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Entitled

*BLOCKCHAIN AS A TECHNOLOGICAL IMAGINARY: MEDIA FRAMING AND THE VIEWS OF BLOCKCHAIN
PROFESSIONALS IN THE ARAB WORLD*

by

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Date & Venue

14:00

Thursday, 13 April 2020

Online

Abstract

Blockchain is a new way to organize, process and share data; it is a distributed ledger that facilitates the secure and private exchange of digital assets and content types without the need for intermediaries, thus revolutionizing all sectors involving the use of databases. This first systematic study of blockchain as a technological imaginary empirically assesses the media framing of this emerging technology in the Arab world and juxtaposes it to the perceptions of blockchain professionals in the region. The researcher uses a mixed methods approach consisting of quantitative and qualitative techniques; a quantitative content analysis of the online versions of fifty-two mainstream online Arab newspapers from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and UAE from 2017 to 2019 is conducted; five hundred news articles published over a period of three years are collected, read and coded according to four frame dimensions identified in earlier studies; presentation, subtopics, cognitive attributes and affective attributes. Semi-structured interviews with thirty blockchain professionals followed by a thematic analysis are used to add depth to the data. This dissertation offers insights into the degree to which Arab media institutions understand blockchain as a concept and insights on the region's readiness for adaptation; it concludes that the coverage of blockchain in online Arab press is predominantly positive. Nevertheless, there are some differences in the media coverage between the studied countries which are reflected in the amount of coverage, subtopics, applications and tone. There is a significant association between specific applications and the tone. There is also a significant association between certain subtopics and the tone. Blockchain Professional perspectives vary on the characteristics and role of the media in covering the topic. Coverage of blockchain in the Arab region is perceived as a reflection of the interest and technological understanding of Arab governments with the UAE being the most developed in this regard. Experts outline a unique set of inherent qualities that make blockchain impactful on many fields, including media and mass communication without ignoring perceived risks. The dissertation reveals an absence in discussing technology ethics both at the level of blockchain professionals and the media. Finally, the dissertation highlights several areas of similarity and difference between the views of experts and the media and presents a list of recommendations.

Keywords; blockchain, heterotopia, media framing, Arab world, technological imaginary, disintermediation, decentralization, technological determinism, technology ethics, inherent qualities of technology, disruptive technologies, artificial intelligence, mixed method