Foreword

In February 2011, Syrian America hip-hop artist Omar Offendum released the riveting “#Jan25.” This song offers a celebration of the role that protests and social media played in the Arab Spring revolts, and contains the following lyrics:

I heard em say

The revolution won’t be televised

Aljazeera proved em wrong

Twitter has him paralyzed

Of course, the line “the revolution won’t be televised” is a play on the title of the classic Gil Scott-Heron song, released some 40 years earlier. Although Scott-Heron is often credited as being a profound influence on hip-hop artists to come, his message is very different from Offendum’s.

Scott-Heron takes the position that the media of his time (dominated by corporate-based print and broadcast outlets) will have no resonance with (and may even ignore) the revolution to come:

There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down

brothers in the instant replay.

...There will be no highlights on the eleven o’clock news.

Offendum, on the other hand, is celebrating the role that the social media of his generation played in actual revolutions. While any causal relationship that social media and mobile devices (mostly cell phones) played in the Arab Spring can be debated, it cannot be denied that the dramatic events were “tweeted” (and blogged, and texted, and streamed) as the events unfolded, and often in real time. No ignoring the revolution, in this case!

At its best, hip-hop provides a venue for powerful social commentary. As voices for their respective times, Scott-Heron and Offendum have quite different takes on the role that contemporary media play in the societies of their times. For Scott-Heron, 1970’s media were removed from the people, controlled by the most powerful and wealthy, who would not report on the revolution to come.

Yet, for Offendum and his contemporaries, social media, often delivered through mobile devices, provides a forum for discourse that is largely the will of the people. Employing a title with a hash tag will allow any individual to begin a dialogue that is immediately open to anyone in the world who wishes to participate.
The presence of social media and mobile devices is becoming ubiquitous in the world of marketing and advertising. Can a TV commercial, Internet-based ad or printed advertisement be viewed without us being asked to like (Facebook) or follow (Twitter) the product being sold? Likewise, social media environments are peppered with ads often connected in some way with the content being viewed.

Book a trip to Spain, and be prepared for ads on Spanish lessons! And we all know the stories of how our mobile device activity is mined for ways that advertisers can match their products with our digital footprint. In other words, the corporate world continues to see significant value in marketing their products through social media.

Popular culture? Music phenomenon Justin Beiber was “discovered” through a series of YouTube performances posted by his mother and him. After his career was well established, Beiber and then girlfriend Selena Gomez tweeted about a song they had just heard titled “Call Me Maybe.” The army of youth who follow the tweets of Beiber and Gomez thrust “Call Me Maybe” and singer Carly Rae Jespen into the popular musical stratosphere. The video of that song prompted an unprecedented and viral series of parodies, including one by former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, offering their own versions of the catchy song. Ironically, in that same year, Justin Beiber’s record for YouTube views for his song “Baby” was surpassed by the billion plus views of South Korean artist Psy’s “Gangnam Style” dancing video. Of course, the viral impact of Gangnam style dancing has resulted in countless versions of that dance celebrated by people from all social strata across the world, including heads of state.

Internationally, the combination of social media and mobile devices is having a broad impact across several sectors, beyond popular culture. As both the World Bank and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have reported, the adoption rate of mobile devices in developing nations has now surpassed the rate of adoption in developed nations. In part, this is because it is less expensive to develop communication systems built upon a network of cell towers than it is to lay new networks of Ethernet or fiber optic cables. Further, mobile phones and tablets are cheaper than their laptop and desktop counterparts. The increasing availability of mobile devices and social networks in developing countries has fostered some intriguing economic development opportunities. Emergent fields like “iAgriculture” and “Ehealth” have grown. Such innovations allow farmers in rural villages to be in touch with commodities markets in different parts of the world to make the most informed decisions regarding the planting of crops. Likewise, mobile devices are being used by patients to manage chronic conditions like diabetes to keep records that they can review themselves and even share in real time with doctors and nurses.

Overall, the worldwide adoption rate of mobile devices, especially cell phones, is remarkable. By the middle of 2012, three quarters of the world’s population had cell phones, outpacing adoption of any communication technology in human history. While price point remains an issue in many parts of the world, tablet devices are now being purchased at an increasing pace. Yet, to overcome the relatively high price of tablets, some dramatic initiatives have been inaugurated. For example, a consortium of Indian government, corporate and education leaders have developed the Aakash, an Android-based tablet computer, with a target price of $35 USD. While a version is to be made available for general public consumption (at a higher price), the key audience for the Aakash’s is the education sector, namely, millions of Indian students who would not otherwise have access to a tool with such power and connectivity.

With the profound impact that social media and mobile devices are having from social movements to commerce to health care, is it not time for serious educators to take notice? While there has been some movement in the adoption of mobile devices and social media as instruments for learning, most often
they are considered ancillary tools and not truly central to classroom instruction. If organizations like UNESCO, The World Bank, and the OECD all see mobile devices and, to a lesser extent, social media as tools for economic development and social mobility, what about the classroom? This book attempts to directly address that dilemma.

The editors have gathered an impressive set of scholars, researchers, and practitioners who are staking out positions, presenting models, and offering research on how mobile devices and social media can be effectively integrated into education. The range of content addressed in this book is far-reaching, from directly addressing the need for new pedagogical models for mobile learning to the relevance of social media in education; from how these new tools could address student accessibility needs and differentiated instruction to their role in communities of practice; from international perspectives to innovative approaches both within and outside the classroom.

The movement to consider the possible integration of mobile tools and social media into education is a relatively new one (and currently without a strong research base). We would be wise to consider ourselves at the early stages in the dialogue on how social media and mobile devices can become robust players in the educational agenda. This book does an impressive job in moving that dialogue forward.

In many ways, the contrast between Offendum’s “#Jan25” and Scott-Heron’s “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” is illustrative for educators. In their “debate” about the relative merits of media in social and political revolutions, and the extent to which control will ever be in the hands of the people, they raise important questions for us. While the technologies of social media and mobile tools can literally put knowledge, discourse and learning in the hands of students (both inside and outside of the classroom), are we prepared to let that happen? Are we prepared to embrace it? In their new book, the editors and authors of Mobile Pedagogy and Perspectives on Teaching and Learning provide us an opportunity to explore this provocative dilemma.

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