Review of the article entitled: "The Digital Literature Crisis in the Middle East"

General assessment:

This article aims at pointing out the trajectories of digital literature in the Middle East and the obstacles standing in its way.

The subject is a relevant one, worth of academic interest, and reflects the increasing interest in relatively new forms of literature, especially in the Arab world.

The article is divided into appropriate sub-titles: an introduction, historical review, pedagogical/economic factors (that influence Arabic digital literature), technological factors, sociocultural factors, political/national factors, academic factors, debate and recommendations.

The article does a good job, through its clear division into sub-titles, of revealing the current obstacles to Arab digital literature. Its recommendations at the end, indicating steps to be accomplished in order for Arab digital literature to spread throughout the Arab world, are also worthy.

Nevertheless, the article has quite a few weaknesses, as detailed below:

Methodology, conduct of research and further materials:

1. The article does not bring much new information, but mainly takes existing data on the subject and divides it into sections, without relating AT ALL to the contents of the digital Arabic works mentioned in it. None of the plots are discussed, not even in brief. This leaves the article without a significant and independent input or innovation (excluding the division into sections and the recommendations at the end, as mentioned above). I believe that the article will benefit tremendously from discussing the plots, as it may give the readers of the article, as well as its author, more than a hint as to why digital literature experiences such difficulties entering the literary "mainstream", in addition to the objective reasons for this delay, as presented in the article. A careful examination the plots may bring to light other difficulties beside digital illiteracy etc. which are mentioned in the article. Could it be

that the contents are "hard to digest" or do they break taboos? Could it be that the writing is artistically deficient? This is worth examining. The combination of exploring the contents of these literary works AND the other "objective" reasons, may offer a more comprehensive explanation for the questions raised by the article.

Exploring both these aspects will also explain how the digital platform helps the writers and serves them in spreading their contents and messages.

2. The author should relate to and deal with the fact that Sanajla encountered difficulties in his attempt to publish his novel on an internet platform, and had to publish it in a paper edition first. How does that conform with the author's claim that the audience was not "ripe" enough for the digital platforms, if the paper edition did not go well, and his other novels, which were published through the internet, were more successful in terms of the number of readers (although according to him, the first novel was artistically better)?

3. The article could benefit a great deal from recent research in the field, such as Nele Lenze's *Politics and Digital Literature in the Middle East* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Teresa Pepe's *Blogging from Egypt 2005 – 2016* (Edinbourgh University Press, 2019) ; al-'Adhba's تأثيرات التكنولوجيا في الرواية من الورقية الى الحاسوبية ; the recent story about the Iranian-Kurdish activist Behrouz Boochani, who wrote a novel through *WhatsApp* from a detention camp in Australia (this should be a part of the introduction of the article, on new forms of literature through new technological and mobile applications). Furthermore, there are writers in Iraq who have been writing ادب الانترنت for some years now, so this is absolutely a phenomenon that can already be discussed and measured.

All these will validate the current article more.

4. The author would do well to avoid statements like: "This study suggests that the main problem is that Arab societies import technology rather than produce it themselves [...] after all, innovation comes from one's innermost thoughts and feelings". Such generalizations are not new, and do not contribute to the thesis.

5. The author claims that during the Golden Age Arabs produced their own original texts (p. 15). This claim should be reserved, since already in the Golden Age Arabs imported literature from other cultures, but did so selectively.

6. On p. 16 the author says that economic prosperity together with political stability brings creativity. This is a claim that should be proven, or at least made with reservations, because sometimes we find that critical times and upheavals in the history of nations make authors even more creative than usual, in order to avoid censorship and to disseminate their ideas, as happened in the middle of the twentieth century in Iraq or the eighties in Syria.

Terminology and choice of words:

7. The title of the article is "The Digital Literature Crisis in the Middle East", but the article does not take into account either Israel or Turkey. I therefore think that it would be better to restrict the scope of the article to the "Arab world" instead of the "Middle East", for better accuracy.

8. The author of the article claims that the first Arabic digital novel was "Zalal Wahid", and translates it into English as "Sole Shadow". But there is no such word in Arabic ("Zalal") in this specific meaning. The correct Arabic word is: "Zilal" (shadows), and this should be corrected throughout the article.

   Second, the title of this novel is "Zilal **al**-Wahid" (meaning: "The Shadows of the one", in the construct state, إضافة) and definitely not as quoted in the article, "Zalal Wahid", and translated by the author ("Sole Shadow", as a noun and its adjective). The way the title has been translated misses the whole point of the novel which talks about different kinds of shadows.
   This is a crucial point, since the title of his first novel relates to the titles of Sanajla's other novels. This is another reason why I recommend reading the discussed novels and stories, and relating to them within the article.

9. In the line: "and literature aspects on the other" the word "literature" should be changed to "literary" (in the introduction).

10. The word "Ta'aththur" (Ta'aththur al-Internet) should be changed to "Ta'thir", as we are talking here on influencing and not on being influenced, beside the fact that the latter is the actual and accurate quote of the original word in the article cited.
11. The word "ba'dha" (ba'dha 'azraq) should be changed to "ba'd**u**ha".
12. The word "Ta'ammullat" should be changed to " Ta'ammulat" (with only one *Lam* ل).
13. On p. 21: "we have been left behind in terms of [...]" – who are "we" in this sentence? This should be clearer.
On p. 21: "this will have a negative impact" – what is the negative impact? Negative in what way, exactly? This is not clear.

Technical issues:

14. The author should refrain from numbering two or three numbers of endnotes together in the text. Endnotes that belong together should be united into one endnote, numbered only once (for example: n. 3+4, n. 16+17+18, n. 30+31+32).
15. Exclamation marks should be avoided completely; they do not strengthen the point but on the contrary, they do not fit in an academic article, except in direct speech (pp. 15, 16, 18, 21)
16. Repetitions should be avoided: the fact that Arab writers do not have sufficient computer skills appears several times, on pages 9, 10, 11, 12.
17. The name Alkakai in endnote no. 24 should be: Alkalai.

To conclude, based on the above-mentioned comments, this article deserves to be published, subject to fundamental corrections and revisions.