



Lebanon Internet Governance Forum

Report of the Fifth Annual Meeting

Under the theme

"Effective Governance for a Better Internet in Lebanon"

Tuesday and Wednesday, January 30 and 31, 2024

hosted by the American University of Beirut,

at the Beirut Digital District (BDD)



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Session 2: Towards a Secure Digital Future: The Impact of Cybersecurity on Society and Strategic Sectors

Session 3: Internet Behaviors: Ethical Considerations and the Public Good

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II- Workshop: "The Reality of the Telecommunications Sector in Lebanon"

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A- Introduction

The Lebanon Internet Governance Forum (LIGF) is a national initiative that aims to open a multi-stakeholder discussion on the challenges and opportunities facing infrastructure development and Internet governance in Lebanon.

The Lebanese Multistakeholder Advisory Group (LMAG) is composed of experts representing the internet sector stakeholders from the public sector, academia, civil society, private sector and technical community.

Under the theme "Effective Governance for a Better the Internet in Lebanon", this committee organized the fifth annual LIGF, on Tuesday and Wednesday, January 30 and 31- 2024, hosted by the American University of Beirut, at the Beirut Digital District (BDD) and virtually via Zoom. The forum was attended by 160 people, and 178 remote participants via Zoom in addition to interaction on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

The meeting began with a direct message from Geneva by Ms. Anja Gengo, Coordinator of National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs) of Internet Governance forums at the United Nations, in which she affirmed her support for the Lebanese forum, which has maintained its continuity despite economic and security challenges, and highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach and multi-stakeholder in Internet governance and encouraged the Lebanese community to participate in the global IGF that will be held in the Arab region, in Riyadh – Saudi Arabia in December 2024.

Then Mrs. Zeina Bou Harb- Head of the LIGF Secretariat, Mr. Charbel Shbeir- Chair of the Advisory group, and Dr. Youssef Asfour- representing the American University of Beirut, stressed the keenness to adopt the same principles of the global Internet Governance Forum, which are summarized in five points: openness, transparency, inclusiveness, bottom-up decision, multi-stakeholder, and a non-commercial forum. They highlighted that despite all the challenges, this initiative was able to maintain its sustainability through the efforts of the advisory committee, the Secretariat, and the sponsors of the Forum. This confirms the tendency of the Internet governance community in Lebanon to support multi-stakeholder dialogue that brings together all parties despite their different views.



The program of the Lebanese Internet Governance Forum 2023 included four main sessions and a workshop, in which specialists and officials from all public and private sectors, academics, civil society, the technical community and regional organizations participated, with the aim of discussing topics related to Internet governance in Lebanon, within the four frameworks identified by the LMAG: Internet Governance, New Technologies and Citizens' Rights, Cybersecurity and Privacy, and the Regulation of Social Platforms and Digital Content.

The first day kicked off with the main session titled "The Future of the Internet in Lebanon", organized by OGERO and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA).

The second session, organized by ESCWA, RIPE NCC, the Digital Transformation Network, the Tripoli Bar Association and LCA, was titled "Towards a Secure Digital Future: The Impact of Cybersecurity on Society and Strategic Sectors".

It was followed by a workshop on the status of the telecommunications sector in Lebanon.

The second day began with the third main session organized by the American University, the St. Joseph University and the LCA, under the title "Internet of Behaviors: Ethical Considerations and the Public Good". The fourth session focused on "Social Media Accountability and the Role of Multi-Stakeholders" and was organized by Maharat, SMEX and UNESCO.

Each session issued recommendations on the topics discussed, which are submitted to decision-makers in the concerned authorities in Lebanon and shared with the global Internet Governance community.

B- Sessions of the Forum

I- Main sessions

Session 1: The Future of the Internet in Lebanon

Organized by: OGERO and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority

Moderator: Ms. Jessy Tannous, Media Specialist in Digital Transformation and IT

Speakers:

Mr. Imad Kreidieh, Chairman – General Manager, OGERO

Eng. Salem Itani, Chairman of Touch

Apologies of MP Tony Frangieh and Ms. Aline Nammar



LEBANON
INTERNET
GOVERNANCE
FORUM

"EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE FOR A BETTER INTERNET IN LEBANON"
FUTURE OF THE INTERNET IN LEBANON
January 30 2024 10:00 - 11:30 AM BDD 1280 - Beirut

Moderator
Ms. Jessy Tannous
Media Specialist in Digital
Transformation and IT

MP. Tony Frangieh
Head of ICT Committee
Lebanese Parliament

Mr. Imad Kreidieh
Chairman-
Director General
OGERO

Eng. Salem Itani
Chairman - CEO
Touch

Ms. Aline Nammar
Lawyer
ISOC

Discussions

Reform of Lebanon's telecommunications sector has been on the agenda of successive governments. It mainly involves transforming the state monopoly into a competitive market driven by private investment and regulated by an independent

regulatory authority. Unfortunately, the priorities are currently to keep the fixed and mobile networks of the three state-owned operators – Ogero, Alfa and Touch – as well as all private networks, operational. New challenges have emerged with the current war and urgent measures have been implemented to mitigate its risks. It is time to develop a clear roadmap for the promised reform that begins with the implementation of laws and does not end with the contingency plan. It has also become urgent to regulate the processing of personal data and the application of clear rules that take into account user privacy in order to benefit the various economic sectors and expand the scope of e-commerce, and Law 81 was enacted to regulate commercial electronic transactions and ensure the sustainability of these businesses.

The moderator opened the discussion by shedding light on Law 431 and the status of the telecommunications and Internet networks in Lebanon, and how Internet reform begins by breaking the state's monopoly on this sector and opening the market to competition.

Asked about Law No. 431 and the past and current challenges that hinder its implementation and what have hindered the work of the national operator, Mr. Kreidieh stated that politics in Lebanon has an impact on the implementation of laws, as the path of reform begins with the application of Law 431, which requires a political decision on the one hand and a waiver by the Ministry of Telecommunications of part of its powers in favor of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority and Liban Telecom. He expressed surprise in terms of considering the law in force, but at that time it was not implemented.

The Minister of Telecommunications is required to propose or nominate members for the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority and the Board of Directors of Liban Telecom, to start the work, and then amend the law if necessary. The application of this law is a wise necessity, especially in light of the chaos in the management of frequency and illegal Internet.

But at the same time, caution must be taken against distributing the telecommunications sector according to political interests, as the introduction of the private sector must be carried out according to a clear regulation and a clear vision that reflects positively on the state and companies.

On the initiatives taken by the Government to strengthen the telecommunications infrastructure network, in light of the current economic challenges, Eng. Itani stated that the economic situation in Lebanon has negatively reflected on the telecommunications sector, but there are plans in place since 2022 that are under implementation to develop and empower the network and keep pace with global technological progress.

On the status of fiber optics and the 5G, Engineer Itani answered that the current infrastructure and network must be prepared before starting the implementation of the fifth generation, which is part of the plan Touch is working on in 2024.

On the subject of fiber, Mr. Kreidieh said that Ogero implemented 21% of the fiber optic project that was developed in 2017, but due to the economic crisis and the deterioration of the exchange rate, work on the project was delayed. A large part of the boxes need to be activated and the project remains incomplete if the housing units that have already been included in the plan are not fully connected. Discussion is being made with the Government to refinance the rest of the project and complete it. As for the 5G service, fiber must be provided for Touch and Alfa stations in order to relieve pressure on frequencies. The engineering and technical teams of Ogero are also shaking off the old copper network and replacing it with fiber due to the need for its existence to promote the Internet and ICT.

Returning to Liban Telecom, the Director General of Ogero said that he rules out its establishment soon, as it is not among the priorities of the Ministry and the Government, and pointed out that Ogero is losing its best young manpower due to poor economic conditions and low salaries.

Regarding the measures put in place during the war to ensure the stability and functioning of telecommunications networks, Mr. Itani stated that a proactive plan was developed that includes the network and human and financial resources to ensure the sustainability of the network, especially in vulnerable areas, but this did not prevent six stations from stopping work due to hostilities.

On the topic of empowering women in the technology sector, Mr Kreidieh stated that OGERO is working to consolidate the principle of equality and make women an essential partner in leadership positions. He added that achievements are better

if women assume leadership positions. The General Manager of Touch also stressed that the company is proud to apply the principle of gender equality, especially in leadership positions.

Regarding the impact of the low purchasing power of citizens on the telecommunications sector, Eng. Itani stressed that the number of mobile subscribers is increasing despite the change in prices and that packages are offered to take into account all segments of society.

Regarding Ogero, they do not have the flexibility to adjust the prices of services and packages, as any amendment requires the conduct of administrative and legal methods (Ministry of Telecommunications / State Council / Council of Ministers). As for the number of subscribers, it is affected by the issue of the illegal Internet, and the crisis led to delays in the implementation of demand, in addition to the decrease in the number of employees, the lack of funding led to the inability to carry out maintenance work and not to secure the requirements for service delivery, which caused pressure on the quality of service, but despite that, the number of customers is still rising.

The session also touched on the possibility of securing satellite Internet and negotiations with Starlink, where Mr. Kreidieh considered that satellite Internet is a delicate and sensitive topic, since the service provider, like any operator, must obtain approval and license from the Ministry of Telecommunications and Licensing must be based on a clear term sheet for operation so that this activity does not turn into an opportunity for personal gains, as national interests must be placed in the first place and before any consideration, especially in a sensitive topic like Starlink. Negotiations are still ongoing between the Ministry and the company and will be put on the table of the Council of Ministers, but the decision must be deliberate, for the benefit of the state and citizens.

On plans to bridge the gap in remote and rural areas in Lebanon, Chairman Kreidieh confirmed that the master plan to connect remote areas was through fiber service, but due to the difficult economic conditions that the country is going through, an alternative plan was resorted to, which is fixed wireless access. In 2024, OGERO will start work on installing LTE-A stations to cover rural areas. Itani also indicated that Touch has implemented a plan to ensure the continuity of communication

service in all regions and is cooperating with Ogero to ensure the continuity of data services. The company is also working to secure the stations to cover gaps in the cellular network.

On the subject of renewable energy for towers, stations and centers, Mr. Kreidieh confirmed that the Lebanese state has duly approved the legal and administrative procedure for a Chinese donation to equip Ogero centers with solar energy, and the equipment will arrive in August 2024, this step will lead to saving an estimated \$ 20-22 million for the price of diesel for generators.



Session 2: Securing our Digital Future: The Impact of Cybersecurity on Society and Strategic Sectors

Organized by ESCWA, RIPE NCC, the DT Network, the Tripoli Bar Association and LCA

Moderator: Dr. Chafic Chaya, Regional Manager, Public Policy and Government Affairs - RIPE NCC

Speakers:



Dr. Amin Hasbini, Director - Meta Research Center, Kaspersky

Col. Mtanios Nasrallah, Directorate of Intelligence - Lebanese Army

Dr. Audine Salloum , Head of Legal Department- LIC- Lebanese University

Dr Zeina Aoun , Head of Security Division - BDL

Capt. Ali Azwar, Cybersecurity Engineer - General Security

Dr. Imad Elhajj / Co-Founder/Professor, SAUGO 360 – AUB

LEBANON INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM

“EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE FOR A BETTER INTERNET IN LEBANON”

SECURING OUR DIGITAL FUTURE : THE IMPACT OF CYBERSECURITY ON SOCIETY AND STRATEGIC SECTORS

30 January 2024 | 12:00 - 13:30 PM | BDD 1280 - Beirut.

Moderator
Dr. Chafic Chaya
Regional Manager, Public Policy and Government Affairs - RIPE NCC

Dr. Amin Hasbini
Director of META Research Center - Kaspersky

Col. Mtanios Nasrallah
Directorate of Intelligence Lebanese Army

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Capt. Ali Al-Azwar
Cybersecurity Engineer General Security

Dr. Imad Elhajj
Co-Founder/ Professor SAUGO 360 - AUB



OFFICE OF INNOVATION & TRANSFORMATION

Discussions

As the moderator, Dr Chafic Chaya initiated the cybersecurity session, emphasising the multi-layered approach required to safeguard Lebanon's digital future. Highlighting the synergy between governance, robust digital infrastructure, and awareness, Dr. Chaya called for enhanced collaboration across sectors. He stressed

the importance of nurturing human skills and retaining local talent, underscoring these elements' critical role in developing a secure, stable, and resilient digital Lebanon. The session set a tone of urgency and cooperation with constructive discourse and actionable insights.

In a detailed virtual presentation, Dr Hasbini provided an extensive overview of Lebanon's dire cybersecurity challenges in 2023. He reported an alarming 8.6 million cyber threat notifications, with significant incidents comprising 2.8 million malware attacks and 60,000 backdoor breaches, alongside 45,000 spyware detections—a testament to the pervasive surveillance threats. Dr Hasbini indicated that government, telecom, finance, and sectors like technology research and pharmaceuticals were prime targets for cybercriminals.

Dr Hasbini's presentation, rich with regional real-world examples, called for action to enhance cybersecurity and awareness of digital defences. He emphasised the urgent need for Lebanon to adopt cutting-edge cybersecurity measures and develop robust national defence mechanisms, highlighting the crucial role of establishing a national Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT). He also advocated for a collaborative approach involving various sectors to strengthen Lebanon, enhancing cyber awareness and improving the country's digital infrastructure with critical upgrades such as the adoption of IPv6, which not only modernises the network architecture but also simplifies and enhances the capabilities of Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in conducting online investigations.

In a significant stride toward bolstering cybersecurity within the Lebanese military, Colonel Nasrallah detailed key advancements in cybersecurity. The Lebanese Army has taken decisive steps by implementing state-of-the-art machinery and instituting two-factor authentication (2FA) to secure mail servers. In tandem with these technical upgrades, there has been a concerted effort to refresh security certificates, enhancing the overall safeguarding of communications.

Additionally, Colonel Nasrallah spotlighted the army's proactive approach to cybersecurity awareness, having conducted specialised training for 174 individuals across prominent Lebanese institutions, including Alfa, Touch, the Army itself, and Ogero. He emphasised that these measures represent a comprehensive push to fortify cyber defences and cultivate a security-conscious culture within Lebanon's critical telecommunications and defence infrastructures.

In a critical analysis by Captain Azwar, the lack of Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) in Lebanese companies was identified as a significant hurdle to

cybercrime investigation efficiency. He highlighted the detrimental impact of insufficient cybersecurity understanding within organisational structures, leading to protracted cyber forensic processes. Captain Azwar called for the urgent appointment of CISOs to streamline and expedite these procedures. He also noted that many organisations need adequate response plans for cyber incidents and often face challenges with security devices that provide insufficient logs and storage for historical attack data. Consequently, he recommended that organisations should significantly improve their logging solutions to bolster their cybersecurity posture.

In her intervention, Dr Aoun underscored the perception of security as a crucial governance issue, advocating for regularly updating security policies. She highlighted the need for frequent awareness sessions and disseminating the latest security dashboards.

Dr. Aoun called for establishing dedicated security teams and comprehensive network security solutions, including regular risk assessments and audits in line with ISO 72000 standards. She also emphasised the importance of technical audits, such as penetration testing and ongoing scrutiny of banking institutions. Dr. Aoun stressed the need to understand hacker profiles to identify and close security gaps. Additionally, she urged the creation of a 24/7 operational Security Operations Center (SOC) and continuous updates to security measures.

In his contribution, Dr. Elhajj brought attention to the critical governance deficits in cybersecurity, advocating for the enactment of new legislation and greater governmental accountability. He highlighted the necessity for enhanced cooperation between the private sector and academia, which currently operate in a self-preservation mode with minimal collaboration.

Dr Elhajj advised against the digital transformation of Lebanon's government services without first ensuring robust security measures are in place. He also touched upon the role of AI in detecting intrusions and addressed vulnerabilities specific to SMS credit exchanges, expressing concerns over the private sector's cybersecurity capabilities in Lebanon.

Dr. Salloum has actively contributed to the enhancement of legal and military expertise in the field of cybersecurity. She emphasised implementing specialised training programs for lawyers, judges, and army personnel in her address. Furthermore, Dr. Salloum advocated establishing stringent laws and regulations that would assign clear responsibility for data breaches or cyber incidents, thus reinforcing the legal framework to address cybersecurity breaches.

Dr. Lina Oueidat contributed to the session by discussing the strategic steps involved in developing and implementing the National Lebanese Strategy for Cybersecurity. She shared insights into the challenges and successes of establishing the national CERT, highlighted the collaborative efforts required across various sectors, and outlined the roadmap for advancing Lebanon's cyber resilience and infrastructure. Her first-hand experience navigating the complexities of fostering international cooperation and her work in cyber policy offered an authoritative perspective on enhancing national cybersecurity measures.

The Q&A session was a dynamic and informative exchange, where attendees eagerly engaged with the panellists. Questions ranged from seeking clarification on cybersecurity strategies to inquiring about practical steps for implementing robust digital defences. The session was an insightful dialogue, offering diverse perspectives on the complexities of cybersecurity and the collective efforts required to safeguard Lebanon's digital future.



Session 3: Internet of Behaviors (IoB): Ethical considerations and public good.

Organized by: AUB, USJ and LCA



Moderator: Ms. Maha Zouwayhed, Associate Director - Talal and Madiha Zein AUB Innovation

Speakers:

Dr. Mariette Awad, Associate Professor - AUB

Mr. Omar Kristidis, MENA Focused Investment & Innovation Expert - Arabnet

Mr. Elie Zeidan , Chief Product Officer & Managing Partner Thidesoft - Potech

The poster is for a forum titled "EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE FOR A BETTER INTERNET IN LEBANON" with a sub-theme "INTERNET OF BEHAVIORS (IOB) : ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PUBLIC GOOD". It is scheduled for January 31, 2024, from 10:00 to 11:30 AM at BDD 1280 in Beirut. The moderator is Ms. Maha Zouwayhed, Associate Director at Zein AUB Innovation Park. The speakers are Dr. Mariette Awad (Associate Professor at AUB), Mr. Omar Kristidis (CEO and Founder of Arabnet), and Mr. Elie Zeidan (Chief Product Officer & Managing Partner at Thidesoft Potech). The event is supported by ogero, Internet Society Lebanon Chapter, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT (Office of Innovation & Transformation), RIPE NCC, and DXTALKS.

Discussions

The session began with a highlight by the moderator Ms. Maha Zouwayhed, on the session's topic: the 'Internet of Behaviors.' Ms. Zouwayhed explained: "In today's digital age, we are constantly connected to the internet, utilizing applications, websites, and social media platforms, thereby generating data around the clock. It's intriguing to contemplate how our data will be utilized, what our individual roles will be in this landscape, as well as the industry's role. We must consider how this data can benefit us, while also exercising caution about potential pitfalls. It's a space where we need to be both vigilant and proactive."

Mr. Omar Kristidis started with an introduction about himself, his journey began in 2009 with Arabnet as a founder/CEO when he initiated a conference focused on technology for startups. Over the years, this endeavor expanded regionally, evolving to encompass the generation of data reports and the implementation of innovation programs. It also served as a platform for startups to pitch their ideas to venture capitalists, fostering growth and investment in the tech sector.

When asked by the moderator about the intersection of his work with the Internet of Behaviors (IOB), Mr. Kristidis articulated a profound insight. He defined IOB not merely as a technology but as a process and a way of thinking, one that integrates human psychology to predict behavior and personalize experiences. Furthermore, Mr. Kristidis emphasized his commitment to incorporating the latest technologies into his activities, reflecting a forward-thinking approach to navigating the evolving landscape of human behavior and technology integration.

Then Mr. Elie Zeidan, with over 20 years of expertise in the field of cybersecurity, is currently dedicating his efforts to harnessing the power of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to scale his offerings.

About the intersection of his work with the Internet of Behaviors (IOB), he explained how his utilization of behavioral monitoring and User Entity Behavioral Analytics (UEBA) aligns closely with the principles of IOB, as they both emphasize the importance of understanding and predicting human behavior to enhance security measures and mitigate risks effectively.

With a focus on smart living and healthcare applications, Dr Awad's research is dedicated to democratizing ML concepts for the betterment of human well-being.

About the intersection of her work with the Internet of Behaviors (IOB), she explained that IoB is about using data analysis, machine learning, and human psychology to understand behavior in the digital landscape, examples include personalized marketing, health monitoring, productivity tracking, smart cities, and personalized financial services.

Defining IoB, she explained that in our digital lives, interactions with social media, wearables, online shopping, and smart devices create a detailed picture of our habits. IoB collects data from various sources like sensors and social platforms to analyze

behavioral patterns. This data forms the basis for creating user profiles, enabling personalized experiences and targeted interventions aimed at influencing behavior.

When asked why we should care about IoB, Mr Zeidan focused on two sides: The commercial aspect of technology which can either assist or exploit us in decision-making, and that IoB plays a crucial role in safeguarding data and user privacy.

About the influence of the Internet of Behaviors (IoB) on society and any ethical considerations, Mr. Kristidis pointed out that accessing data about individuals with high accuracy is already within reach, citing examples like Netflix, Spotify, and Anghami. He highlighted some pros of IoB, such as assessing insurance and price risks more accurately, but also raised ethical concerns. He mentioned instances like misinformation and disinformation during the US elections, the impact on demand generation in a consumer economy like Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL), and the importance of addressing algorithmic fairness and bias.

On her perspective on various aspects of the Internet of Behaviors (IoB) concerning user empowerment and ethical considerations, Dr. Awad emphasized the importance of recognizing the benefits of IoB, exemplified by devices like smartwatches. However, she also acknowledged the presence of abuse and stressed the necessity for regulation, particularly regarding security, accuracy, and transparency. Despite concerns about bias in AI, Dr. Awad highlighted ongoing efforts to address this issue. She underscored that users should be regarded as the owners of their data, with the ability to easily modify or erase it. Moreover, she emphasized the need to develop appropriate ecosystems and tools to ensure the responsible implementation of IoB.

Mr. Kristidis provided diverse examples of how the Internet of Behaviors (IoB) influences various sectors, such as healthcare, financial services, small business loans, and even transportation services like Uber. He highlighted its impact on media and consumer goods, illustrating how the internet may gather personal data to a degree of knowing one's pregnancy status before the individual does. Moreover, he noted the transformation of the retail experience through innovations like smart mirrors.

Mr. Zeidan expanded on IoB's reach, emphasizing its role in remote working and conditional access, as well as behavioral changes observed in devices, like automatic

login features on Netflix. He pointed out its significance in e-commerce, mentioning the use of bots to compare prices and the emergence of microloans. He also referenced the intriguing movie 'Severance,' which explores the challenge of segregating personal and professional life in the age of pervasive technology.

On a question about the extent of knowledge we should possess, Dr. Awad reflected further on additional dimensions of the issue, including developments in the automotive industry, where startups are leveraging IoB to enhance driver experiences by understanding driver emotions. She also emphasized that it's not only companies but also governments have access to vast amounts of data. This highlights the importance of addressing not just corporate practices but also governmental policies and regulations regarding data collection and usage.

In discussing the ethical dimension of the Internet of Behaviors (IoB), Mr. Kristidis raised concerning examples such as the use of CCTV to assign social scores, as seen in China during the Covid pandemic to monitor mask-wearing. He stressed on the importance of user consent and the rise of conscious consumers who seek transparency. Mr. Kristidis proposed the idea of a badge system to indicate adherence to certain criteria, highlighting the need for accountability and consumer empowerment. However, he acknowledged the challenges of regulation in a rapidly evolving tech landscape. On a practical note, Mr. Zeidan advised individuals to conduct research and manage their digital footprint, underscoring the importance of personal responsibility in navigating the complexities of IoB ethics.

At the end, Ms. Zouwayhed's inquiry about best practices and regulations regarding data usage prompted insightful responses from the panel. Mr. Zeidan highlighted the significance of regulations like GDPR and recommended using privacy-focused browsing platforms such as Mozilla Firefox. Mr. Kristidis emphasized the need to reconsider the current business model, which heavily relies on user data, advocating for a shift towards a more sustainable approach that prioritizes consumer rights over reckless growth. He suggested that pressure from entities like pension funds on venture capital funds could influence the ethos of Silicon Valley. Dr. Awad stressed the importance of recognizing that each data point represents a person and called for improvements in policies to safeguard individuals' privacy and rights in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.



Session 4: Accountability of Social Media Platforms and the Role of Multi-Stakeholders

Organized by: Maharat Foundation, SMEX and UNESCO

Moderator: Journalist Layal Behnam

Speakers:

MP Elias Hankash, Member of the Parliamentary ICT Committee

Dr. Rita Sayyah, Professor at NDU University

Ms. Marianne Rahme, Legal Expert at SMEX

Mr. Tony Mikhael, Legal Expert at Maharat

Dr. Lina Oueidat, ICT Advisor at the Council of Ministers



LEBANON
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**"EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE FOR A BETTER INTERNET IN LEBANON"
ACCOUNTABILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS
AND ROLE OF MULTISTAKEHOLDERS**

January 31 2024 12:00 -13:30 BDD 1280 - Beirut

Moderator
Ms. Loyal Bahnam
Journalist - Maharat

MP. Elias Hankach
Member of ICT Committee
Lebanese Parliament

Dr. Rita Sayyah
Professor - NDU

Ms. Marianne Rahme
Legal Policy Expert
SMEX

Mr. Tony Mikhael
Legal Expert
Maharat

Dr. Lina Oueidat
ICT Advisor
Council of Ministers

ogero^o it all starts here | Internet Society Lebanon Chapter | AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT OFFICE OF INNOVATION & TRANSFORMATION | RIPE NCC RIPE NETWORK COORDINATION CENTRE | DCTALKS

Discussions

Amid growing efforts at the global level to regulate digital platforms Lebanon remains behind the global debate. There is a need to discuss Lebanon's position at the national level on the importance of dealing with social media platforms while preserving freedom of expression and the free flow of information online and giving a role to civil society to be part of this discussion. The Internet Governance Forum is the most appropriate platform for these discussions at the national level.

As Moderator, Ms. Loyal Behnam initiated the dialogue on social media accountability and the role of stakeholders. Lebanon is still far from the global debate, despite increasing efforts at the global level to regulate digital platforms, including the European Union's digital law, and UNESCO's global dialogue on "Guidelines for Governance of Digital Platforms."

She highlighted the recommendations of Lebanese experts compiled by Maharat and reflected in two reports on Accountability Frameworks for Social Media Users and Accounts and on Pluralism of Information in Algorithms– released by the Information and Democracy Forum last year. She briefed on to the lack in Lebanese laws that have often raised concerns about regulation in countries lacking the rule of law such as Lebanon. It has become urgent to join the international conversation with the increase in online hate speech in Lebanon, misinformation and

disinformation (especially during elections) and with the challenges faced by independent media platforms due to the lack of accountability and responsibility on social media platforms. She stressed the need to discuss Lebanon's position at the national level on the need to deal with social media platforms while preserving freedom of expression and the free flow of information online, and while giving a role to civil society to be part of this discussion.

In his capacity as a member of the Parliamentary Information Technology Committee, MP Elias Hankash spoke about the work of the committee in the recent period, specifically the cyber-attacks on the airport, pointing out that despite the issuance of the implementing decrees of the Electronic Transactions Law, the application has not yet reached the required level. He considered that the discussion is late on everything that may create protection for users on social networks and on regulations according to Lebanese laws, and that practices since 2009 until now are witnessing an increasing restriction on social platforms in terms of summoning activists because of their expressions on the Internet, in a country that was considered an oasis of freedoms in the region, as Lebanon is currently witnessing a decline in the freedom index.

Hankash said there is a need to balance the protection of users on social media from cases of blackmail and harassment with the protection of freedom of expression. He stressed the importance of fighting misleading information in the media and on social networks, without prosecuting activists, restricting freedoms in the country and using police practices to discipline everyone criticizing any officials. It is important to preserve the freedom, to establish media platforms and provide incentives to establish emerging media companies.

Hankash pointed out that the ICT committee at the parliament refers to experts and invites technology companies to coordinate and work with them when developing laws in the aim of keeping pace with development, welcoming Maharat's idea of communication with representatives of Meta to coordinate with them on several issues. In his opinion, the solution is to change some laws and loopholes, and to join international agreements to regulate social media platforms policies. In addition, it is important to cooperate with all stakeholders, including the security services to protect freedoms and develop laws, pointing to the urgent need to initiate public

consultations with experts and the civil society and a need to media and technology education.

As an expert in developing national strategies and following up on all topics related to governance, Dr. Lina Oueidat said that the law alone is not enough, but rather regulatory mechanisms and standards must be put forward to implement the law, and that freedom of expression must be accompanied by a culture of conscience, awareness raising and national responsibility, as we are in a phase of transformation in the technical world that poses challenges such as fake news and hate speech.

As part of her work as an expert in the field of cybersecurity and counter-terrorism, Oueidat pointed out that the first strategy on cybersecurity was presented since 2019 and the experience of all independent bodies was studied in an attempt to overcome all obstacles with the strategy and law that can delay work, and thus find laws, standards and regulations that contribute to protecting freedom of expression and protecting users. The solution, in her opinion, is to promote a culture for dealing with social media and to draft implementation processes when adopting laws, because laws without these processes will not be applied.

In a critical look at the general frameworks of laws and regulations in the world, Ms. Marianne Rahme spoke about international standards in content regulation, providing an example of DSA and the role of the Authority, which aims to identify illegal content on social media such as misleading content. It sets procedures on private social media companies and this approach is carried out in accordance with human rights. In her opinion, the problem is not with the regulations themselves, but with their application, and this has been evident since October 7, when the EU Commission asked major social media sites (Meta, Tiktok and X) to regulate content search around the events of October 7, thus showing the confusion from the European Union between misinformation and illegal content, which are two different things. She pointed out that there were observations on UNESCO's

principles, although they had improved, and wondered whether UNESCO had the mandate to issue such standards or general principles for all states. According to Rahme, the solution is to combine the development of mechanisms and standards in addition to media literacy, as well as working with platforms to understand how algorithms work and how to regulate content and change platforms policies.

Based on his work and follow-up on the issue of freedoms and the media law, and his close follow-up to the work of the parliamentary small committee to develop a

report on recommendations for proposing the media law, specifically what is being discussed about the formation of a media regulatory body and the possibility of giving it powers over the digital space, Mr. Tony Mikhael spoke about that the problem in Lebanon today in terms of establishing independent bodies according to sectarian names. And added that the establishment of a media regulatory body that regulates all media sectors is a non-realistic proposal because there's no possibility of establishing any entity that regulates social media sites that are controlled by international companies and have special standards to monitor content and respect human rights, pointing out that Lebanon today is lagging behind in developing policies that must include preventing hate speech that is precisely defined.

Mikhael recalled the many incidents of deleting content by platforms, as is currently happening in the Gaza war, and that there are people who resorted to the judiciary to file a complaint about the deletion of their content, but the complaint takes time and the platforms were not fair in many cases, considering that Lebanon cannot impose fines on platforms as the European Union does in the event of violating privacy or deleting content, and gave an example of this what happened during the elections because the Independent Commission for Supervising the Elections had no communication channel with platforms to control electoral spending related to advertisements.

Based on his experience and work in keeping pace with the information environment during the elections, and talking about hate speech in particular, Mikhael believed that the Parliament is supposed to deal with it because all societies face hate speech, especially during the election period, and Lebanon as a sectarian society in which you find hate speech of a greater kind, but it is somewhat controlled. He, therefore, suggests that it is necessary to act according to the definitions of hate speech in the Rabat Plan of Action and to consider the extent of the impact of those who launch hate speech on social media, their number of followers, and the likelihood of harm.

The Lebanese experience is late, according to Mikhael, especially in comparison with countries such as France, where they abolished the cybersecurity committee and formed another committee for digital protection in general, and Lebanon has not yet been able to catch up with this experience due to legislative slowness.

With regard to prosecutions in freedom of expression, Mikhael pointed out in the first part that the matter is not related to complaints, but practices, and that

prosecution is required to be carried out by the court, not the cybercrime office or the Public Prosecutor, as well as preventing arbitrary practices such as asking the activist to delete the post without a legal reason. As for the second part, it is related to prosecutions that take place without complaints, such as insulting a president or any official or friendly countries. The Minister of Justice, when he started his mandate in 2017, tried through a circular to cancel these prosecutions, but this circular was not implemented.

In her intervention, Dr. Rita Sayyah spoke about the fact that regulations in the media framework raise fear for freedom of expression, and the need for a media body that can develop systems and standards that preserve media freedom and secure freedom for users of social networks. She pointed to the need to think about incentives to help media startups operate in Lebanon. The solution to the spread of hate speech, despite the existence of laws, according to Sayyah, is to work to spread awareness and ethics when using social media, and to apply media literacy to all students, parents and professors in order to combat hate speech and misinformation, pointing out that the development of mechanisms and regulations must not restrict freedoms on social networking sites, and it is necessary to know who is the body that will regulate the work of these platforms.





II: The Workshop "The State of the Telecommunications Sector in Lebanon"

Organized by: SMEX

Moderator: Abed Kataya, Director of the Media Program with SMEX

Speakers: Safaa Ayyad and Salma Sakr from the Anti-Racism Movement in Lebanon

At the workshop titled "The State of the Telecommunications Sector in Lebanon", organized by SMEX, Abed Kataya from SMEX presented a research paper conducted by SMEX on the telecommunications sector in Lebanon between 1992 and 2023, highlighting the challenges in this sector at the levels of governance, infrastructure and service delivery to the end consumer. The paper provided a brief timeline for the sector, highlighting the most prominent milestones that contributed to its current situation. In addition, the paper highlighted the repercussions of high prices on the most vulnerable and marginalized communities, which have been exacerbated by economic crises and the devaluation of the Lebanese currency. The paper presented a study of the root causes, including faltering governance and management, monopolistic practices, and regulatory gaps, highlighting the telecommunications sector's loss of consumer confidence amid limited alternatives.

The workshop emphasized transparency in the telecommunications sector and enhancing accountability, considering access to the Internet and telecommunications as a fundamental human right.

The workshop witnessed in-depth discussions between representatives of telecommunications companies in Lebanon, some experts in the field, and the workshop presenters, on the telecommunications sector and the research paper. The discussions led to a consensus on need to coordinate between various parties to enhance joint work and exchange of observations, studies and procedures with the aim of developing the sector.

C. Outputs and Recommendations

On the Future of the Internet

- The path to reform begins with the implementation of laws, the first of which is Law 431.
- To find ways to be fair with employees due to the importance of the human factor in ensuring the continuity of the telecommunications sector, especially in the field of technology.
- To keep politics away from decisions related to the management of a vital sector such as telecommunications.
- To set clear regulation and vision that reflect positively on the revenues of the state and companies prior to the introducing the private sector.
- Licensing for any new service provider, including Starlink, must be obtained through a clear licensing system that guarantees the rights of the state, existing operators and users.
- To complete the Fiber optic project due to its importance in promoting the Internet and information and communication technology and diversifying services.
- To develop proactive contingency plans that include the network and human and financial resources to ensure the continuity of the network in emergency situations.
- To Implement alternative plans for Fiber to bridge the gap in remote and rural areas in Lebanon, such as Fixed Wireless Access.
- To adopt renewable energy to reduce the financial burdens on operators and the environmental impact of the grids.

On The Impact of Cybersecurity on Society and Strategic Sectors

For Cybersecurity Governance and Policy:

- Enact new, robust cybersecurity laws and regulations.
- Establish a national CERT to coordinate responses to cyber incidents.
- Regularly update security policies and conduct comprehensive risk assessments.

For Cybersecurity Infrastructure:

- Implement advanced cybersecurity measures, including IPv6, to enhance network security and facilitate LEA investigations.
- Develop a 24/7 operational Security Operations Center (SOC).
- Increase government, private sector, and academia collaboration to bolster digital infrastructure.

For Cybersecurity Training and Awareness:

- Conduct regular cybersecurity awareness sessions across all sectors.
- Integrate cybersecurity education into school curricula.
- Expand training programs for legal, judicial, and military personnel.

For Organizational Cybersecurity Practice:

- Strengthen the role of CISOs in organisations.
- Improve logging and storage capabilities of security devices.
- Advocate for structured response plans for cyber-attacks.

For Technical and Operational Excellence:

- Encourage technical auditing, such as penetration testing, to identify vulnerabilities.
- Ensure continuous updates in security implementations to keep pace with evolving threats.

On Internet of behaviors:

- To emphasize Education and Awareness: Encourage individuals to become more aware of their digital footprint and educate them about managing their data responsibly. Users need to be diligent in making informed decisions about where and when to share data and how much data they must share when needed.
- To advocate for Transparency and Consent: Stress the importance of transparency in data collection and usage, as well as obtaining explicit consent from users. Implement mechanisms to empower users to control their data.
- To push for Ethical Regulations: Call for the development and enforcement of ethical regulations governing data usage, similar to GDPR,

to protect user privacy and rights. Using the potential of IoB as a tool to enhance decision-making processes could help, but robust data protection measures must be implemented to ensure privacy and security are prioritized throughout IoB initiatives.

- To foster Collaboration and Accountability: Encourage collaboration between governments, businesses, and technology stakeholders to establish responsible practices and ensure accountability in the IOB ecosystem.
- To promote Sustainable Business Models: Advocate for a shift towards sustainable business models that prioritize consumer rights and ethical data practices over reckless growth and exploitation.
- To enhance Data Protection Measures: Invest in technologies and policies that enhance data protection, security, and anonymity, ensuring that individuals' privacy is safeguarded in the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Users must be empowered to control their data and encouraged to share only necessary information while IoB initiatives implement robust data protection measures.

On Accountability of social Media platforms and role of Multistakeholders

- To initiate public consultations in parliamentary committees with experts and civil society to develop laws that include a digital dimension and balance the need for regulation and respect for freedoms.
- To balance between control and incentives by approaching the issue of social media to take advantage of it to create opportunities for young people, especially by supporting startups.
- There is a need to join international agreements and international dialogs to open channels of communication with social media platforms towards more transparent and responsible policies.
- To create processes that accompany the adoption of laws, because laws without processes will not be applied.
- There's a need to a dialog with Social media platforms in order to understand how algorithms and content publishing policies work and try to influence the policymaking of these platforms.

- Not to interpret hate speech in the legislation that must be passed by the parliament, but to adopt a clear definition in accordance with the Rabat Action Plan, by setting some criteria such as considering the size of the impact of those who launch hate speech on social media and the number of followers and the likelihood of harm.
 - To advocate for changing the laws prosecuting journalists and activists for commenting on social media, resorting to the civil judiciary and abolishing the prison sentence under the penal code. Thus, any dialogue conducted by the Lebanese authorities with the platforms must be in the spirit of consecrating freedoms, not suppressing them.
 - To promote media and information literacy for all categories of students, parents and professors as a way to combat misleading news and hate speech.
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