SOCIAL MEDIA
GO TO WAR

Rage, Rebellion
and Revolution in
the Age of Twitter

EDITED BY
RALPH D. BERENGER

MARQUETTE BOOKS LLC
Spokane, Washington
In Memoriam

Photo courtesy of the Daily Missourian | Bill Sikes/Missourian Archive

John Calhoun Merrill
1924-2012

Scholar, Educator, Author, Ethicist, Colleague and Friend

-30-
# Table of Contents

In Memoriam, John C. Merrill ................................................................. iv
About the Contributors ........................................................................ ix
Foreword ............................................................................................... xix

Mohammad Ibrahim Ayish

Introduction: Social Media Go to War .................................................. 1
Ralph D. Berenger

Part I
Power, Politics and Publics:
Ideologies, Theories and Policies Underlying Social Media

1. Plane Talk: Mack A. Velli and the Ethics of Direction ....................... 19
   John C. Merrill

   Steven J. Dick

3. The Role of Contemporary Media in Political Transitions:
   Searching for a New Paradigm ........................................................... 43
   Katharine R. Allen

4. Al Jazeera, Bab Al Hara, and Social Media
   in the Resurrection of Arab Nationalism .......................................... 63
   Sohail Dahdal

5. The Social Military’s About Face: U.S. Defense Department’s
   Changing Relationship with New Media ........................................ 81
   Jennifer A. Berenger
Part II

Precursors of the Arab Spring:
Case Studies of Social Media Use Around the World

6. Filling-in-the-Blanks During National Crises:
The Good and Bad of Social Media in Georgia ........................................ 99
   Byron T. Scott and Ellada Gamreklidze

7. Collectively We Unite: A Case Study
   of Social Networking for a Cause ..................................................... 109
   Basma Botros and Melanie Mills

8. Barack Obama, the American Uprising and Politics 2.0 ...................... 133
   Martin A. Parlett

9. Citizen Journalism in Cuba: Transnational Advocacy
   Via the Voice of Generacion Y .......................................................... 169
   Katharine Reed Allen

10. The Struggle for Truth: The Online Fight
    for Freedom Before the 2011 Tunisian Uprising ............................. 191
    Catherine Cassara

11. Digitizing Discontent: YouTube
    and Thailand’s Red Shirt Uprising ................................................ 205
    Melissa Wall and Treepon Kirdnak

12. Social Media, Students, and Protests
    in the ‘Wisconsin Spring’ ............................................................. 217
    Tim Macafee and J. J. De Simone

13. Traditional Media, Social Media, and Social Change
    in India: The ‘Free Binayak Sen’ Campaign ..................................... 237
    Margaret U. D’Silva, Siobhan E. Smith and Girish Nikam
Contents

Part III

The ‘Persian Spring:’ Iran’s Presidential Election Protests

14. Emerging Power of New Media
   and Post-Election Violence in Iran ........................................... 251
   Irfan Raja

15. Effective or Overrated? The Role of Social Media
   in Iranian Mass Demonstrations of June 2009 ......................... 277
   Cora Werwitzke and Jürgen Wilke

16. Social Media and Cyber Activism:
   YouTube and Iran’s Election Protests ................................. 303
   Emily A. Ehmer

17. The Power of the Picture: Penetration of the Real on YouTube .... 321
   Bojana Romic

18. Citizen. ‘Micro-journalism’: How #IranElection
   Was Exploited in Politics and Newspaper Stories ................. 335
   Rune Saugmann Andersen

Part IV

Social Media and the ‘Arab Spring’

   and the Tunisian Revolution ............................................. 353
   Catherine Cassara and Lara Lengel

20. Political Activism in Egypt:
   Youths Break the Spiral of Silence .................................... 367
   Radwa A. Mobarak

Social Media Go to War | vii
Contents

21. The Icon of the Egyptian Revolution:
Using Social Media to Topple a Mideast Regime 383

Sadaf Ali and Shahira Fahmy

22. Battleground Facebook:
Contestation Mechanisms in Egypt’s 2011 Revolution 399

Hanan Badr

23. Revolution in Egypt and President Obama’s Response:
American and Middle Eastern Student Views 423

William R. Davie, Steven J. Dick, Maha Bashri,
Mohammed Galander, James St. Pierre and Naila Hamdy

24. Social v. State Media: Egypt’s Fight
for Information After the Uprising 441

Elizabeth Iskander and Mina Monir

25. ‘Voices of Freedom’: Music and Revolution in North Africa 457

Lara Lengel and Catherine Cassara
with Christy Mesaro-Winkle and Kaitlin Chatetz

26. The ‘News Blog’: Social Media
and Global News Coverage of the ‘Arab Spring’ 471

Aziz Douai, Phil J. Auer and Dustin Domangue

27. Women and Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution 487

Naila Hamdy and Lindsey Conlin

28. Jordan Unrest: Did Royal Tweets
Absorb Some of the Anger? 501

Hania A. M. Nashef

29. Social Media Go to War:
Summation and Conclusions 511

Ralph D. Berenger

Index 519
Jordan Unrest: 
Did Royal Tweets Absorb Some of the Anger?

Hania A. M. Nashef

Shafiq Rushaydaat Street, commonly known as University Street, in the northern Jordanian city of Irbid is recognized by the Guinness Book of Records as having the world’s largest number of Internet cafés in one square kilometer.

Because of the proliferation of computers and Internet service providers, Jordan by the 1990s was one of the leading countries in the Arab world in connectivity, according to Jihan Buhjat Hadad and Dr. Mohammed S. Shunnaq (2009). Hadad and Shunnaq add that the Royal Scientific Association, through its Information System Center, helped in spreading the use of computers within Jordanian society. Therefore, the government traditionally has encouraged Internet use through a conscious effort to make the service available to all Jordanians.

According to OpenNet (2009), Jordan’s Internet “remains largely unfettered, with filtering applied to a single news Web site that is often critical of the Jordanian and other Arab regimes.” However, the OpenNet article rightly lists inconsistencies in the kingdom’s policies often applied to the Internet. The Internet today remains under government control, which successive administrations have manipulated to their advantage, sometimes providing leniency while at other times withdrawing freedoms when they felt a need to curb criticism or dissent. Changes in the 2007 Jordanian press law brought online publications “under the same law as the written press” (CIMA, n.d.). Social media sites in Jordan, on the other hand, have been encouraged; the royal family being one of their first users and most ardent supporters.
This chapter will:

- Analyze the role social media sites has played in the protests that took place in Jordan in 2011, an extension of the angry Arab Spring that spread throughout the North Africa and the Middle East.1

- Concern itself with three youths’ movements, “Jayeen,” “Shabab 24 March” and “April 15,” which actively used Facebook to mobilize people in peaceful protests that pressed government for a variety of demands.

- Attempt to analyze what actually transpired following the March 24-25, 2011, demonstrations and how the previously mentioned policy contradictions played into the various scenarios that took place before and after that fateful weekend.

- Look at the role of the Jordanian monarchy, and specifically Queen Rania’s Facebook and Twitter pages as they responded to protests calling for reforms that have spread throughout the kingdom.

- Investigate whether Facebook and Twitter attempted or were able to absorb some of the anger of the street by offering solutions or explanations to various demands such as the call for probes into corruption by high-ranking officials, to the reverting to the 1952 constitution,2 or even try to displace the notion that government employs double-standards.

SHOWDOWN AT AL DAKHLIYA ROUNDABOUT

The March 24, 2011, demonstrations in Amman’s Al Dakhliya Roundabout (Interior Ministry Roundabout) saw a turning point in protests that had been previously organized by either the trade unions or various Islamicist groups.3 The call for protest was announced through Facebook by a hitherto unknown group calling itself Shabab 24 March. Prior to the March 24 call, a group calling itself Jayeen (We’re coming) was sending press releases to independent Internet news sites, such as ammonews.net, allofjo.net, ammanpost.net, and assawsana.com with its agenda as early as January 2011 to mobilize a peaceful demonstration in front of the Jordanian Cabinet Headquarters to call for the resignation of then-prime minister Samir al Rifai’s cabinet; an independent higher judiciary body to investigate corruption; and for revision of the tax laws, among other demands.

Jayeen’s Facebook page and some Jordanian Internet sites reported that the group first met under the banner in the southern city of Kerak in January 2010 call-
Jordan Unrest: Did Royal Tweets Absorb the Anger?

ing for change and announcing that it would protest every Friday until demands were met. However, the group’s first call was for a protest on January 29, 2011, days after demonstrations broke out in Cairo. Its current Facebook name, *Jayeen min ajl el Taygheer* (We’re coming to change), does not reveal much information about the group. It claims it consists of people from different societal levels, age groups and professions. Anyone interested in implementing change in Jordan can join it, the organizers said. The group’s demands concerned fighting corruption; the establishment of an independent judiciary body to investigate privatization ventures implemented by previous governments; reintroducing government backing of essential commodities; and tax cuts, which would eventually lead to the eradication of the country’s value added tax. The group’s protest mission statement also stipulated that only the Jordanian flag would be raised and that all protests should be peaceful. Besides the mission statement, which was added on January 22, 2011, there was not much information on its Facebook page. This is contrary to the youth movement of *Shabab 24 March*, whose Facebook page enjoyed more traffic.

The *Shabab 24 March* group, in contrast, used its Facebook pages to give more information about its movement. The first post, published on Facebook and circulated amidst the various Jordanian Internet news sites, called for a protest on March 24, at the Al Dakhliya roundabout. The photo on the page depicted a number of people pointing their index fingers upwards towards the Jordanian flag; its second post, which also sported the colors of the Jordanian flag, shows a closed fist, and had a slogan, “Our reform . . . our future.” The group’s first video call on YouTube and Facebook stated:

Because Jordan deserves better
Because the one who remains silent on injustice is a mute devil
And because the execution of justice is a basic right
And because the dignity of a human being is the root of all human life
And because we, the youth of Jordan, male and female, are free and are fed up with postponements, promises, and corruption
And because we can demand our rights
Our rendezvous is with dignity, freedom and a more beautiful Jordan, on Thursday 24/3 in Dakhliya Roundabout.
We are going to be there.
Join us.
*Shabab 24 March*

The choice of the roundabout was symbolic and significant. Al Dakhliya refers to the Interior Ministry, which is located nearby. The roundabout intersects four major roads, coming from important locations in the city. By choosing this location the protesters, whether purposefully or inadvertently, could halt traffic in a location that is normally congested with trucks, buses and cars. Simply by being there, and
through the obstruction they caused, demonstrators could make a statement. Traditionally, earlier protests in Amman took place downtown in the area surrounding the Grand Al Husseini Mosque or near the headquarters of trade unions in Shmeisani, one of Amman’s affluent neighborhoods. On March 25, pro-government demonstrations were held simultaneously in Al Hussein Public Parks. It is worth noting that since the call to organize the March 24 protest in Al Dakhliya Roundabout, the number of Facebook users in the kingdom has grown by 230,000 to reach 1.4 million (Freihat, 2011), while Ibrahim Mubaideen (2011) of Al Ghad newspaper claimed it had reached 1.5 million. Checkfacebook.com on October 6, 2012, revealed the number stood at 2,476,300 users, 142% of the total number of Internet users in Jordan (checkfacebook.com, 2012), about a third of Jordan’s officially reported population.4

Naseem Tarawneh, a prominent Jordanian blogger who operates black-iris and is one of the main editors of 7iber a youth-operated independent media outlet to advance citizen journalism, wrote about the events that transpired March 24 and 25:

Underneath the bridge was a fairly well-organized group of young 20-something year olds. They had their posters in Arabic and English. They had a truck with a sound system. They had low-level organizers with bullhorns who would walk around making sure their group kept to the sidewalk. They had brooms and garbage bags, and people designated the task of keeping the area clean. They had tents, food, laptops, Internet connections, digital cameras, camcorders, a live feed going, as well as a fire roaring in near-freezing weather (Tarawneh, 2011).

The Shabab 24 March movement emulated what they had seen their counterparts do in Tahrir Square in Egypt. Like the youth who organized in Egypt, the protests were going to be peaceful. However, what transpired was different. In a raw video footage filmed by Uns Damra and posted on ammonnews.net – a site that calls itself the voice of the silent majority – on March 25, the youth are seen swearing an oath to protect and be loyal to Jordan, to remain calm and hold a peaceful demonstration no matter what happens, even if stones were hurled at them or gas was used against them. In another raw video footage also shot by Damra and posted on the same day on ammonnews.net, the demonstrators are seen carrying the Jordanian flag as some speakers call for reforms. The crowd replies with Mawtini, (My Homeland), the national anthem of both Palestine and Iraq.5 The crowd also sang the Jordanian national anthem and popular Arab songs.

During the sit-in, the crowd always emphasized that reforms should be held under the leadership of King Abdullah II and never exhibited any form of disloyalty or demanded a change of regime. Some of the protesters carried signs that read “not only Facebook, we are face to face,” indicating that they were no longer afraid of protesting; but challenging authority was a line they had now crossed.

According to a report on March 25, 2011, by Al Jazeera’s Hasan al Shobaki
Jordan Unrest: Did Royal Tweets Absorb the Anger?

(2011), more than 50 were injured in clashes with anti-demonstration protesters and the electricity was cut off in the early hours. Security forces present at the time did not interfere to halt the stone hurling by thugs. During the same event, the ruffians instigated trouble by cursing the protesters, who in turn tried to remain peaceful. Once again security forces failed to interfere. This was documented by a Human Rights Watch report (Wilcke, 2011). The report cites at least three instances when the security officers failed to act. According to one eyewitness quoted in the report:

[..] he saw a group of around 10 thugs wearing civilian clothes, holding sticks and batons, coming out of official darak vans, and moving toward protesters running away from the circle (Wilcke, 2011).

The hooligans began attacking the protesters in various forms. In the early morning of March 25, thugs carrying Jordanian flags began singing and playing Jordanian songs, in the hope that the demonstrators would react. The protesters, who were at all times urging silmiyya, [peacefully], responded with Jordanian flags and national songs. Even when the thugs began playing loud music during the early morning prayers, the protesters remained calm. The hurling of the stones began around noon on March 25. As all episodes were broadcast live on Shabab 24 March Facebook page and on Internet news sites, it was difficult for the authorities’ version of the events to hold up, especially when the raw footage posted on the social media sites showed otherwise.

Tarawneh (2011) wrote that the protesters were difficult to define, contrary to the thugs, which were referred to as loyalists, a term Tarawneh finds problematic. According to him, the group consisted of “people who strictly backed the king and were interested in very little beyond that” (Tarawneh, 2011). Shabab 24 March protesters, however, also supported the king. On their Facebook pages and the demonstrators called for the same reforms that the king had asked for, and they never did question the legitimacy of his rule.

Some of the raw footage exposed undercurrents of divisions within Jordanian society. The teenaged hooligans were adamant that protesters on the roundabout had other agendas, overthrowing the monarchy, or establishing a Palestinian state within Jordan. Some even believed that the protesters were Shi’ites or Hizbollah affiliates being paid by Iran. The anti-protesters were obviously misguided and this became evident when confronted with questions on both their accusations towards the demonstrators and reasons for throwing stones at them. They could not provide any justifications or evidence for their various actions. Instead they played the old narrative of “who’s a real Jordanian?” Rana F. Sweis (2011) wrote:

In the aftermath of the clashes, angry rhetoric has continued, with some government supporters accusing the organizers of the demonstration, known as the March 24 Youth Movement, of treason amid signs of rising tensions between East Bank Jord-
Aftermath of the Protest

As mentioned earlier, these young thugs were ill advised and appeared to be playing to the old prejudices without fully comprehending what the protesters were actually calling for, or even attempting to understand the demands of the Shabab 24 March youth movement. However, the violent counter-protest might have had an impact in splintering the solidarity of the protest groups.

Jayeen suspended ties with Shabab 24 March following the events of March 24 and 25, as they sought clarification on the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the demonstrations. In a statement issued to various news Web sites, Jayeen criticized Shabab 24 March for coordinating with the Muslim Brotherhood without consulting them first, saying that initially the call for the sit-in was agreed upon by various movements, Shabab 24 March, Jayeen, Jayeen min ajl el Taygheer, 1952 Constitution, Jordanian Youth Movement, Civil Citizenship and Thought, and other independent bodies (amman.net, 2011). What transpired on March 24 and 25, according to Jayeen, was that Shabab 24 March assumed positions and stands that were not initially agreed upon and that seemed to serve the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood (amman.net, 2011). It was unclear, however, if the changes in the agenda had any bearing on the attacks that happened at Al Dakhiliya Roundabout.

Attacks on the Shabab 24 March movement were also launched on social media sites. On its Facebook page, Shabab 24 March claimed its e-mail was hijacked on April 11 by pro-government hackers, which led it to create other Facebook pages, “Rum, March 24 news,” “Hirak: Jordanian Youth Movement” and “Shabab March 24-USA” to call for a second protest April 15, 2011. A statement in English published April 9 listed eight demands relating to changes and calls for fighting corruption:

We are not the holders of slogans... we are the holders of plans.
We are not traders of illusion... we are the makers of future.
We know what we want... and we will seek to achieve what we want.
For that, and to explain what we have been started... and what based on our absolute belief that the nation is the real source of authorities... (Shabab.March24th, 2011)

Following the events that transpired at the roundabout, a rap song was posted on social media sites including YouTube describing the events (Shabab 24 March Song, 2011). The song, which begins in English “24 March let’s go,” continues in Arabic and describes how youths were beaten by thugs and how the security forces
Jordan Unrest: Did Royal Tweets Absorb the Anger?

did nothing to stop the attacks. The song’s refrain states that the youth are free, with legitimate patriotic rights, and willing to defend Jordan. The Web site’s wallpaper used in the song’s video was illustrated by then-Al Ghad newspaper cartoonist Emad Hajjaj. In it Hajjaj uses Arabic calligraphy to draw 24 March in the colors of the Jordanian flag. The translated sentence on the cartoon reads “glory and eternal life to the martyrs of March 24, and shame and disgrace on the government and its thugs.”

On her Facebook and Twitter pages, Queen Rania of Jordan praises the very cartoonist: “To all you Jordanians out there, this made my day. A truly great Jordanian talent!” and both comments are signed “#WeAreAllJoe” (Queen Rania, 2011). The link opens a TwitPic page in which a cartoon, depicting the Jordanian flag as two people standing hand in hand. The writing reads “national unity, political reform, security and stability,” and “your hand in ours; we guard our homeland” (TwitPic, 2011).

THE QUEEN OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Queen Rania was one of the first ruling family members in the Arab world to actively participate in social media sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The queen has even used the sites to promote her social projects, such as Jordan Education Initiative, Madrasati Palestine, Jordan River Foundation and others. Through these sites, she also presents an image of the successful, glamorous, modern Arab female that defies age-long entrenched Western – and Arab – stereotypes. By engaging with her audience in cyberspace, the queen is modifying and smoothing out the image of the traditional Arab ruler/ruling family, which has been traditionally viewed as ubiquitous yet coolly detached from the populace, typically beyond reach by the commoners, presiding over a stratified society where the disparity between the rich and poor is stark, and where elites play by different rules than those without means or influence.

Through her SNS pages, she welcomes and encourages open dialogue from the Jordanian public and beyond; one comment signed #JO states “JO is one big extended family. You never feel alone. Our doors are open; our hearts are open” (Rania Al Abdullah, 2011). By becoming an active member of SNS sites, Queen Rania is also trying to reach out to the younger generation in Jordan, 35% of which are under the age of 15, and 59% are between 15 and 64 years old, with a median age of 22.1 years (CIA-The World Factbook, 2011).

The queen’s reaction to the events of March 24 and 25, 2011, on both her Facebook and her Twitter pages, reiterated King Abdullah’s comments. She wrote on March 29, 2011, quoting the king:

Social Media Go to War | 507
National unity is sacred, no alternative to dialogue for consensus on comprehensive reform [. . .]. We don't fear reform & will respect Dialogue Committee’s recommendations on amendments related 2 parliamentary life[. . .]. Vandalism and chaos are rejected and a red line . . . Golden opportunity lies ahead, I reiterate we have nothing 2 fear in endeavor 2 fulfill reform, national goals . . . [and her own comments were:] Reform & loyalty go hand in hand. They give us a sense of belonging. They show we are all on the same side [. . .] Our national loyalty is TO all Jordanians. Our national reform is FOR all Jordanians . . . (Rania Al Abdullah, 2011).

All the comments were signed “#WeAreAllJoe.” The queen’s comments could be seen as addressing the “who’s Jordanian?” rhetoric that was played out at Al Dakhliya Roundabout, albeit unintentionally. However, this runs contrary to the events that unfolded on the roundabout as the loyalist thugs who used force were seen coming out of governmental security forces’ vans. There was no direct comment or engagement with the events that happened on March 24 and 25 by the royal family per se. It was merely a reiteration of the official rhetoric of the palace. The role of the thugs and the security forces were neither commented on nor addressed with transparency.

As the events are still unfolding and various committees have been set to investigate corruption and study the constitution issues, it is still too early to predict the shape of the coming events. If contradictions remain the order of the day, then the demands of the protesters may take a different route. Furthermore, events unfolding for nearly a year after the Arab Spring in neighboring Syria might also have an impact on developments in Jordan. This was evident in the demonstrations that took place in the northern Jordanian town of Ramtha in support of Dara’a, the adjacent town on the Syrian side of the border. A report by Al Jazeera Arabic showed crowds calling out “one and one, Dara’a and Ramtha are one” (Jarrar, 2011).10 The “one” refers to a city that was once unified before colonial map drawings divided the cities between two different countries. If anything, what the Arab Spring has done is eradicate deeply entrenched borders, albeit through the virtual world of cyberspace, but this topic is outside the purview of this chapter.

REFERENCES

Jordan Unrest: Did Royal Tweets Absorb the Anger?

Freihat, M. (2011, April 16). "Million أردني 4 ارتفاع قاعدة المستخدمين إلى " (Facebook users up to 1.4 million). Al Arab Al Yaum , p. 10.


Rania Al Abdallah. (2011, March 5). Retrieved from Twitter: http://twitter.com/#!/Queen Rania

march. 24


NOTES

1The Tunisian demonstrations calling for the ouster of the late Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, were propelled by corruption, inflation and high unemployment, and were triggered by Mohammed Bouazizi’s setting himself on fire on December 17, 2010, in response to humiliation he incurred at the hands of a Tunisian police woman. The Tunisian protests set the stage for protests erupting all over the Arab world.

2A return to the 1952 constitution in effect means withdrawing and limiting certain powers of the monarchy, specifically relating to the appointment of the prime minister and the government. The 1952 constitution requires that the government is elected through parliamentary political party representation. Currently, the monarch has executive powers, which enables him to appoint and sack governments, and dissolve the lower House of Parliament, which is elected by the people.

Social Media Go to War | 509
Dakhliya is the name people use to refer to the roundabout. Its actual name is Gamal Abdul Nasser Square, named after the former Egyptian president whose vision was to unite the Arab world, but this is rarely used. Herein, the author will use the popular name, which is Al Dakhliya Roundabout.

Jordan’s 2011 population was 6,508,271. Of Facebook users 73% were male; 41.3% of the Facebook users were between the ages of 18-24; 25.7% were in the 25-34 age group, while 10.9% were between 16-17 (checkfacebook.com, 2012).

The lyrics of “Mawtini” were written by Palestinian poet Ibrahim Touqan.

According to the Jordanian Public Security Department, one person died of heart failure, 62 civilians and 58 police officers were wounded, following the events of March 24 and 25, 2011.

The song, which was posted on YouTube and the group’s Facebook page contained cartoons and actual photos of the event, and accused the government and specifically the security forces of training and bringing the thugs to create chaos during the sit-in. The song claims that state security forces not only failed to stop the thugs from hurling stones but also encouraged them to go on top of high-rise buildings to throw rocks at the crowd, with potentially lethal results. The song urged people to tune to Al Jazeera to get the “real” news; criticized the current prime minister Ma’ruf Bakheet; and saluted the youthful protesters, ending with a poster who said “we’re all March 24.”

Emad Hajjaj has since joined the semi-government daily newspaper, Al-Rai.

TwitPic is a Web site that allowed users to easily upload and post pictures to the Twitter micro-blogging and social media service. TwitPic was often used by citizen journalists during the Arab Spring to document, upload and distribute pictures in near real-time. During the Arab Spring, TwitPic – created only three years before – received thousands of posts and was often the only source of information in countries where news reporters were banned or harassed.

All translations in this chapter were by the author.