

Identifying the Factors Shaping the Future of Iran's Digital Media in Response to Emerging Media Innovations by the Horizon of 2035

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to investigate the impact of emerging technologies (artificial intelligence, the internet, social media, and augmented reality) on media innovations and to identify optimal scenarios for the production, distribution, and consumption of targeted and personalized content to maintain competitiveness and create new value for audiences.

Methods: The research employs a critical uncertainty scenario planning approach, utilizing primary data (interviews, questionnaires) and secondary data (library resources). Data analysis was conducted using qualitative and quantitative content analysis methods.

Findings: The first scenario ("Digital Iran: A Sustainable Future") and the second scenario ("New Role-Playing") demonstrate the highest potential for enhancing media performance in response to emerging technologies. Strategic utilization of technologies and extensive collaborations foster innovation and generate distinctive value for audiences.


Conclusion: This study indicates that the intelligent adoption of new technologies and broad collaborations can strengthen media innovations and create new value for audiences. The findings suggest that media entities should leverage emerging technological opportunities and foster international partnerships to effectively address forthcoming challenges while preserving their traditional values.

Keywords: Emerging media technologies, digital media future, scenario planning, media innovation, Iran

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Introduction

The interaction between media and technology has emerged as one of the most influential drivers shaping the sociocultural, political, and economic trajectories of societies worldwide. Traditional media outlets such as television, radio, and print have gradually lost their dominance as new digital platforms disrupt communication ecosystems. In Iran, the challenge of integrating emerging media innovations into the national media system is both urgent and complex. Audiences increasingly consume personalized, on demand, and interactive content through platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts, eroding reliance on traditional channels. This transformation raises questions of governance, cultural preservation, trustbuilding, and competitiveness in a highly dynamic global media market. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to identify the driving forces and scenarios most likely to shape Iran's digital media future by 1414 (2035), offering actionable insights for policymakers, media managers, and researchers.

Methodology

The research employed critical uncertainty scenario planning, a robust foresight methodology designed to cope with unpredictable technological, economic, and social dynamics. Data collection involved a threestep process:

1. **Exploratory Stage:** An initial list of 35 driving factors was derived from literature review and environmental scanning, then expanded to 50 based on expert suggestions.
2. **Expert Panels:** Three panels of media and futures studies specialists (20 in the first round, 15 in the second, 10 in the third) ranked, refined, and evaluated the driving forces. Structured questionnaires were used to assess importance and uncertainty levels.
3. **Analytical Techniques:** Data were tested for reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.85$) and analyzed using MICMAC software to examine crossimpact matrices. Factors were grouped into clusters of key drivers, dependent variables, and emergent dynamics.

The process led to the identification of ten final driving forces including: integration of advanced technologies (AI, blockchain, data mining), user centered innovation, cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, creative management, local platform development, innovative business models, and enhanced user experience design.

Findings

The scenario analysis resulted in four plausible futures for Iran's digital media ecosystem:

1. Digital Iran: A Sustainable Future – Strong governance, robust investment in technologies, and audience engagement foster a globally competitive and trustworthy media system.
2. New RolePlaying – Governance improves and cultural values are reinforced, but economic weakness constrains technological innovation, leading to slower growth.
3. Crisis of Trust – Economic and technological progress is undermined by weak governance, resulting in misinformation, audience alienation, and social fragmentation.
4. Digital Mirage – Technological advancement continues, but weak governance and poor economic support lead to dependence on foreign platforms and widening digital divides.

Comparative analysis highlights that scenarios 1 and 2 are the most desirable and feasible pathways for Iran. Both emphasize the strategic importance of strengthening governance, prioritizing usercentric design, enhancing digital literacy, and cultivating sustainable revenue models such as targeted advertising and subscription services.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the future of Iran's digital media landscape will hinge on the interplay of technological adoption, governance effectiveness, cultural adaptation, and usercentered innovation. To secure a sustainable digital future, Iranian media must invest in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and skill development, while also fostering international collaborations and localized platforms that reflect domestic cultural values. The findings enrich academic debates in media management and futures studies by providing a multidimensional framework for analyzing technological disruptions in non Western contexts. Practically, the results offer policymakers and managers a roadmap to mitigate risks, enhance trust, and leverage innovations for competitive advantage.

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