

The Role of Media in the Arab Revolutions: Jordan

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Abstract

The media has assumed a central role in shaping public opinion particularly with the rise in protest activity during the recent uprisings in the region. The influx of news caused an information revolution that played an important role in undermining the state monopoly on knowledge and information. During the Arab Spring, the media transformed and worked to disseminate information faster and to a more diverse range of people. Thus, the media has become more involved in the Arab Spring and expanded its role from previous revolutions. The media began a competition between political actors and changed the manner in which these actors responded to political and ideological conflicts. This research is important because it sheds light on how the media influences Jordanians' views on the Arab Spring. However, this study was limited because it accounted only for the opinions of Jordanians, and hence does not necessarily reflect the opinions of citizens in other Arab nations.

To fully understand the impact of the media on the Arab Spring, we examined the results of a survey done by the Center for Strategic Studies and analyzed them along with other statistics on the rise of social media. Through our analysis, we found that Jordanians believe that the news is biased and has a hidden agenda. This led us to question whether Jordanians were using sources other than traditional media for their information on the protests. From this, we have created the following hypothesis: social media's role in the Arab Spring as a news agent was largely due to dissatisfaction with the current and conventional news agencies' manner of reporting.

Key words: Social media; Arab Spring; Facebook; Twitter; YouTube; One-way ANOVA; Two sample *t*-test

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9267>

INTRODUCTION

Much has been made of the media's impact on the Arab Spring. Analysts from all over the world explored how social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were instrumental in jump starting the protest movements. However, to date, much of the focus of these analyses has been on Egypt and Tunisia, the first two countries to undergo widespread (and successful) revolutions. This study seeks to focus on another country in the Arab world that continues to see weekly protests at the time of writing which is Jordan.

The Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan conducted a survey about the Role of Media in the Arab Spring, and it is important to analyze the effect of these social media outlets in our immediate proximity. By probing into how Jordanians acquire their news and information, we can better understand the anatomy of the protests in a rapidly changing social and news environment.

One of the main emphases of the study is on social media and internet use within the country. The graph below gives the reader an idea as to how many Jordanians are using the computer and internet.

Of those who use the internet (of 83% above), 42% report that they use the internet to learn about political activities taking place in Jordan, compared to 21% in the 2010 survey. Meanwhile, 24% state that they use the internet to express their opinions on political issues,

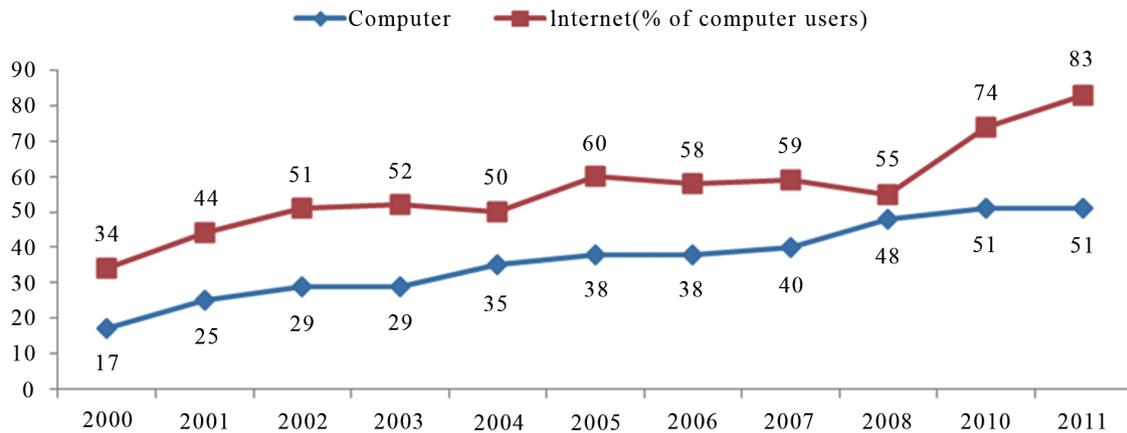


Figure 1
Percentages of Computer and Internet Users (Ages 18+) in Jordan Since 2000¹

compared to 12% in 2010. Over one-third (36%) report that they use the internet to learn about the opinions of the political opposition in Jordan, as compared to 19% in

2010. It is important to note that the percentage of internet users whose primary aims are to follow and participate in political issues has doubled over the past year (see Figure 2).

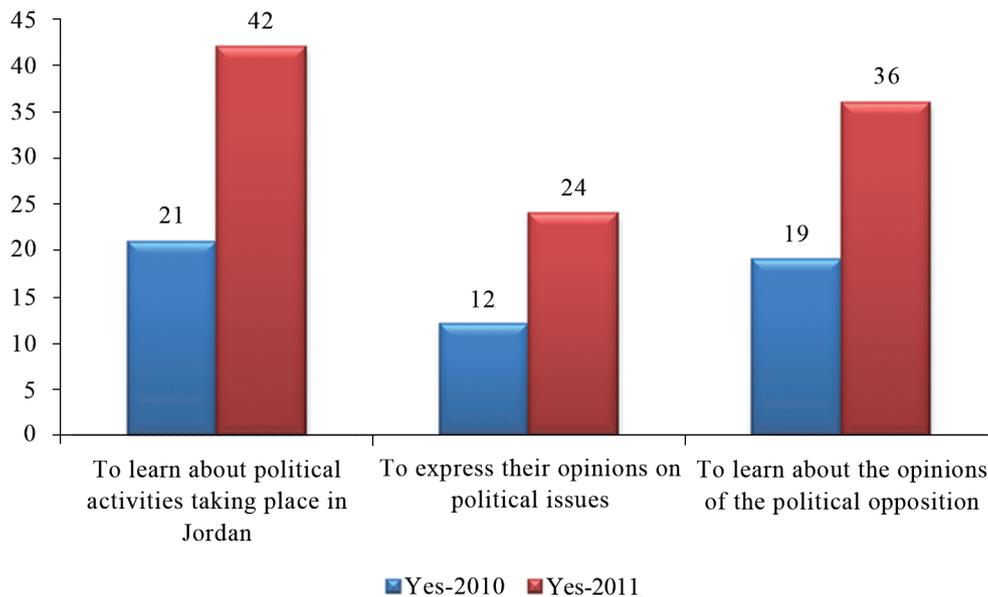


Figure 2
Jordanian Use the Internet for Various Social, Entertainment and Political Purposes. Do You Use the Internet “_____?”²

The study will go into significantly more detail, but one important data point to note is the sharp increase in internet users in 2010/2011. This coincides exactly with the Arab Spring, and this study will argue that the increase in Jordanian internet users is a direct result of a desire for alternative media sources such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

The purpose of this paper is to understand how the Arab Spring has influenced the media and perceptions of

Jordanians, with the following objectives:

- a) Explore the role social media has played in the revolutions and its recent rise in popularity.
- b) Understand the level of confidence that Jordanians have in their news and how much they rely on particular sources for information.
- c) Assess the role of bias in the media.

1. SAMPLE METHODOLOGY

A stratified clustered sample method was used for the implementation of the survey. This design enables CSS to easily analyze and subsequently publish the results. It

¹ “The State of Democracy in Jordan: Public Opinion Survey” Center for Strategic Studies, Amman, Jordan, 2012.

² Ibid.

is also the most effective and feasible sample design to compare the information on different provincial levels. The sample was based on geographical and administrative divisions in the kingdom as well as addressing social stratification between rural and urban areas. CSS drew the sample in a way to represent geographical and administrative levels, and to reach the level of housing blocs as the smallest sampling unit.

The poll included a sample of 1,940 Jordanian ages 18 and older out of which 1,933 completed the questionnaires, giving us a response rate of 99.6%. The sample polled an equal number of males and females, with a 2.5% margin of error. CSS collected the data from respondents via face-to-face interviews. The fieldwork was implemented during the period from October 26-31, 2011 utilizing 72 data collectors and 18 field supervisors. The final sample was divided by following provinces:

Table 1
Province Distribution

Province	Count	%
Amman	781	40
Balqa	127	7
Zarqa	296	15
Madaba	47	2
Irbid	340	18
Mafraq	79	4
Jerash	53	3
Ajloun	42	2
Karak	73	4
Tafelah	27	1
Ma'an	31	2
Aqaba	37	2
Total	1933	100

2. THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS

In order to test our hypothesis: That Jordanians have turned to social media websites because of their unhappiness with traditional media biases, we will explain each social media websites' general purpose, its purported role in the protests, and compare hard data for users in other Middle Eastern countries. Finally, we will extrapolate these findings in order to contrast them with available information on traditional news media to arrive at our conclusion.

2.1 Facebook During the Arab Spring

Facebook is a social media website that, according to their information page, is "A social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study, and live around them." Users with a Facebook account may communicate

with friends that also have an account. In addition, they may upload pictures, videos, and post "statuses" that anyone who uses the website may see. During the Arab Spring, users of this website posted pictures, statuses, and videos in order to notify others of protests, marches, and other social gatherings. The numbers¹ indicate that Facebook is by far the most active social media website in the MENA area.

According to spotonpr.com, as of May 2010 there were 15 million Facebook users in the MENA region. Jordan had 883,780 Facebook users, which were a small number compared to Egypt, which had 3.4 million users, but large compared to Libya's 143,960.²

By June 2012, the number of Facebook users in the same area had more than doubled, to 39.6 million.³ Facebook users in Jordan increased to 2,204,500, Egypt jumped to 10,999,640 users, and Libya increased to 545,700. All of the above countries' use more than doubled, with Egyptian usage tripling and Libya's accounts increasing fourfold in the three year period.⁴

Prior to the Arab Spring, Facebook usage was fairly prevalent in the Middle East. However, we contend that the increases noted above are a direct result of Arab Spring protesters desire for a less biased news source, and not simply normal increases in the number of Facebook users as the site gains popularity. To help support this postulate, we looked at countries with similar rates of internet penetration in the same general area.

Perhaps the best comparison of the group is the Jordanian case. Jordan, Lebanon, and Kuwait are all Arabic-speaking, Muslim-majority countries. Of these three, Jordan is the only country that has seen large-scale protests due to the Arab Spring. Despite having the lowest internet penetration of the group, Jordan displayed the highest increase of Facebook users in the one-year period. Lebanon, despite sharing a border with two countries undergoing Arab Spring protests (Syria and Jordan), only saw a 17% increase in Facebook users.

¹ In Jordan alone, Facebook users outnumber twitter users by 50:1

² "Middle East and North Africa Facebook Demographics". Retrieved 2012, June 25 from http://www.spotonpr.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/FacebookMENA_24May10.pdf

³ "What Were Those Facebook Stats Again?" Retrieved 2012 June 26th from <http://www.spotonpr.com>

⁴ "Egypt" retrieved 2012, June 25 from <http://www.checkfacebook.com/>
 "Jordan" retrieved 2012, June 25 from <http://www.checkfacebook.com/>
 "Libya" retrieved 2012, June 25 from <http://www.checkfacebook.com/>

⁵ Data compiled from the following websites:
<http://www.msrinternet.capmas.gov.eg/pls/fdl1/tst12e?action=1&lname=%201>

http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/index.htm

<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>

<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>

<http://www.ideaigitalmarketing.com/facebook-penetration-by-countries-january-2011.html>

<http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/?interval=last-6-months#chart-intervals>

Table 2
Facebook Usage in Selected Countries by Year⁵

Country	Population	Internet penetration	Facebook users 2011	Facebook users 2012	% increase
Egypt	82,265,000	26.4%	5,199,780	10,999,640	111%
Kenya	41,070,934	25%	1,015,100	1,424,580	40%
Nigeria	155,215,000	29%	2,844,940	5,051,440	77%
Libya	6,469,000	5.9%	267,000	545,700	104%
Malawi	15,879,252	4.5%	71,660	139,540	94%
Lesotho	1,924,000	4.4%	16,920	34,340	102%
Togo	6,771,000	5.3%	50,620	88,880	75%
Jordan	6,315,000	30%	1,205,600	2,204,500	82%
Lebanon	4,143,000	33%	1,228,600	1,449,420	17%
Kuwait	2,595,000	42.4%	585,320	918,080	56%

Thus, from the information above, we conclude that the increase in Facebook users increased in our three target countries as a direct result of the Arab Spring and the desire for unbiased news. Youth are increasingly using social media as a source of information,⁶ and for the moment, Facebook seems to be the primary social network in the MENA area, and especially our three target countries.

2.2 Twitter Usage in Jordan

The Twitter website describes itself in the following fashion:

Twitter is a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting. Simply find the accounts you find most compelling and follow the conversations. At the heart of Twitter are small bursts of information called Tweets. Each Tweet is 140 characters long, but don't let the small size fool you—you can discover a lot in a little space. You can see photos, videos and conversations directly in Tweets to get the whole story at a glance, and all in one place.

Twitter gained popularity during the Egyptian revolution as a quick way to organize protest marches and gather large groups of people reliably. "Tweets" can also be received on a mobile phone via an SMS text message, further increasing the site's popularity as a quick and up-to-date information source.

Twitter rose to prominence in the Egyptian Revolution. Egyptian protesters used the octothorpe (known as a "Hashtag" to Twitter users, which is used to aid in searches) to help spread protest movements. In fact, "#egypt" was the most popular Hashtag on twitter in the year 2011, with "#Jan25" (the date of Egypt's first protest) also in the top 8.⁷

According to Ammon News, Jordan has 37,000 registered Twitter users as of June 26th, 2012. The Jordan Times noted that Jordan has the sixth highest penetration rate in the Arab World.

In conjunction with the country-specific numbers, we also looked at the presence of news media on Twitter. We

selected BBC Arabic, Al-Jazeera Arabic, and France 24, three of the most prevalent news stations in the Middle East. As of June 25th 2012, BBC Arabic had 314,561 followers, Al-Jazeera Arabic had 1,415,949 followers, and France 24 had 170,627 followers. By "following" these news networks, people receive updates every time the news agencies Tweet a story on their page. This contributes to the rapid dissolution of information, and keeps followers informed of current events. Despite the fact that followers of these three pages might not necessarily be from the Arab World, we believe these figures give a general idea of the interest of the news networks in the region.

While Twitter is nowhere near as prevalent as Facebook, it nevertheless reaches many people. Perhaps the most important aspect of Twitter is its ability to text extremely up-to-date information to user's phones. This has the capacity to effect large groups of people more rapidly than Facebook, which is primarily a computer-based interface. For example, if just one person in a large group on the street receives a Tweet, that information can rapidly spread throughout the group. Facebook users, on the other hand, are far more likely to be at home on their computer when they receive the information, and far less likely to be in a large group. This more than any other factor, has led to the media coining the Egyptian revolution the "Twitter Revolution."

2.3 YouTube as a Political Engine in the Arab Spring

YouTube is a video sharing website that is defined as:

Allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers large and small.

During the Arab Spring, people uploaded videos to YouTube in order to demonstrate the widespread government brutality and share the protests with the world. Some videos showed footage of riots and assaults, while others simply urged leaders to step down.

Sixty hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute worldwide, however, in the MENA area only one

⁶ See <http://www.spotonpr.com/facebook-versus-newspapers/>

⁷ "#Overused: The Most Popular Twitter Hashtags of 2011" retrieved 2012, June 26 from <http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/12/06/overused-the-most-popular-twitter-hashtags-of-2011/>

hour of YouTube videos is uploaded per minute. In the past year, playbacks have doubled in the MENA region. There are 167 million video views per day in this area, putting the region in the spot for the second most views, behind the United States. Since last October, there has been a 112% increase in daily views.⁸ In Jordan, video uploads increased 140% and views increased 240% from 2010-2011. 2010 and 2011 were pivotal years for the Arab Spring, and it is likely that there is a direct correlation between the protest activity and the increase in uploads and views in Jordan and across the Middle East.

While Facebook and Twitter have given people immediate access to news updates and have played pivotal roles in rallying people around specific causes, YouTube has allowed people to see the information first hand. Even though YouTube is often used for entertainment purposes, it also serves as a resource for live footage and personal videos that users create in order to make a political statement. For a video to become popular on YouTube, users need to view it, and the more views a video has the more likely it is that people will spread it around, causing the number of views to rise. People share YouTube videos on social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, which helps to increase their number of views, thereby increasing their popularity. During the Arab Spring, videos of violence, suffering, and protests were uploaded as a way of communicating the injustice of the situation to the world. Many of the videos spread like wildfire, and protestors used them as rallying points against their governments.

3. REASONS FOR THE PROMULGATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The prevalence of social media in the Arab World, and especially during the recent uprisings, led many to examine the psychological aspects of youth behavior towards social media. Many scholars note how the revolutions exposed the 'technology gap' between the youth who relied on social media, and the adults who relied on print and news media. Ulrichsen et al. note that "65% of the population of the Middle East is under the age of 30 and are increasingly technology-savvy and adept at using new forms of communication to bypass state controls and mobilize around common issues or grievances" and also that "Bloggers in Egypt and Tunisia were instrumental in publicizing and spreading accounts of torture and human rights violations by the security services." (Cottle, 2011) Perhaps the biggest take-away from the quote above is the extreme "youth bubble" that

the Middle East has. With 65% of the population under 30, any social media that is popular among this age group (see above data on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) will have a large impact on the region as a whole.

A quote from an Egyptian protester reveals exactly how integral to the revolutions (and since, society as a whole) social media was. The protester stated, "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world."⁹ This, perhaps more than any analysis, shows the total integration of social media as a normal and oft-used form of media in the Arab World.

The question is, why did the youth break from the traditional print and news media and choose social media as their main news source?

One of the reasons is the fact that Jordanians consider social media websites a reliable source of information. Only 6% "did not" trust Facebook, 1% "did not" trust Twitter, and 4% "did not" trust YouTube.

Table 3
Jordanian Trust in Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as a News Source

	Facebook %	Twitter %	YouTube %
Trust it to a large degree	28	24	30
Trust it to a medium degree	46	49	51
Trust it to a small degree	20	26	15
Not trusted at all	6	1	4
Total	100	100	100
Weighted average*	65	65	69

Note. Weighted average was calculated by multiplying each category count on assumed weight (large degree=100, medium degree=100, small degree= 33.33, not at all=0)

This tells us that an overwhelming majority of youth find these three sites reliable. When this information is combined with the ease of access to these sites and the perceived bias of current traditional media (detailed below) it is easy to see why people so strongly utilized social media as a news source.

The results show that 67% of those who said they follow protests and revolutions using Facebook were from 18-34 ages old. The two samples T-test shows that there is a significant difference at 5% level between the Youth (18-34) and the other age group (35+) in following the protest through Facebook (alpha=.004)

The same study found that 71.1% of Jordanian males and 79% of females used traditional media sources as their main source of information. However, 49.5% of the same males and 44.9% of the same females thought that the aforementioned media played a biased role in reporting on the revolutions (Center for Strategic Studies, 2012).

⁸ "YouTube Statistics in the Middle East". Retrieved 2012, June 25 from <http://www.mediainegypt.com/2012/04/youtube-statistics-from-middle-east.html>

⁹ Anonymous Cairo activist, quoted in Nadine Kassem Chebib & Rabia Minatullah Sohail. (2011). The Reasons Social Media Contributed to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. *International Journal of Business Research and Management*, 3, 139.

Table 4
Do You Follow the Arab Revolutions and Protests Through Facebook

		Age		Total
		18-34	35+	
Yes	Count	254	124	378
	% within yes	67.2%	32.8%	100.0%
	% within age	60.8%	49.2%	56.4%
<i>T</i> -value	-2.914	Sig. (2-tailed)=.004		Mean difference =-.115
				Std. error difference =0.039

Note. Question was asked to respondents who use internet only.

Most importantly, 40% of the youth demographic (generally the demographic that incites protests and rebellions, considered here to be between the ages of 18-

34) believes that the media played a biased rule. See Table 5 for more details.

Table 5
Media Bias in the Jordanian Youth Demographic

In your opinion, in dealing with revolutions and protests, do the media play a neutral role or a biased role?				
		Age		Total
		18-34	35+	
Play a neutral role	Count	278	408	686
	% within row	40.5%	59.5%	52.6%
plays a role which is not neutral / biased	Count	249	368	617
	% within row	40.4%	59.6%	47.4%
Total	Count	527	776	1303

Note. This question was asked to respondents who follow the revelations and the protests only

The fact that nearly 40% of the youth polled distrusted traditional media reveals youths' dissatisfaction with typical media sources. We contend that this bias, coupled with the perceived reliability of social media websites shown in Table 3, is the main reason 18-34 year-olds flocked toward these websites during the revolution. While "news" reported on social media websites is by no means professional, it is easier for those watching a YouTube video for example, to form their own opinions, instead of having the information

twisted and warped by state-run media sources.

Another potential draw toward social media is its "user friendliness" and easy access. Caught up in the revolutionary fervor, one can see how youth would desire to be a part of such a movement, even in such a small way. Accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube all are created with a few clicks of the mouse, something that attracts many users. This undoubtedly contributed to the massive rise of such users as noted above.

Table 6
Replacement of Traditional Media by Social Media

In your opinion, to which degree has the online media and social interaction website succeeded in replacing the satellite station as an alternative source of information about the revolutions and protest movements?

		Age		Total
		18-34	35+	
Succeeded to a large degree	Count	146	97	243
	% within row	60.1%	39.9%	100.0%
	% within age	35.4%	37.6%	36.2%
Succeeded to a medium degree	Count	153	92	245
	% within row	62.4%	37.6%	100.0%
	% within age	37.0%	35.7%	36.5%
Succeeded to a small degree	Count	73	36	109
	% within row	67.0%	33.0%	100.0%
	% within age	17.7%	14.0%	16.2%
Did not succeed at all	Count	41	33	74
	% within row	55.4%	44.6%	100.0%
	% within age	9.9%	12.8%	11.0%
Total	Count	413	258	671
	% within row	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
	% within age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note. This question was asked to respondents who uses internet only.

Looking at the data compiled in this study, coupled with the reasons mentioned above, it is possible to determine that the massive rise and effects of social media were largely due to the youths' dissatisfaction with current media, and the easy availability of other outlets. The mass movement toward social media as a news outlet subsequently led to the fall of former leadership, and contributed greatly to the overall success of the revolutions.

Perhaps the survey question that most completes this analysis was "In your opinion, to which degree has the online media and social interaction website succeeded in replacing the satellite station as an alternative source of information about the revolutions and protest movements?" The responses, outlined below, paint an extremely interesting picture of how the youth now view social media.

A mere 9% of youth do not think that social media has replaced traditional media. This tells us that a vast majority of Jordanian youth have accepted social media as an alternative news source, and also that they feel it is a more reliable and up-to-date information reference.

When respondents rely solely upon one source for information, they limit the scope of the material that they process and understand. In order to get a clear, unbiased media perception it is important to rely on multiple news outlets and forms of media. Jordanians appeared to follow this model and accessed information through multiple forms of media, yet they were mostly still dependent on television news as a source for protest information. According to a survey on the role of the Media in the Arab Revolution conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University in 2012, 47% of respondents believe that the media plays a biased role in reporting the revolutions and protests. Not only do Jordanians believe Middle Eastern media is biased, they support it. 55% of Jordanians reported that they support media bias to a small, medium, or large extent. It is difficult for news sources to be completely unbiased due to the fact that they often report the news by giving the facts and then an analysis. This analysis inherently combines the opinion of the journalist writing the article with the actual evidence, which in turn makes the information biased. Respondents value news analysis because it helps them process information and make their own informed opinions about current events. See Table 7 below for more details.

4. MEDIA BIAS AND TRUST

Table 7
Jordanian Youth's Support of Media Bias

To what degree do you support the bias (non-neutral in the coverage and the transfer of information), that some channels do in relation to revolutions and protests?				
		Age		Total
		18-34	35+	
To large extent	Count	75	119	194
	% within row	38.7%	61.3%	100.0%
	% within age	11.6%	11.9%	11.8%
To medium extent	Count	223	283	506
	% within row	44.1%	55.9%	100.0%
	% within age	34.4%	28.4%	30.7%
To small extent	Count	80	128	208
	% within row	38.5%	61.5%	100.0%
	% within age	12.3%	12.8%	12.6%
Don't support this at all	Count	235	387	622
	% within row	37.8%	62.2%	100.0%
	% within age	36.2%	38.8%	37.8%
Don't know	Count	36	80	116
	% within row	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%
	% within age	5.5%	8.0%	7.0%
Total	Count	649	997	1646
	% within row	39.4%	60.6%	100.0%
	% within age 2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note. This question was asked to respondents who follow the revelations and the protests only.

While the survey questioned the reliability of news sources, it did not specify how respondents define reliability. It is possible that a news source can be biased but still reliable because it consistently produces up to date and well-researched stories. The results indicate that a plurality of Jordanians, 38.6%, believe that Al-Jazeera is the most reliable news source for information

on the Arab Spring. The second most trusted source was Jordanian TV, which only 12.5% of respondents found to be reliable. Despite the survey findings on Al-Jazeera's reliability, 51.3% of Jordanians believe that Al-Jazeera has a political agenda. Jordanians still favor Al-Jazeera and rely on the station for information regarding the protests and other important current events even though

they believe it has a political agenda that influences its coverage.

Jordanians perceived the media as having a strong political bias. 38.5% of Jordanians believe that satellite channels have a political agenda depending on the country they are reporting on and their country of origin. Jordanian had various answers for the source of the political agenda,

but 16.3% believed the station’s political agenda was to serve the interests of the West. 15.6% believed that the agenda was to sabotage Arab states, and 14.8% thought it was to serve the interests of some Arab regimes. Finally, 13.7% believed the bias was to serve the interests of the channel itself. Table 8 breaks down the responses from the 18-34 year old demographic.

Table 8
Satellite Channel Biases According to Jordanians

Bias	All respondents	18-34%	35+%
Serve the interests of the West	19%	32.7%	67.3%
Serve the interests of Arab regimes	17%	36.2%	63.8%
Sabotage Arab States (undermining security and stability)	18%	36.4%	63.6%
Serve the channel’s interests	16%	35.6%	64.4%
Inciting sectarian strife within countries and the dismantling of national unity	13%	40.0%	60.0%
Topple Arab regimes/rulers	8%	38.1%	61.9%
Show reality and the fight against injustice and corruption	5%	58.6%	41.4%
Distort country image in the streets	2%	58.3%	41.7%
Others	2%	35.3%	64.7%
Total	100%		

Al-Jazeera’s prejudice could potentially be the result of Western pressure and influence. Since Al-Jazeera English’s establishment in 2006, it has grown at an astonishing rate. Currently, the channel broadcasts to 250 million households in 130 countries.¹⁰ In contrast, Al-Jazeera Arabic only has 40 million viewers. We speculate that there could be pressure from the English branch to take a more pro-Western perspective on issues.¹¹

Another source of Al-Jazeera’s bias could result from serving the interests of Arab regimes, particularly the interests of Qatar. Several Al-Jazeera journalists recently resigned because they felt that the news organization’s reports on the Arab Spring were biased, and that the Emir of Qatar had a direct influence on the programming of the channel.¹² These resignations support our hypothesis that Jordanian are unsatisfied with the manner in which traditional news media operates and, as a result, are turning to social media in order to get protest information.

With the rise of the internet and social media, information is constantly at the fingertips of millions of people worldwide; all that it takes is the touch of a button. However, with the influx of information, trust in all forms of media has lowered. Al-Jazeera is still highly regarded by Jordanians as a reliable source despite its perceived bias, because people have begun to expect some form of partiality in the news. Respondents use traditional media

for information but are increasingly looking to other forms of media in order to get the fullest picture. This has contributed to a rise in internet and social media usage for news purposes.

CONCLUSION

The data provided helps us to draw conclusions about the prevalence of social media in the Middle East since the rise of the Arab Spring. We conclude that social media became a prevalent source for news and played a pivotal role in the Arab Spring because citizens were dissatisfied with the traditional news media and the manner in which information and facts were being presented. A direct correlation can be drawn between the rise in social media usage and the protest activity occurring all over the Middle East because Arabs are using the websites as a means to rapidly disseminate revolution information. Since the start of the Arab spring, Facebook users have more than doubled across the MENA region. Jordan saw a dramatic increase in Facebook users, YouTube views and video uploads. Social media has become an important part of how Middle Easterners give and receive information, about themselves and the world. When an event occurs, Arabs on the ground can be Tweet about it, upload a picture to Facebook, or record a video and upload it to YouTube that very moment. Traditional news media is nowhere near as responsive and fast, while the social media websites help activists to get information in real time, as it happens.

While social media has played an enormous role in the revolutions, Jordanian is still dependent on traditional news media. This exception to our hypothesis was proven by Jordanian’s reliance and trust in Al-Jazeera and other

¹⁰ “Corporate Profile”. Retrieved 2012, July 11 from <http://www.aljazeera.com/aboutus/2006/11/200852518555444449.html>

¹¹ “Al-Jazeera TV Viewers Demographics”. Retrieved 2012, June 20 from http://www.allied-media.com/aljazeera/al_jazeera_viewers_demographics.html

¹² “Al-Jazeera Employees Resign Over the Channel’s Biased Coverage” Press TV, March 12, 2012. Retrieved 2012, July 12 from <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/231366.html>

satellite channels. According to the survey, Jordanians overwhelmingly cited television news as their main source of information, and 97.5% of respondents stated that they used it as a source to learn about the revolutions and protests. Respondents also get their information from other forms of media—49.1% of Jordanians hear about the revolutions through conversations with friends, and 32.6% read the newspaper. In comparison, 29.2% learn about protest activity online. One can therefore see that while social media and the internet are becoming more prevalent, Jordanians largely tend to rely on other sources for preliminary protest information.

Social media is growing. Every day more and more people create Twitter, YouTube and Facebook accounts. People use their accounts for a myriad of different activities, but they provide a venue conducive to news reporting and the spread of information. While people still place a lot of value on traditional media, the Arab

Spring demonstrates that the role of the media is shifting and Arabs are looking for news online with increasing frequency. We believe that this is due to a general dissatisfaction with the manner in which traditional news media presents information, and because there is a general excitement that surrounds new technology and products. Social media allows activists to post information and to get excited about it in a whole new way. Only time will tell the true impact of social media on the news, but for now there seems to be a positive association between social media use and trust.

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