**Literature and Social Media**

**About the Book**

This book discusses the influence of social media on the three levels of Arabic literary text: content; form; and language. It has been divided into three chapters, each of which treats one of these three levels in depth. In **chapter one**, we explore the Arabic literary texts in which social media plays a fundamental role in influencing the content. We have termed such texts “Social Media Literature”, similar to other literary terminologies that reflect the text’s contents (e.g., “War Literature”, “Resistance Literature”, “Uprising Literature, “Arabic Spring Literature”, etc.).

The fact that social media has infiltrated our lives so magnificently in the last decade (so much so that it has become a parallel universe in its own right) prompted us to research this topic. Through social media we meet people from different countries and cultures, talk to them and exchange personal information, and everyone has a cohort of “virtual” friends. Social media has provided users the opportunity to build different types of relationships, including familial or professional relationships, or relationships with those who share similar hobbies or interests. Some even depend on social media for romantic relationships or marriage. This electronic link between users has become a substitute for face-to-face visits and meetings. In short, social media has led to enormous changes in our lifestyle and culture, affected our way of thinking as well as our value system, and transported us from the real world to a virtual world that exists even when our computers are turned off.

As literature from the perspective of the “realistic school” reflects an era and authors express culture, fears, and dreams, it would be naïve for us to believe that literature is not influenced by the changes that social media has imposed on our lives both, as individuals and as a society. It is only logical that social media would inspire authors and transform the main topic of their texts. In fact, a large number of texts about social media express a noteworthy shift in the content of contemporary literature, prompting the questions: What are the recurring themes and patterns in Social Media Literature? How does Arab society deal with this media? To what extent does it accept or preserve Arab society? Has the way in which Arab society deals with social media changed since it first emerged?

We have endeavored to answer these questions by employing different literary models to analyze several texts written over twenty years (1996-2016), roughly representing the period in which social media first began to permeate the Arab world until now. It is worth mentioning that we selected the texts in this chapter through a precise screening process in which we focused on several aspects, including genre and the aesthetic quality of the texts. Thus, we included an array of literary genres such as stories, poems, and novels. We also carefully considered genre representation, on the one hand, and geographical representation of various Arab countries, on the other.

Drawing upon the findings of the study, we discovered that these literary texts reflect a huge shift in how Arab society deals with social media across different time periods. Many of the texts that were written from the late 1990s until the late 2010s are about the fear of social media and the mental and societal damages it can cause, and about the excitement over what social media has achieved in terms of communication and sharing knowledge and ideas with people around the world. The beginning of the 21st century brought about a new trend among authors, in which they wrote about social media with a greater awareness. Authors began to deal with social media creatively, participating in important philosophical discussions and underlining social media’s ability to advance society and change it for the better, if used correctly.

The influence of social media is not restricted solely to literary content; rather, it has influenced form and structure, as well. Therefore, we devote the **second chapter** of this book to what we term “Literature Across Social Media” (i.e., all texts taken from, written on, and published on social media). In other words, this chapter discusses literary texts that emerged from social media. As these texts were fundamentally written to be published via social media, they were subjected to, and benefitted from, the conditions of electronic publishing and developed new aesthetic characteristics. Continuing from this, we attempt to answer several questions, most notably: How has social media influenced the formation of different literary genres? Have completely new literary genres emerged in the realm of social media? To what extent it is possible to claim rights to the literature posted on social media?

In order to answer these questions, we analyzed several literary genres published on social media, focusing on the most important changes that affected their external characteristics, including the new traits they acquired from being published on social media and the technological capabilities provided by electronic publishing. As the capabilities discussed in this chapter are few compared to the previous chapter, we did not adhere to the same criteria when selecting the texts. As we could only work with the texts that were at our disposal, there is a variation in the number of selected models for each section. It is worth mentioning that we divided this chapter into several sections, and we treat a specific literary genre in each section, namely: novels, short stories, poetry, and biographies. Furthermore, we focus on the literary texts published on the social media platforms most frequently used to transmit the creative literary experience, i.e.: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp, as well as blogs and forums.

Through this study, it became apparent to us that the literary genres published on social media have preserved their well-known fundamental characteristics, including the literary foundation, in that we still refer to them as “novels” and “stories”. They also acquired new traits regarding their form and structure, resulting from the intermediary channel through which they were published. Among these characteristics are the use of visual and sound effects, merging video clips, abridgment of the text, division of the text into parts or extracts, and overlapping varieties of one genre. In order to distinguish between the traditional and new literary genres on social media, we organized the titles into appendices to indicate either the new technology employed (e.g., “connected story” or “video poem”) or the literary means in which they appeared (e.g., “a Facebook novel”, “a Tweet story”, “blog novel”, etc.

Social Media Literature has resulted in a new model for literary textual aesthetics, and non-literary standards have imposed a distinction between different literary genres. We found that Arab authors did not utilize the technology available nor did they benefit from the unique characteristics of social media to present creative, independent, and self-standing work. Such innovation did not exist previously, nor did it evolve from the literary genres that were written in the pre-digital age.

Regarding the legitimacy of the literature published on social media, we noticed variations amongst different texts. Some texts are sobering and serious, and some are characterized by superficiality. This is because many Social Media Literature authors are amateurs with unrefined talents and still need a long time to acquire the eloquence necessary for this level of literature (for this reason some critics deem their writing “informal”).

In the **third chapter**, we touch on “the influence of social media on the language of the literary text”, and we attempt to monitor e linguistic phenomena and new characteristics that infiltrate the literary texts due to the prominence of social media, by analyzing several famous literary models. Following this, we discuss the various dimensions of these phenomena. Through this study, we uncover the most prominent linguistic phenomena in Social Media Literature, namely: using new linguistic terminologies taken from the worldwide web; extending the semantic field to some network words; the use of English; writing in the vernacular; typographic richness resulting from the use of the keyboard; the prevalence of errors due to the lack of spellcheck; abbreviations for various considerations, including those related to screen size; and using technology as an expressive language.

We wrap up this chapter by concluding that the linguistic scene of the literary speech in social media is marked by several advantages, which several critics viewed negatively and others viewed as normal in terms of the evolution of linguistic style. This dichotomy has given rise to two schools of thought. The first seeks to combat these advantages, which it views as degrading the literary text, while the second seeks to establish a new literary discourse for this new type of literature.

**Methodology**

In this book, we generally adhere to the descriptive curriculum, in that we use historical tools, some of which are limited.

**Significance of the Present Work**

This book is distinct in several aspects. For one, this is the first and only book that distinguishes between the two types of literary texts and their relationship with social media, namely: texts that view social media as and end, and texts that treat it as a means. Additionally, this book coins the new term “Social Media Literature”, which expresses the shift in literary content that emerged at the beginning of the 21st century and is the first book treating this topic.

Furthermore, it is the first book to shed light on the Arabic literary prose employed in social media by panoramically encapsulating the various levels of literary texts (content, form, and language) in depth. We found that the main weakness of previous studies is that they either focus on one literary level or fail to focus on one literary genre. In Ibrahim Melḥem’s book “The Theory of Digital Literature in Social Media Sites” (2018), for example, the author touches on an exceptionally small number of literary genres found on social media, compared with the number of genres we focused on. Furthermore, he focuses only on the form of the text, without considering how social media influences the text’s content or language. As for “The Internet and the Poetics of Intertextuality in the Modern Arabic Novel” (2018) by Moḥammad Hindi, the author fails to treat how social media has impacted novels.

Most critical studies that have treated the new literary genres on social media, be they Arabic or Western, have viewed them through the lens of digital literature, and we found that most of these books focus on texts that employ technology. Thus, we analyze technological aesthetics and their impact on the reader, as in the case of “Literature and Social Media” (2020) by Bronwen Thomas, “Digital Narration” (2017) by Wahība Ṣāliḥ, and “Narration and Technology: Transformations of Form and Content” (2019) by Aḥmed Al-Raḥāla and Jamīl Al-Ḥayāri. We touch on the literary genres that depend upon technology as well as those that do not, in an effort to observe new characteristics that emerged in the literary genres after the transition to social media (without going into technical analysis of these characteristics, except to highlight them). The aim is to monitor the phenomenon, not to analyze it. This approach allows the researcher to track the overall changes and transformations that have occurred in each of the literary levels. Finally, this book paves the way for future studies in the field of comparative literature. Publishing this book in English will help authors from different backgrounds to undertake studies comparing Arabic and world literatures and their relationships with social media.