

Women Hashtactivism: Civic Engagement in Saudi Arabia

Authors : Mohammed Ibahrine

Abstract : One of the prominent trends in the Saudi digital space in recent years is the boom in the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. As of 2016, Twitter has over six million users in Saudi Arabia. In the wake of the recent political instability in the Arab region, digital platforms have gained importance for both, personal and professional purposes. A conspicuously observable tide of social activism has risen, with Twitter playing an increasingly important role. One of their primary goals is to enforce the logic of public visibility, social mobility and civic participation in the Saudi society. Saudi women use Twitter to disseminate specific and relevant information and promote their social agenda that remained unrecognized and invisible in the mainstream media and thus in the public sphere. The question is to what extent does Twitter empower Saudi women or reinforces their social immobility and invisibility? This paper focuses on three kinds of empowerment through Twitter in the religiously conservative and socially patriarchal Saudi society. It traces and analyses how Saudi female hashtactivism is increasingly becoming a site of struggle over visibility, mobility, control, and civic participation. The underlying thesis is that Twitter makes a contribution to the development of participatory culture, especially in the lives of women.

Keywords : civic, hashtactivism, Saudi Arabia, Twiterverse

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