

Study: Social media and the Internet allowed young Arab women to play a central role in the Arab Spring

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Over the course of 2011's momentous Arab Spring uprisings, young women in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen used social media and cyberactivism to carve out central roles in the revolutionary struggles under way in their countries, according to a new study commissioned by Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

The study, "Unveiling the Revolutionaries: Cyberactivism and Women's Role in the Arab Uprisings," explores the activism of several key figures, including Egypt's Esraa Abdel Fattah, who became widely known as "Facebook girl," as well Libya's Danya Bashir, Bahrain's Zeinab and Maryam al-Khawaja and Tunisia's Lina Ben Mhenni, who became known as the uprising's "Twitterati," dubbed by influential media and pundits as "must-follows."

The paper was written by Courtney Radsch, a doctoral candidate in international relations at American University and an internationally recognized expert on [social media](#), [citizen journalism](#) and activism in the Middle East.

Exploring such contexts as political rights and elections, the public sphere, [sexual violence](#) against women as well as post-revolution developments, Radsch shows how these and other women transcended and broke with [traditional gender roles](#) and communication methods to help organize virtual protests as well as street demonstrations; these

women also played bridging roles with the [mainstream media](#) and helped to ensure that the 24-hour news cycle always had a source at the ready.

"Not only have cyberactivism and social-media platforms shifted the power dynamics of authoritarian Arab governments and their citizenry, but it has also reconfigured power relations between the youth who make up the majority of the population and the older generation of political elite, who were overwhelmingly male and often implicated in the perpetuation of the status quo," Radsch said.

"While women and men struggle valiantly to bring about political change, these women cyberactivists stand out for their use of new media technologies and access to platforms that transcended national boundaries and created bridges with transnational media and activist groups."

Radsch cautions against viewing her findings outside of current developments in the Middle East; she points to widespread, post-revolution crackdowns on pro-reform activists in countries swept up by the Arab Spring. "The struggle to consolidate revolution and enact meaningful reforms remains a challenge that young women will continue to be involved in, and (they will) undoubtedly continue to use new media technologies to participate in and influence the future trajectory of their countries," she said.

More information: "Unveiling the Revolutionaries: Cyberactivism and Women's Role in the Arab Uprisings":

bakerinstitute.org/publication...mAndWomen-051712.pdf

Provided by Rice University

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