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## **Visual Public Relations in Middle Eastern Higher Education: Content Analysis of Twitter Images**

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Researchers conducted a content analysis of 537 Twitter images posted by Kuwait University, King Saud University of Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates University to examine how public universities in the Middle East use social media to promote their agenda. Researchers analyzed prominent topics and democracy frames featured in the Twitter images and the structural characteristics of those images. The analysis shows significant differences between the three universities in terms of the most prominent topic category and democracy frame. A significantly higher proportion of the Twitter images posted by Kuwait University featured educational and political topic categories. The analysis of democracy frames shows that these public universities often used their social media channels to promote the respective government's political agenda.

Keywords: Visual content analysis, visual framing, social media, higher education, Middle East

Social media have become an integral part of external communication in higher education in many countries (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018; Ekachai & Brinker, 2012; Keller & Sweester, 2012; Salesforce, 2012). Universities use popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to inform and engage students, faculty, and other university members. With the increased availability of information and communication technologies (ITCs) in the Middle East (Internet World Stats, 2017; Seo & Thorson, 2012), universities in the region have also started capitalizing on the emergence of social media in their public relations activities (Ayyad, 2011; Communication on Public Relations Education, 2018). In particular, in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring, political movements in some Middle Eastern and North African countries including Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria since 2010, some public universities in the region have used social media channels to support their government's efforts to prevent political movements and to promote their government's notion of democracy.

Visual imagery has been at the core of social media-based public relations by higher education institutions in the region, where it has also played significant roles in religious, cultural, political, and social aspects (Ayyad, 2011; Barry & Bouvier, 2011; Fahmy & Johnson, 2007; Nevzat, Amca, Tanova, & Amca, 2016; Seo & Ebrahim, 2016). Indeed, the emergence of social media has made the role of visuals in communication more prominent, as people opt for easy-to-digest content and share attention-grabbing images via social media channels (Alper, 2013; Belicove, 2011; El-kasim & Idid, 2016; Li, 2013). For this reason, organizations have been attempting to optimize visual content for effective communication in the age of social media and online social networking (Fahmy, Bock, & Wanta, 2014).

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Despite the increasing significance of social media-based visuals by higher education institutions in the Middle East, there is little empirical or theoretical research on this topic. We aim to fill this gap in the literature by conducting a content analysis of images used on social media sites of Middle Eastern universities. Specifically, we examine what topics are prominently featured in Twitter images posted by public universities in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. In addition, we analyze the frames used in images related to democracy. In doing so, we examine whether there are any differences between the three countries in terms of prominent topics and democracy frames featured in Twitter images.

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates were selected due to their higher level of Internet connectivity as compared with most other countries in the Middle East (Internet World Stats, 2017). The three countries are also members of the six-country Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political and economic alliance, along with Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar. The universities studied in this research are Kuwait University, King Saud University of Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates University. Each is the most prominent public university in their respective country and is active in terms of using social media for external communication. Kuwait University uses Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, while United Arab Emirates University employs the three social media platforms and YouTube. King Saud University uses Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Google Plus.

This research enhances our understanding of how images are used for social media-based external communication by higher education institutions in the Middle East. It also helps us understand how some public universities in the Middle East utilized images to support their government's agenda. Finally, this study contributes to advancing methodological approaches of analyzing social media-based images.

## Literature Review

### Arab World and Communication Technologies

Twenty-two Arab countries were identified as similar in religion, customs and values, history and language; however, the nations differ in many other aspects (Arab Social Media Report, 2013). The differences occurred in areas of wealth, population, geographical area, geographical location, political direction, and foreign policies. Differences among these countries were clearly reflected in fields of telecommunication infrastructure, information and media productions, communication policies, and cultural industries (Salem, 2017). Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE—the three countries chosen for this research—have been members of the Arab world since founded and have a similar level of wealth. There are some differences between the three countries in terms of level of freedom enjoyed by citizens in the respective country. According to the latest Freedom House report (2017), Kuwait scored the highest in terms of political rights and civil liberties, followed by UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait was classified as a partly free country in terms of press freedom, while the UAE was classified not free and Saudi Arabia was named as the “worst of the worst.”

Fundamentally, the Arab world faced a wide range of modern challenges in the course of developing Internet communication systems. While Western countries enjoyed the benefit of online social networking and digital communication technologies in advancing economic and social aspects, Internet connectivity in Arab lagged behind (Harasim, 2006; Seedat, 2014). According to Miladi (2016), the types of democratic practices

prevailing throughout the Arab countries constituted a major factor affecting the use and production of digital media. The level of democracy had fundamental and significant influences on how digital media could be utilized in many aspects of society including government and business public relations. In this globalized information society, countries are increasingly reliant on digital communication technologies for national and international activities, and this change has consequently demanded a more democratic society. In this context, the appropriateness of democracy has been extensively debated in the Arab world (Arab Social Media Report, 2013). Despite prevalent concerns by most Arab countries about implications of digital adoption for political movements, Internet connectivity in the region has grown steadily (Internet World Stats, 2017). Empirical research showed that some Arab countries including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar have emerged as major hubs for international Internet bandwidth in recent years (Seo & Thorson, 2012).

### Social Media in Middle Eastern Higher Education

Social media have facilitated public relations practitioners' engagement and interactions with their target audiences (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Diga & Kelleher, 2009; El-kasim & Iddid, 2016; Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012). Popular social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram help organizations share their information directly with their key audiences without having to go through traditional intermediaries such as mass media. This disintermediation, along with interactive features of social media, has facilitated real-time interactions between an organization and their key audiences. As a result, more and more organizations are adopting different social media applications for their public relations activities (Adweek, 2014; Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008).

The increased importance of social media has also had important consequences for higher-education institutions (Ekachai & Brinker, 2012; Nevzat et al., 2016). Effective incorporation of social media and other information communication technologies into classroom settings is shown to benefit student learning outcomes and participation in classroom activities (Tang & Zhang, 2010; Tess, 2013). University students access social networks sites several times a day, and it is an increasingly important part of their personal and educational lives (Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Tess, 2013). Therefore, social media can serve as an effective medium to reach this group of digital natives who grew up with digital technologies, and there is an important opportunity for universities to engage students via social media channels.

Social media sites are also important for universities in the Middle East. Indeed, there is empirical evidence that public and private universities in the Middle East use different social media channels to inform and engage their students, faculty, and staff. For example, a study that analyzed messages posted by Kuwait University, Kuwait's leading public university, showed that these messages cover a wide variety of issues including political, social, and cultural aspects. In addition, Kuwait University was more active in utilizing social media accounts, compared with private universities in Kuwait (Ebrahim, 2014).

### Social Media-Based Visuals and Visual Framing of Democracy

While visuals have been an integral part of communication, the emergence of digital communication technologies has made the role of visuals in communication more prominent (Alper, 2013; Belicove, 2011; Brantner, Lobinger, & Wetzstein, 2011; Canella, 2017; Fahmy,

Bock, & Wanta, 2014; Goldstein, 2009; Rose, 2012; Toscano, 2017). That is because people prefer easy-to-digest and attention-grabbing visual content in this age of fast-paced information consumption.

For this reason, organizations have tried to optimize visual content for effective communication. This is the case for higher education institutions in the Middle East. Universities in the region that are active on social media often post images to their social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to better engage their target audiences. In some cases, Middle Eastern universities posted images conveying their notion of democracy. This should be understood in the context of the role of social media in the so-called Arab Spring. Social media played a significant role in popular political movements in some Middle Eastern and North African countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria since 2010 (Howard & Hussain, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Sanger, 2011; Miladi, 2016). Countries in the region that have not been directly affected the Arab Spring attempted to resist political changes in their own country. A few years before the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East, a call for a democracy that integrated Islamic and democratic values gained momentum among Muslims in the region (Kanra & Ecran, 2012; Tessler, Jamal, & Robbins, 2012). However, a “non-democratic” or “half-democratic” political structure is still prevalent in the Middle East (Maghsoudi & Khorshidi, 2011; Smith, 1996). Leaders in the Arab Gulf States fear ideological changes in their country will threaten their authority and thus have attempted to resist any ideological change that would influence their tribal political regimes (Barany, 2011; Tessler, Jamal & Robbins, 2012; Wehrey, 2014; Yanai, 2015). Public universities in these countries sometimes conveyed government messages and framed democracy in a particular way that subtly discouraged political movements in the country.

Against this backdrop, we examine visual framing of democracy in images posted to Twitter by public universities in the three countries under this study—Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Democracy is a contested concept in the countries, as public participation and freedom of expression are highly constrained. In the Freedom House’s latest report (2017), Kuwait is designated as a partly free country, and UAE and Saudi Arabia are considered not free. Yet, the ruling regimes describe their countries as a democratic country or working toward a democratic system (Constitution of U.A.E., 2013; Ruling System, 2015). Thus, it is important and relevant to study how public universities may have used social media-based visuals to frame democracy to serve interests of their respective government.

Frames refer to schemata of interpretation that allow individuals to organize, perceive, identify, and interpret information (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Goffman, 1994; Reese, 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). A framing approach is used to make a certain aspect of an issue more salient and thus can influence how the receiver of the information understands or interprets the issue presented. Visuals play an important role in presenting an issue in a way that makes certain aspects of the issue salient (Borah, 2009; Brantner, Lobinger, & Wetzstein, 2011; Fahmy, 2010; Seo & Kinsey, 2012). For example, Seo and Kinsey (2012) analyzed which aspects of democracy were prominent in short videos submitted the Democracy Video Challenge in 2011, an international social media campaign run by the U.S. Department of State. Their research found that different aspects of democracy were emphasized in videos submitted by countries in different stages of democracy. Fahmy’s (2010) analysis of visual frames used by English- and Arabic-language newspapers showed that the newspapers used different types of frames in covering war and terrorism and thus attempted to make different aspects of war and terrorism more salient to their readers. An experimental research study by Brantner, Lobinger, and Wetzstein (2011) found that visual

framing of international conflicts influences how viewers emotionally respond to those conflicts. The current study continues in this tradition and examines what types of democracy frame were prominent in Twitter images posted by leading public universities Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Specifically, we examine the following research questions.

## Research Questions

**RQ1:** How do structural features of Twitter images differ between the Kuwait, Saudi, and UAE universities?

**RQ2:** How do prominent topics featured in Twitter images differ between the Kuwait, Saudi, and UAE universities?

**RQ3:** How do frames of democracy featured in Twitter images differ between the Kuwaiti, Saudi, and UAE universities?

## Methods

We analyzed images posted on Twitter accounts of Kuwait University, King Saud University of Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates University from January 1, 2014 to December 31, 2014. We chose Twitter, as it is the platform through which the three universities most frequently share images. During the analysis period, a total of 537 images were posted on the official Twitter accounts of the three universities. Kuwait University posted 272 images, King Saud University 89 images, and the UAE University 176 images. For this research, we coded all the images posted during the analysis period.

*Coding Categories.* First, each image was coded for the most prominent topic. Our categories for coding topic were *educational*, *administrative*, *political*, *social/cultural*, and *other*. The *educational* category covered issues related to academic programs or research projects such as social or natural science research initiatives and programs, academic courses, registration, admissions, duties, and rules. The *administrative* category covered administrative guidelines for faculty and staff such as ethical guidelines, job offerings, and facilities development. The *political* category covered issues related to government agencies, legal representation, political party tolerance, and public involvement. The *social/cultural* category was used to code images portraying cultural events, religious aspects, lifestyle issues, hospitality, and social welfare.

Second, each image was coded for whether it portrays democracy or not. Every image that portrays democracy was then coded for the dominant frame used to depict democracy. While the literal meaning of democracy is “rule of the people,” scholars came with many different definitions or perspectives based on diverse beliefs and cultural backgrounds in different countries (Lijphart, 2012; Maghsoudi & Khorshidi, 2011). For example, Dayton and Kinsey’s study (2010) examining interpretations of democracy by Middle Eastern civil society leaders found that these leaders agreed that people are the source of the government’s power in a democratic society and emphasized the importance of freedom of speech and press. The democracy frame categories used in analyzing the images are *popular participation*, *freedom of speech*, *freedom of religion*, *justice*, *human rights*, *diversity*, *deliberation*, *governance*, and *other*. These categories were developed based on a review of previous studies that dealt with different aspects of democracy (Janda, Berry, & Goldman, 2008; Larsson, 2001, Seo & Kinsey, 2012). The *popular participation* category covered images that emphasized the notion that in a democracy society, citizens

have significant influence in making decisions about the future of the society. The *freedom of expression* category covered citizens' rights to freely express their opinions and ideas, whereas the *freedom of religion* category was used for images portraying democracy as citizens' liberty to choose their religion. The *justice* category covered images that stressed fairness based upon rule of law rather than personal position. The *human rights* category was used for images portraying political, economic and social human rights. The *diversity* category covered images emphasizing values of multiple ethnicities and lifestyles as well as gender diversity in different aspects of society. The *deliberation* category was used to code images that portrayed the importance of dialogue and discourse in sustaining and improving democracy. The *governance* category covered stable operation of the society. This is relevant, as the countries under study sometimes portrayed participation in governance by tribal or religious leaders as a form of democracy. For example, the Saudi political regime claims that its ruling is based on the Islamic Law and that the participation of the 150-person Shura Council selected by the Saudi king constitutes as a democratic governing process (Ruling system, 2015). Although Al-Sabah tribe rules Kuwait, it was stated in the sixth article of the Kuwaiti constitution that "The system of government in Kuwait shall be democratic."

Finally, the structural features of images were coded. The items are (i) whether the image is a still photo, video, or graphic illustration, (ii) whether the tweet accompanying an image is in English, Arabic, or both English and Arabic, or other language, and (iii) whether the primary target audience for the image was student, faculty, administrative staff, or non-university community member.

*Intercoder Reliability.* To assess intercoder reliability, two trained coders fluent in both Arabic and English coded the same 54 images from the three universities' Twitter accounts. This constituted about 10% of the total 534 images analyzed for this study, as recommended by content analysis handbooks (Krippendorff, 2004; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Intercoder reliability was determined using *Scott's pi*. The intercoder reliability scores for topic and democracy frame were .91 and .89, respectively. The mean intercoder reliability score for the structural features was .98.

## Results

The following results are based on our content analysis of 537 images posted to the official Twitter accounts of Kuwait University (272 images), King Saud University (89 images), and UAE University (176 images) between January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014.

**RQ1: Structural Features.** Our first research question asked how structural features of Twitter images differed between the Kuwait, Saudi, and UAE universities. In terms of image type, most Twitter images posted by the three universities were still photos accounting for 66.3% of the total 537 images. Kuwait University's Twitter account shows most variation in terms of image type with still images, graphics, and videos accounting for 58.8%, 32.4%, and 8.8% of their total 272 images, respectively. About 61.8% of the 89 images on the King Saud University Twitter page posted during the analysis period were still photos and 38.2% were graphics. In comparison, a significantly higher proportion of the Twitter images on the UAE University Twitter account were still photos (80.1% of the 176 images), followed by graphics (17.6%), and videos (1.7%). The differences were statistically significant ( $\chi^2(1, df = 6) = 37.49, p < .001$ ).



Most of the textual comments accompanied the images were in Arabic only (Kuwait University: 82.0%; King Saud University: 93.3%; and UAE University: 81.8%). A small proportion of the comments were in English only (Kuwait University: 11.8%; King Saud University: 3.4%; and UAE University: 12.5%) and some were in both Arabic and English (Kuwait University: 6.3%; King Saud University: 3.4%; and UAE University: 5.7%).

**RQ2: Topic.** Our second research question asked how prominent topics featured in Twitter images differed between the Kuwait, Saudi, and UAE universities. We found a statistically significant difference between the three universities in terms of the most prominent topics featured in Twitter images ( $\chi^2(1, df = 8) = 58.64, p < .001$ ). As shown in Table 1, the *educational* topic category was the most salient in the Twitter images posted by Kuwait University (34.9%), followed by the *political* topic category (29.8%), the *administrative* topic category (23.5%), and the *social/cultural* topic category (11.8%). The *educational* topic category was frequently featured as the Kuwait University used Twitter to promote faculty research activities and academic programs. Twitter images under the *political* category included ones that encouraged university students to participate in political decision-making processes such as elections.

Table 1. Prominent topics in Twitter images

Topic	Kuwait Univ.		King Saud Univ.		UAE Univ.	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Educational	95	34.9%	10	11.2%	45	25.6%
Administrative	64	23.5%	25	28.1%	35	19.9%
Political	81	29.8%	16	18.0%	40	22.7%
Social/cultural	32	11.8%	38	42.7%	54	30.7%
Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	1.1%
Total	272	100%	89	100%	176	100%

Note: The differences are statistically significant ( $\chi^2(1, df = 8) = 58.64, p < .001$ )

In comparison, the *social/cultural* topic category was most prominently featured in the Twitter images posted by King Saud University (42.7%). The second most prominent topic category was *administrative* (28.1%), followed by *political* (18.0%) and *educational* (11.2%). King Saud University often posted images of social or cultural events where community members enjoyed social welfare services provided by the government. Similarly, the highest proportion of the Twitter images posted by UAE University (30.7%) belonged to the *social/cultural* topic category, followed by *educational* (25.6%), *political* (22.7%), and *administrative* (19.9%).

**RQ3: Visual Framing of Democracy.** Our third research question asked how frames of democracy featured in Twitter images differed between the three universities. For this category, we analyze 137 Twitter images that touched on aspects of democracy. This includes 81 images from Kuwait University, 16 images from King Saud University, and 27 images from UAE University. There was a statistically significant difference between the three universities in terms of how they portrayed democracy in their Twitter images ( $\chi^2(1, df = 16) = 43.64, p < .001$ ). As shown in Table 2, *governance* was the most frequently featured in the Twitter images in all three universities, but with different degrees. The *governance* frame category accounted for 37.0% images posted by Kuwait



University, 87.5% by King Saud University, and 67.5% by UAE University. Images under this category framed democracy as stable governance by the current administration or royal families, discouraging citizens from seeking political changes.

Table 2. Democracy frames in Twitter images

Frame	Kuwait Univ.		King Saud Univ.		UAE Univ.	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Popular participation	28	34.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Governance	30	37.0%	14	87.5%	27	67.5%
Diversity	5	6.2%	2	12.5%	6	15.0%
Human rights	6	7.4%	0	0.0%	1	2.5%
Justice	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	3	7.5%
Deliberation	3	3.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Freedom of speech	4	4.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Freedom of religion	2	2.5%	0	0.0%	1	2.5%
Total	81	100%	16	100%	40	100%

Note: The differences are statistically significant ( $\chi^2 (1, df = 16) = 43.64, p < .001$ ).

The second most prominent democracy frame category in the Twitter images posted by Kuwait University was *popular participation* (34.6%), followed by *human rights* (7.4%), *diversity* (6.2%), and *freedom of speech* (4.9%). In comparison, *diversity* was the second most prominent theme both in King Saud University's Twitter images (12.5%) and UAE University's images (15.0%). Images under the *diversity* frame posted by Kuwait University and UAE tended to focus on women in academic and other settings of society. In contrast, images under the *diversity* frame posted by King Saud University rarely featured women; instead, they focused on diversity in the sense of international representation. This seems to reflect the fact that women's rights are significantly limited in Saudi Arabia (Freedom House, 2017).

## Discussion

Based on a content analysis of 537 Twitter images posted by Kuwait University, King Saud University of Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates University in 2014, this research examined prominent topics and democracy frames used in the images as well as structural characteristics of those images. Our results found interesting similarities and differences between the three universities in terms of how their Twitter images are used to publicize university programs and activities and also to help promote the respective government's political agenda.

In general, images posted on Kuwait University's Twitter account differed significantly from those posted on King Saud University and UAE University both in terms of prominent topic and democracy frame. Kuwait University's Twitter images focused more on educational aspects that tend to be more directly relevant for university members including students, faculty, and staff. For example, one of the images under the educational category showed a research presentation by a faculty member at Kuwait University. Other photos under educational or administrative categories covered academic achievements of faculty members and Kuwaiti students. In comparison, King Saud University and UAE University focused more on social and cultural aspects including issues related to religion and lifestyle. For example, a Twitter image posted by King Saud University featured an event

promoting cultural similarities between GCC countries. The Saudi Twitter account posted quite a few images of religious leaders participating in social welfare events, which reflects their view of *Sharia* as a style of democracy. UAE University posted a Twitter image featuring an event in which university members promoted the importance of planting trees to protect an environment.

One of the most significant patterns in terms of democracy frames featured in the Twitter images was that all three universities focused heavily on the aspect of stable governance. This finding should be understood in the context of the Arab Spring. Since popular political movements in some Arabic countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, countries in the region that have not been directly affected the Arab Spring made efforts to prevent similar political movements in their own country (Barany, 2011; Tessler, Jamal & Robbins, 2012; Wehrey, 2014; Yanai, 2015). In doing so, they utilized social media platforms including those of public universities. Kuwait University created its Twitter account in January 2011, King Saud University in January 2009, and UAE University in February 2012. Their Twitter activities became more active after the Arab Spring. Public universities in these countries sometimes relayed government messages and framed democracy in ways that subtly discouraged political movements in the country, and reflected democracy in a manner corresponding to their understanding of democracy as reflected in their constitutions.

While some political movements took place in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, these movements did not have any significant impact comparable to the Arab Spring (Howard & Hussain, 2011; Matthiesen, 2012). Indeed, the governments in the three countries have attempted to discourage their citizens from organizing political movements like the Arab Spring movements (Abdelhay, 2012; Dalacoura, 2012). Our content analysis shows that the leading public universities in the three countries supported the respective government's attempt to resist political changes by framing democracy as stable governance. It should be noted, however, that the proportion of such images was significantly lower in Twitter images posted by Kuwait University compared with those posted by King Saud University and UAE University. This seems to be in line with the fact that Kuwait enjoys more political freedom, and their government structures are considered more democratic than those in Saudi Arabia and UAE (Freedom House, 2017).

It is also important to note that the three universities tended to use Twitter primarily for one-way information dissemination of informing students, faculty, and staff, rather than two-way dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). While not a main focus in this study, our preliminary analysis of the universities' engagement strategies show the universities use social media mainly to push their messages without meaningful interactions with their followers. This one-way communication practice makes it difficult for the universities to use social media platforms to their full potential.

Our empirical analysis of Twitter images posted by the leading public universities in the Middle East enhances our understanding of social media practices in higher education in the region. Moreover, our findings provide important context as to how university social media platforms are sometimes used to help promote their government's framing of democracy and thus support their political agenda.

*Limitations and Future Research:* As is case with any empirical research, our study is not without limitations. First, there were significant differences between the three universities in terms of numbers of Twitter images posted during the analysis period. Since we coded all the images available during the analysis period, this imbalance posed some challenges in terms of comparative data analysis. Future research may analyze Twitter images posted for several years so that a representative sampling method can be used.

Second, it will be helpful to analyze audience reactions to Twitter images to identify characteristics of images that generate most audience reactions. While we coded some metrics of audience engagement (retweets and favorites), we did not have time to incorporate this aspect into our current manuscript.

Third, we examined Twitter images of only three of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. An additional analysis of Twitter images posted by public universities in the other three GCC countries—Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar—will help us better understand the role of social media in the GCC higher education. Future research may also analyze higher education social media use of the GCC countries with that of the countries where political movements resulted in significant political changes during the Arab Spring.

Finally, future research should examine the universities' specific engagement strategies such as interactive comments, call to action, and reposting their followers' images. It will be also useful to interview university public relations practitioners to understand their decision-making processes in regard to posting content on their university's social media accounts.

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