based remedies [17].

This study is designed to explore the perceptions of digital technology, particularly AI, within a prominent technological center such as the UAE. Its primary objective is to clarify the prevalence of a techno-solutionist narrative.

4. Materials and Methods

Empirically, the study is based on triangulated methods combining quantitative (survey) with qualitative (interview) methods. It draws on semi-structured interviews with 13 participants from across the cultural sector in Sharjah and a survey among 224 employees and stakeholders in five different media and cultural institutions in Sharjah. The emirate of Sharjah was selected because it has not only emerged as the Cultural Capital of the UAE but has also been crowned as the Cultural Capital of the Arab World. The promotion of Sharjah as the Cultural Capital of the Arab World by UNESCO in 1998 has been further endorsed by its recognition as Islamic Cultural Capital in 2014 and Arab Tourism Capital in 2015 [18–20].

The following Table 1 is an overview of the anonymous participants/interviewees:

The purpose of conducting interviews for this research is to converse with a purpose where the researcher and the informant become conversational partners. Due to its nature, the interview allows researchers to have the freedom to ask for more information and the informant to explore their own thoughts more deeply and reflect on their answers while articulating their ideas. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to ensure a high level of flexibility and the richest data [21]. The primary goal was to gain insights into the participants' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions and to explore the participants' attitudes and opinions by asking open-ended questions while encouraging discussion to obtain a deeper understanding justifying the participants' attitudes. An interview guide was developed drawing on relevant previous studies such as Reese [22], focusing on the following themes:

- The extent of participants' optimism/pessimism with regard to AI
- The extent of their understanding of AI as a concept and practice
- Whether media professionals have engaged with AI as users or content creators

- How they evaluate their adoption of AI in their lives (as users/producers)
- How they foresee the role of AI in the creative sector (e.g., unemployment, disruption, efficiency, creating more jobs)
- How they foresee the future of AI in the UAE, the region and the world
- The ethical challenges they see in the adoption of AI
- The challenges of AI in the creative sector (e.g., not enough people with technical skills)
- How they see AI, overall, e.g., as a force for good/evil.

Table 1. Overview of participants.

No.	Nationality	Agency/Position
P1	Emirati	Sharjah Broadcasting Authority
P2	Non-Emirati	Sharjah Broadcasting Authority
P3	Emirati	Digital Content Creator, Freelancer
P4	Emirati	General Manager of a production company
P5	Emirati	Creative Project Manager
P6	Emirati	Digital Artist and Motion Designer, Freelancer
P7	Emirati	Director of a production company
P8	Emirati	Co-Founder of a creative agency
P9	Emirati	Director of a major media platform
P10	Non-Emirati	National Network Communication
P11	Non-Emirati	National Network Communication
P12	Non-Emirati	National Network Communication
P13	Non-Emirati	National Network Communication

Interviews were conducted in Arabic between January and July 2024 and transcribed verbatim. Prior to conducting the interviews, the authors sought and obtained the approval of their institution's ethics committee, and consent and information sheets were sent to each participant. The authors translated excerpts of interviews into English and used them in the following analysis section.

The interviews were analyzed thematically, distilling the main narrative from each script, and acknowledging that narrative practices shape our understanding of experiences, transforming perceptions and events into coherent stories. For this, the scripts were analyzed using MAXQDA.

Initially, the researchers aimed to collect data through interviews only, but some interviews revealed conflicting tendencies that the researchers sought to explore on a larger scale, preferably with a larger sample size in a survey.

The interviewees were recruited using snowballing sampling from the first author's professional contacts. As for the survey participants, they were recruited via the above five creative organizations in Sharjah, UAE. Each organization was asked to share the survey link with their employees and with some of their stakeholders, particularly freelancers.

A survey was then distributed to the leading media organizations in Sharjah, which were asked to share it with their stakeholder groups. The survey was open from 12 June to 1 August 2024, and we collected 224 valid answers. A link to the survey template is included in the Data Availability Statement below. The survey intentionally included several open-ended and closed multiple-choice questions to delve deeper into certain responses. The participating organizations were as follows:

1. Sajaya Young Ladies of Sharjah, a government entity
2. National Network Communications, a private PR agency
3. Media Office of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, a government entity
4. Sharjah Broadcasting Authority, a semi-government entity
5. Press and Play agency, a private creative agency

The themes of the survey were also drawn from Reese [22], which focused on general attitudes toward AI, the perceived impact of AI on society, the future outlook of AI, and its role in the labor market and specifically in the media sector. In total, 224 responses were collected, answering 46 questions, of which a few were open-ended. Not all answers to these open questions were provided, however, as some respondents preferred not to do so. For the sake of brevity, only a few themes will be discussed below.

To enhance the reliability of the findings, several measures were taken. First, prior to implementing the survey, we conducted a pilot test to ensure that the survey questions were clear, relevant, and suitable for the target audience. The survey was distributed to a small sample of stakeholders within the creative sector in the UAE (n = 5), which allowed us to gather preliminary feedback on the structure, wording, and overall usability of the instrument. Based on the feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve clarity and ensure that the questions were interpreted consistently. Second, experts in digital media communication were consulted during the questionnaire development phase to ensure that the questions accurately captured the research objectives. Third, the survey was administered using a structured format via SurveyMonkey to ensure all participants responded uniformly to the same questions. Finally, we calculated Cronbach's alpha for key multi-item constructs to assess the internal consistency of the survey; the analysis indicated that the Cronbach's alpha for the entire questionnaire was above 0.60, suggesting an acceptable level of reliability.

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the survey data, summarizing the respondents' characteristics and the distribution of responses. Measures such as frequencies, percentages, and correlations were used to describe the central tendencies within the dataset, enabling an understanding of the overall patterns and trends in the responses.

Moreover, this study takes a holistic narrative approach in analyzing open-ended questions and interviews to highlight the underlying cultural narratives surrounding artificial intelligence and its use in the UAE. The choice of narrative theory is based on the belief in narrative in opinion formation [23,24], such that forming a narrative can facilitate understanding and coping with new technologies. Narrative here is defined as an account of social reality based on one or more storylines with actors, attribution of roles and responsibilities, and causal relations [25,26].

While we do not claim generalization of findings, given the novelty of this study, we believe it still provides some valuable insights for future research on this under-researched topic.

5. Results

5.1. Defining AI

When asked to define what constitutes AI, the data from the survey offers valuable insight into public perceptions and awareness of AI technologies, indicating a spectrum of familiarity with different AI applications, with some technologies being more readily acknowledged as AI than others. For instance, the most widely recognized example of AI was virtual assistants, such as Siri and Alexa. This high level of recognition likely arises from the prevalent use of these technologies in everyday life, where they are frequently employed for simple tasks such as setting reminders, answering questions, and controlling smart devices. The frequent interaction with virtual assistants has rendered them a familiar and accessible representation of AI for many individuals. These data also indicate that public recognition of AI technologies varies depending on their visibility and familiarity. Interactive and visible technologies such as virtual assistants and robots are more likely to be recognized as AI, while less interactive ones like recommendation algorithms and spam filters are less readily identified as AI by the public.

To further explore how respondents perceive AI, they were asked an open-ended question to define AI in their own words. Notably, the respondents provided diverse definitions for AI, reflecting varied understandings and perceptions. Reflecting on all

answers, we divided the answers thematically, grouping them into the following categories of attributes or themes:

1. Technology and automation: Many definitions emphasize AI as technology that automates tasks, performs human-like functions, or simplifies complex operations, showing an understanding of AI as a tool for efficiency and automation. Examples of this definition include these statements: "Robots doing some human tasks", "AI is a means to ease technological tasks and reduce the time taken to perform them", "AI aims to ease life from a technical view and solve several problems and crises", "it can do anything you can imagine", and "it is a new technology that is used to make work more efficient in all sectors".
2. Human-like capabilities: A significant theme involves AI mimicking human intelligence, decision-making, and problem-solving, indicating a perception of AI as an extension of human capacities executed through machines. One example is this comment: "AI is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. These processes include learning, reasoning, and self-correction". Another participant stated: "My knowledge of AI began early in my life, and this topic has always interested me. Since I was young, I have been fascinated by how human brains work and infer information, and how to imitate these capabilities using computers and software".
3. Practical applications: Descriptions often mention practical applications, such as facilitating daily tasks, enhancing work processes, and providing solutions, showcasing AI's utility in various domains. Examples of this definition include the following statements: "Different tools that help in automating tasks", "It's an application that gives you solutions", and "Tools that help in easing the work process".
4. Cognitive functions: Responses also focus on AI's cognitive aspects, like visual perception, speech recognition, and language translation, suggesting a recognition of AI's broad capabilities beyond mere task execution. Examples of such a definition include these statements: "Programs or software that are designed to think like humans", "intelligence that mimics human intellectual capacities", and "machines that are designed to think and behave like [a] human".

These responses depict a clear perspective on AI, largely centered on the participants' belief in AI as a powerful tool capable of efficiently performing human tasks, such as automation, and offering innovative solutions. This perception also highlights a form of technological solutionism, wherein AI (and digital technology in general) is seen as a universal remedy for numerous problems. This viewpoint is further elaborated upon below, especially in the participants' optimistic outlook regarding AI.

The participants were also asked about their outlook on using AI in the labor market and whether AI can aid their work, replace humans, or create more jobs (Figure 1). The data exhibit a more complex scenario, presenting a mixed and somewhat unclear picture of participants' views on the future of the labor market. For example, the data indicate that 77 respondents who believed that AI would lead to job creation also expressed a significant level of concern, with 66 respondents expressing worry about the impact of AI on their jobs.

This suggests that even among those who are optimistic about the potential for AI to create jobs, there remains a significant level of anxiety about the immediate effects of AI on their current employment. Also, among those who disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that AI will create jobs (43 and 9 respondents, respectively), there was a relatively balanced level of workplace fear. Specifically, 69 respondents who disagreed with job creation were concerned about workplace AI. This indicates a correlation between skepticism about AI-driven job creation and heightened fears about job security. Respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the notion of AI-driven job creation (69 respondents) showed moderate workplace fear (62 respondents). This group represents a significant portion of respondents who may need clarification about the future impact of AI. Their ambivalence likely reflects a wait-and-see attitude, where they are still determining whether AI will ultimately positively or negatively impact jobs. Interestingly, among those who strongly

agreed that AI will create jobs (26 respondents), workplace fear was significantly lower (19 respondents). This suggests that strong optimism about AI's potential to create jobs may mitigate concerns about its negative impacts on the workplace. Respondents in this category may feel more confident in their ability to adapt or benefit from AI-driven changes. Finally, those who strongly disagreed with job creation due to AI (9 respondents) exhibited the lowest level of workplace fear (8 respondents). This group might consist of individuals who either do not expect AI to significantly affect their jobs, or are confident in their job security regardless of AI advancements.

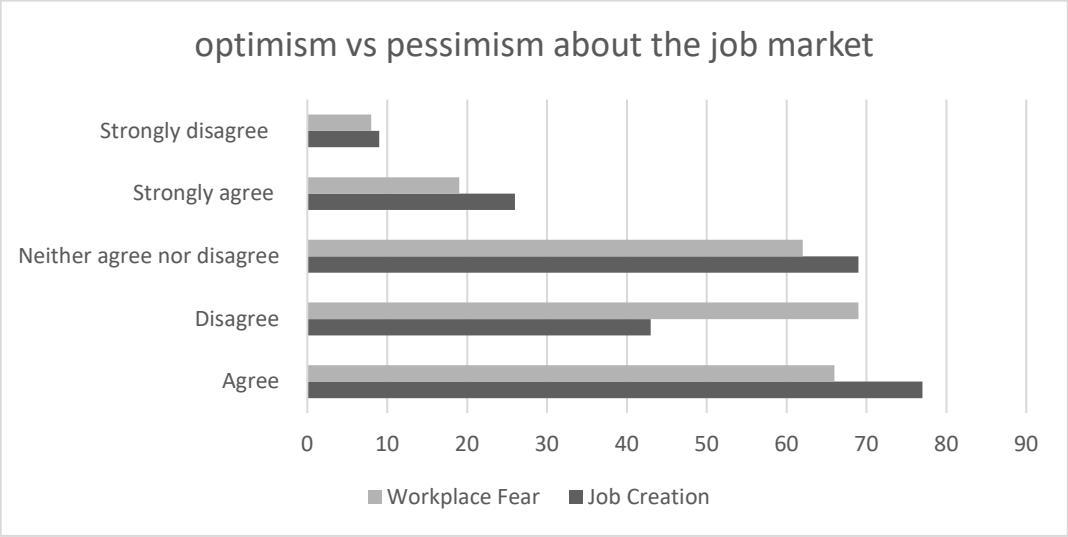

Figure 1. Optimism versus pessimism about employment.

When asked an open-ended question about measures to mitigate AI's adverse impact on their employment, a significant portion of respondents (31) emphasized the importance of regulating AI as a key strategy. Examples of answers include: "Regulating the work of artificial intelligence in a way that prevents it from replacing individuals", "Strict regulations", "AI can mention the name of the person who feeds it with instructions to produce a certain image, I mean, it should give the person the [copy]rights to the idea", and "Legalizing this technology is a necessity. I do not call to limit its use, but to work side by side with humans so that the technology does not become a reason for cutting off livelihood and livelihood".

This suggests widespread concern that AI could have detrimental effects on the job market without proper oversight. These respondents likely see government intervention as crucial in establishing guidelines and policies to ensure that AI is deployed responsibly, safeguarding employment, and preventing potential exploitation.

Another common theme, identified by 23 respondents, is the need for a combination of training and regulations, and this perspective reflects an understanding that regulation alone will not be enough to address the challenges posed by AI. Workers must also be provided with the necessary training to adapt to the changes AI brings to the workplace. Examples of this theme include the following statements: "It is recommended that people get more training about AI so they will be able to adapt to the changes in their jobs in which they will use AI more on a daily basis", and "Its use should be gradual and begin by studying the labor market to define who will be affected by AI and directing students to the disciplines that can be filled with AI skills". This approach highlights the importance of protective measures and proactive strategies, recognizing that empowering workers with new skills is as essential as regulating AI's use. Moreover, a smaller group of respondents (9) suggest that limiting the use of AI in certain jobs could help protect employment. This view likely stems from concerns that AI could replace human workers in specific roles,

leading to job losses. By advocating for restrictions on AI's application in these areas, these respondents hope to preserve jobs that might otherwise be at risk.

Finally, some respondents highlighted the importance of raising awareness about AI's impact on employment, hiring experts, providing training, and elevating individuals' roles to adapt to AI-driven changes. Examples of such answers include the following statements: "To try to educate people to develop themselves in the use of artificial intelligence and also in areas that do not need intelligence", and "Raising awareness, education, and spreading the culture of managing the digital skills of each individual instead of depreciating human value". These statements point to the need for clearer guidelines regarding AI skills and how to train workers to use them.

The belief in AI's ability to enhance "efficiency" was repeated in another open-ended question where participants were asked to reflect on how AI might affect their current jobs (Figure 2).

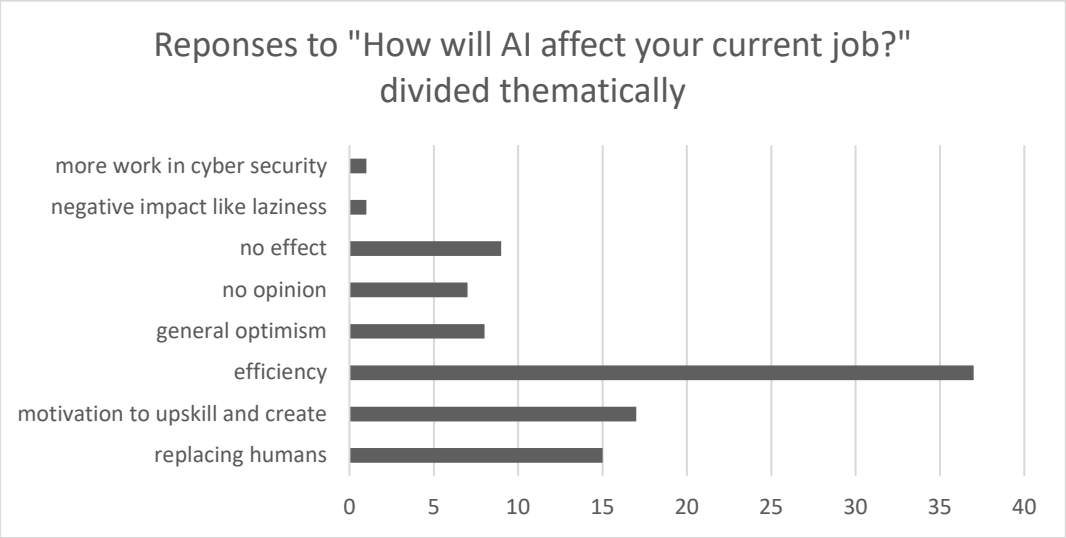

Figure 2. AI impact on participants' jobs.

On this, the vast majority believed that AI would impact their current jobs by increasing efficiency, reflecting a techno-solutionist view that shows a strong confidence in technology as a solution provider.

Zooming in on the media and entertainment sector, and how specifically it may be affected by AI, content creation emerged as the foremost area of impact, closely followed by advertising and marketing (Figure 3). Additionally, there was a consensus regarding the significant influence of AI on content curation, recommendation, and user interaction.

To further explore this idea of "content recommendation" or personalization, the respondents were asked whether "AI personalization improves experience". A substantial majority of respondents (117) agreed that personalization enhances their experience, in addition to a notable proportion of respondents who strongly agreed with this statement (38), further reinforcing the overall positive reception of AI personalization. In general, this indicates a strong positive sentiment toward using AI in tailoring media services to individual preferences to enhance user satisfaction and engagement. Following this, a large number of respondents (44) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, indicating a level of neutrality or ambivalence. This group may recognize the potential benefits of AI personalization, but might not have experienced it sufficiently to form a strong opinion, or they may have mixed experiences with AI personalization, leading to a more cautious or indifferent stance. On the other hand, a smaller group of respondents disagreed (17) or strongly disagreed (8) with this statement, indicating that while there is some skepticism about the benefits of AI personalization, it is relatively limited compared to the overall positive sentiment. Those who disagree may have concerns about privacy, data usage, or the

accuracy of AI personalization, leading them to question its overall value, as discussed before. Overall, the data suggests that AI personalization is generally perceived as a positive feature, with the majority of respondents agreeing that it improves their experience.

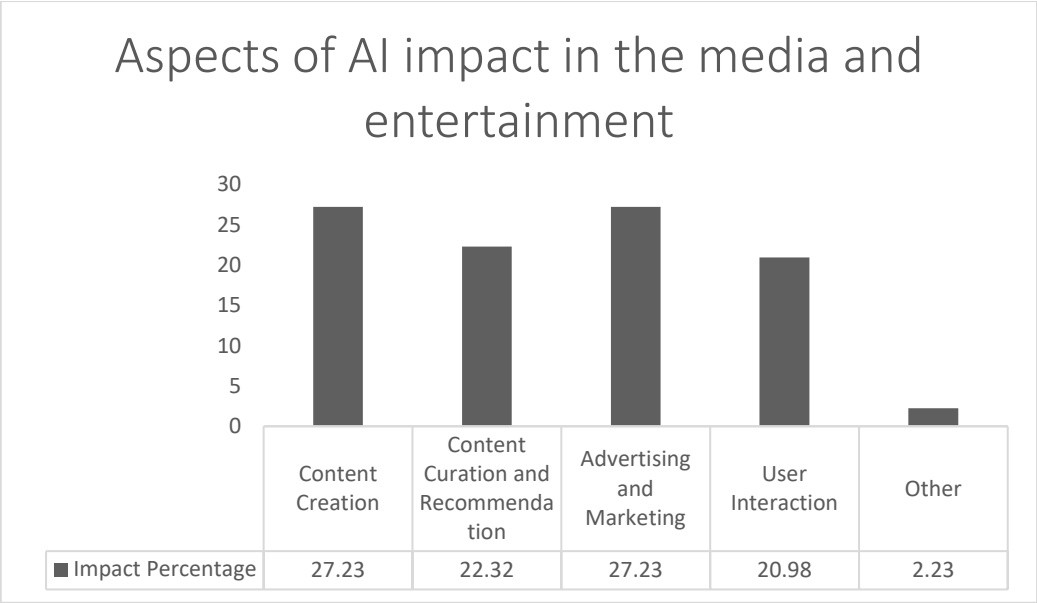

Figure 3. Impact of AI on the media and entertainment.

Additionally, the majority of respondents also believed that AI use in the creative sector would lead to greater diversity in media offerings, reflecting, again, a general optimism about using AI in the creative sector (Figure 4).

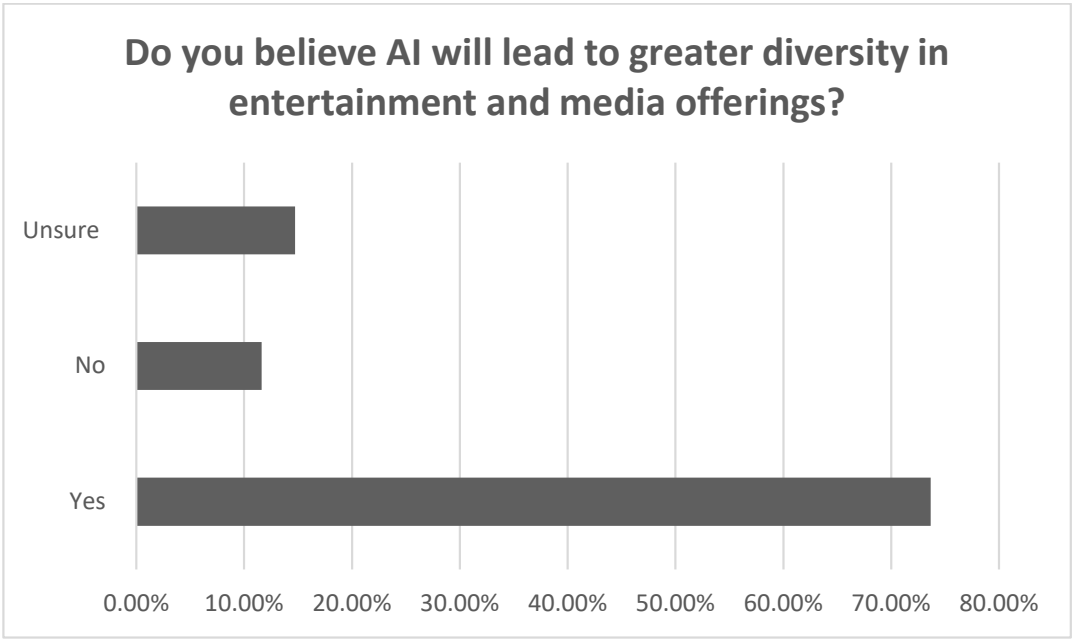

Figure 4. AI leading to diverse media content.

Moreover, a majority of respondents expressed optimism about AI's potential to enhance creativity in fields such as movies, music, and games. Specifically, 34.82% strongly agreed, and 45.98% agreed, totaling 80.80% who believe that AI will positively contribute to creative endeavors. This overwhelming support suggests that respondents view AI as

a tool that can push the boundaries of creativity, perhaps assisting in complex creative tasks, or providing previously unimaginable innovative solutions. A small proportion of respondents were neutral (12.95%), indicating widespread acceptance of AI enhancing creativity with little uncertainty. Fewer respondents disagreed (4.91%) or strongly disagreed (1.34%), implying minimal skepticism about AI's role in enhancing creativity. Such views revealed that people are generally more open to AI enhancing creativity than being comfortable with AI generating content such as news articles, books, or music. Those who disagreed (or were neutral) may have shown this uncertainty or ambivalence about AI-generated content because they may have concerns related to AI-generated content's quality, authenticity, or other ethical implications (such as copyright issues; see below). This difference in attitudes may arise from the perceived variation in stakes between aiding creativity and fully automating creative processes. While AI is considered a valuable tool that can assist and expand human creativity, there is less comfort with AI replacing human creativity altogether, particularly in areas closely linked with human expression, cultural significance, and ethical considerations. It is also important to note that viewing AI as an enabler (or generator) of creative content might justify the fear of it replacing human jobs.

5.2. Creativity and Efficiency

An in-depth analysis of interviews conducted with media professionals shed light on the multifaceted approach toward AI within the industry. Perspectives varied, encompassing an optimistic outlook on AI's efficacy and its potential to enhance efficiency, alongside concerns regarding future implications. For instance, several participants acknowledged that AI can enhance work quality and provide new opportunities, suggesting that those who embrace new tools and methods will be better positioned to succeed in a competitive landscape. For instance, P7 encapsulated this urgency by stating, "The world is moving forward, and we must keep up. . . but we have a problem in the Emirati media, which is already behind [other countries]. We need a leap to catch up with others". She stressed keeping pace to avoid losing out in the AI race. Similarly, P9 expressed concern that if she does not embrace AI, she will be perceived as "old-fashioned", emphasizing that technology must be embraced rather than resisted. P5, a filmmaker, saw AI as a valuable tool in his work, and expressed fear that failing to keep up may undermine his professional credibility. Moreover, professionals thus feel compelled to train themselves independently. P6 remarked, "We don't necessarily need formal education for AI, but we do need to put in the effort to organize its training. Many individuals, including myself, take it upon ourselves to learn. For instance, I didn't know how to create prompts in ChatGPT, so I searched for instructional videos on Google".

P8 supported this notion, suggesting that the private sector should spearhead AI development rather than the state: "The private sector is the driving force of the world. We see phones developed by private corporations, not states, and platforms where we spend half of our day are owned by the private sector, not governments".

On the other hand, participants emphasized the narrative of efficiency in using AI and the belief that AI can substitute an entire team, reflecting concerns about the devaluation of professional skills and the potential oversimplification of complex creative processes. P7 noted, "AI has definitely made our work easier". Moreover, P13 and P12 highlighted the significant role AI can play in enhancing efficiency within the UAE's creative industries, and P12 stressed that AI can streamline tasks, improve productivity, and provide innovative solutions. Furthermore, P11 highlighted a keen interest in AI, particularly ChatGPT, to enhance efficiency in his creative work; for instance, he described how AI can provide a research report in a minute, which enhances his productivity. He viewed AI as a tool that can augment human capabilities rather than replace the creative process entirely. Finally, P10 recognized the significant role AI can play in enhancing efficiency within the creative industries of the UAE, but she also emphasized the importance of balancing AI use with human input to maintain creativity and emotional intelligence. P10 also expressed concerns about the potential for AI to displace human jobs within the creative industries. While

she acknowledged AI's benefits, she highlighted the anxiety surrounding job security and the need for human elements in creative work to ensure cultural relevance and emotional intelligence.

Similarly, AI was said to be likely to replace producers who edit sound or switch cameras between speakers in podcasting. P1 explained that "some people are concerned about their own prospects because the available jobs in the UAE market now require a generalist professional with the skills that can replace five people". This shift toward multi-skilled professionals reflects a broader trend driven by technological advancements. In the past, producing a TV bulletin required an editor and several producers; now, a single editor can manage the entire process using AI. This view was also shared by P6.

P11, P12, and P13 also pointed to the potential of AI replacing humans. For instance, P11 observed a trend where companies increasingly depend on AI, reducing the need for human teams and threatening job security. Likewise, P12 discussed how AI can impact the role of human creators and the fear it brings regarding job security.

The above highlights AI's threat to traditional job roles, reflecting broader societal concerns about technological unemployment. For instance, P3, a young content creator, said jokingly, "I believe that if development continues at this pace, in five years, we may no longer need editors or photographers; they will become content creators themselves".

On the other hand, P11 emphasized that AI cannot replace the nuanced understanding and creativity that human professionals bring to their work. He pointed out that AI lacks the cultural and experiential depth required to create truly authentic content, and he believes that while AI can assist with tasks, the essence of creative work comes from human experience and cultural knowledge, which AI cannot replicate ("Culture is a lived experience... You can't replicate that. That has to come from the source, and we are the source").

P7 also emphasized this sense of techno-solutionism, highlighting how AI technology can provide solutions to complex problems, often emphasizing efficiency and innovation over traditional methods ("Initially, I honestly didn't believe in AI at all, in all aspects, I felt it was just a hype. But by 2023 or 2024, I realized that we are compelled to keep up, whether we like it or not"). This, again, emphasizes the perception that staying current with technology is necessary for survival in such a competitive sector.

P5 also acknowledged AI as an unavoidable evolution in the technological landscape. He spoke of AI not just as a tool, but as a necessary advancement that must be embraced to remain competitive and efficient in today's fast-paced environment ("If we worked with the old system and didn't keep up, we wouldn't be able to do our work as we do now, and it would delay us"), reflecting a strong belief in the inevitability of AI's integration into daily workflows. P5 also saw AI as a crucial component for maintaining relevance and efficiency, reinforcing the idea that adopting AI is not just an option but a necessity.

Thus, media professionals are divided into those who resist AI to protect their jobs and those who embrace it to enhance their competitiveness, while their clients may be skeptical about AI, fearing it undermines the value of the content they purchase, and indicating a lack of mutual understanding among all stakeholders.

In summary, the urgency of adaptation to AI technologies is underscored by participants who warn that adherence to outdated methods will lead to falling behind, particularly in the face of global competition. With their advanced experience and quality, overseas competitors place additional pressure on local small businesses to innovate and remain competitive. This narrative reflects a sense of technological determinism, where the progression of technology is seen as an inevitable force driving industry change, and technological advancements drive changes in job requirements and industry standards. The media market in the UAE has shifted toward valuing professionals with multiple skills, including proficiency in AI for editing and recording, and this shift, driven by the efficiency and capabilities that AI and other technologies bring to media production, exemplifies how technology is perceived as a tool to reduce the need for large teams and complex logistics. Additionally, the themes of techno-solutionism, or the belief that technological advance-

ments, especially AI, can provide comprehensive solutions to complex problems, were evident in several responses. For instance, P3's optimism about using AI reflected their hopeful outlook on how these technologies can enhance their work in content creation. She viewed AI as a crucial component of modern content creation, allowing for more efficient and effective processes. This reflects techno-solutionism, where technology is seen as the key to solving industry challenges ("Every creator needs to know how to integrate AI").

6. Discussion

The narrative discussed in the above sections paints a nuanced picture of how AI is perceived in the creative sector in the UAE and society at large. The participants and interviewees are overwhelmingly optimistic about AI's functionality in automating mundane tasks, and most see AI as synonymous with "efficiency". They also agree that AI is an inevitability as a new technological force that must be addressed, as doing so might cause the country to miss out on a competitive edge.

As revealed by the data, participants rely on individual initiatives to enhance their AI skills. This may involve experimenting with new AI tools online or subscribing to platforms like ChatGPT or other AI platforms. This aligns with the fact that the UAE tops the Arab region regarding individual subscriptions to online courses. In fact, according to data from the global education provider Coursera [27], the UAE is ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa for skill proficiency. Learners here tend to focus on developing IT skills for digital transformation roles, which are expected to grow significantly. Nonetheless, 82% of UAE learners seek additional training to gain more confidence in their careers, highlighting the importance of further skill development [27].

The drawback is that a new form of digital divide may emerge among various groups of media professionals or different segments of society. This could lead to a situation where those who invest in training and updating their digital skills are rewarded, while those who invest less time, money, or effort in developing similar skills need to catch up. Another downside is that the specific AI skills required for the industry may need to be clarified and expanded to acquiring new advanced computers or video cameras or using new applications for voiceovers rather than agreeing on a set of skills that need to be developed concurrently. For example, a broadcasting company could create a training and upskilling program that includes a variety of applications and digital skills that every employee, depending on their department, needs to master, and this set of skills is updated regularly. Clearly, many institutions already provide training on newly purchased systems or applications, but this is insufficient to ensure that their employees are equally adept at updating their skills in using AI in their specific fields, such as video editing, sound mastering, content creation, story development, research, or idea generation. In other words, as highlighted by this study's participants, there is a need for clear guidelines for this type of upskilling, and simply allocating a training budget is insufficient. Employees must know what they need to learn, why it's important, and how to apply their new knowledge to their daily tasks.

The study's ultimate contribution lies in examining the digital divide [28]. The preceding sections underscore that relying solely on data about internet access cannot accurately depict how individuals acquire and sustain digital skills or the professional outcomes they attain. This observation is particularly pertinent in the Global South, where digital progress is often predominantly measured through internet access data. In reality, the complexities underlying this progress demand thorough exploration and debate.

In addressing the digital disruption discussed in the theoretical framework above, this study challenges the simplistic view of technology's impact on media industries as either entirely positive or negative. Instead, it acknowledges technological change as just one of the many factors influencing media industries. The study also underscores the significance of training a new labor force by emphasizing the need for multidisciplinary skills encompassing digital media production, data analytics, and emerging technologies. Additionally, it advocates for implementing a comprehensive guide with specific milestones

to foster the development of digital talents, including strategies for continuous learning, networking opportunities, and mentorship programs.

In summary, while the UAE boasts a digitally proficient workforce eager to embrace AI technologies, the full potential of this digital engagement can only be realized through strategic organizational changes. This includes the development of clear policies, comprehensive training programs, a strategic alignment with national objectives, and an overhaul of internal communication strategies. These steps will ensure that digital technologies are integrated effectively and equitably, supporting a unified and strategic approach to digital transformation across the UAE. The findings also highlight a potential risk arising from the disparity between state leaders' top-down dissemination of the digital vision and the mid-layer tactical process needed to actualize this vision. The responses indicate that although there are abundant individual training initiatives, they need to be orchestrated by a strategic plan aligned with the industry's goals.

7. Conclusions

The findings suggest that although there are individual efforts to integrate AI technologies, there needs to be more strategic alignment with the overarching goals of national digital transformation initiatives. This mismatch could contribute to widening the digital gap, highlighting the critical need for clear directives, comprehensive training programs, and collaborative endeavors across the industry to leverage AI's capabilities in the creative sector fully.

To effectively address these dual perceptions, organizational leaders must develop clear milestones by articulating specific, achievable AI integration goals that align with the organization's strategic objectives and the employees' ability to adapt to new technologies. Finally, they should cultivate a supportive culture by fostering an organizational culture that supports learning and adaptation to new technologies rather than merely introducing them as quick fixes. The overall aim, in short, should be to address the cultural and communicative aspects necessary for successful AI integration.

This study sheds much-needed light on the perception of AI in the Arab region, a rather underrated research topic. The Arab region is part of the Global South, where most young people are allegedly technology-savvy [29]. Unfortunately, people in this part of the world are seen as located outside the knowledge economy and often represented as mere consumers of new technology rather than innovators, which calls for more attention to the vast potential of this region to produce new technology, new ethics, and an understanding of this technology [30]. Finally, the study contributes to the digital divide debate [31], shedding light on the subtle divide even in a well-connected technological hub like the UAE.

To our knowledge, this is the first academic study about imagining AI in the UAE, and so the analysis provides new insights for future studies. However, there are inevitable limitations, too, as the study was limited to a few selected sectors and thus cannot be generalized to all sectors in the UAE. Also, the study focuses on the UAE, which is committed to advancing its AI technology, and the findings may not be generalized to other countries in the region, with no similar commitment, although it can be replicated in other GCC states known for their high connectivity and commitment to utilizing digital technology, such as Saudi Arabia.

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