Refugee Journalist Phenomenon as a Consequence of Migration and Refugee Crises: The Role of Social Media in Transferring Refugees' Role from "Has Been Affected" to "Has Affected"

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of using social media by Syrian refugees, focusing on the shift from receiving messages to sharing content and news related to the Syrian crisis. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the findings indicate that social media has become a more accessible and affordable medium of communication for Syrian refugees, both during and after seeking refuge. The study highlights the transformation of Syrian citizens from citizens who are not allowed to use the internet and social media to "refugee journalists" by being affected by social media. Social media use among Syrian activists or Syrian refugee journalists has contributed to the emergence of the "refugee journalist" phenomenon, which helps convey opinions, voices, and suffering to the world. However, the findings also highlight the negative effects of the "refugee journalist" phenomenon on Syrian refugees, citizens, and activists. The findings also indicate the potential moral violations and lack of integrity and reliability standards in the publishing of activists' stories, leading to distortion of facts and misleading audiences.

Keywords: social media, refugee journalist, citizen journalism, syrian refugee crisis, migration

1. Citizen Journalism and Social Media

In recent years, there has been much debate about the role played by social media, especially during crises, in enabling the average citizen to participate in the collection, dissemination, and analysis of news. Citizen journalism, where citizen journalists follow trending events and participate in citizen journalism, helps fill gaps and provide responsive coverage (Poghosyan et al., 2016). Citizen journalism may help official media outlets by providing accurate, reliable information, increasing audience engagement, and fostering independence and credibility (Horoub, 2023). Traditional journalism became dependent on digital and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs to capture news. Social media has evolved into a medium for active information production and consumption, serving as a personal communication tool and an avenue for information dissemination. The media plays a crucial role in addressing society's most pressing concerns. Online media is considered more successful and preferable than traditional media for discussing citizen rights issues freely. Social media has recognized and highlighted crises because no one has authority over them (Aldamen, 2017). It played an important role in crises and wars, particularly at the outset. That was obvious during the Arab Spring movements, where youth used the Internet and social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube in order to help organize demonstrations. The use of social media in crises is increasing because citizen journalism has brought situations to the forefront and provided new perspectives on fast-moving situations. Because of some of the gaps in the traditional media's coverage of the issue of the refugee crisis, the social media situation has been important (Berry et al., 2016).

According to the BBC (2011), social networking sites were restricted in Syria in 2007, yet some Syrian users utilized multiple proxies to access these sites, which have an estimated 400,000 members. In 2011, the Syrian government, without an official explanation, removed the block on YouTube and Facebook sites. Furthermore, it was reported that tens of thousands of Syrians used special programs to circumvent the blockade.

2. Methodological Framework

2.1 Background, Purposes and Hypotheses

During the Syrian government crackdown, social media became the primary news source for Arab and international media,

relying heavily on activist journalists and citizen journalists. Facebook and Skype played crucial roles in enabling live reporting and communication among revolutionary sections. The revolution exposed the regime through various platforms, with Facebook being the second-most important site. Social media has provided advantages for citizens and refugees to transfer their suffering and voices to the world, both before and during wars.

Due to the Syrian refugees' increasing reliance on social media to meet their demands, social media dependency starts to take on more significance in their lives and have a greater impact on them. Many Syrian refugees relied on social media for a variety of purposes, including information access and expressing themselves. Based on the concept of the citizen journalist, which implies creating news about the important events that take place around people, this study aims to shed light on those citizens when they are refugees and how those refugees were able to become journalists who participate in providing news and transmitting it through social media. Especially the Syrian refugee, who, before resorting to neighboring countries, suffered from repression and restrictions on freedom of opinion, expression, and access to social media and the Internet, especially because of the poor infrastructure that prevented access to the Internet and the regime's censorship and control of entry and posting on social media (Aldamen, 2023a).

Refugee journalists play a crucial role in reporting on conflicts and their aftermath, providing unique perspectives and insights into displaced populations' experiences. However, studies have not adequately addressed the role of citizens, particularly refugees, in using social media for news dissemination and journalistic content creation. There is a gap in literature regarding the use of social media by Syrian refugees in two nearby countries: developed country (Türkiye) and developing country (Jordan). This study contributes to a better understanding of the role of social media in the establishment of the refugee journalist phenomenon and Syrian refugees' use of social media in this regard.

The main purpose of this study is twofold. First, look at the origins of the refugee journalist phenomenon by using social media by Syrian refugees and how social media contributed to transferring refugees' situations from "has been affected" to "has the effect". Second, to uncover some perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of that phenomenon that influence refugees' lives. The study postulated two main hypotheses based on the objectives stated:

H1: Social media use by Syrian refugees while seeking asylum resulted in a rise in social media use, which contributed to the birth of the refugee journalist phenomenon.

H2: There were positive as well as negative impacts on Syrians living in Jordan and Türkiye from the refugee journalist phenomenon.

2.2 Methodological Procedures of the Study

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, using a questionnaire instrument with dichotomous, multiple-choice, and Likert scales. A representative sample of 303 Syrian refugees in Jordan and 303 in Türkiye over 18 years old, as well as social media users, was surveyed within four months. The survey was conducted through telephone interviews, face-to-face meetings, and an online survey using Google Forms. Participants were able to access the questionnaire through email, WhatsApp, and Facebook accounts. To ensure neutrality and participation rates, the link was published in ten Facebook groups representing Syrian refugees from various backgrounds and locations in Jordan and Türkiye.

307 questionnaires were gathered in Jordan, while 305 were collected in Türkiye. A total of 303 questionnaires were authorized for analysis, with males making up the majority. In Jordan, men made up more than half of the sample (60.1%), while women made up 39.9% of the participants. Males made up 51.8% of the sample in Türkiye while females made up 48.2% of the sample. Jordan had the highest rate of married people, with 63.7%, while Türkiye had 45.5%. The age group 23-29 years had the highest participation rate in both nations, with Jordan having 29.7% and Türkiye having 35.0%. The age group of 30-39 years had 28.4% and 25.1%, while 18-22 years had 13.9% and 29.4%. The age group aged 50-59 had 6.9% and 3.6%, respectively. The 60-69 age group had the lowest participation rate, accounting for less than 1.7% of the sample in Jordan and 1.0% of the sample in Türkiye.

The education level of the sample members in Jordan and Türkiye was less than High School, High School, Vocational Diploma, Bachelor's, Higher Diploma, Master's, and Doctorate. The number of participants from Jordan whose degrees were less than a high school diploma was 31%, compared to 10.6% of the sample in Türkiye. While the number of high school degree holders who participated from Jordan constituted 21.8% of the sample, 26.4% participated from Türkiye. The number of Vocational Diploma (Intermediate Institute Certificate: 2-3 years, less than a bachelor's degree) holders in Jordan was 12.2% of the sample and 10.6% of Türkiye's sample. Bachelor's degree holders were 31% of the Jordan sample and 39.9% of Türkiye's sample. Those with a master's degree were 1% of the sample in Jordan and 2.0% of Türkiye's sample. As for the graduate holders, their number in the sample in Jordan was 1.7% and 4.0% in Türkiye's sample. While the number of PhD holders participating in the survey in Jordan is 1.3% of the Jordan sample, their number in the Türkiye sample is 6.6%.

The study utilized a qualitative method, using focus group discussions to understand participants' views, opinions, and

attitudes on the Syrian refugee community in Jordan and Türkiye. The discussions were held in Arabic and included 15 Syrian refugees of varying ages, education levels, and backgrounds. The first discussion took place in Amman, Jordan, on March 20, 2018, and the second in Istanbul, April 20, 2018. The sample characteristics included the age group 22-48, marital status (single and married), education level (less than high school graduate to PhD student), and work status (working or not working).

3. Findings and Results

Tables 1–6 below show the main results regarding the use of the internet and social media platforms by the respondents.

Table 1. Internet Connection for the Respondents' Computers

Answer	Numbers and Percentages in Jordan		Numbers and Percentages in Türkiye	
Wireless (Wi-Fi)	37	12.2%	94	31.0%
Internet Subscription	55	18.2%	24	7.9%
Both of them	21	6.9%	53	17.5%
No Personal Computer	190	62.7%	132	43.6%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 2. Internet Connection for the Respondents' Smartphones

Answer	Numbers and Percentages in Jordan		Numbers and Percentages in Türkiye	
Wireless (Wi-Fi)	30	9.9%	116	38.3%
Internet Subscription	223	73.6%	67	22.1%
Both of them	45	14.9%	119	39.3%
No Smartphones	5	1.7%	1	0.3%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 3. Family Members of the Respondents Who Over the Age of 18 and Use Social Media

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	184	60.7%	235	77.6%
No	32	10.6%	12	4.0%
No member in the family over the age of 18	87	28.7%	56	18.5%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 4. The Platform of Social Media on which the Respondents have Account

Answer	Number in Jordan	Number in Türkiye
Facebook	279	292
Youtube	101	139
Instagram	93	181
Twitter	95	80
Others: Quora, 9GAG, Flickr, InterPals, ASKfm, Telegram, LinkedIn	45	29

Multiple answers were accepted from each participant.

The total is more than 303, so the percentage is not valid in this question

Table 5. Most Used Social Media platform (One answer only)

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Facebook	262	86.5%	192	63.4%
Instagram	8	2.6%	54	17.8%
Youtube	6	2.0%	26	8.6%
Twitter	2	0.7%	8	2.6%
Others: Quora, 9GAG, Flickr, InterPals, ASKfm, Telegram, LinkedIn	25	8.3%	22	7.3%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 6. How Many Hours a Day the Respondents Use Social Media

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
More than 4 hours a day	58	19.1%	95	31.4%
2-4 hours a day there	83	27.4%	109	36.0%
Less than 2 hours a day	162	53.5%	99	32.7%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 7 shows that 15.8% of the sample in Jordan and 59.7% of the sample in Türkiye have a page on Facebook or Twitter (not a personal account). While 84.2% of the sample from Jordan and 40.3% of the sample from Türkiye did not have a page (not a personal account) on Facebook or Twitter.

Table 7. Responses to whether respondents in Jordan and Türkiye have a Private Facebook page or a Private Twitter Page (not a personal account)

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	48	15.8%	181	59.7%
No	255	84.2%	122	40.3%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 8 shows that 87.8% of the sample from Jordan and 97.7% of the sample from Türkiye are members of Facebook pages. While 12.2% of the sample from Jordan and 2.3% of the sample from Türkiye are not members of any page on Facebook.

Table 8. Are you a member of any Facebook Groups?

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	266	87.8%	296	97.7%
No	37	12.2%	7	2.3%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 9 shows that 73.6% of the sample from Jordan and 38.3% of the sample from Türkiye said that they knew about pages created by their friends to help refugees. While 26.4% of the sample from Jordan and 61.7% of the sample from Türkiye said that, they did not know about pages created by their friends to help refugees.

Table 9. Do you know about the pages created on Facebook by your friends to help refugees?

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	223	73.6%	116	38.3%
No	80	26.4%	187	61.7%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 10 shows that 77.9% of the sample in Jordan and 67.7% of the sample in Türkiye said that they joined groups on Facebook after the Syrian war. 22.1% of Jordan's sample and 32.3% of Türkiye's sample said that they did not join groups on Facebook.

Table 10. Number of people who joined any group on Facebook after leaving Syria

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	236	77.9%	205	67.7%
No	67	22.1%	98	32.3%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 11 shows that the numbers of people who publish news, images, or videos about the Syrian war are as follows: 14.3% of the sample in Jordan (3.0% before asylum, 7.3% after asylum, 4.0% before and after asylum), while they were 18.8% of the sample in Türkiye (5.3% before asylum, 5.9% after asylum, 7.6% before and after asylum).

Table 11. Have you sent a news, a news photo, a video related to the Syrian crisis to a social media account of news sites?

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes. Before taking refuge	9	3.0%	16	5.3%
Yes. After taking refuge	22	7.3%	18	5.9%
Yes. Before and after asylum	12	4.0%	23	7.6%
No	243	80.2%	204	67.3%
Refused to answer	17	5.6%	42	13.9%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 12 shows that 22.1% of the sample in Jordan and 14.2% of the sample in Türkiye said that they posted a story, news item, or video item about the Syrian crisis on social media. While 70% of both groups said that they did not post a story or discuss the Syrian crisis on social media.

Table 12. Have you published a story or content about refugees or the Syrian crisis on social networking sites?

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	67	22.1%	43	14.2%
No	212	70.0%	212	70.0%
Refused to answer	24	7.9%	48	15.8%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 13 shows that 17.5% of the sample in Jordan and 22.4% of the sample in Türkiye said that they published stories of other Syrian refugees on social media. 74.6% of the sample in Jordan and 62.0% of the sample in Türkiye said that they did not publish a story about other Syrian refugees on social media.

Table 13. Have you published the suffering or the story of other Syrian refugees on social networking sites?

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	53	17.5%	68	22.4%
No	226	74.6%	188	62.0%
Refused to answer	24	7.9%	47	15.5%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 14 shows that 30.4% of Jordan's sample and 36.0% of Türkiye's sample said they commented on a news item or a picture about Syrian refugees on social media, while 60.7% of Jordan's sample and 47.9% of Türkiye's sample said no.

Table 14. Have you sent a news, photo, or comment on news about Syrian refugees on social media sites?

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	92	30.4%	109	36.0%
No	184	60.7%	145	47.9%
Refused to answer	27	8.9%	49	16.2%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 15 shows that 10.2% of sample in Jordan and 18.2% of sample in Türkiye answered that they took photos or sent news to social networking sites during their exit from Syria. While 85.1% of sample in Jordan and 75.6% of sample in Türkiye said that, they did not take photos or send the news to social networking sites.

Table 15. During leaving Syria, did you take photos or document the Syrian crisis on social networking sites?

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Yes	31	10.2%	55	18.2%
No	258	85.1%	229	75.6%
Refused to answer	14	4.6%	19	6.3%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

Table 16 shows that 53.5% of the sample in Jordan and 48.8% of the sample in Türkiye said that it is a positive thing that activists send pictures and videos of what is going on in Syria to social media. 17.2% of the sample in Jordan and 6.9% of the sample in Türkiye said that it was negative from their point of view. While 29.4% of the sample in Jordan and 44.2% of the sample in Türkiye see that it is both negative and beneficial at the same time.

Table 16. How do you find some activities that refugees do such posting photos and videos of what is going on in Syria?

Answer	Number and Percentage in Jordan		Number and Percentage in Türkiye	
Positive	162	53.5%	148	48.8%
Negative	52	17.2%	21	6.9%
Positive and Negative	89	29.4%	134	44.2%
Total	303	100%	303	100%

The main important extracts of the participants in the focus group discussions are shown in Table 17 below.

Table 17. The characteristics of the focus group discussions in Istanbul and Amman

	Focus Group Discussions in Istanbul	
Extract 1	*"It's positive; not like official television and news channels, they don't hesitate to tell the truth; they convey it without too many politicized restrictions."*	Participant 13, a 58-year-old male with a bachelor's degree who works as a translator.
Extract 2	*"Some are brave! Unless they have a hidden agenda, they put themselves at risk to help people and pass on important information."*	Participant 3, a 35-year-old female with a M.Sc. and not working.
Extract 3	*"It is positive as it exposes the crimes of the regime. They let the world know the enormity of the humanitarian catastrophe and that there is no excuse for global silence. Focusing on the fact that the Syrian issue is not resolved reminds us that there is no humanity."*	Participant 1, a 31-year-old female PhD student.
Extract 9	*"Any refugee story presented through social media can be resolved. Also, social media has contributed to the solidarity of suffering Syrians by enabling people to read and watch what is happening to them."*	Participant 13, male, 23; bachelor's degree; working as a translator.
Extract 12	*"90% of activists compete to publish news that is unproductive and may be harmful or false. More importantly, they are active in copying and pasting, and few report real news from the field."*	Participant 11, female, 43, high school graduate/not working.
Extract 16	*"It's negative because some activists misrepresent the revolution; there are issues that don't deserve media hype, but there are also issues that need to be addressed further."*	Participant 6, female, 27, high school graduate, not working.
Extract 25	*"Aid and assistance come; some of them are distributed to the refugees, while the rest is sold or goes to those people who photograph and show refugees in an image of pity to exploit those refugees!"*	Participant 15, male, 19, undergraduate student.
Extract 26	*"This process has become a profession. A group of people comes to take photos of people in need; they use the people's pain to get aid for themselves."*	Participant 6, male, 27, high school graduate, not working.
	Focus Group Discussions in Amman	
Extract 4	*"All the media has stopped conveying our pain. Therefore, it is very necessary for activists to convey this because the photos and videos posted by activists are truthful, and what is happening in Syria needs to be shown to the world without prejudice."*	Participant 7, female, 32, with a bachelor's degree and working.
Extract 5	*"It conveyed the suffering of the Syrian people and documented abuses and crimes committed by the regime that are not found in the official media, such as bombing, killing, arresting, displacing, and disclosure,"*	Participant 12, Female, 34, less than high school graduate/not working.
Extract 6	*"In the absence of traditional media, either because of the policies of satellite channels or the inability of the media to reach the ravaged areas and report to the world what is happening, activists convey what is happening."*	Participant 10, female, 48, PhD, working.
Extract 7	*"There were activists who were the icons of the revolution; the Syrian issue would not have continued until now if Bashar Assad and his associates were guilty of their acts if these iconic activists had not been sacrificed and documented. That is, it cannot be an issue that has cost the whole world. Thanks to them, the whole world has been able to learn. Because this family has been able to learn from the 1980s until today. Guilt has a long history."*	Participant 5, male, 45, high school graduate/working)
Extract 8	*"There were many people against Syrians, but social media made the truth clear for the people to become more aware of their suffering."*	Participant 4, Female, 29, Undergraduate, not working.
Extract 10	*"This relayed secret photos that 80% of the world's people didn't know about us. Now, thanks to social media activists, everyone knows the suffering of the Syrian people... It also helped reach people who needed help and were successfully taken care of."*	Participant 8, male, 31, bachelor's degree/working.
Extract 11	*"Many people whose stories have been spread on social media have had the opportunity to get more help or a better transfer to other countries."*	Participant 4, female, 29, bachelor's degree/not working)
Extract 13	*"I think it is the role of the media, not the role of media activists. Activists should let the media work well. The activist media person needs professionalism. Sometimes the photo they share is not real. Activists make issues bigger; they lack impartiality; they can be defined as a group of amateurs who have cameras, which does not mean they are persons of the media."*	Participant 4, female, 29, bachelor's degree, not working.
Extract	*"Right now, every activist does what he wants and publishes what he sees fit based*	Participant 3, male, 34, high

14	*on the political view to which he belongs. Some lie, some want the truth, and we don't know who is a liar and who is sincere."*	diploma, not working.
Extract 15	*"It's a negative, bad feeling. It's a deadly feeling when we see our children and our parents under the rubble of buildings."*	Participant 12, female, 34, less than a high school graduate/ not working.
Extract 17	*"Exaggerated attention to photography and posting on social media is one of the scourges that dampened the revolution and sapped the sincerity of its supporters. In addition, the media is not amateur work, and most of the "revolutionary media" does not have the slightest principle in the media, so media production is more than positive content. The censorship or lack of editing of what was posted on social media by the "revolutionaries" led to the dissemination of videos, photos, and news that distorted the revolution, and many other topics were exploited negatively against the revolution".*	Participant 15, male, 32, graduate student.
Extract 18	*"In most cases, a news jump occurs for some stories that are not followed later, and even for a few articles that are followed for a short time. Most of the stories are aimed at promoting some social media page and increasing the followers of the page."*	Participant 5, female, 45, secondary school, graduate/working.
Extract 19	*"In most cases, a news jump occurs for some stories that are not followed later, and even for a few articles that are followed for a short time. Most of the stories are aimed at promoting some social media page and increasing the followers of the page."*	Participant 5, female, 45, secondary school, graduate/working.
Extract 20	*"The probability of making an impact is limited, so my answer was that their impact is moderate. To get a bigger impact, their news on social media should be followed by Western people."*	Participant 14, male, 27, college graduate, working.
Extract 21	*"Many issues were not disclosed and ignored."*	Participant 13, female, 25, college graduate/working)
Extract 22	*"It contributed to enlightenment and focusing on the undeserving."*	Participant 7, female, 32, bachelor's degree, working.
Extract 23	*"Some individuals who were unaware of using social media took advantage of others who needed it to get more help and funding, especially weak women and international organizations."*	Participant 10, female, 48, PhD, working.
Extract 24	*"As a result of exaggeration or false stories, social media has also lost credibility and realism."*	Participant 12, female, age 34, married, less than high school graduate, not working.
Extract 27	*"This publication can help the political regime reach out to some people who hide and don't want others to know their whereabouts. As a result, it provides easy access to those who are hurting them."*	Participant 5, male, 45, high school graduate/working.
Extract 28	*"Sometimes the problem reaches out to those who shouldn't know about it, and they are the ones who can develop their tools and cause problems for refugees."*	Participant 5, male, 45, Secondary School/Works.

4. Discussion of the Findings

4.1 The Active Refugee in the Use of Social Media

Tables 1-3 snd 6 reveal trends and characteristics that explain Syrian refugees' increased social media usage, as they depend on internet connections for their own use and that of their family members. Tables 4 and 5 illustrate refugee preferences and social media platforms, including Quora, 9GAG, Flickr, InterPals, ASKfm, Telegram, and LinkedIn, in addition to well-known ones like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. The daily use of social media indicates that Syrians became more engaged in social media after leaving Syria. Following the Syrian conflict, 77.9% of respondents in Jordan and 67.7% in Türkiye claimed they joined Facebook groups. The majority of Syrian refugees are aware of other people's Facebook sites, and many develop pages to support or inform other refugees. Syrian refugees joined Facebook sites, with 87.8% in Jordan and 97.7% in Türkiye. They also own pages and have a Facebook or Twitter profile.

Twitter's positive determinism as a social media platform has expanded from information collection to aiding in the rescue of victims. Citizens and governmental bodies use Twitter as a crucial tool for locating victims and delivering on-the-ground reports. Twitter has significantly affected rescue and relief efforts by enabling those trapped under rubble to connect, ask for help, and receive it (Aldamen and Hacimic, 2023).

4.2 The Formation of "Refugee Journalists" among Syrian Activists

Table 7 shows that 15.8% of the sample in Jordan and 59.7% of the sample in Türkiye have a Facebook or Twitter profile, indicating that refugees are moving from being impacted to being effective and engaged in having an impact via social

media. 87.8% of the sample in Jordan and 97.7% of the sample in Türkiye are members of Facebook pages, while 12.2% of the sample in Jordan and 2.3% of the sample in Türkiye are not members of any Facebook page. 73.6% of the sample in Jordan and 38.3% of the sample in Türkiye have friends who have built social media accounts to support other refugees. While 77.9% of the sample in Jordan and 67.7% of the sample in Türkiye indicated they joined Facebook groups following the Syrian war, 22.1% of Jordan's sample and 32.3% of Türkiye's sample did not join Facebook groups, suggesting they preferred to keep the solution hidden.

Table 8 shows that 87.8% of the sample from Jordan and 97.7% of the sample from Türkiye are members of Facebook pages. Table 9 shows that 73.6% of the sample from Jordan and 38.3% of the sample from Türkiye said that they knew about pages created by their friends to help refugees. While Table 10 shows that 77.9% of the sample in Jordan and 67.7% of the sample in Türkiye said that they joined groups on Facebook after the Syrian war.

Table 11 shows that social media contributed to the creation of the "Refugee Journalist" phenomenon. 80.2% of the sample in Jordan and 67.3% of the sample in Türkiye stated that they did not publish news, pictures, or videos about the war via social media before seeking refuge. 14.3% of the sample from Jordan and 18.8% of the sample from Türkiye stated that they published news, pictures, or videos about war or conflict events via social media. Table 12 shows that 22.1% of Jordan's and 14.2% of Türkiye's sample reported publishing a story or topic on social media related to the Syrian crisis. However, 7.9% of Jordan's and 15.8% of Türkiye's sample refused to answer the question. Table 13 shows that 17.5% of Jordan's and 22.4% of Türkiye's sample published stories of other Syrian refugees via social media. 7.9% of Jordan and 15.5% of Türkiye's sample refused to answer the question, indicating the freedom of social media use that started to form after the crisis.

Social media has become a crucial tool for refugees, providing various services such as education, employment, and business. After the departure of Syria, the freedom of use of social media increased, making its dependency more significant. Syrian refugees relied on platforms like Twitter and Facebook to address issues and concerns that mainstream media often overlook. These platforms disseminate information about COVID-19, provide advice, expose misinformation, and advocate public health measures. Additionally, they are used in online learning to help students manage their media dependence without affecting their academic performance (Mohammad and Aldamen, 2023).

Table 14 shows that 30.4% of Jordan's and 36.0% of Türkiye's respondents commented on news and images related to Syrian refugees, indicating that a significant number of participants used social media to follow and interact with social communication on their country's issues. This has contributed to the "refugee journalist" phenomenon. Table 15 shows that 10.2% of Jordan's and 18.2% of Türkiye's respondents took photos or sent news to social networking sites while fleeing from Syria. 53.5% of Jordan's and 48.8% of Türkiye's respondents found activists' actions on social media positive, while 17.2% and 6.9% of Jordan and Türkiye's respondents considered them negative. The number of respondents who took photos indicates acceptance of social media after it was banned. The phenomenon of "refugee journalists" emerged among Syrian refugees after years of repression and fear of the internet. Social media has contributed to the emerging Syrian refugee journalist phenomenon by allowing people to download videos and publish news after facing repression of their freedom of expression. Syrians used international proxy servers to circumvent firewalls on restricted social networking sites like Facebook and YouTube. In 2011, Syria lifted a five-year ban on Facebook to monitor accounts and reveal owners' identities. Social media has helped Syrian refugees transition from being influenced to becoming influencers and refugee journalists. The figure below reflects the transformation of a Syrian citizen from a citizen who is not allowed to use the internet and social media to a "refugee journalist" by passing two stages affected by social media.
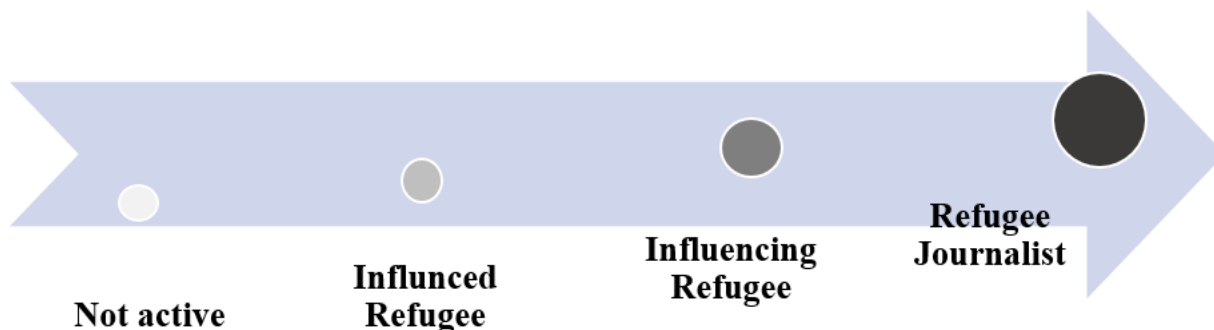

Figure 1. Social Media Use by Syrian Refugees Transforms from Affected (influenced) to Affecting (influencer)

Facebook and YouTube, which are technically prohibited in Syria, are popular social platforms throughout the country,

and Syrians were able to access these sites by bypassing the firewall with international proxy servers (Williams, 2011). In 2011, Syria lifted a five-year ban on Facebook to monitor accounts and reveal identities and what they were up to. From the discussed findings, it is concluded that the Syrian refugees before leaving Syria starting in 2011 were seen as somehow passive, more dependent on being affected, and less able to resist the effect of media. They could not escape from the media's influence, so they could be considered "sitting ducks" (Lasswell, 1927). Thus, social media enabled Syrian refugees to be affected, and at the same time, the "refugee journalist" emerged.

The discussed results prove the first study's hypothesis that social media use by Syrian refugees while seeking asylum resulted in a rise in social media use, which contributed to the birth of the refugee journalist phenomenon.

4.3 The Perspectives of the Participants toward Evaluating the Effects of the Refugee Journalist Phenomenon on Social Media

Refugees were influenced quite a lot, not by the media but by activists who exposed themselves to the media to be informed and reinforce their standpoints with some opinions. Therefore, refugees became not passive, uniform, and passive, but in fact, taking into consideration those effects, they could differ from person to person and group to group. The flow of information and influence from the social media to the refuges and audience of those activists involved two steps: from the media to opinion leaders who influence and inform the activists or citizen journalists around them, and from them to the public (Lazarsfeld and Berelson, 1944). In the focus group discussions in Amman and Istanbul, the participants views were divided on activists' actions in sharing photos and videos of Syrian events. Some believed it was positive due to social media clarifying the situation and providing a platform for Syrians to express their views. Others believed it highlighted the suffering of Syrian refugees and suggested ways to help them. Social media also identified areas of interest for Syrians and focused on resolving their problems. Social media has been a powerful force in not only linking refugees back to their loved ones in Syria (Mast and Hanegreefs, 2015) but also ensuring that the public has to keep a constant eye on the situation in Syria and what is happening with people there.

4.3.1 Positive Effects on Syrians from the Refugee Journalist Phenomenon

Table 16 shows that 53.5% of Jordan's and 48.8% of Türkiye's respondents believe it is a good thing for activists to post photographs and videos of the Syrian situation on social media. The majority of respondents believe that social media is both harmful and beneficial; with 29.4% of the sample in Jordan and 44.2% of the sample in Türkiye believing it is both harmful and beneficial. Activists' primary reasons for posting images and videos on social media were that they believed it was positive and helped convey the truth and alert the world about the suffering of the people and their stories (Extract 1). According to some studies, Syrian refugees were able to find out what people thought of them, how they were portrayed in host country media (Aldamen, 2023b), and whether they had received sympathy or xenophobic speech (Aldamen, 2023c), allowing them to defend their image and portrayal and gauge how other refugees felt about it. As a result, they turned to social media in order to have their voices, true stories, and suffering heard around the world (Aldamen, 2023a).

While some participants see their work as positive, others view it as a hidden agenda (Extract 2). Some participants see the work of activists as positive in many respects, such as reminding people of the sufferings of those who stayed in Syria, reminding those who could go abroad to see the situation (Extract 3), and showing hope for freedom (Extract 4). Social media platforms were used to counteract xenophobic speech by allowing the voices, true tales, and suffering of the Syrian people to be heard worldwide. It also explains the true destruction in Syria and helps reveal the truth about what is happening there (Extract 5). Social media has been effective in shedding light on the suffering of the Syrian people, making their voices heard in Western countries, and making the Syrian humanitarian crisis known worldwide (Extract 6). The international public has paid attention to the suffering of the people because it has been recognized. The impact of social media in this context was positive for the people involved (Extract 7), as it contributed to the psychological support of refugees by making their problems known to the world and reaching organizations providing support, aid, and resettlement (Extracts 8, 9). The rapid spread of news about Syria has helped mobilize Arab and international institutions, civil society, refugee affairs groups, and supporters to find solutions and pay attention ((Extracts 10 and 11).

4.3.2 Negative Effects on Syrians from the Refugee Journalist Phenomenon

The focus group discussions reveal that some activists' actions on social media are negative, leading to rumors and false news. They believe that the content posted lacks professionalism (Extract 12). Some activists use both real and fake images and videos, often resulting in exaggerated or fabricated stories (Extract 13). They also lack integrity and credibility principles, distorting the truth and misleading readers (Extract 14). Moreover, they believe that social media can reveal the range and course of action of innocent people, posing a real threat to their lives. They also believe that videos and images posted on social media are sometimes used for personal and political purposes. Some participants view their actions as irresponsible, as they do not consider the general feelings of those who read or see the actions being taken against Syrians. Some participants believe that what activists do on social media exposes the faults of the Syrian opposition and that many people's sympathy for the Syrian war is similar to that of the losing regime. They believe that

their actions are not right, as they have allowed some mistakes to become known, leading to a decrease in interest in the Syrian resistance and the Syrian war (Extract 16). Furthermore, the demonstration by activists that there is no alliance between opponents has led to a decrease in support for other countries.

The use of social media by activists is seen as a form of propaganda and a threat to the lives of innocent people in Syria. Social media activists often bring up sectarian issues and make them political, including the regime, to push a certain agenda, make people want to get back at Syrians, and make people hate them (Extract 17). The presence of certain Syrians' stories on social media contributes to the increase in the reputation of certain people and causes other people to be forgotten (Extract 18). This way, focusing on specific issues has brought more attention to some of them (Extract 19). Some respondents feel that social media mobilizes and categorizes people and negatively influences people's views through the spread of misinformation by some activists, which negatively affects good activists who share and publish true news. To achieve greater impact, Westerners must follow their news on social media (Extract 20). Discussions in the focus group revealed that social media sheds light on individual cases that do not convey the suffering of many, and they were worried that this coverage would not lead to any real changes in the places where Syrian refugees lived (Extract 21). Publishing such tragic stories did not benefit either the people involved in these stories or other Syrians, as when people's sad stories are published on social media ((Extract 22), the spirit of the Syrian people in general has been negatively affected (Extract 23), and they have caused them to feel pain by reminding them of their loss. The purpose of perpetuating and repeating tragic stories is to keep the interest of the international public in the subject alive. However, most participants do not sympathize with the repetitive sharing of these tragic stories and are bored with this situation. Some people can create an account to become famous on social media (Extract 24), exploit the issue as a commodity, and commercialize it to make money without moral concern. Sometimes, social media does not give accurate news about refugees, leading to false news being spread without being checked, which tarnishes the image of refugees.

The negative aspects of what activists or refugee or citizen journalists publish on social media regarding Syrian refugees' stories, according to the participants' opinions, can be divided into **three categories:**

The first category is the negative effects on Syrian refugees in other countries.

The second category is the negative effects on the Syrian activists themselves.

The third category is the negative effects on Syrians staying inside Syria.

The first category is the harm that this social media coverage causes to Syrian refugees. The participants mentioned some points in the discussion in this regard. The answers focused on **social and psychological harm**.

On the level of **social harm**, they highlighted the distortion of the refugees' image, which affected their status and presence with the citizens of host communities. Some of the stories that were presented contained defamation of the image of refugees. As well, they see that some of the aid is distributed to refugees, but others, who could be the activists themselves, exploit the rest. The participants also see that they made their private images and photos available to all, while some refugees may not want others to violate their privacy and know about their stories and details of their lives, even if it brings them a benefit or aid.

Moreover, exaggeration in publishing stories leads to distortions in our understanding of the Syrian refugees' needs and the Syrian crisis. The publication of news and posts about the bad behaviors of some refugees in neighboring countries on social networking sites negatively affected the status of all Syrian refugees in general. The participants see that they did not convey the reality of the refugee tragedy in full and did not convey many stories that did not give people their rights but ignored many important issues, which contributed to the lack of access to people in need by NGOs and supporting aid bodies.

On the level of **psychological harm**, the participants see that what some activists and refugee or citizen journalists publish negatively affects the psychological status of the refugees, especially when they see photos of one of their martyr relatives or their body parts after being killed circulating in social media and available to everyone.

The second category is the negative effects on those activists, citizen journalists, and refugee journalists who publish and share news and stories about Syrian refugees and the Syrian crisis via social media. The following are some of the reasons why the participants see that this group was negatively affected more than the other two categories:

The participants see that the main purpose of most activists who share these posts is not to help Syrians but to increase their own fame. As they state, the lack of specific controls on their posts on social media made it difficult to distinguish between fake and true news (Extract 26). As a result, it caused people to be hesitant about donating to needy Syrians, as they doubted that what was published was fake and not true. The participants see that a large number of the activists have come to take photos of and exploit the suffering of refugees. When the aid comes, some needy refugees get some of it, while the rest are taken away (Extract 25). These aids are turned into visual shows and go to the activists, who film and exploit their situation. However, the distribution and photography of these aids have become two-dimensional negatives

((Extract 26). The participants see that social media activists seek fame and look to gain the spotlight instead of aiming at helping refugees or contributing to providing them with real assistance.

The third category is the negative effects that were more obvious on Syria itself and the Syrian citizens who stayed in Syria than on Syrian refugees. This is attributed to the fact that what was published on social media led to fueling the conflict and the continuity, causing arrests, or killing off all those who appeared obviously through social media platforms with those activists or citizen journalists. As the participants see, what is published through social media about the regime violation provokes its elements to harass and chase those whose names and photos were published to catch them or members of their families and thus arrest and prosecute them under the pretext of incitement and cybercrime (Extracts 27 and 28). The discussed results prove the second study's hypothesis that there were positive as well as negative impacts on Syrians living in Jordan and Türkiye from the refugee journalist phenomenon.

5. Conclusions

Social media has significantly affected the refugee journalist phenomenon among Syrian refugees. The influence of social media extends to both Syrian citizens and refugees, with increased usage in Türkiye and Jordan due to its accessibility and affordability. The unrestricted use of social media by Syrians in their refugee countries has led to increased use of Facebook, which is the most popular social media network among refugees. This platform reveals the truth about current events and crises, exposes the agony of Syrians, and encourages compassion and humanitarian assistance. It also educates institutions about intervention and exposes the regime's responsibility for the suffering of the Syrian people. The positive effects of the use of social media by activists or refugee journalists include the Syrian people's ability to connect with aid institutions and organizations, apply for opportunities for education, communication, information, and aid, and seek sympathy with refugees.

However, many respondents have reported that what Syrian activists published on social media about Syrian issues had various negative consequences. The phenomenon of refugee journalists is increasing in the current century, and cyberethics and literacy studies should be intensified in the use of social media. Most of the information shared on social media was either fake or exaggerated, and some stories were published without their permission. Social media can be a place where manipulation takes place to frame an issue for one agenda or another. Some activists could have their own agendas rather than shed light on a situation. In terms of social harm, the views focused on the deterioration of the image of host communities, affecting their situation and existence with their people. By using social media for an extended period, refugees' families' social ties are weakened, and some individuals raise funds and seek additional assistance by taking advantage of weak people in need. Refugees are receiving aid and support, but only a portion is handed to them, while refugees are abused and made to suffer. Most social media reporting by activists makes it difficult to distinguish between fake and authentic news, which discourages people from helping refugees in need.

Note: This article is part of a larger study of the effects of social media on Syrian refugees in Jordan and Türkiye.

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