Title: Internet and democracy in Morocco: a force for change or an instrument for repression

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Abstract

The paper explores the extent to which the future of democracy in Morocco is healthier with the Internet as the primary means by which people create a public sphere where they communicate and form public opinion. A study on digital media in Morocco was carried out to examine the emergence of new media platforms, and the impact of digitization on democracy and journalists' activity. The study relies on in-depth interviews with digital activists and online journalists, and carries out content analysis of online news portals. The study found that the Internet had created a dynamic and networked public space where lively debates can take place on many issues still considered off limits to mainstream media. Social media triggered a revival of the watchdog function of the media and paved the way for it to act as a fourth estate in monitoring political abuses by the regime. It has also been used as a tool for nascent political movements to organize and mobilize supporters across the country, particularly in the context of the ongoing Arab Spring. Morocco was spared from the draconian measures used in other authoritarian countries and the Internet was relatively free. The 20th of February movement in 2011, Amina Filali campaign in 2012, the Daniel Gate case in 2013 are significant moments of victory that relied on social media for political mobilization. However, with the surveillance technology available and its use justified (since the most democratic countries such as the US and France use it), the state is clamping down on Internet freedom. Activists identified surveillance as the most dangerous instrument in the hands the regime. Surveillance is worse than censorship, harassment, cyber-attacks and other instruments of repression used so far by the regime. The regime learned to use the empowering potential of the Internet to serve its own repressive agenda.

Title: 'Here Comes the Rain Again': Global climate change, social media, and rising political consciousness in Saudi Arabia

Bio: Leigh Llewellyn Graham is an anthropologist, PhD at Columbia University, USA (Llg2107@columbia.edu).

Abstract

Saudi Arabia has the highest per capita Twitter use in the world, accounting for 4.1% of global Twitter users. This presentation will interrogate Twitter's potential and limitations as a platform for real-time information sharing, community organization, and political and legal policy reform in response to environmental disasters. Drawing upon ethnographic data collected during my fieldwork at a women's university in Jeddah from 2010-2011 and periods of online ethnography since, I address the ubiquity of Twitter in Saudi Arabia and suggest that a mixed methods approach combining online and offline ethnography is optimal for understanding social media as a mode of public education and political mobilization.

Since 2009, torrential rains have flooded the seaside city of Jeddah. Each year, rains claim lives, wipe out critical transportation routes, and destroy cultural heritage sites, homes and businesses. Saudi citizens repeatedly turn to social media, namely Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, to manage the disaster. Tweets keep citizens connected and informed as the rains begin to fall and disseminate critical, real-time updates and alerts that often save lives. In the aftermath of the floods, Twitter functions as a platform for public debate and pointed criticism of the city's antiquated infrastructure and laws. Online debates have led to a number of online campaigns targeting the government's failures in urban planning, environmentalism, emergency preparedness, and immigration policies.

This presentation highlights specifically how Saudi students are emerging as educators and leaders in response to this situation. Students are connecting the grassroots activism and techno savvy that typifies their generation with the reach and resources of their universities to create new tools for crisis intervention and powerful public expressions of political will. When local governments are too slow or fail to respond, students organize food, clothing, and medical drives to meet urgent need. They utilize Twitter to monitor the situation, access community needs, and spread location information about shelters and aid sites.

Through discourse analysis and sentiment analysis as well as case studies of Saudi citizens negotiating the precarious relationship of online and offline activism in a strict legal culture and highly monitored Internetscape, this paper positions Twitter as a key factor in the

country's transformation of public space and emerging sense of civil society. Moreover, we may approach Saudi Arabia's Twitter use as a veritable experiment in peer-to-peer civic education, envisioned, embodied, and enacted by tech savvy Saudi youth with an inclination toward self-organization and political activism.

Title: Communicating and Democratising or Still Just Informing? Discursive Practices on *Twitter* and the Communication Deficit of the European Union

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Abstract

It has been argued that the 'democratic deficit' of the European Union (EU) resides in a set-up of different forms and channels of its communication. As it was often suggested, the EU has failed to develop an efficient, orchestrated strategy of communicating with its 'external environment' that would also foster the development of a transnational European Public Sphere. The European Commission (CEC) was especially criticised despite developing its own Communication Policy since the early 2000s. In the criticisms, the CEC was seen as not aiming at communication, i.e. practices of exchange of information and ideas with its stakeholders, media and the wider public, but much rather at one way information about the politics of the EU. As a result, the CEC was thus criticised for failing to make the EU a part of Europe's national public spheres, a goal that the Commission has actually set itself in its own 2006 White Paper on the European Communication Policy. The same concerned the use of web-based and social media that since 2006 ('Strategic Framework on e-Commission') have become the key element of CEC communication.

The current paper examines the role of Twitter, and its use by the CEC PR specialists, in improving the 'communication deficit' of the EU. The paper links systematic, critical-linguistic analysis of discursive practices on Twitter with a theoretical reflection on the role of social media in democratising Europe's supranational politics. The paper looks closely at the Twitter behaviour of the key CEC spokespeople and analyses the ways in which they interact within the triangle that also includes EU-politicians (e.g. officials such as CEC President or EU Commissioners) and media/journalists covering EU matters. Conducted within the tradition of Critical Discourse Studies, the analysis (spanning one month) focuses on the discourse of tweets along with patterns of interdiscursive recontextualisation of various meanings (e.g. by means of retweets). It aims to assess whether the Twitter discourse and behaviour of CEC spokespeople display openness and willingness to engage in Europe-related debates, or whether the EU PR uses social media as just another channel of information. The paper hence analyses whether CEC spokespeople's Twitter activities emphasize their

willingness to strengthen communication – especially between the EU and European media – and its EU-democratising role or whether they approach Twitter-based media/journalist contacts in a typical and technical spokesmanservice manner (just 'checking' the efficiency of information).

Title: Algorithms shaping collective identity: From a politics of identity to a politics of visibility

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Abstract

How does the algorithmically mediated environment of social media re-structure social action? This paper explores the role of social media in the organization, unfolding, and diffusion of contemporary protests, focusing on the role of social media in shaping identity-building processes.

Social media are changing the way people organize, mobilize, and protest. Organizational patterns of social movements have transformed, as individuals and networked collective action become more prominent at the expenses of traditional movement organizations. Organizing has become easier and quicker, and protest tends to be elusive and temporary. The narrative of the action is no longer controlled by organizations and leaders: any activist can contribute, by producing, selecting, punctuating, and diffusing meaning in the forms of tweets, posts, and videos. Individual and collective narratives unfold in social media platforms as much as they unfold into the real world. I call this (relatively) new type of mobilizing "cloud protesting", as it is grounded on centralized and proprietary social media platforms.

In computing, "cloud" indicates the delivery over the Internet of customized services such as software. Similarly, recent mobilizations can be seen as a cloud where a set of "soft resources" coexists: identities, narratives and know-how, which facilitate mobilization. These resources originate both online and offline, but mostly "live" online. They can be customized by and for individuals, who can tailor their participation. In addition, through social media protesters participate in the first person in identity building. The algorithmic environment of social media platforms structures this emerging social dynamic.

In this paper, I explore different aspects of the "cloud" seen in relation to the technical properties of social media: organizational patterns, tactics, and the impact of perception of online surveillance on tactical choices. I then focus on collective identity building at the interplay of a "politics of identity", typical of the so-called new social movements, and the "politics of visibility" fostered by social media. By visibility, I indicate the online presence of individuals and organizations, which needs to be constantly negotiated, reinvigorated and

updated. The politics of visibility is the result of a process that originates and ends within the individual, where the group is just a necessary intermediary stage, functional to peer recognition.

This research is situated at the crossroad of science and technology studies and social movement research. The paper intends to be a theoretically contribution grounded on fieldwork that combines participant observation with software ethnography.