ABSTRACT
Questions of media form have not received sufficient attention in recent studies of Arabic-language media. In Jordanian radio today, however, media form is a highly relevant discursive resource for broadcasters, who strategically invoke the ways in which different types of media communication are conceived and framed, in a metapragmatic manner that goes beyond the impact of merely technical distinctions between media forms. This article examines two examples of this process: the ‘unification’ of radio station voices in a memorial programme for a martyred fighter pilot broadcast in February 2015, where radio’s limitation to sound was used ideologically to assert national unity; and references to digital media on morning talk show programmes, which allow hosts to define audiences and forms of participation in radio conversations. These metapragmatic framings of media form, further, produce specific publics for Jordanian radio: groupings that include, and legitimize, certain segments of listenership—such as ‘true’ Jordanians or ‘the Jordanian people’—while implicitly excluding others. Grounded firmly in discursive data, this article thus provides much-needed nuance to our understanding of mass media in the Arabic-speaking Middle East today—and, ultimately, the genuine significance of media form in its social and cultural context.

Introduction
Jordanian radio broadcasting today is far removed from the classic image of attentive listening to a static receiver, a linear flow of sound that cannot be recovered. In line with developments elsewhere in the world since the 1990s, Jordanian radio is heavily intertwined with digital media: not only do internet browsers and smartphones provide alternatives to analogue receivers in cars and homes, but digital media—especially social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and applications such as WhatsApp—form an integral part of everyday radio conversations, and supplement more classic forms of radio participation such as telephone calls.

Yet the distinct nature of radio continues to resonate in Jordan. Consider, for example, the programme Istūdyū al-tahlīl ma‘ā Āyris Jarrār (‘Studio Analysis with Iris Jarrar’), a show broadcast several times weekly by Hayat FM, a radio station mostly...
broadcasting Islamic religious content (and tied closely to the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood). *Iṣṭūyū al-tahlīl* features Jarrar, a former lawyer and Hayat’s chief news editor, hosting analysts and public figures for comment on contentious issues. The 16 August 2017 episode, for instance, analysed the results of the recent local elections in Jordan, where for the first time, Jordanian voters were choosing not only municipal councils and mayors, but members of governorate (*muhāfaẓāt*) councils as well.¹ Jarrar’s interviewees in the post-election episode—the secretary of the Democratic Popular Unity Party, Sa’id Diyab, and the mayor of the city of Zarqa, ‘Ali Abu al-Sukkar—both presented critical views that challenged official representations of the elections as a historical step in the country’s democratic reform process: Abu al-Sukkar claimed that the low turnout demonstrated a lack of trust in democracy on part of Jordanians, and Diyab described the elections as mere *shakl*, ‘form’ without substance.²

Like most of Hayat FM’s daily programming, the post-election *Iṣṭūyū al-tahlīl* was recorded via an in-studio webcam, and published as a video on YouTube a day after it had been broadcast live. Apart from showing Jarrar speaking inside Hayat FM’s studio, the video of the post-election episode features a sequence of clips recorded on the day of the elections, in addition to photographs of each guest speaker as they are introduced. Jarrar herself, further, makes full use of the semiotic possibilities of the visual recording mode: she looks straight at the camera, uses ample hand gestures, and manipulates papers on the desk before her in ways almost indistinguishable from television presenters.³

Other cues, however, nevertheless frame the recording as clearly a *radio* programme. Jarrar wears headphones as any radio presenter would; she speaks from a space unmistakably meant to be seen as a sound recording studio, a physically enclosed room with a prominent free-standing microphone; and the graphics accompanying the video include the different FM frequencies on which Hayat FM can be listened to in different areas of Jordan, clearly defining it as a radio station first and foremost.⁴

Why draw on these radio aesthetics so prominently? In terms of the pragmatics of media usage—the usability, or functionality, of different media forms—radio, with its limitation to sound and its temporally linear infrastructure that does not allow evanescent broadcasts to be recovered, seems to have been superseded by media with visual transmission capabilities and the ability to store broadcasts indefinitely on-line (for instance, via YouTube). But the way in which Jarrar’s programme clings to its radio origins suggests there is more to the story than the technicalities of media alone. In this article, I argue that *media form* is a prominent discursive resource in Jordanian radio programming today. Invoking the ways in which different types of media communication are conceived and framed provides broadcasters with the possibility to make

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¹Hala Akhbar, ‘Al-malik: intikhābāt al-lāmankarāziyya wa-l-baladiyyāt tushakkil kha wa muhimma fi masirat al-lā ḍalaysh-shāmīl,’ *Hala Akhbar*, 16 August 2017, [http://www.hala.jo/?p=113730](http://www.hala.jo/?p=113730) (accessed 23 August 2017); Suleiman Al-Khalidi, ‘Jordan Holds Local Elections in Step to Devolve Powers’, *Reuters*, 15 August 2017, [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-jordan-election-idUSKCN1AV2EK](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-jordan-election-idUSKCN1AV2EK) (accessed 23 August 2017).

²Hayat FM, ‘Iṣṭūyū al-ṭa’llīm ma’ā āyris jarrār – qirā’t a’ammad bi-l-intikhābāt al-baladiyya wa-l-lāmankarāziyya, āyāt af am’, *YouTube*, 16 August 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sJqjrLma58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sJqjrLma58) (accessed 23 August 2017). See José Ciro Martínez, ‘Jordan’s Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: The Production of Feeble Political Parties and the Perceived Perils of Democracy’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017): 356–72, on how such perceptions are in part manufactured by discursive practice on part of the Jordanian regime and media.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.
particular reflexive arguments and promote particular rhetorical positions, making older media forms such as radio just as valuable as newer ones in the contemporary media landscape.

Such socio-cultural understandings of media—what I define below as the *metapragmatics* of media form, as distinct from the ‘pragmatics’ of the technical context of media communication—are part of a broader complex of ideas and practices involving linguistic and communicative authority in Jordanian radio that I have explored in more detail in previous work.⁵ These include the use of ‘authentic’ Jordanian dialect by presenters; the dialogic, interactive construction of broadcaster persona as authoritative in call-in programmes; and reference to, and acceptance of, authority of Islamic religious texts by both broadcasters and audiences (callers). Through such communicative practices, broadcasters selectively define, delimit and include certain segments of the audience as legitimate listeners or participants, and exclude others. Here, I focus on a further discursive strategy with similar socio-cultural effects: mobilizing the metapragmatic aspects of media form—shared local understandings of what communication in a particular medium entails—for specific interactional ends.

All media have their own specific technological properties—that Ian Hutchby terms ‘affordances’—that inevitably affect how, and what kind of, media messages will be transmitted by any particular medium.⁶ Radio is a good example: for much of the 20th century, its affordances limited it to transmission of sound alone in a temporally linear, evanescent manner—which, in turn, led to the development of specialized communicative practices, such as the use of informal language to produce the effect of conversational intimacy, or the need to split linear broadcasting schedules into discrete segments to ensure representation of different cultural and linguistic groups.⁷ But it is not just the bare technological facts of sound transmission that make radio what it is. Equally relevant are the tacit social and cultural understandings of what ‘radio,’ as a distinct medium, actually is. When Jarrar’s programme is transmuted into a YouTube video, the classic technological affordances of radio—its exclusive transmission through sound and its temporal linearity—seemingly no longer hold. Yet visual cues such as headphones, microphones, and the listing of FM frequencies still effectively frame the programme as a radio broadcast. These aspects of radio become symbols that define and delineate it as a distinct from other media forms, even as production practices converge towards hybridizing them.

In this article, I distinguish between these two levels of media form—its technological affordances, and its socio-cultural understandings—through the term *meta-pragmatics*. By analogy with the use of the term ‘pragmatics’ in linguistics—referring to differences in forms of language as a result of its use in different social contexts—a pragmatics of media might examine differences in the dynamics of communication across media settings: how a particular message is affected due to its transmission through radio,

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⁵ Jona Fras, ‘Linguistic Practice on Contemporary Jordanian Radio: Publics and Participation,’ PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2017.

⁶ Ian Hutchby, ‘Technologies, Texts and Affordances’, *Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2001): 441–56.

⁷ Paddy Scannell, ‘For-Anyone-as-Someone Structures’, *Media, Culture & Society* 22, no. 1 (2000): 5–24; Ian Hutchby, *Media Talk: Conversation Analysis and the Study of Broadcasting* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 12–13; Debra Spitulnik, ‘Mediating Unity and Diversity: The Production of Language Ideologies in Zambian Broadcasting’, in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, ed. Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 163–88.
for example, as opposed to television, a phone call, a message on social media and so forth, according to the specific technological properties of each media form. By contrast, a metapragmatic study of media form examines not just how different media can be used to transmit different messages, but how media communication is affected by local understandings of the differences between media. Metapragmatics, in essence, refers to the ideological level of pragmatics reflected in communicative practice: not only the impact of context on communication, but also ideas and evaluations of this impact as they emerge in discourse, either explicitly or implicitly.

Questions of media form have not received sufficient attention in recent studies of Arabic-language media. Recent scholarship on issues such as the legal and political frameworks that limit the operation of media in different Arab countries; the role of media in social and political change, especially following the numerous revolutions and regime transitions in the region since 2011; and how so-called ‘new media,’ such as satellite television and the internet, might be used to challenge long-established social, political, and cultural hierarchies. For Jordan, in particular, Naomi Sakr has examined in some detail how ties to political elites have affected development in the classic media sector, impeding change for both private and public radio and TV broadcasters through ‘coercion and containment’ on part of the establishment, underpinned by selective licensing laws and practices. Other works have drawn on discourse analysis to consider the structuring of media messages transmitted through these outlets, aiming to reveal implicit power relations and inequalities. Ebtihal Mahadeen’s work, for example, analyses contemporary Jordanian media representations of female subjects, revealing patriarchal gender bias in discussions of state power and crime. These studies provide important and sensitive analyses of the content of mass media and its impact in contemporary Arabic-speaking societies. Yet what remains underexplored is the impact of media form itself: examining, in other words, the role of ideas about communication circulated through one medium as opposed to another—on Facebook as opposed to newspapers, on satellite television channels as opposed to a national radio station.

This article thus draws on data gathered during fieldwork in Amman, Jordan, in 2014–2015, to examine the metapragmatic aspects of media form on Jordanian radio. It analyses, first, a

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8Michael Silverstein, ‘Indexical Order and the Dialectics of Sociolinguistic Life’, Language & Communication 23 (2003): 193–229.

9Aziz Douai and Mohamed Ben Moussa, eds., Mediated Identities and New Journalism in the Arab World: Mapping the ‘Arab Spring’ (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Tourya Guaaybess, ed., National Broadcasting and State Policy in Arab Countries (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Kai Hafez, ed., Arab Media: Power and Weakness (New York: Continuum, 2008); Philip N. Howard and Muzammil Hussain, Democracy’s Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Lena Jayyusi and Anne Sofie Roald, eds., Media and Political Contestation in the Contemporary Arab World: A Decade of Change (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Marwan M. Kraidy, Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Marc Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Mahjoob Zweiri and Emma Murphy, eds., The New Arab Media: Technology, Image and Perception (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2011); Naomi Sakr, Arab Television Today (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Mohamed Zayani, ed., The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

10Sakr, ‘We Cannot Let It Loose: Geopolitics, Security and Reform in Jordanian Broadcasting’, in National Broadcasting and State Policy in Arab countries, ed. Tourya Guaaybess (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 96–116.

11El Mustapha Lahlali, Contemporary Arab Broadcast Media (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 119–54; Noha Mellor, ‘Islamizing the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict: The Case of the Muslim Brotherhood’, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 44, no. 4 (2017): 513–28.

12Ebtihal Mahadeen, ‘Media, State, and Patriarchy: Discourses of State Control in Jordanian Discussions of Virginity’, Feminist Media Studies 15, no. 5 (2015): 763–78; Ebtihal Mahadeen, “The Martyr of Dawn”: Femicide in Jordanian Media’, Crime, Media, Culture 13, no. 1 (2017): 41–54.
memorial programme for the martyred Jordanian pilot Mu’adh al-Kasasbeh broadcast live by a number of non-government radio stations in February 2015, where radio’s ideological limitation to sound was used metaphorically to assert national unity. Second, it examines two morning talk radio programmes where hosts make ample use of digital media such as Facebook and WhatsApp, allowing them to make particular arguments regarding audiences and participation in radio conversations. In both these contexts, conceptions of media form become involved in metapragmatics of media, as differences between media forms are conceived, framed, and utilized for specific linguistic and discursive ends beyond merely technological and utilitarian considerations. As this article demonstrates, these conceptions and framings are, ultimately, involved in what Michael Warner has characterized as the publics of media: social groups—such as audiences and nations—addressed and interpellated in mediated communication. Such public-making processes include and legitimize certain segments of its listenership while implicitly excluding others—underscoring the importance of media form, and specifically its metapragmatic aspects, for understanding contemporary Jordanian radio in its broader social and cultural context.

Apart from its empirical contribution regarding the dynamics of communication on Jordanian radio today, this article also seeks to provide a more sophisticated comparative framework for analysing contemporary Arabic-language media. A sound grounding in discursive data reveals not only how different media technologies are appropriated by actors for specific ends, but also that metapragmatic understandings of the medium itself shape what, how, and when can be said in media messages—and, ultimately, their reference to wider socio-cultural concepts such as nations and publics. In a scholarly context where considerations of media form have often been neglected, this approach provides much-needed nuance to our understanding of mass media in the Arabic-speaking Middle East today.

**Data: the discourse of Jordanian non-government radio**

Media form emerged as a major factor in my research on language in Jordanian non-government radio, the focus of my fieldwork in the Jordanian capital Amman between September 2014 and March 2015. The term ‘non-government radio’ requires some clarification. While radio broadcasting in Jordan proper can be traced back to the 1950s with the establishment of the state-run Radio Amman—which later became the ‘radio’ component of the Jordanian Radio and Television Corporation (JRTV)—the government retained a monopoly on radio broadcasting until the end of the 20th century. In the climate of reform and economic liberalization in the early 2000s, however, the broadcasting sector was deregulated, abolishing the Ministry of Information and inaugurating an ‘Audiovisual Commission’ (now the Jordan Media Commission) to enable oversight of non-government—that is, non-JRTV—broadcasters. Until the end of 2005, the Commission had issued 14 licences for FM radio stations; by 2014, the total number of licenced stations had risen to 38.

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13. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005).
14. Sakr, ‘We Cannot Let It Loose’, 100–103.
15. Sakr, ‘We Cannot Let It Loose’, 105; Hay’at al-ilām, Dalīl al-sharīkāt al-murakhkhāt a: ma a āt al-bathth al-idhā’ī, 2015, [http://mc.gov.jo/Pages/viewpage.aspx?pageID=30](http://mc.gov.jo/Pages/viewpage.aspx?pageID=30) (accessed 13 August 2015). The 2014 number includes three non-Jordanian stations: B.B.C, Sawa, and Radio Monte Carlo.
Some of these ‘non-government’ stations are in fact owned by state agencies—such as Radio Hala, run by the Jordanian army, and the police-run Amen FM. However, these still have much more in common with commercial and community media outlets than the official JRTV channel, both in terms of the type of programming they provide and how this programming is presented and framed. Like commercial stations such as Radio Rotana and Radio Fann, and community stations such as Radio al-Balad and Sawt al-Aghwar, they all feature extensive live programming and broadcast to a large extent in Colloquial Arabic. They run advertisements, and most are owned by private individuals and companies—even if some of these owners and companies do have close economic and personal links to the regime.¹⁶

During my fieldwork, I recorded episodes of a wide selection of typical non-government radio programming—including morning call-in shows, daytime advice programmes, afternoon ‘drive-home’ programmes, and interview and discussion shows—using both a smartphone radio receiver and accessing radio streams through an internet browser, producing just over 185 hours of audio material in the .mp3 format. In addition, I conducted both formal and informal interviews with radio producers and listeners, as well as observing practices of listening and other media consumption practices among Ammani Jordanians.

Examining my fieldwork data, it became clear that media form was a major preoccupation of radio producers. Broadcasters made constant references to social media, encouraging their audiences to connect through Facebook or WhatsApp, as well as the webcams transmitting live feeds from radio station studios through the stations’ websites and dedicated smartphone apps. I indexed such references with tags and timestamps as I prepared the outline summaries and transcripts of my data. This enabled me to subsequently compare and interpret my transcripts looking for meaningful trends and patterns—an interpretive textual method used widely in linguistic anthropology and known as ‘anthropological discourse analysis,’ in which segments of texts, recordings, or other language-based data are compared in order to draw broader conclusions regarding the broader social structures and cultural ideologies that affect its production and understanding.¹⁷ In so doing, I was able to combine the attention to detail of anthropological and sociolinguistic methods with a degree of interpretive flexibility and sensitivity to context, and examine the distinct relevance of media form in contemporary Jordanian non-government radio.

This article focuses on a subset of my fieldwork data: the Ṣawtunā ʾwāḥid (‘Our Voice is One’) memorial programme in February 2015, and recordings of morning talk shows of two well-known Jordanian broadcasters, Muhammad al-Wakil on Radio Hala and Hani al-Badrī on Radio Fann. The excerpts I examine include some of the most explicit references to media form in my data—functioning, in this sense, as ‘extreme cases’ of the metapragmatics of media form.¹⁸ Nevertheless, such appropriation would not be possible if not for particular ideas about media that reflect more broadly in Jordanian non-government radio discourse today.

¹⁶Sawsan Zaidah, ‘Man yamluk al-ʾlām fi al-urdunn?’, 7iber, 13 September 2015, http://www.7iber.com/politics-economics/who-owns-media-in-jordan/ (accessed 20 September 2015).
¹⁷Susan Philips, ‘Method in Anthropological Discourse Analysis: The Comparison of Units of Interaction’, Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 23, no. 1 (June 2013): 82–95, 83.
¹⁸Bent Flyvbjerg, ‘Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research’, Qualitative Inquiry 12, no. 2 (2006): 219–45, 230.
Unifying the nation’s voice: media form in the ʿsawtunā wāḥid broadcast

ʿSawtunā wāḥid,’ ‘Our Voice Is One,’ was a one-off programme initiated by a number of Jordanian non-government radio stations in memory of the Jordanian air force pilot Muʿadh al-Kasasiba (or ‘al-Kasasbeh’ in the customary Jordanian colloquial pronunciation). The programme ran from 10 AM to 7 PM on Thursday, 5 February 2015, and throughout these nine hours, anybody who tuned into one of the ten-odd participating channels would hear the very same broadcast: hosts chatting with each other, interacting with listeners via social media, fielding phone calls from well-known Jordanians, and giving regular updates on events honouring Kasasbeh.

Kasasbeh’s case first emerged in Jordanian media in December 2014, after the fighter plane he was piloting crashed over Syria while conducting operations against the radical group Islamic State (IS; known as ‘Daesh’ (dāʾishh) in Arabic). The IS subsequently took Kasasbeh captive, and despite negotiations being initiated for his release executed him by burning at some point during January 2015. On 3 February 2015, a video documenting the execution was published online and spread quickly via news websites and social media. The negotiations were promptly broken off from the Jordanian side, and the Jordanian army declared Kasasbeh a ‘martyr’ in the line of duty (shahīd al-wājjīb).

In the following days, Kasasbeh’s death was the most prominent topic of public discussion in Amman. T-shirts were printed with slogans honouring the martyr; huge crowds gathered in Amman’s city centre on Friday, 6 February, in a show of ‘solidarity’ with Kasasbeh, and there were similar marches in other cities in Jordan, including Zarqa and Ma’an.19 Such responses were lauded as ‘spontaneous’ outbursts of solidarity and patriotism in regime-friendly media—a narrative taken at face value by many commentators outside of Jordan, and taken as an indication that Jordanian ‘public opinion’ would turn to support a full-out war on the IS.20 Spontaneous or not, they certainly did not occur in a vacuum. Protests demanding action to secure Kasasbeh’s release had begun immediately after the pilot’s capture at the end of December 2014; the government and the military had likewise issued communiqués that framed Kasasbeh as a national security issue, and warned media against criticizing any actions the army might take regarding it.21

Non-government radio stations played their own part in publicizing the topic. Hosts of morning programmes mentioned Kasasbeh regularly, typically declaring their hope for his safe return; occasional call-ins asked for the same, and some stations even set aside time in their advertising blocks for clips asking for the pilot’s safety. But on 5

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19 Muhammad Hamid, ‘Al-malika rānyā tataqaddam masāra fi ‘ammān āmilā ʿurat muʿādh al-kasāsiba’, Elwatan News, 6 February 2015, http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/656953 (accessed 24 August 2015); Jfra News, ‘Masāra fi maʿān ā r al-yawm kullunā muʿādh’, Jfra News, 7 February 2015, http://goo.gl/oisE14 (accessed 24 August 2015); Jamal Alyan, ‘Masāra āshida fi al-zarqāʾ inti āran li-l-shahīd al-baʿ al muʿādh al-kasāsiba’, Anba al-Watan, 5 February 2015, http://goo.gl/G44T9S (accessed 24 August 2015).

20 Alice Su, ‘It Wasn’t Their War’, The Atlantic, 5 February 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/jordan-isis-pilot-response/385199/ (accessed 24 August 2015); Sheera Frenkel, ‘Pilot’s Brutal Murder Brings Calls For ISIS Blood In Jordan’, BuzzFeed News, 4 February 2015, http://www.buzzfeed.com/sheerafrenkel/pilots-brutal-murder-brings-calls-for-isis-blood-in-jordan (accessed 24 August 2015).

21 Roya News, ‘Masāra taʿāmunīyya maʿāʾ ayyār al-baʿ al muʿādh al-kasāsiba’, Royanews.com, 26 December 2014, http://www.royanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=32788:---q-q-&catid=45:local&Itemid=239 (accessed 24 August 2015); Ziad Abu-Rish, ‘Manufacturing Silence: On Jordan’s ISIS War, Arab Authoritarianism, and US Empire’, Jadaliyya, 14 February 2015, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20856/manufacturing-silence_on-jordans-isis-war-arab-aut (accessed 15 February 2015).
February, with Ṣawtunā wāḥid, the radio field demonstrated a whole new level of dedication to Kasasbeh. From 10 AM onwards, normal programming on all participating stations was suspended in favour of a ‘unified broadcast’ (bathth muwaḥḥad) from the studios of Radio Hala in West Amman. The schedule was divided into hour-long slots, each co-hosted live by broadcasters from two or three different stations, speaking with each other on Kasasbeh’s martyrdom and its aftermath. There were several phone guests—mostly Jordanian public personalities of various degrees of prominence, including journalists, singers, and Parliament deputies—giving condolences to Kasasbeh’s family and the Jordanian people, but most airtime was occupied by broadcaster conversations reaffirming Jordanian unity, vilifying the IS, and giving updates on the latest developments in Jordan’s ‘war against terrorism,’ such as further air strikes on IS positions in Syria.

The very title of Ṣawtunā wāḥid alludes to the centrality of ideas about media form to the discursive strategies of radio broadcasting. The initiative sought to unify the sound broadcasts of all the participating radio stations, making their diverse voices ‘one,’ and thus metonymically unifying the Jordanian listening public to which they cater. For radio to perform unity in the face of the national tragedy of Kasasbeh’s death, unification of sound is all that is required—but only because the prevailing metapragmatic understandings of radio as a media form hinge on it as a transmitter of sound alone.

This idea is prevalent in media studies discourse on radio broadcasting, where scholars such as Andrew Crisell and Susan Douglas have argued that radio is a medium defined fundamentally by its non-visuality. Unlike media such as television, which also involves visual transmission, radio works exclusively by aural channels, and provides no means of ‘seeing’ where the voices issuing from the speaker are actually originating. In the U.S. and Europe, throughout the 20th century, the development of radio broadcasts has involved strategies for either overcoming or playing on this limitation, primarily via various verbal (and other sonic) means that enabled the human imagination to compensate for the absent visual stimulus. Here, radio’s ‘blindness’ or ‘invisibility’ is a technological limitation—what Ian Hutchby terms an ‘affordance’—that has fundamentally shaped the development of radio and broadcasting practice, a pragmatic factor exerting a strong influence on both the performance and understanding of radio communication.

But radio’s limitation to sound is not merely a technical restriction on the pragmatics of communication. Equally important are the cultural and symbolic dimensions of affordances, the shared understandings of what radio is and what kind of communication it makes possible—what we might term the meta-pragmatic aspects of radio as a media form. As Ilana Gershon notes, such understandings—what she terms media ideologies—in turn crucially ‘influence… how people in practice communicate when using or avoiding media,’ even beyond the technical capabilities and limitations of communication within a specific medium.

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22 Andrew Crisell, Understanding Radio (London: Methuen, 1986), 5–15, 56–8; Susan J. Douglas, Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004): 68, 26–30, 100–123.
23 Hutchby, ‘Technologies’; Crisell, Understanding Radio, 7; Douglas, Listening In, 6.
24 Ilana Gershon, ‘Media Ideologies: An Introduction’, Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 20, no. 2 (2010): 283–293.
25 Ilana Gershon, ‘Language and the Newness of Media’, Annual Review of Anthropology 46 (2017): 19.
In Jordanian radio broadcasting, this metapragmatic aspect emerges clearly in strategies that seek to reconstitute the originary context of broadcast production through sonic means. Morning call-in shows, the most popular genre of radio programming in Jordan today, exhibit this on a daily basis. In the prominent host Muhammad al-Wakil’s programme on Radio Hala, for example, the presenter’s speech is constantly punctuated by raspy coughs and the clinking of coffee cups, brought to him by junior employees at regular intervals. Hani al-Badri, the host of the morning show on Radio Fann, uses hand gestures to good effect, and produces conspicuous noises by tapping his hands on the studio desk as he develops a particularly important point. Rose al-Suqi, who hosts a mid-morning programme on Mazaj FM, is engaged in constant exchanges with sound engineers and other members of the live studio team—whose slightly muted responses can then actually be heard on air, due to propitious spatial arrangements as well as microphone settings. All these techniques function to re-naturalize sound, to challenge the invisibility of radio transmission and allow listeners to imagine a concrete studio environment behind a disembodied broadcast voice. Yet in order to be meaningful, they also need to assume this very invisibility as a fundamental aspect of radio that needs to be overcome.

While such practices provide implicit evidence of the metapragmatic aspects of radio’s affordances, these were made much more explicit during the Ṣawtunā wāḥid programme. Here, radio’s limitation to sound was not subject to concealment, but rather used creatively by broadcasters to perform national unity through discursive means. Multiple radio stations came together for the broadcast, transmitting the same sonic feed and thus homogenizing their ‘voices,’ the sound of their transmissions. And throughout the programme, broadcasters framed this sonic unity as standing for actual unity—through constant attempts to neutralize, or at least subsume, the multiple identities of participating stations by referring to their temporary broadcast homogeneity. The following exchange between two of Ṣawtunā wāḥid’s co-hosts, Hiba Jawhar and Rami Salkham, is a typical example:

1 HJ: kāmlīn ma’akum min istuḍyūḥāt Ṣawtunā wāḥad
2 ma’akum hiba jawhar min idhā’at faraḥī an-nās
3 RS: wa-ma’akum rāmī salkham min aḥlā idhā’ a mazāj af am
4 al-yawm al-idhā’at al-mushārīka fi mubādarat ḥāṣhtāq Ṣawtunā wāḥad
5 lázi mihkīhā akid hiba li-kull al-nās al-yawm ‘am-byisma’ūnā
6 li-anī Ṣawt al-urdun wāḥad
1 HJ: We’re continuing with you from the ‘Our Voice Is One’ studios
2 Hiba Jawhar is with you from Farah al-Nas
3 RS: And Rami Salkham is with you from ‘the nicest radio station,’ Mazaj FM
4 Today the participating stations in the initiative, the hashtag ‘Our Voice Is One’
5 We must mention them of course, Hiba, to everyone listening today
6 Because Jordan’s voice is one

26 Transcripts of the recordings have been edited for disfluencies and to reflect a standardized Arabic transliteration system; however, colloquial Arabic features – including morphological ellision and addition of vowels, grammatical particles such as the progressive ‘am, and phonetic features such as use of the glottal stop ’[ʔ] or q where Standard Arabic uses q (qāf) – have been preserved as much as possible. All translations are the author’s own. All recordings, unless noted otherwise, are part of the author’s personal archive and available upon request.

27 Ṣawtunā wā’ id’ (Amman: Radio Hala, 5 February 2015), [MR012], author’s archive, 23:37–23:55.
In line 1 of the excerpt Jawhar refers to the broadcast as taking place from the ‘Ṣawtunā wāhid studios’—rather than, as it in fact did, from the studios of Radio Hala. Salkham, similarly, after asserting his station’s identity through its promotional catch-phrase (‘the nicest radio station (aḥlā idhā’a), Mazaj FM’) in line 3, quickly turns to mention that other stations are participating as well—a fact reflective not only of broadcast unification, but national unity as well. Like the stations’ voices, Salkham notes in line 6, ‘Jordan’s voice’ (ṣawt al-urdun) is, on this day, also ‘one.’

In addition to reflexive statements on station activity, Ṣawtunā wāhid broadcasters also asserted unity in a more dialogic manner, through invoking the programme’s audiences in particular ways. Here as well, sonic homogeneity was utilized as an iconic measure of unity—as demonstrated by the following exchange between Rose al-Suqi, Ammar Madallah, and Shuruq al-Hijazi:

1 RS: al-yawm yawm mukhtalif
2 yumkin kul muzi ‘am-byiḥiss al-yawm innu awwal marra byiḥla’ wa-byiḥki wa-byu’ud wara al-māyık
3 ma’a innu mā šā’ allāḥ al-kull ‘indu khibra ǰawila wa-madida
4 bi-ʾālam al-iʾām
5 bas al-yawm li-annu l-yawm
6 mukhtalif
7 li-annu l-ḥadath mukhtalif
8 wa-li-annu al-wāqa’ mukhtalif al-yawm ‘alaynā jamī’an ka-urduniyyīn
9 biddi uraḥḥib bi-zumalāʾi shurūq al-ḥijāzī wa-ʾammār madallāḥ
10 ṭak nakūn ma’a ba’qal ʾīlan al-fitra al-muqbilā
11 ahla wa-sahlī fikum
12 AM: aḥlan shurūq
13 SH: aḥlan
14 AM: ʿabāḥ al-ward ʿabāḥ al-khayr rūz
15 SH: ʿabāḥ al-khayr
16 ‘ammār ʿabāḥ al-khayr li-ilak kamān rūz
17 wa-biddi usabbih ‘ala kull al-mustami’īn wa-kull al-ʾasdiqāʾ illi ‘am-byismaʿūnā ʾībar kull al-ʾidhāʾāt al-urduniyya al-yawm
1 RS: Today is a different day
2 Every broadcaster might feel today it’s the first time that they’re coming up and talking and sitting behind the microphone
3 Even though, thank God, everyone has a long and extensive experience
4 In the world of media
5 But today because today is
6 Different
7 Because what is happening is different
8 And because reality is different today, for all of us Jordanians
9 I wish to welcome my colleagues, Shuruq al-Hijazi and Ammar Madallah
10 We will be together throughout the following period
11 Hello and welcome
12 AM: Hello Shuruq
13 SH: For sure
14 AM: Good morning, good morning Rose
15 SH: Good morning
16 Ammar, good morning to you as well Rose
17 And I want to say good morning to all listeners and all friends who are
listening to us, on all Jordanian radio stations today

al-Hijazi’s claim to addressing listeners on ‘all Jordanian radio stations’ in line 17 is
contestable, as several prominent non-government channels—including Radio Fann,
Radio Rotana, and Hayat FM—were notably absent from the Sawtunā wāḥid initiative.
Nevertheless, such universal address can only be made from a position of imagined
unity of the radio field. And this unity is effected, again, through the ideology of sound as
radio’s sole means of transmission. Similarly, in lines 1–8, al-Suqi spends some effort
asserting that Sawtunā wāḥid is a special occasion—not only as an exclusive rupture in
the routine flow of broadcasting, but a profoundly different experience for broadcasters
as well. Unlike the day-to-day exchanges with each broadcaster’s particular audience—
their ‘long and extensive experience in the world of media’—mourning Kasasbeh
requires a much broader, indeed nationwide, addressivity. This is possible through
unifying the voice of the broadcast—but only if the voice is all there is.

In Sawtunā wāḥid, the metapragmatic understanding of radio as sonically exclusive
was thus an important discursive tool for demonstrating Jordanian national unity. As a
one-off broadcast organized in response to a specific event of imagined national crisis,
this programme was quite exceptional. But the metapragmatics of media form likewise
emerge as a valuable discursive resource in more conventional, day-to-day contexts. This
is evident in the communicative practice of morning show broadcasters, to which I now
turn.

Online audiences and compressed participation: digital media in morning shows

Digital media pose a fundamental challenge to classic conceptions of radio’s afford-
dances. Since internet usage became widespread in the 1990s, radio stations worldwide
have begun to experiment with different means of supplementing radio’s sonic limita-
tion—for example, adding visual transmission through the use of webcams, or using
social media such as Facebook and Twitter to provide additional content, draw in more
listeners, and increase audience engagement and interactivity. Jordan is no exception
to this; indeed, non-government radio in Jordan has been closely intertwined with
digital media since the very beginning. Radio al-Balad, the first station to break the

28awtunā wāḥid (Amman: Radio Hala, 5 February 2015), [MR010], author’s archive, 21:19–21:56.
29Such unified broadcast initiatives are, of course, not limited to radio; I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out
that recently a number of television channels in Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine unified their broadcasts to protest the
US President Donald Trump’s decision to move the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. While beyond the
scope of the present article, it would be interesting to comparatively examine whether the linguistic (and other
semiotic) resources used to assert unity differ in the context of television as opposed to radio, and what the
implications of such differences for media communication and public-making might be.
30Richard Berry, ‘Radio with Pictures: Radio Visualization in BBC National Radio’, The Radio Journal 11, no. 2 (2013):
169–84; Maura Edmond, ‘All Platforms Considered: Contemporary Radio and Transmedia Engagement’, New Media &
Society 17, no. 9 (2015): 1566–1582; Michele Hilmes, ‘The New Materiality of Radio: Sound on Screens’, in Radio’s New
Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era, ed. Jason Loviglio and Michele Hilmes (New York: Routledge, 2013): 43–61;
Wendy Willems, ‘Participation – In What? Radio, Convergence and the Corporate Logic of Audience Input through
New Media in Zambia’, Telematics and Informatics 30, no. 3 (2013): 223–31.
Jordanian regime’s broadcast monopoly, in fact began broadcasting via an internet feed in 2000, a few years before non-government channels could obtain terrestrial broadcasting licences. Some radio stations, such as the community radio station Sawt al-Aghwar based in the Jordan Valley, continue to provide exclusively web-based sound feeds. Yet this situation is considered less than ideal by radio producers: Radio al-Balad sought to add a terrestrial broadcast frequency as soon as possible—via transmitters in the Palestinian West Bank in the first instance, and later after obtaining a licence in Jordan itself—and Sawt al-Aghwar has the same ultimate goal, though currently stifled by its inability to pay the requisite licencing fees.

Even if some sort of terrestrial presence is ultimately preferred, Jordanian non-government radio stations are apt in providing digital complements to their broadcasts. One option is directly reconstituting the visual. Most of Jordan’s major radio stations place webcams in their studios, which constantly transmit live video feeds to the internet via the station’s website or dedicated phone applications (in addition to audio streams). Assertions that their programmes can be seen are also a constant part of broadcaster discourse: every host whose station offers the option mentions the possibility to ‘watch us live’ several times per hour in their live broadcasts, and their promotional jingles likewise invite members of the audience to ‘listen to us and watch us’ (isma’na wa-shūfnā) through their website. Occasionally, the webcam’s visual affordances also have more direct uses: Jessy Abu Faisal, host of an established morning programme on Sawt al-Ghad, ran a series of quizzes in February 2015 where for a cash prize callers needed to describe objects inside the studio that could only be identified by watching the video feed.

But the affordances of radio that can be challenged by digital media are not limited to sonic exclusivity alone. Unlike other sound-based media such as discs and cassette tapes which store sound for potentially infinite re-circulation, classic radio is also *temporally linear*. Its transmissions are fleeting, ‘evanescent,’ and cannot easily be recovered once they have been circulated. But the capacities of digital media allow Jordanian broadcasters to overcome this limitation as well. Sound recordings of shows or programme segments are regularly published on video sharing websites such as YouTube and Facebook. Sometimes this includes particularly memorable segments of the broadcast, as with one recording which documented Muhammad al-Wakil breaking into tears on the air over the story of a girl whose father could no longer provide for his family due to a debilitating disease.

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Other uploads are more conventional: as with *Istūdūyū al-tahlīl*, Hayat FM uploads videos of its live programmes to YouTube on a daily basis, and presenters such as al-Badri and Abu Faisal do the same for interviews with officials and public personalities they conduct during their shows.

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31Lawrence Pintak and Daoud Kuttab, ‘AmmanNet Founder Daoud Kuttab: “Huge Need for Independent Media” in Middle East’, Arab Media & Society, February 2007, http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20070312112301_AMS1_Daoud_Kuttab_Interview.pdf (accessed 31 January 2014).
32Zaidah, ‘Man yamluk al-ilām fi al-urdunn?’.
33Each station offers its own ‘app,’ available for free from the major online storefronts providing smartphone content.
34Jessy Live, 24 February 2015’, Jessy Live (Amman: Sawt al-Ghad Jordan, 24 February 2015), [RR093], author’s archive, 1:51:34–2:28:45.
35Douglas, *Listening In*, 29–31.
36Alwakeel news, ‘Qi‘at al-fatāḥ allati abkat al-ilāmī mu ammad al-wakīl’, YouTube, 31 August 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58gW5wl4UHq (accessed 19 November 2014).
Such recordings permit radio stations not only to reach audiences beyond the live broadcast—listeners who might miss it and check up on them later, for example—but also to transcend the linear nature of radio, allowing for delayed access and re-circulation in the digital realm. Stations regularly re-post links to videos of broadcasts on their social media pages, where they can be viewed and commented on by users at any time. Like Istūdyū al-tahlīl, many of these recordings provide additional visual supplements to radio voices; but not all do. Stations such as Radio Fann and Radio Hala often upload ‘videos’ in which the visual aspect involves only a generic still image of the station logo, or a photograph of the broadcaster. Here, the visual mode is less relevant than the potential for temporal manipulation, capturing sound from the evanescent moment of the live broadcast and storing it in a permanently browsable medium that defies radio’s classic limitations.

But can radio still be termed ‘radio’ if its affordances are challenged in this way? Again, a distinction must be made between the pragmatic level of affordances as technical limitations, and the attendant metapragmatic understandings—or media ideologies—that define one medium as distinct from another. Digital links do, indeed, allow contemporary Jordanian broadcasters to transcend the sonically exclusive and temporally linear aspects of radio. But importantly, whenever such links are made, they are also accompanied by discursive and symbolic cues suggesting that crossing over into a different medium is involved.

Consider the Istūdyū al-tahlīl episode on Jordanian elections. Although visually rich, with a host making skilful use of the gestural strategies of television presenters, it uses this very same visual mode for asserting it is a radio programme: Jarrar wears headphones, sits in a sound studio, and is surrounded by images of Hayat’s FM frequencies in Jordan. The language of radio broadcasters provides further evidence. Hosts address their audiences as ‘listeners’ (mustami’īn) or ‘those listening to us’ (illi byisma’ūnā), hence asserting radio’s sonicity; and listeners are continuously invited to engage with radio live as it airs, via call-ins, social media, or merely by ‘staying with’ the station for the duration of the programme—as if, indeed, its circulation was evanescent, with no option for delayed access. By contrast, whenever listeners are told to click (ikbiśū or i’mišū klik) or link (ushbukū) to a website, digital media usage is always identified as a separate activity, rather than an integral part of the experience of engaging with radio. Digital links, though widely present in Jordanian radio today as a pragmatic aspect of media communication, are ultimately defined as a different mode of communicative engagement in its metapragmatic understandings.

This is not to say, however, that they do not appear in radio programmes in their own right. Their impact is most noticeable in the ways that broadcasters address and interact with explicitly digital audiences. One striking example is Muhammad al-Wakil’s obsession with the number of his Facebook followers. al-Wakil, a former presenter and newsreader on Jordanian national television, and currently the host of the Barnāmīj al-Wakil (‘Al-Wakil’s Programme’) morning show on Radio Hala, is among the most famous Jordanian radio broadcasters today. Social media are an integral part of his live shows: he regularly refers to followers and comments on Facebook, as well as messages (both text and voice) received through the instant messaging application WhatsApp. In Jordan today, both these

Gershon, ‘Media Ideologies’, 283–4.
platforms are accessed predominantly through mobile phones, and used nearly universally as channels for direct communication and content-sharing at varying degrees of public-ness and privacy—from publicly sharing posts on Facebook, to messages posted to members of a WhatsApp ‘group,’ to private person-to-person exchanges.

Facebook users may also choose to ‘follow’ updates of a public figure such as al-Wakil, via this figure’s public ‘Page,’ made available without privacy restrictions. At the outset of my research into Jordanian radio in mid-2014, the number of such ‘followers’ on al-Wakil’s Page already exceeded one million; subsequently, it only kept on climbing. When the number four million was finally reached on 13 January 2015, al-Wakil seized the opportunity to make a formal announcement of the milestone—both on his programme, which now began to feature jingles during commercial breaks that specifically mentioned the four million figure, as well as on social media itself. One particularly striking collage, published on al-Wakil’s Facebook page, featured the broadcaster’s well-known visage along with the number four million and a large graphic rendering of the thumbs-up symbol representing a ‘Like’ action on Facebook.  

The number alone is impressive, and would add up to approximately half of the current estimate of the entire population of Jordan if each Facebook profile in fact stood for a unique individual. This is not, in fact, likely to be the case: one person may possess multiple profiles, or several people share the same profile, and creating ‘fake’ social media profiles to be sold and bought for commercial or other purposes is a widespread practice. Still, the sense of a real, identifiable human being behind each profile remains a core aspect of how such websites are perceived, ideologically, by their users and external observers. This profile-individual equation assumes, in brief, that social media users utilize their profiles as digital extensions or proxies of themselves, for a range of purposes, from following news stories, to communicating with friends and family, to creative self-expression in a publicly visible setting. The pragmatic-level realities of media use, as noted, of course belie any such easy identification; yet on a metapragmatic level, on the level of understandings and ideas of what social media should be like, the profile-individual equation reigns supreme.

This assumption is made clear in the reflexive statements about media made by al-Wakil in his programmes. One example is the 2 December 2014 episode of Barnāmij al-Wakīl. While al-Wakil had not quite reached four million Facebook followers by that point, he nevertheless invoked the website explicitly to legitimize himself as an influential radio host. One of the day’s topics on which he had been giving an extended monologue were fuel prices, which were at that time decreasing, though without a concomitant decrease in public transport fares. In response, al-Wakil launched a full-frontal assault at the Ministry of Transportation, specifically their apparent inability to set prices in accordance with market fluctuations, as well as the government more generally for not reducing fuel prices enough compared to worldwide decreases in the price of oil. ‘The Jordanian people are not convinced by this,’ al-Wakil claimed; ‘not because they are stupid, but because they are smart.’

38 Mohammad Al Wakeel, ‘af at al-‘lāmi mu’ammad al-wakil ta‘ tafi bi-l-miliyun al-rābi’, Facebook, 13 January 2015, https://www.facebook.com/MohammadAlwakeelshow/photos/pb.195486037149957.-2207520000.1421818664./1243833018981915/(accessed 12 August 2015).
39 Caleb T. Carr, David B. Schrok, and Patricia Dauterman, ‘Speech Acts within Facebook Status Messages’, Journal of Language and Social Psychology 31, no. 2 (2012): 176–96; Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin, ‘Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships’, Computers in Human Behavior 24, no. 5 (2008): 1816–36.
And if anybody was entitled to speak for ‘the Jordanian people,’ it was al-Wakil himself, with his (nearly) four million followers:

1 MW:  
   anā bānqul jass nabiš al-shāri` al-urdunī  
2 mīsh mīn `inā mīsh mītfaṣaf mīn `inādī  
3 kullu hādha al-nās tiṣṣānī iyyāh  
4 `āshān uwaṣṣil li-ḥāḍarātkum  
5 maṣʿūlīn aṣḥāb qarār  
6 al-shaghla l-gharība illī bitṣīr yaʾnī al-`ān kull al-shaʾb al-urdunī `ala ṣafḥatnā `al-l-fāysbūk  
7 kull al-shaʾb al-urdunī `innā  
8 arbaʾa milyūn illā mitayn alf `innā  
9 kull al-shaʾb al-urdunī `innā  
10 bi-hāy al-shaʾb al-urdunī igrū yā hukūma  
11 allāh lā yikhlif `alayku idha btaʾmilū lāyk  
12 iʾmilū lāyk li-ṣafṣa bas `āshān tigrū al-taʾliqāt  
13 baʾdayn ḥafīdhā anā bi-l-īnglīzī ḥāy  
14 iʾmilū ānlāyk  
15 bas igrū al-taʾliqāt ʾiṣlaʾū minhā  
16 biddīsh tkunū fīhā anā aṣlan yaʾnī  
17 bas aʾlāh lā yikhlif `alayku idhā kamā bidku tgūlū  
18 ṣanḍu ṣafṣa ḍakhma  
19 laʾ āyū li-l-shaʾb al-urdunī mish ilku

1 MW:  
   I’m passing on the pulse of the Jordanian street  
2 Not from me, I’m not philosophizing by myself  
3 People are sending all this to me  
4 So I can pass it on to you  
5 Officials and decision-makers  
6 The strange thing is, now all the Jordanian people are on our Facebook page  
7 We have all the Jordanian people  
8 We have four million, less two hundred thousand  
9 We have all the Jordanian people  
10 And this Jordanian people—Government, read it  
11 God will not reward you if you [only] make a ‘like’  
12 Make a ‘like’ on the page, but only to read the comments  
13 Then—and I’m keeping this in English  
14 Make an ‘un-like’  
15 Read the comments, then leave it  
16 I don’t want you to be on it in the first place  
17 But God will not reward you if, as you might say  
18 ‘He has a huge page’  
19 No, this is for the Jordanian people, not for you

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40 Barnāmij al-wakīl, 2 December 2014, Barnāmij al-wakīl (Amman: Radio Hala, 2 December 2014), [RR025], author’s archive, 1:15:45–1:17:44.
al-Wakil’s monologue is, in essence, an admonition of Jordanian government officials (addressed as ya ḥukūma, ‘the government,’ in line 10) supposedly uninterested in what ‘the Jordanian people’ have to say. Officials might be present on social media, and ‘like’ al-Wakil’s page; but if they do so, their primary purpose should be to in fact read the posts and respond to people’s problems, rather than simply following because al-Wakil ‘has a huge page’ (line 18).

What deserves particular attention is the seamless way in which al-Wakil invokes the number of his Facebook followers when bolstering his claim as a representative of ‘the Jordanian people’ (al-sha’b al-urdunī). His comments on fuel prices are not just idle talk, or ‘philosophizing’ for a personal agenda (lines 2–5). What al-Wakil is conveying is, indeed, the ‘pulse of the Jordanian street’ (line 1). This is an ambitious statement—though one which al-Wakil can easily justify through reference to social media. Just looking at his number of Facebook followers is, presumably, enough to verify the truth of his claims: by quoting the exact number of ‘likes’ his page enjoys, he can directly enumerate what would otherwise be a largely shapeless audience of radio broadcast listeners. Statements such as ‘we have four million, less two hundred thousand’ (line 8) and ‘we have all the Jordanian people’ (lines 7 and 9)—an exaggeration, though not that far from the truth if the profile-individual equation is assumed, given Jordan’s most recent population estimates at around 10 million—clearly reflect this concern. For al-Wakil, tacit metapragmatic understandings of media form thus become discursive resources for legitimization, rhetorically justifying his criticism and positioning him as a true representative of the ‘Jordanian people.’

But the metapragmatics of digital media enter into Jordanian radio discourse even more directly when hosts use social media as a means of communication with listeners. One example is the common practice of reading out listeners’ messages and comments out loud on the air. The written, visual matter of digital media is thus transmuted seamlessly into the sonic mode of radio—though always accompanied by reminders of where the message ultimately originated. Morning programmes are filled with references to people ‘in touch’ (mitwāṣlin) via Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, and hosts often apologize for not being able to read out all the messages they are receiving. Single-line greetings—such as ‘good morning’ (ṣabāḥ al-khayr, ṣabāḥ al-ward, etc.) or ‘greetings’ (tahiyātī)—are the most common; hosts usually rattle off and respond to as many of these as they can. In such speech acts, giving a concrete name to the listener is just as important than the greeting itself. Comments on websites such as Facebook and Twitter give the user’s profile name automatically, but when using a service such as mobile texting or WhatsApp, contributors need to sign their names—and are called out by hosts when they do not, with responses such as ‘give us our name so we can say good morning to you.’

There is, of course, no way to verify whether these names are genuine, or perhaps pseudonyms. But for the communicative dynamics of the exchange,

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41As Jared McCormick has noted for Lebanon, WhatsApp is easily accessible to, and widely used by, anybody with a smartphone—by which now amounts to the majority of mobile phone users in many Arabic-speaking countries—and generous mobile data plans also make it much cheaper than classic text messages (Jared McCormick, ‘The Whispers of WhatsApp: Beyond Facebook and Twitter in the Middle East’, Jadaliyya, 9 December 2013, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15495/the-whispers-of-whatsapp_beyond-facebook-and-twitter (accessed 15 January 2014)). Notably, however, in Jordan WhatsApp is also subject to oversight by government security services, and messages sent through the application can be monitored for contentious content. (I thank Ebtihal Mahadeen for this point.)
this point is less relevant. All that matters is that a name is given—that a single person, an individual, can be imagined as a participant in the conversation. This focus on naming, again, invokes the metapragmatic understanding each profile standing for a single, unique, discrete individual (even if concealed by a pseudonym).

The role of digital media is not, however, limited to such phatic exchanges. Listeners might send in their own comments on topics that the hosts discuss, and broadcasters delight in reading out especially eloquent or sarcastic messages and adding their own comments in turn. In the genre of call-in shows known in Jordan as ‘service programmes’ (barāmij khadamātiyya), requests for assistance are also frequent. These might include listeners asking the host to transmit a local problem to the responsible authorities, or asking other listeners for financial support or help in finding a job. Although most requests are transmitted through phone calls, mobile text and social media messages—through Facebook or WhatsApp—are also a viable method. On Barnāmij al-Wakīl, which falls into the service programme category, the possibility of contacting the show through various means other than phone calls is prominently advertised: al-Wakīl constantly mentions the name of the show’s Facebook page and its WhatsApp number, and these are also regularly posted on the station’s social media pages whenever the programme begins.

Similar strategies are used on Wasaj al-balad, on Radio Fann, hosted by Hani al-Badri—like al-Wakīl, a former television presenter, though now mostly committed to radio work. When not taking phone calls or giving his own, often sarcastic, comments on the day’s developments, al-Badri fills airtime by reading and responding to messages sent by listeners. When specific requests sent in via WhatsApp or text messages are involved, this usually takes the form of mere acknowledgment—most often, a simple ḥāḍrīn (idiomatically, ‘we’re on it’)—but at times the interactions turn more complex. On the 21 January 2015 episode, for example, a listener sent in a question regarding her application for a job posting made through the Civil Service Bureau (diwān al-khidma al-madaniyya). The listener was apparently unsatisfied with al-Badri’s curt on-air acknowledgment of her enquiry—as, a few minutes later, she sent in another message, this time wondering whether the host had even understood her initial question. al-Badri promptly read out the first message in full, then proceeded to defend his approach—not without sarcasm:

1 HB: al-mawḍū’ mish qirā’at
2 al-masaj
3 hiyya
4 mutāba’at al-mawḍū’
5 ‘ashān hāk gūlnā
6 lāzīm nṭābī ‘ashān nshūf diwān al-khidma al-madaniyya wayn wāssal
7 dawrak
8 al-qīṣṣa mish qissat qirā’a
9 lā tkūnī mīttakārire mudir rā’īs diwān al-khidma al-madaniyya ẓul nahu ār gā’id byisma’ masajāt al-nās
10 ((laughter))
11 ‘a-rā’y ikhwānnā fi maṣr albak abyaq!
1 HB: The issue isn’t reading
2 The message
It’s
Following up on the problem
That’s why we said
We must follow up so we can see where the Civil Service Bureau has advanced
Your application
The story isn’t reading [it]
Don’t think that the president of the Civil Service Bureau sits listening to people’s messages all day
((laughter))
As our brothers in Egypt would say, ‘your heart is white’

The idiom ‘your heart is white’ (albak abyaḍ) in line 11 characterizes the listener as supremely naïve her insistence that al-Badri read her message out loud. Really, it does not matter; officials are not listening in any case. al-Badri, by contrast, is listening, and available—and, ultimately, the person who needs to be contacted in order to get results. In such exchanges, digital media are used to demonstrate the radio host’s responsiveness to immediate interactional prompts, and confirm that the broadcast truly is live: whenever a listener decides to contact the host, there will at the very least be an acknowledgment, a reassurance that ‘we’re on it’—distinguishing radio, not least, from staid and inert government agencies.

The role of text and media messages is thus similar to that of listener phone-ins—though not identical. Phone-ins, in which listeners call the station to speak live on the air, are a prominent feature of Jordanian service programmes, and perhaps the most vivid example of direct interactivity that can be achieved by radio hosts. But what digital media allow is, crucially, a greater density of interaction. A broadcaster can only take a limited number of calls in each episode of their programme, but the number of people that can be greeted in response to Facebook comments or WhatsApp messages is much larger. Messages arriving in during the broadcast are not transmitted as they come; rather, they are ‘temporally compressed’—read out together in groups, or at convenient times during the broadcast after the host has had time to devise an appropriate response.

The metapragmatics of digital media presuppose that unique individuals stand behind each social media profile and phone number; what broadcaster responsiveness to digital messages testifies to is, further, the live, immediate nature of their links to these individuals—at a scale unmatched by even the most diligent host dealing only with phone calls.

There may, indeed, be little choice for radio broadcasters when it comes to engaging with digital media. Social media are enormously popular channels for communication in Jordan today; and for contemporary audiences to be captured and sustained, a digital presence is crucial. But such presence also brings out radio’s temporal and visual deficiencies; it maintains the tension between its traditional evanescence and sonic exclusivity, and digital media that can transcend these affordances—at least pragmatically. Audiences are no longer only ‘listeners’; they are also Facebook followers, WhatsApp users, and viewers of YouTube videos.

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42. Wasaṭ al-balad, 21 January 2015’, Wasaṭ al-balad (Amman: Radio Fann, 21 January 2015), [RR049], author’s archive, 1:17:00–1:17:18.
43. Daniel Fisher, ‘Intimacy and Self-Abstraction: Radio as New Media in Aboriginal Australia’, Culture, Theory and Critique 54, no. 3 (2013): 372–93, 388.
and webcams. Likewise, direct interaction between hosts and listeners is no longer limited to live phone calls. It is distributed across a huge number of temporally compressible digital interactions, carried out discontinuously by the broadcaster across the course of a programme. And the discourse of radio hosts is not deaf to these dynamics: they utilize references to media form to legitimize themselves rhetorically, both through the numeric force of the audiences they address and speak for, and their dense, immediate, responsive communicative practice.

**Media metapragmatics and Jordanian radio publics**

All this suggests the necessity for a rather different conception of ‘new’ media than is adopted by much contemporary scholarship on the Middle East. As Walter Armbrust has pointed out in a recent review of the field, much work on Arabic-language media—especially studies of newly emergent phenomena, including trans-national satellite TV channels (such as al-Jazeera) and digital media—tends to fall into the trap of technological determinism, claiming that each new medium will transform Arab societies in an unprecedented way while at the same time sweeping aside all impact of previous media forms. But digital media are not just a technological development enhancing the speed and reach of information transmission; nor do they automatically displace or make irrelevant ‘older’ media forms. Rather, they exist in a complex media ecology where they play particular rhetorical and discursive functions depending on their attendant metapragmatic understandings. It is not just the ‘pragmatic’ fact of using new media that is relevant—that they can provide visual supplements to radio, for example, or store live broadcasts for delayed access. Equally important is how these uses are *represented*, the claims and arguments that they enable within a given socio-cultural context.

The concept of metapragmatics is thus helpful for developing a more nuanced understanding of the relevance of ideas about media and media form. I borrow the term from the linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein, who uses it to refer to social and cultural evaluations of communication as they *themselves* appear in communicative practice: ‘it relates and, in its discursive mode even describes, explains, or rationalizes the pragmatics of language use... in terms of perhaps more fundamental frameworks, cultural agendas that bespeak human interests perspectively caught up in social-institutional processes.’ Media, as systems of communication and exchange of information, are in this sense similar to the other semiotic frameworks (principally, language) on which Silverstein’s analysis focuses: they, too, have their own *pragmatic* rules for usage, norms and guidelines for what is considered appropriate or effective media usage in any particular context. When these evaluations appear in actual media use—when Iris Jarrar wears headphones to signal she is a *radio* presenter; when *Ṣawtunā wāhid* presenters draw on the sonic exclusivity of radio to represent the unity of the Jordanian nation; when Muhammad al-Wakil invokes the number of his Facebook followers to legitimize himself as a representative of ‘the people,’ or Hani al-Badri contrasts government non-

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44 Walter Armbrust, ‘A History of New Media in the Arab Middle East’, *Journal for Cultural Research* 16, no. 2–3 (July 2012): 155–174.

45 Silverstein, ‘Indexical Order’, 196.
responsiveness to his live interactions with listeners via WhatsApp—we can thus speak of metapragmatics of media: not just the contextually conditioned differences in communication dynamics between media forms, but also how differences between these forms are conceived, framed, and utilized for specific discursive ends.

I find it productive to speak of media metapragmatics here, and not only media ‘ideologies.’ Media forms cannot be reduced to ideas or conceptions alone. In order to become relevant, they need to be empirically present, to emerge in communicative processes within the mass media. These processes may, in Silverstein’s terms, be ‘ideologically saturated’—yet they are still acts of interaction and communication in their own right, with their own discursive and participatory dynamics. If technological determinism is to be avoided, so should ideological determinism. Speaking of media metapragmatics thus emphasizes the centrality of communicative process, rather than the impression of immutable preconceptions determining how communication takes place conveyed by the term ‘ideology.’

A focus on process is important because, in mass media interaction, ideas are not merely ideas. Their observable, practical discursive application matters as well. For Ṣawtunā wāḥid broadcasters, ideas about the nature of radio were crucial for their performance of national unity. This performance was, however, directed at a very specific audience. Listeners were not only assumed to recognize the symbols of patriotic nationhood performed by the broadcasters, but were also directly addressed as a united people on a national scale, as in references made by Rose al-Suqi and Shuruq al-Hijazi to ‘all listeners and all friends,’ and ‘all of us as Jordanians.’

Such forms of address define listeners as part of a collectivity constituted through the spoken language of broadcasters. They can thus be effectively conceptualized through Michael Warner’s concept of a public: an audience addressed as a group of indefinite strangers brought together by acts of address alone. In other words, whenever a group of people is addressed—by mass media, for example—the form and type of address determine how they are to be understood as a collectivity: its size, its nature, its boundaries, what kinds of people it includes and excludes.

Publics are a primarily performative and discursively organized phenomenon. Nevertheless, they require some sense of the discourse actually being circulated among individuals imagined as members of this collectivity, even if they might never meet face to face. In the case of Ṣawtunā wāḥid, this (in Warner’s words) ‘path for the circulation of discourse’ is provided by sonic transmission of a broadcast from a studio to an audience of listeners—defined as a national public, as ‘all Jordanians,’ in the on-air performances of broadcasters.

Warner’s concept of publics focuses on the dynamics of communication first and foremost, and can thus be used productively to analyse forms of address in media communication more generally. Importantly, it does not necessarily refer to the often fetishized ‘reading public’ of white bourgeois liberalism, or the public as a collectivity whose sovereignty inheres in its capacity for ‘rational’ deliberation along bourgeois liberal norms—what is...

46Ibid.
47Warner, Publics and Counterpublics, 8–16, 67–96.
48Warner, Publics and Counterpublics, 90–2, 103–6; Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, ‘Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity’, Public Culture 14, no. 1 (2002): 191–213.
49Warner, Publics and Counterpublics, 92.
termed the ‘public sphere’ proper in English-language scholarship, a familiar concept from Jürgen Habermas’s early work. These are, indeed, only context-specific metapragmatic evaluations of whom, and how, a media form might address. Audiences, and publics, can also be defined differently: as addressed by radio broadcasters, for example, or through exchanging direct messages that are read out in a public setting and thus made available for all to hear. What is kept constant is the one-to-many format of mass communication, and its performative function of constituting collectivities. The metapragmatic aspects of communication thus hold high social relevance through their ability to disseminate, and manipulate, specific ideas about group membership and belonging.

On Jordanian radio today, such communication mostly takes place within a sonically exclusive and temporally linear context. Digital media, as we have seen, pose a challenge to these affordances. But when viewed from a metapragmatic perspective, as discursive resources for addressing and constructing publics, they also prove to be strategically complementary to classic ideas about radio as a medium that we have seen operating in the Šawtunā wāhid broadcast. In al-Wakil’s obsession with social media followers, public-making strategies are central: Facebook brings together a grouping of social media users, united by ‘following’ al-Wakil’s page, which is performatively addressed—continuously so, by al-Wakil, on episode after episode of his morning show—but claimed to have a degree of social reality. When al-Badri communicates with his audiences through Facebook and WhatsApp, he similarly relies on the notion that each listening individual possesses a palpable digital extension recognized ‘as a real path for the circulation of discourse’ via comments, messages, and other types of social media interactions. Ideologies of social media validate each user as a unique, discrete individual; and it is the presence of links between the radio programme and the social medium that allows al-Wakil and al-Badri to claim they speak to, and for, a digitally present public—though one that is also simultaneously unified by the discursive addressivity of a radio broadcast.

The upshot of this unification is, of course, that only a limited public is invoked. Those who do not identify with feelings of mourning and anger after Kasasbeh’s death fall outside the purview of the Jordanian nation as defined by Šawtunā wāhid. People who share these emotions—the audiences unified through listening to the broadcast, and the broadcasters who address them—count as true Jordanians; those who do not are simply excluded. And to be invoked as part of the audience represented by al-Wakil, or gain assistance on al-Badri’s programme, listeners must not only be Jordanians, but also digitally literate Jordanians: they must, in fact, possess a Facebook profile and follow al-Wakil’s page, and use their smartphone data allowance to send WhatsApp messages. Public address can include and unify certain audience segments; but it simultaneously excludes and disregards others. Whether mass media can truly be said to be inclusive or representative thus depends to an important extent on discursive strategies—including the metapragmatics of media form.

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50 Peter Lunt and Sonia Livingstone, ‘Media Studies’ Fascination with the Concept of the Public Sphere: Critical Reflections and Emerging Debates’, *Media, Culture & Society* 35, no. 1 (2013): 87–96.
51 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 92.
Conclusion

This article has examined how metapragmatic concerns about media form emerge in Jordanian radio discourse today. Ideas regarding the nature of media forms are mobilized for strategic ends, such as in the efforts of Ṣawtunā wahid broadcasters to unify their audience—the Jordanian nation—through sonic address alone. Yet it is not just radio’s classic affordances that are made relevant: broadcasters also make use of widely shared tacit understandings of contemporary digital media—social media profiles standing for real, unique individuals, which hosts can claim to represent as a proxy for the entire Jordanian nation, as with al-Wakil’s claims about the number of his Facebook followers; or interact with in a live, immediate manner, as with al-Badri’s communication with listeners via WhatsApp. Ideas about how communication does or should take place in a specific medium—the metapragmatic aspects of media form—become valuable discursive resources in broadcaster rhetoric. What I describe as media metapragmatics is thus a crucial element in mediated communication, and holds broad social relevance for its potency in invoking and delimiting boundaries between social groups—audiences, nations, publics, both inclusive and exclusive.

The role of media form in such processes has not gone unnoticed in some contemporary scholarship on Middle Eastern and Muslim societies, particularly in the field of linguistic anthropology. Flagg Miller’s study of audiocassette poetry in Yemen, for example, reveals the complex and manifold ways in which mediation also holds moral implications—namely, in the tension between a cassette poem’s capacity to retain the true ‘character’ of poetic authorship, versus suspicions of ‘duplicity’ through its being easily copied and circulated.52 Similarly, Patrick Eisenlohr’s work on Muslim devotional poetry in Mauritius examines how sound reproduction of such poetry on cassettes and CDs is treated as a more ‘authentic’ form of engaging with pious performances than written texts: introducing a novel type of medium in order to conceal mediation altogether, part of a never-ending process of ‘oscillating between highly visible, creative power and phenomenological disappearance’ central to mediated communication.53

These studies make clear the discursive utility of media metapragmatics in genres such as political poetry and religious performance that form important segments of contemporary public discourse. But they have yet to be applied to scholarly research on mass media in the Arabic-speaking Middle East more broadly. While important studies exist that consider the impact of different modes of media communication—Marwan Kraidy’s study of ‘hypermedia spaces’ enabled by participatory practices in contemporary Arab reality shows, for example, or the variety of degrees to which new communicative technologies ‘empower’ social actors recently reviewed by Aziz Douai and Mohamed Ben Moussa—the evaluation and strategic use of these modes

52Flagg Miller, ‘Of Songs and Signs: Audiocassette Poetry, Moral Character, and the Culture of Circulation in Yemen’, American Ethnologist 32, no. 1 (2005): 82–99; Flagg Miller, The Moral Resonance of Arab Media: Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007): 35, 280–379.
53Patrick Eisenlohr, ‘Materialities of Entextualization: The Domestication of Sound Reproduction in Mauritian Muslim Devotional Practices’, Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 20, no. 2 (2010): 314–333; Patrick Eisenlohr, ‘Media Authenticity and Authority in Mauritius: On the Mediality of Language in Religion’, Language & Communication 31, no. 3 (2011): 266–273, 267.
has received far less attention. Yet such evaluations are highly relevant in contemporary Jordanian radio discourse, as revealed through this article’s analysis of media metapragmatics. Publics and audiences are defined, delimited, included and excluded through metapragmatic strategies, and a communication-focused approach holds great comparative potential for studying these dynamics in Arab media today.

Media should not just be black-boxed as vehicles for transmission of information—a danger risked by the prevailing focus in Arab media scholarship on overbearing social, cultural, and political structures, and (in technological determinist arguments) the transformative impact of media on these structures. In her ground-breaking study of Arab journalism, Noha Mellor has argued that studies of Arab media should not just examine media content, but also the various social and cultural factors that determine access—hence, participation—in any particular medium. I suggest, however, that attention should also be paid to considerations of form. This includes both the form of the message itself—its discursive framing—as well as the metapragmatic aspects of media form that said message assumes and invokes. It is only through acknowledging these aspects of communication that we can answer what the media crossings and hybridizations so frequent in contemporary Arab media—videos of presenters wearing headphones, audience enumeration through Facebook, and radio hosts firing off social media messages—actually mean.

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54 Marwan M. Kraidy, ‘Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the Changing Arab Information Order’, *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007): 139–156; Mohamed Ben Moussa, ‘Beyond the Technology Debate: A General Introduction’, in *Mediated Identities and New Journalism in the Arab World: Mapping the ‘Arab Spring’*, ed. Aziz Douai and Mohamed Ben Moussa (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 5.
55 Armbrust, ‘A History of New Media’, 158–61.
56 Noha Mellor, *Modern Arab Journalism: Problems and Prospects* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 107–15.