

Social Media Fashion among Digitally Fluent Young Arabic Women in the UAE

Catherine Strong, Ph.D.

Senior Lecturer

School of Journalism

Massey University

Wellington, New Zealand

[E-mail: cathystrong@gmail.com](mailto:cathystrong@gmail.com)

Hessah Hareb

Masters Student

College of Communication and Media Sciences

Zayed University

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

[E-mail: hessah.h@gmail.com](mailto:hessah.h@gmail.com)

Abstract

The social networking application of Twitter has been under the spotlight in the Middle East with the part it played in the pro-democracy violent demonstrations in several countries. Scholars may debate the exact extent Twitter contributed to the uprisings, but there is clear evidence the Middle East and North Africa population is adopting Twitter at a rapid rate. One group that seems to be heavy users of Twitter is the UAE's young Arab females, a significant group because they are considered potential Middle East leaders. Young Emirati women are increasingly university educated, digitally competent, and moving into leadership roles. Despite the growing prominence of female Emiratis, there has been little research into their usage of social media. This study indicates their usage is contrary to global trends – they eschew Facebook in favor of Twitter. They shift deftly between Arabic and English language, and mainly send messages about their daily activities or observations. This study found that their explosive uptake of Twitter is mainly because of its fast pace and constant mobility.

Keywords: Twitter, Facebook, Social media, Arab women, Gender and Media

Introduction

This study explored how the digitally competent young females in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) use Twitter, the social media program rapidly gaining popularity in the Middle East. It is timely to explore the use of Twitter, which has been pivotal in the Arab Spring pro-democracy protests in Tunisia and Egypt; and equally timely to explore the current communication styles of the UAE female citizens who are increasingly taking leadership roles in the region.

The country as a whole is well connected digitally. A government survey showed that 99% of residents had mobile phones, and 28% of those had more than one (Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, 2010). The survey indicated 78% of the country's population had regular Internet access, and that almost half had an account on a social media websites (*ibid.*).

Only a small amount is known about the detailed use of Twitter in the UAE, although it is clear that Twitter is a growing influence in the Middle East. One survey estimated 28% of the UAE Internet users have a Twitter account (Zawya, 2011). The number of users increased 20% a month (Spot On Public Relations, 2009), and in 2011 the United Arab Emirates led the region in the number of users (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Twitter came under the spotlight in early 2011 for the part it played in the violent political protests in several Arab countries. The media called the uprising in Tunisia and in Egypt "Twitter Revolution" (Beaumont, 2011; Bergstrom, 2011). Although other commentators dismissed Twitter's importance in the movements (Hudson, 2011), governments such as Egypt and Tunisia tried to block it in an attempt to quell the unrest (Leyne, 2011; Howard et al., 2011).

In 2012, the growing power, or perceived power, of Twitter was demonstrated by several governments, including the United States and Britain, trying to find ways to censor Twitter messages. Some countries saw this as a way to control terrorist activity from groups such as the Taliban, Hezbollah, or Somalia's Al-Shabaab (York & Timm, 2012). Whether the censorship was activated or not is secondary to the point that Twitter was seen as a very powerful and effective communication tool.

Not all Twitter usage is for political reasons, and, in fact, when Twitter was created five years ago one of its founders, Jack Dorsey, said it was intended to help people instantly keep in contact with friends, "where you can just locate your buddy list and at a glance locate what your friends

are up to, or what they say they're up to" (Dorsey, 2009). By late 2011, Twitter had 100 million subscribers around the world (Twitter.com, 2011).

One of the main characteristics of Twitter is that messages are limited to only 140 characters, the equivalent of 28 words, labeled micro blogging. Twitter is brief and only text (although it allows links to photos, videos and other websites). This is in contrast to Facebook and other social network sites that allow very long messages, photograph albums, videos, plus conversation histories where all comments on a message are visible in one place.

Despite the rapid growth and influence of Twitter usage in the Middle East, there has been sparse academic research into its usage in the UAE. Even the usage statistics quoted above include all residents of UAE, including the large group of expatriates who are mainly non-Arabic. There is less known about the social media usage among Emiratis, who are Arab citizens of the UAE, colloquially also called locals or nationals.

The UAE is made up for seven emirates, which were separate authorities until the country was formed in 1971. Each emirate is governed by a ruling family, with some services, like education, funded and administered by the overall federal government. Expatriates, who come to the country mainly on work permits and eventually return to their home country, heavily dominate the population of the UAE. Recent figures by the U.S. State Department (2011) estimated the population of the UAE at 8.9 million, with 90% being expatriates -- 51% from Asia (Indian 1.75 million, Pakistani 1.25 million, Bangladeshi 0.5 million, other Asian 1 million), 23% from Iran or other Arab countries, and 6% from Europe and Africa (0.5 million). Despite comprising only 10% (890,000) of the population, Emiratis are the permanent citizens, and the only ones who can assume many of the government and ruling positions (ibid.).

Although Emirati females make up only about 5% of the total population, the spotlight recently has been on them as potential future leaders (WAGL, 2012; WIL Forum, 2011). The UAE government has encouraged women to become leaders and take on more employment roles (UAE Government, 2011; UAE Statistics, 2010), and the government website reports that "the UAE has become a model for Arab women in all fields" (WAM, 2009). The legal position of gender equality in the UAE has been acknowledged by the World Economic Forum in its 2011 Gender Gap Index. The index listed the UAE as the top Arab country in both 2011 and 2010 (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2011). The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region,

however, rated lowest of all other regions in the world, and the UAE ranked 103 among 135 countries globally. Nonetheless, the Gender Gap Report congratulated the UAE on the increasing education it provided for females. The government provides free education through university level to Emiratis.

Emirati females are taking advantage of the educational opportunities. They are outpacing men in qualifications, according to the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates Washington DC (2010):

The number of UAE national women enrolled in higher education is actually 24 percent more than the number of UAE national men enrolled in higher education. In fact, 77 percent of UAE females continue on to higher education from high school (¶3).

Correspondingly, Emirati women are also taking the opportunity to become more publicly visible and to take leadership responsibilities. Forbes magazine has declared that the most powerful Arab woman in the world, and one of the top 100 most powerful women in the world, is UAE's Minister of Economy, Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi (Forbes, 2010). Another indication of a higher prominence is Emirati women's participation in the Federal National Council. When the council was first set up in 2005, 22% of the members were female. In the second election, in 2011, only one female was elected, but more Emirati women than ever before were nominated to run, 85 out of the total 469 candidates (UAEInteract, 2011b).

This progress for women in the ultra modern UAE is a dramatic jump from the country's inception in 1971, when the country was "an impoverished collection of sand-blown principalities" (Walters, Quinn, & Jendi, 2006, p. 150) and half the population was not literate (Hammoud, 2006). At that time there was only one newspaper (Kirat, 2005), and no higher education (Morris, 2005). Most of the education and digital communication progress has been made within one generation. As an example, Piecowye's (2003) survey of young Emirati women found that none of their mothers used a computer or the Internet.

Young female Emiratis of the 21st century are not only better educated than previous generations, but also have become extremely competent with digital technology (Piecowye, 2003; Walters, Quinn, & Jendi, 2006). They are heavy users of Internet, spending an average of

seven hours a week online, according to a study conducted by YouGovSiraj (Abu Dhabi Media Company, 2010). This same study found 71% UAE women belonged to a social networking site. They use social media to gather information, extend networks and experiment with different identities (Shen & Khalifa, 2010).

Although Emirati women are advanced with technology, their practice of social communication is still relatively conservative. As described by Shakir et al. (2008), it is still common to limit the interaction women have with the outside world, and male members of the family closely monitor this. “Any violations of these conventions is then viewed as inappropriate and would negatively affect the reputation of the daughter, sister, or wife as well as her family” (p8). It is customary for females to expose her face only to close family members or other females (ibid.) Although this is changing towards a more western standard, especially with more women in publicly visible positions, some observers contend that equality for women is only the government’s attempt to present a good image to the outside world (Dhaheri, 2009).

Nonetheless, the study of Emirati women is of value in exploring social media communications usage. In essence our study focuses on the California-developed social media service Twitter and how it is used 7,000 miles away by Arabic women in the UAE.

The theoretical framework for this research is based on the global media theories that posit that national boundaries no longer contain how people use the media. Even as far back as the 1960s McLuhan (1962) predicted that similar media content would develop the world into a single global village. Since the spread of the Internet and new media, however, global media theories indicate that people in even the remotest countries are using media in similar ways to those in developed urban countries (Dennis & Merrill, 2006). Our research builds on those theories, in suggesting that the new media communication usage of young female Emiratis is as much a part of the global media scene as those users in any other country.

Alongside the global media theories is the previous work that positions young female Emiratis as technically proficient by international standards. As outlined by Piecowye (2003), as well as Walters, Quinn, and Jendi (2006), young Emirati women are technically savvy, and are early adaptors of digital technology. These theories lead to the Research Question: *How do young female Emiratis use the social media program Twitter.*

Research Method

This study encompassed two research approaches to explore the usage of Twitter among female Emiratis. The first stage was a survey of 167 young female Emiratis who used Twitter, to explore their attitude towards Twitter as compared to Facebook. The second stage was a content analysis of 5,752 tweet messages generated by 87 users, 65 female and 22 male, to study the usage patterns and topics of tweet messages.

The survey asked respondents which social media network sites they used regularly and why, as well as asking demographic information (such as nationality, age, gender), and how many activated mobile phones they currently owned. A common problem with surveys is achieving a satisfactory response rate (DIIA, 2007), and this survey was no different. Initial distribution via Twitter and Facebook drew only a few responses. Previous experience by this study's researchers showed that mass email distribution also results in weak responses, which was also found by other researchers (Schonlau, Fricker, & Elliot, 2002). Therefore, paper copies of the survey were personally handed out at venues frequented by Emiratis aged in their early 20s, such as universities and shopping mall. The Zayed University Research Committee approved the survey.

The content analysis stage of the study collected data from Twitter accounts, mainly from female users, but also some from male users for comparison purposes. The sample was selected by a modified snowball system of searching Twitter website accounts and associated list of followers to identify accounts that fit the criteria of Emiratis, aged between 18-29, living in the United Arab Emirates.

Content analysis of Twitter is a complex methodology, requiring digital searches on both computers and mobile phone devices. This was done because some Twitter information is not displayed on a computer screen, but is on a mobile device (e.g. as where the tweet originated, such as iPhone, Blackberry, computer) whereas other information was only available on a computer (such as how long the user has been registered with Twitter). Many other respected social media content analyses relied on natural language processing (NLP) computer software to help search for what users are communicating (News Group, 2011; Socialbakers, 2011; Microsoft, 2009). One Arabic content analysis study of Twitter was the Special Report:

Awakening of the Arab Consciousness (SocialEyez, 2011), an analysis of 10 million social network messages in various languages.

Our research did not use software, but instead a manual approach, allowing more detailed information that could be cross-tabulated. The data collected included information on the profile page of the account (the level of security, number of other accounts they corresponded with (*followers* and *following*) and frequency of their tweets. Also data was collected about each tweet message, such as the language used, the topic, and method used to send it out (mobile phone or computer). Also analyzed was the proportion of the messages that were retweets (simply taking a received message and passing it on to all their followers, indicated with *RT*), used a hashtag (the message is sent to a specific topic page, indicated by #, but also is sent to all their followers) or were a conversation (which is sent to a specific user who is alerted to it, with the mark @, but is also sent to all other *followers*).

Results from the Survey

The 167 survey respondents were all female Emiratis, who already had a Twitter account. Three-quarters of them were aged 19 through 29, with the remainder younger, and only a few were older than 30. Most had their own mobile phone (97%) and a large proportion had multiple mobile phones that were active at the time of the survey -- 31.5% had two mobile phones and another 6.2% had three or more mobile phones.

Table 1: Number of activated mobile phones owned by young female Emiratis

N=167	
At least one	97%
Two	31.5%
Three or more	6.2%

The survey participants were also asked “how important are security/privacy settings for you on social media websites”? The majority of participants said that privacy was important to them. More than 89% of women said privacy settings were important (55.2% very important, 33.9% somewhat important).

On the other hand, their usage of Twitter was very high. The majority of those surveyed used Twitter at least once a day (91%). In fact almost 61% of the respondents said they are constantly looking at Twitter on their phone, and another 25% said they logged on several times a day.

Table 3: Female Emiratis' Reliance on Twitter

N=167	
Constantly check Twitter throughout the day	60.8%
Several times a day	25%
Once a day	6.1%
Daily users TOTAL	91%

Their usage of the globally popular Facebook social networking website was fairly low. Only 33.5% of the respondents said that they use Facebook regularly, such as logging on every day. Another 38.5% said they have a Facebook account but rarely use it anymore, and 28.1% said they have never used Facebook.

An overwhelming proportion (94%) said they prefer Twitter to Facebook. The most common reason for preferring Twitter was that it is faster and easier to get news and find out what is happening in their community. Another interesting reason was that it was simpler to use than Facebook, which they felt had become crowded with too many applications such as photo albums, updates, multiple pages for videos, etc.

*Table 3: Reasons Female Emiratis prefer Twitter to Facebook
 (157 of the 167 said they prefer Twitter)*

N=157	
Faster to get latest news/happening	77.1%
Twitter is easier to use on my mobile phone	75.2%
Easier to make new friends	35%
My friends are on Twitter, not Facebook	34.4%
Facebook has become crowded with too many activities (videos, photo albums, etc.)	31.2%

Easier to follow celebrities	30.6%
No unsolicited advertisements	21.7%

It is understandable that the respondents relied on Twitter rather than Facebook to obtain news, because of their heavy reliance on mobile phone devices. The Pew (2011) study in the U.S.A. found that those using mobile devices tended to favor Twitter usage because of its ease and readability.

Results from Content Analysis

A total of 5,752 tweet messages generated by 87 users were analyzed. The sample included 65 female (75 %), and also 22 male (25%) as a form of comparison. The gender was determined by their name, profile photograph or content information. Most had their Twitter account for less than a year, which is understandable in that Twitter has been generally active in the UAE only since 2009 (Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, 2010). This section outlines how they used Twitter, followed by what topics they tweeted.

Account Privacy: The majority of the female users had unlocked accounts (70.8%), and men were even higher, with 90.5% of their accounts unlocked. Unlocked accounts mean that anyone in the public can view their profile information and general outgoing messages, and can join their list of *followers* without permission. However, most of the female Twitter users (77.4%) used a false photo of themselves on the profile, which accompanies all tweet messages sent out. These included illustrative pictures of flowers, scenes, their childhood photo, or a famous film or music star. There were 22.6% who did use photos that seemed to be a realistic likeness of themselves. This compares to 57% of the men who used a realistic photo of themselves.

Table 4: Privacy of Twitter Accounts

N=87	All %	Female %	Male %
Unlocked account	75.6	70.8	90.5
Unrealistic profile photo	70	79	43
Tweet from mobile phone device	92.6	91.9	94.7

--	--	--	--

How They Tweeted: The overwhelming majority of the users sent their tweets from their mobile phone (92.6%) rather than from a computer (6.4%). This included Blackberry, iPhone, etc. The difference between females and males who tweeted by phone was minor (females 92%/ males 94%).

Language Tweeted: The official language in the UAE is Arabic, with English also used widely. The tweets reflected this, being a combination of English, Arabic, or Arabish (Arabic written with Latin letters). The language used in the tweets was not consistent; in other words, the users did not use Arabic in all their tweets, or English in all their tweets. They tended to mix the language depending on the topic of the tweet. The most popular usage was for a user to use all three languages during the week being monitored -- some tweets in Arabic, some in English and some in Arabish. The results may have been affected by the particular software used by the individual to send Twitter messages, as some do not support Arabic characters. Although this study focused on females, it is interesting to note that none of the men surveyed used only Arabish in their tweets. Another interesting gender difference is the heavy reliance on English by the men, compared to the women: 47% of men tweets only in English, compared to only 15% of women.

Table 5: Language Used in Tweets

N=5,752	All	Female	Male
All English	23.2	15.9	47.4
All Arabic	2.4	0	10.5
All Arabish	2.4	3.2	0
English and Arabic	12.2	12.7	10.5
English and Arabish	25.6	31.7	5.3
Arabic and Arabish	1.2	0	5.3
English and Arabic and Arabish	32.9	36.5	21.1

Who They Tweeted: The average number of other accounts that each person subscribed to, called *following*, was 200 to 300. These are the number of people or organizations from whom

the user is receiving tweets. The number of *following* varied widely, and there were two users (one male and one female) who were receiving tweets from more than 1,500 other Twitter accounts. Another interesting finding was that most users followed the tweets of other individual users, not celebrities, organizations, or commercial advertising accounts. For most of the sample, less than 10% of the tweets (if any) they received were from organizations.

Similarly, female tweeters were *followed* by an average of 200-300 other accounts, while the majority of men were *followed* by fewer than 150 other accounts. Three females had more than 2000 followers. The amount may seem low compared to famous *twitterati*, such as UAE's Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi on 76,000 followers, and actor Ashton Kutcher on 7 million followers, but for non-celebrities, 2000 is a high number of followers.

What they Tweeted: On the average, both female and male sent out about 50 tweets a week, or seven each day. However some of the females were big tweeters, with a third of the sample sending more than 100 tweets a week, and three females sending out more than 300 tweets each in the week monitored (40 tweets a day). This compared to all men sending fewer than 100 tweets during the week, except for one who sent out 179.

Retweets (RT) made up 14% of the messages analyzed. More than one-third of the users did not retweet any messages during the week. There were only two females in the sample who frequently retweeted other people's messages, but even then it was only half of the messages they sent.

Also, very few tweeters used hashtags (#). Hashtags indicate a message relates to a particular topic, and can be searched by that word. For instance, the hashtag #Jan25 was used by many sending messages about the Egypt protests. A Twitter search of #Jan25 will show all messages sent with that hashtag. More than half the sample used no hashtags at all during the week monitored, and even those who did only added hashtags to fewer than 19% of their messages. Male users were even more disinclined to use hashtags.

Although Emirati tweeters did not use hashtags nor retweets very frequently, they did use specific @addresses, which means the message was intended for one particular person, although other *followers* would receive it. About 47% of the tweets were sent to an individual, using

@address. Half of the female tweeters (and 40% of the male tweeters) used @address on more than 50% of their tweets.

Topics Tweeted: The topics being tweeted mostly fell into two categories – chatter about daily activities and personal philosophies. All topics were coded into seven categories, but the results showed most of the tweets were these two personal comment type of messages. The clear majority of the messages (56.4%) were chatter about daily activities or feelings, such as what they planned to do later in the day or something personal that happened to them. Examples were: *I'm feeling sick today.....My interview went well this morning.....I finally finished a 5,000 word document... My new favourite number is 21... Very tired... Everytime I plug my BB into the charger it shut down & I need to remove the cord.*

Another 26.7% of the tweets were personal thoughts that seemed to be philosophical outlook of the tweeter. The messages were phrased like advice to the world. Examples were: *People who let down their friends, don't deserve to have any...Internet killed TV and bbm killed everyone else....Stay away from what might have been, & look at what can be.....I remember the show kawaser, it was awesome....Friends change your bad mood into a good mood.....Most of the time when I eat, I'm not even hungry, just bored.* There were no significant differences between genders in the type of topics tweeted.

Relatively few tweets were about events of the day, such as a conference or concert, their current location, or current news happenings. Another subject not used was “trending” topics which are global questions posted each day, such as “the thing I hate the most” or “the stupidest thing I’ve done”.

Table 6: Topics tweeted

N=5,752	All	Female	Male
Daily Chatter	56.4	53.9	68
Personal Thoughts	26.8	26.9	26
Trending	8.7	10.4	0.8
News	4.7	5.3	1.9
Location	2.6	2.8	1.9
Events	0.4	0.3	0.8

In summary, during the week measured, the average Emirati female tweeter did not use a realistic photograph of herself, but left her account unlocked for anyone to view. She tweeted from her mobile phone device, and sent out about 50 tweets a week, mostly using a combination of English, Arabic and Arabish. She followed about 200-300 other tweeters and had about the same number of followers. She did not seem to use Twitter to follow celebrities, nor to get involved in trending topics of the day. Instead, she used Twitter to chat about her daily activities, or her philosophical musings. Also, female Emirati tweeters directed their messages to one person, despite the message going to other followers, which averaged 200-300 people.

Conclusion

This research further refines what we know about social media usage among young Emirati Arab women in the UAE, especially their reliance on Twitter. Other research has shown that a growing proportion of UAE residents are using Twitter, estimated to be 28% of those on social networking sites (Zaywa, 2011), but also estimated to be growing at 20% a year (Spot On Public Relations, 2009). These studies, however, include all residents in the UAE, of which most are non-Emiratis (estimated 90%). In contrast, our study focused specifically on young female Emiratis, who comprise only about 5% of the population, but are an influential sub-group because of their permanent status in the country, and because of their potential leadership potential.

Most other research into Twitter messages used Natural Language Processing (NLP) computer software that collects specific words, but is less able to analyze the minutiae of the tweeted messages. Our research employed a manual method, which means comparisons to other studies are limited. There were two similar studies, both done in the U.S.A., and one conducted only in English. Despite the differences, however, there is value in exploring the comparisons.

The answer to our Research Question (*How do young female Emiratis use the social media program Twitter?*) is that female Emiratis are digitally confident and competent, and are much heavier users of Twitter compared to others.

As an indicator of their above-average usage, female Emiratis sent seven messages a day, compared to only one message a day by those in a study of 11.5 million tweets globally (Sysomos, 2010). Another indicator of heavy usage was that 91% of our sample logged on to

Twitter at least once a day, compared to 33% of users in a recent study using the same style of survey in North America (Pew Internet Project, 2011). In addition, female Emiratis had a stronger preference for Twitter than for the other globally popular social network program, Facebook. The Pew study showed that 92% of people on social networks regularly used Facebook, whereas only 33.5% of the female Emiratis on social networks regularly used Facebook. Looking at it another way, our study showed that 66.6% female Emirati Twitter users never, or no longer, use Facebook. This would indicate a trend away from the globally popular Facebook and towards Twitter.

This study paints a picture of young confident women who are experts in multi-platform cyber communication. These Arab women have mastered the 21st century content production skills that relate to micro blogging. They produced concise 140-character messages in a variety of languages (English, Arabic, Arabish), and uploaded quickly to the Internet.

They said they prefer Twitter to Facebook because Twitter is faster and easier to access on their mobile phone devices. Other reasons they eschewed Facebook was that fewer of their friends were users, and it is awkward to navigate because of ever-increasing applications and changes – additions that they felt unnecessary for their communication needs.

Another example of their digital competence was that the participants in this study seemed to have customized Internet security to suit their own cultural requirements. They took the step of avoiding Facebook and its questionable privacy issues and simply migrated to a social media website that better allows them the fashion of anonymity they prefer. They seemed to embrace the lack of privacy of Twitter, by keeping their identity private, but their thoughts and opinions public. They left their accounts unlocked (open to anyone in the public) but carefully avoided posting realistic photos or extra profile information, thereby leaving nothing personal to protect. The messages, however, were not private, as they were sent to hundreds of other Twitter accounts, and could be read by anyone in the public.

An interesting finding was that the topics of most messages (83.2%) were daily chatter about what users were doing and feeling at that time, or philosophical thoughts. In other words, they were sharing their world through their tweets, in a form of self-discovery. This is in line with studies that conclude that social media helps young people in their development of self-perception, especially for females (Shen & Khalifa, 2010). In addition, almost half, 47%, of the

Twitter messages in the sample used the @address (directed at one particular person), which is much higher than the 12% of @address found in the Pew study in America (2011), the 9% in the Java et al. study (2007), and the 23% in the Sysomos global study (2010). There is no indication why the women used conversational addresses more than others, except they also sent out more messages than others.

The participants gave reasons for preferring Twitter, but not reasons for using it as much as they do. One explanation for their heavy usage of Twitter is that technically they are able to do so. They live in a country that has excellent broadband coverage, and most of their acquaintances have internet-enabled mobile devices for the use of quick conversations.

However, another explanation on the heavy reliance on Twitter is that the female Emiratis are early adopters of technology, and they are at the forefront of what may become a global trend towards Twitter. They are among a powerful group who make up the UAE Twitter community. The ruler of Dubai is a frequent tweeter and will use Twitter to comment real time on events he is attending, @HHSkMohd. Also, the UAE is home to one of most reliable sources of the 2011 Egyptian protests, Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, @SultanAlQassemi, who tweeted frequently, up to every 45 seconds, during the uprising, and was listed as one of the world's top 140 Tweepers by Time Magazine (Fastenberg, 2011). Although this study indicated only 4.7% of the female's tweet messages were on the topic of news, a limitation is that studies like this are unable to assess what the Twitter users received and read. Therefore, female Emiratis may not be sending news messages, but in fact may be receiving news events by powerful local tweeters.

It is beyond the scope of this study to answer why young Emirati women are drawn to social media in the first place, and use it as often as they do. Some hints are given by previous researchers, who concluded that Arab women are drawn to social media because it gives them a voice, an outlet for their opinions, in a culture that traditionally encourages women to remain publically invisible. Zohara Hirji, who operates grapesishisha.com in the UAE said, "Arab women have been using the Internet to have their views –and search for other opinions that distance and lack of exposure to global opinion had prevented in the past" (as cited in McMeans & Mikeiwicz, 2010, ¶10). Mazen Nahawi, the CEO of News Group that produced the comprehensive "Regional Social Media Monitoring Report" also believes that social media gives young Arabic women an opportunity to discover viewpoints they previously did not have, and a

new ability to express their opinions (Nahawi, 2011). He predicted this will increase, and social media will offer young Arabic women much more freedom in their personal lives than they have had until now. This can be the subject of further research.

In conclusion, this study supports the theories that social media is indeed a global phenomena. It also indicates that such social media developed in the United States is being customized to suit the lifestyle of cultural groups, such as this sample of female Arabs. The concise and rapid style of Twitter seems to suit female Emirati's lifestyle needs, allowing them to use their mobile phone devices to send messages whenever and wherever they want. Twitter also suits their social needs, allowing them to share their current feelings and thoughts immediately with hundreds of other Twitter users, while still retaining some personal anonymity.

References

- Abbas, W. (2010, October 12). UAE women top men in literacy rate. *Emirates 24/7*. Retrieved from <http://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/uae-women-top-men-in-literacy-rate-2010-10-12-1.302909>
- Abu Dhabi Media Company. (2010). *Arab Women are digitally savvy, confirms new survey commissioned by anaZahra.com*. Ami Info:Abu Dhabi. Retrieved from www.ameinfo.com/235118.html
- Al Awadhi, N. (2007, June 15). Empowering UAE Women. *Gulf News*. Retrieved from <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/empowering-uae-women-1.184021>
- Beaumont, P. (2011, February 25). The truth about Twitter, Facebook and the uprisings in the Arab world. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/25/twitter-facebook-uprisings-arab-libya/print>
- Bergstrom, G. (2011). Egypt: The First Twitter Revolution? *Marketing About*. Retrieved from http://marketing.about.com/od/crisis_communication/a/egypt-mubarak-power-in-social-media.htm
- Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. (2011). *Background Note: United Arab Emirates*. USA Department of State.
- Dennis, E., & Merrill, J. (2006). *Media Debates: Great Issues for the Digital Age*. Belmont, CA, USA: Thompson Wadsworth.
- Dhaaheri, H. (2009). Women and Nation Building: The Case of the United Arab Emirates. *Hawwa*. Brill (7). 271-302
- DIIA. (2007). *Guidelines for Maximizing Response Rates*. Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment, University of Texas at Austin. <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/diia/assessment/iar/teaching/>
- Dorsey, J. (2009, January 18). Twitter creator Jack Dorsey illuminates the site's founding document. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2009/02/twitter-creator.html>
- Dubai School of Government. (2011). *Arab Social Media Report 2* (Vol. 1). Dubai, UAE: Dubai School of Government.
- ECSSR (2011). *Education in the UAE: Current Status and Future Development*. ISBN 978-9948-14-427-4. Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research.
- Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington DC. (2010). Women in the UAE. Retrieved from <http://www.uae-embassy.org/uae/women-in-the-uae>.

- Emirates 24/7. (2011, June 18). Firms asked to not hire expat women in PR. *Emirate 24/7*. Retrieved from <http://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/firms-asked-to-not-hire-expat-women-in-pr-2011-06-18-1.403261>
- Fastenberg, D. (2011, March 28). 140 Best Twitter Feeds. *Time*. Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2058946_2059032_2059025,00.html
- Flauto, F. (1999). Walking the Talk: The Relationship Between Leadership and Communication Competence. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Winter, 86-97.
- Forbes. (2010, October 9). Power Women #70 Sheikha Lubna Al Qasemi. *Forbes*.
- Gergawi, M. (2010, January 3). Why #Twitter's Bigger than Facebook. *Gulf News*. <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/why-twitter-s-bigger-than-facebook-1.561249>
- Hammoud, H. (2006). Illiteracy in the Arab World. *Adult Education and Development*, Number 66, DVV International.
- Housmann, R., Tyson, L., & Saadia, Z. (2011) *The Global Gender Gap Report 2011*. World Economic Forum, Geneva.
- Howard, P., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M., Mari, W., & Mazaid, M. (2011). *Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?* Project on Information Technology & Political Islam. Seattle: University of Washington.
- Hudson, J. (2011, January 11). The "Twitter Revolution" Debate" The Egyptian Test Case. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/global/2011/01/the-twitter-revolution-debate-the-egyptian-test-case/21296/>.
- Ismial, M. (2011, March 9). Women's rights in job market top of agenda. *The National*, A5.
- Java, A., Finin, T., Song, X., & Tseng, B. (2007). Why We Twitter: Understanding Microblogging Usage and Communities. *Joint 9th WEBKDD and 1st SNA-KDD Workshop*. San Jose: ACM.
- Johansen, B., & Johansen, R. (2009). *Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Kessler, S. (2011, August 25). *UK to Twitter, Facebook & RIM: We Won't Ban Social Media*. Mashable. Retrieved from <http://mashable.com/2011/08/26/uk-twitter-facebook-rim/>.
- Kirat, M. (2005). Virtual Public Relations in the United Arab Emirates. *Public Relations Review*, 381-388.
- Leyne, J. (2011). *Egypt protests: Anti-Mubarak demonstrators arrested*. BBC, January 26, 2011) Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.uk/news/world-africa-12289475>.

- McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of typographic Man*. Toronto, Canada: Toronto Press.
- McMean, A., Mikiewicz, G. (2010, June 16) UAE women rank second for middle East Internet use. *The National*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/uae-women-rank-second-for-middle-east-internet-use>
- Microsoft. (2009). *Natural Language Processing from Scratch*. Microsoft Research 3 Dec. 2009. Retrieved from <http://research.microsoft.com/apps/video/dl.aspx?id=115867>
- Morris, M. (2005). Organisation, social change and the United Arab Emirates. *Social Change in the 21st Century*. Brisbane : Centre for Social Change Research. Queensland University of Technology.
- Moussly, R. (2010, October 10). Facebook a Female Obsession. *Gulf News*. A9.
- Nahawi, M. (2011). *Social Media in the Arab World*. Presentation to Zayed University College of Communication and Media Sciences. October 18, 2011.
- News Group. (2011). *Regional Social Media Monitoring Report*. Dubai: SocialEyez.
- Pew Internet Project. (2011). *Social network sites and our lives*. Washington DC: Pew Research Center.
- Piecowye, J. (2003). Habitus in Transition? CMC use and impacts among young women in the United Arab Emirates. *JCMC* 8 (2).
- Schonlau, M., Fricker, R., & Elliot, M. (2002). *Conducting Research Surveys via E-Mail and the Web*. Santa Monica: Rand Distribution Services.
- Shakir, M.; Shen, K., Vadanovich, S., & Urguhart, C. (2008). Exploring UAE Women's Experiences with IT. *European and Mediterranean Conference on Information Systems 2008 (EMCIS2008)* May 25-26 2008, Al Bustan Rotana Hotel, Dubai.
- Shen, K., & Khalifa, M. (2010). Facebook Usage among Arabic College Students: Preliminary Findings on Gender Difference. *International Journal of e-Business Management V4*, 1080-1087.
- Socialbakers. (2011). *Heart of social media statistics*. Socialbakers. Retrieved from www.socialbakers.com.
- SocialEyez. (2011). *Special Report: Awakening of the Arab Consciousness*. SocialEyez. Retrieved from <http://blog.socialseyez.ae/2011/03/31/special-report-awakening-of-the-arab-consciousness/>.
- Spot On Public Relations. (2009). *Middle East & North Africa Twitter Demographics & User Habits Survey*. Dubai: Spot On Public Relations.

- Starr, P. (2001). United Arab Emirates. *World Education Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3409700234.html>
- Strong, C., & Badran, B. (2010). United Arab Emirates National Report. In GMMP, *Who Makes The News*. Toronto: UNIFEM.
- Sysomos. (2010). *Twitter Statistics for 2010: An in-depth Report on Twitter's Growth*. Marketwire. Toronto. Retrieved from <http://www.sysomos.com/social-media/reports/>.
- Telecommunications Regulatory Authority. (2010). *ICT in the UAE Household Survey, 2010*. Abu Dhabi: Federal Authority. UAE.
- Twitter.com. (2011). *One hundred million voices*. Twitter. Retrieved from <http://blog.twitter.com/2011/09/one-hundred-million-voices.html>.
- UAEInteract. (2011). *Human Rights*. UAE Government. Retrieved from www.uaeinteract.com/government/human-rights.asp
- UAEInteract. (2011b). *Number of female FNC candidates increases*. UAE Government. Retrieved from http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Number_of_female_FNC_candidates_increases/46526.htm.
- UAE Statistics. (2010). *Analytical Report on Economic and Social Dimensions in the United Arab Emirates*. Abu Dhabi : National Bureau of Statistics.
- United Arab Emirates. (2008). *Women in the United Arab Emirates: A Portrait of Progress*. Abu Dhabi: Ministry of State and Federal National Council Affairs.
- WAGL. (2012). About WAGL. *Women as Global Leaders Conference*. Retrieved from <http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/wagl2012/about.aspx>.
- Walters, T., Quinn, S., & Jendi, A. (2006). A New Roadmap to Life; Media, Culture, and Modernity in the United Arab Emirates. *Intercultural Communications Studies XV:2* , 150-162.
- WAM. (2009, November 24). *Foreign Media Delegation Visits*. WAM. Retrieved http://uaeinteract.com/docs/Foreign_media_delegation_visits_GWU/38528.
- Wellman, R. (2011, August 21). Record Number of Women Run for Office in UAE. *Voice of America*. Retrieved from <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Record-Number-of-Women-Run-for-Office-in-UAE-128147833.html>.
- WIL Forum. (2011). Home Page. *Women in Leadership Forum*. Retrieved from <http://www.wilforum.com>.
- York, J., & Timm, T. (2012). U.S. Government Threatens Free Speech With Calls for Twitter Censorship. *Electronic Frontier Foundation*.

Zawya. (2011). Bayt.com and YouGov survey reveals that main usage of internet in the UAE is for social purposes. *Zawya Update*. Retrieved from <https://www.zawya.com/story.cfm/sidZAWYA20110918075140/?relcontent=ZAWYA20111205092017>.

The authors would like to thank the researchers who helped Hessa Juma, Shaikha Faisal Khalid Al Qassemi, Muna Abutalib Moustafa Abdulrahim Mustafawi Al Hashimi, Manal Abdulla Amer Abdulla, Hamda Shaban Ibrahim Mohamed Al Balooshi, Fatma Abdulrahman Mohamed Aqil Al Zarouni, Arwa Mohammad Ahmad Ghanim Bin Dailan