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The Arab Spring

Editorial

I am pleased to introduce this special issue on the theme of the Arab Spring and the Media. Dr. Diana Bossio and Dr. Saba Bebawi of Swinburne University have initiated and developed this special issue reaching out to academics and researchers involved in and committed to the issues.

The papers published emerged from a highly successful symposium organised by Diana and Saba held at Swinburne University in Melbourne in 2012. As noted in their editorial, the Arab Spring is an evolving phenomenon and these papers mark a particular reflection at a specific time and articulated from within an Australian context.

Thanks to all who assisted with this issue, the referees, the members of the editorial committee and especially to Diana and Saba for their interest in Global Media Journal (Australian Edition)

Hart Cohen

Guest Editorial

Special Issue Editors Saba Bebawi and Diana Bossio

As we are writing this editorial, thousands of Egyptian men and women are protesting on the streets of Cairo, opposed to President Mohammad Morsi's assumption of sweeping political power in the country's draft constitution. The sometimes violent scenes – reminiscent of the protests that toppled Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 –are being played out across the world on computer screens, tablets and social media.

Revolutions occur on the street. They often pose the threat of violence and sanction to those who gather to call for political and social change. But revolutions also occur in the mind. Global recognition (and support) for the Egyptian, Libyan and Syrian people who want social and political change has also occurred through the dissemination of news and information. Journalists and other media practitioners have always been part of this process of 'getting information out', although now this process is changing.

Beginning in Tunisia in 2010, what has been termed the 'Arab Spring' has encompassed political uprisings in Egypt, Libya, Syria and many other areas of the Middle East, toppling governments and calling for political change. Perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of these protests is the use of social media and alternate digital media technologies to both co-ordinate action by protesters and to report upon the events. Activists, protesters and traditional and mainstream journalists were seemingly innovative in their interactions, digitally sharing each other's eyewitness accounts of events through interview, reportage, image and video online.

This special issue of Global Media Journal aims to explore the investigation and dissemination of news and information during the Arab Spring. This issue is the product of a research symposium about the Arab Spring, social media and the politics of reportage, held at Swinburne University in June 2012. Sponsored by the Australian and New Zealand Communications Association (ANZCA), the symposium brought academics together from universities across Australia to think about the social, political and cultural ramifications of these interactions and their meaning in a digital media age. The event opened with a Skype address from Adel Iskander followed by several presentations offering new analyses of the changes and tensions that have occurred in the relations between those engaging in various forms of investigation and dissemination of news and information during the protests.

This issue publishes some of the research presented, as well as some thought-provoking essays about the Arab Spring.

Diana Bossio and Saba Bebawi present the results of a qualitative analysis they completed about the interactions between mainstream and alternative modes of journalistic practice for news reportage and dissemination in Libya and Egypt in the early days of the protests. They argue that despite the changes in journalistic practice afforded by 'diplomatic' interaction between mainstream and alternative modes of journalistic practice, true 'collaboration' was hindered by the institutional and organisational constraints posed by the discursive reporting practices of each group.

Martin Hirst offers a note of caution in an environment of cyber-hyperbole about the use of social media during times of revolution and crisis. He argues that digital optimists forget that revolutions are made on the streets, not using social media and for journalists covering the crisis, the discourse about 'social media revolutions' is only one part of a complex truth about how the Arab Spring came to be.

Lisa Gye's rich essay explores Argentinian anthropologist Gaston Gordillo theory of resonance to understand the work of Egyptian media artist Ahmed Basiony. She presents an analysis of Basiony's work *Thirty Days Running the Place,* suggesting that the piece conducts the resonance produced by the Arab Spring uprisings to its audience, allowing the force of the protests to be affective even after the protesters had left Tahrir Square.

Amin Ansari's paper examines the post-election use of Twitter in Iran to demonstrate the role of social media technology during the ongoing crisis there. He suggests that the use of social media in Iran's revolutionary battles has actually been overstated, and the Iranian government's subsequent reaction to the use of social media actually devalued the social capital that protesters associated with social media and its use.

Wajeehah Aayeshah has also contributed a 'themed review' of A Malki, Kaufer, Ishizaki and Dreher's monograph: *Arab Women in Arab News Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age.* We hope that you find the themed selection thought-provoking and enjoyable. We extend our gratitude to all the Arab Spring Symposium participants, to Global Media Journal Australia and to our peer reviewers for their time.