From the Guest Editors
Social Media at Work: A Middle Eastern Perspective

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Introduction

Social media is becoming an integral part of life in today's contemporary society, changing the way we create, share and consume information. There are countless stories related to the role that social media has played in contemporary society either in the entertainment industry where it has propelled Psy (a Korean rapper) to worldwide fame through the spread of his "Gangnam Style" YouTube video or its role in political landscape as with the "Arab Spring" uprisings or of the so-called "Facebook revolution."

Social media consists of a variety of tools and technologies that include collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia and wiki-spaces), Blogs (e.g., WordPress) and micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), social networks or social networking sites (e.g., Facebook and Cyworld), folksonomies or tagging (e.g., delicious.com), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life), and all other internet-based platforms that facilitate the creation & exchange of UGC (Khan, 2014).

Due to its inherited characteristics of openness, participation, and sharing, social media seems to be an emerging medium of interaction between governments, governments & citizens, and other governmental agencies & businesses (Hsu, Park, & Park, 2013; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2012). Governments mainly use social media to socialize information, establish mass collaboration, and carry out social transaction though social media channels (Khan, 2014). Social media is being used by the business community to drive brand affinity, increase sales, crowd-source ideas and knowledge, provide customer services, and manage projects (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Berkman, 2013).

Social media and Middle East

The Middle East is compromised of the "lands around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, extending from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula and Iran and some-

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times beyond" (Britannica, 2014). The Middle East consists of the states or territories of Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, The Sudan (now Sudan and South Sudan), Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (Britannica, 2014). According to Internet World Statistics (IWS) (2012), the Middle East represents about 3.20% of Internet users' world population with a 40% penetration rate. And as of 2012, there were more than 23 million Facebook users in the Middle East (IWS, 2012).

While the literature on social media is emerging, limited attention has been paid to the social media dynamics in the Middle Eastern region. Leveraging social media in Middle Eastern countries requires a deep understanding of the unique economic, social, political, and cultural values. This special issue of the Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia (JCEA) investigates different aspects of social media in the Middle Eastern region.

This special issue includes two studies. The first study by Nahed Al-Haidari and Jane Coughlan investigated the relations between electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) adoption of information, and its effect on purchase intention in an online beauty forum in Kuwait. The authors found that females tended to rely on argument quality, which represents the central route by which the content of a message is evaluated. In terms of quality, they also tended to provide more neutral recommendations such as how to use the products, where to find them, and prices and descriptions, without expressing judgments.

The second study included in this special issue is by James A. Danowski and Han Woo Park and deals with the structure of semantic networks before and after the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA). The authors suggest that in the MENA region the early uprisings were associated with increases in the presence of radical Islamist concepts in their Internet sites and that ideological content is important for developing narratives for the recruitment of protesters and the mobilization of protests.

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