

**Epilogue: On the Digital Middle East and Computational Social Science**  
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Changes in the global digital landscape over the past decade or so have transformed many aspects of society, including how people communicate, socialize, and organize. These transformations have also reconfigured how companies conduct their businesses and altered how states think about security and interact with their citizens. Glancing into the future, there is good reason to believe that nascent technologies such as augmented reality will continue to change how people connect, blurring the lines between our online and offline worlds. Recent breakthroughs in the field of artificial intelligence will also have a profound impact on many aspects of our lives, ranging from the mundane—chatbots as convenient, always available customer support; to the disruptive—replacing medical doctors with automated diagnosis tools.

The ubiquity and ever-increasing use of ICTs are not merely changing society, they are also changing the way we study society. With nearly every digital activity, users leave behind digital breadcrumbs. Digital traces of what we do, what we write, what we share, and what we consume are a by-product of Internet use and provide a record of human behavior at an unimaginable scale. Notwithstanding the concerns that data permanence raises in relation to the issue of privacy, these generated digital footprints open up exciting research possibilities. As such, they constitute a new opportunity for understanding the individual, the state, and society in an unfolding digital era.

The digital Middle East is particularly interesting to study from the perspective of computational social science. This new type of research is truly interdisciplinary, applying computational and “big data” approaches to address research questions that are posed by sociologists, political scientists, demographic researchers, and experts from other fields. The rapid diffusion of digital media infrastructure and the wide adoption of digital technologies in the region have put new methodological avenues for scientifically observing these ongoing changes at the disposal of Middle East scholars, Internet researchers, and data scientists. Social media in particular provide a valuable source of data to make sense of evolving Middle Eastern societies. Digital networks can serve as “observatories” of transformation in the region that are due to, and go beyond, the adopted digital technologies themselves.

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