



THE DIGITAL RHETORIC OF A MONARCH: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF KING ABDULLAH'S TWEETS

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Abstract

Twitter (X) has become one of the most important online spaces for political communication. This study examines how King Abdullah II of Jordan strategically utilizes Twitter to engage with domestic and international audiences. Using Naeem et al.'s (2023) framework for thematic analysis, the researcher examined a set of 188 tweets posted between 2020 and 2025. Results showed nine dominant themes, from diplomacy and national unity to humanitarian efforts and economic progress. The findings reveal a leadership discourse centered on soft power, international diplomacy, and cultural cohesion, with a strong emphasis on recognition, solidarity, and national identity. The study also highlights the relative underrepresentation of security and economic topics, raising questions about alternative communication channels used for these policy areas. These insights contribute to understanding the evolving role of digital political discourse in monarchies, offering a foundation for future comparative research on social media engagement by political leaders in the Middle East.

Keywords: Twitter, politics, Jordan, King Abdullah II, thematic analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has fundamentally altered the landscape of political communication, providing politicians with an unprecedented platform to reach constituents and global audiences without relying on traditional media channels (Housholder & LaMarre, 2015). Twitter has become a critical tool for political leaders seeking to craft their public image due to its accessibility, real-time nature, and widespread use across political contexts (Lee & Xu, 2018).

Political digital discourse on Twitter has become a new dimension of political propaganda. High-ranking figures, including presidents, ministers, and legislators, frequently "tweet"—a term referring to posts in the form of text or images on Twitter—about various social and political issues within the country (Suharto, 2024: 163). This transformation provides a foundation for scientific research, allowing political discourse on Twitter to be analyzed through the study of tweets (Guo et al., 2019)

Although research on the use of Twitter by political leaders is growing, there is a notable research gap in understanding how monarchs, particularly in the Arab world, utilize social media for governance and public communication. While studies have examined the use of social media by political figures from different perspectives and across various countries, limited attention has been given to the use of social media by monarchs in the Middle East, and specifically by King Abdullah II of Jordan.

This study contributes to the existing literature in three key ways. First, it applies a rigorous, systematic thematic analysis framework (Naeem et al., 2023) to political Twitter discourse, a approach still emerging in political communication studies. Second, it addresses a significant gap by shifting the focus from elected populist leaders to a hereditary monarch, specifically in the understudied context of the Arab Middle East. Third, by mapping the themes of King Abdullah II's tweets, it provides a nuanced empirical basis for understanding how digital soft power strategies are operationalized within a modern monarchy to bolster both domestic legitimacy and international image. The present study, thus, seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What key themes emerge from King Abdullah II's tweets?

2. How does King Abdullah II use Twitter to engage with both domestic and international audiences?

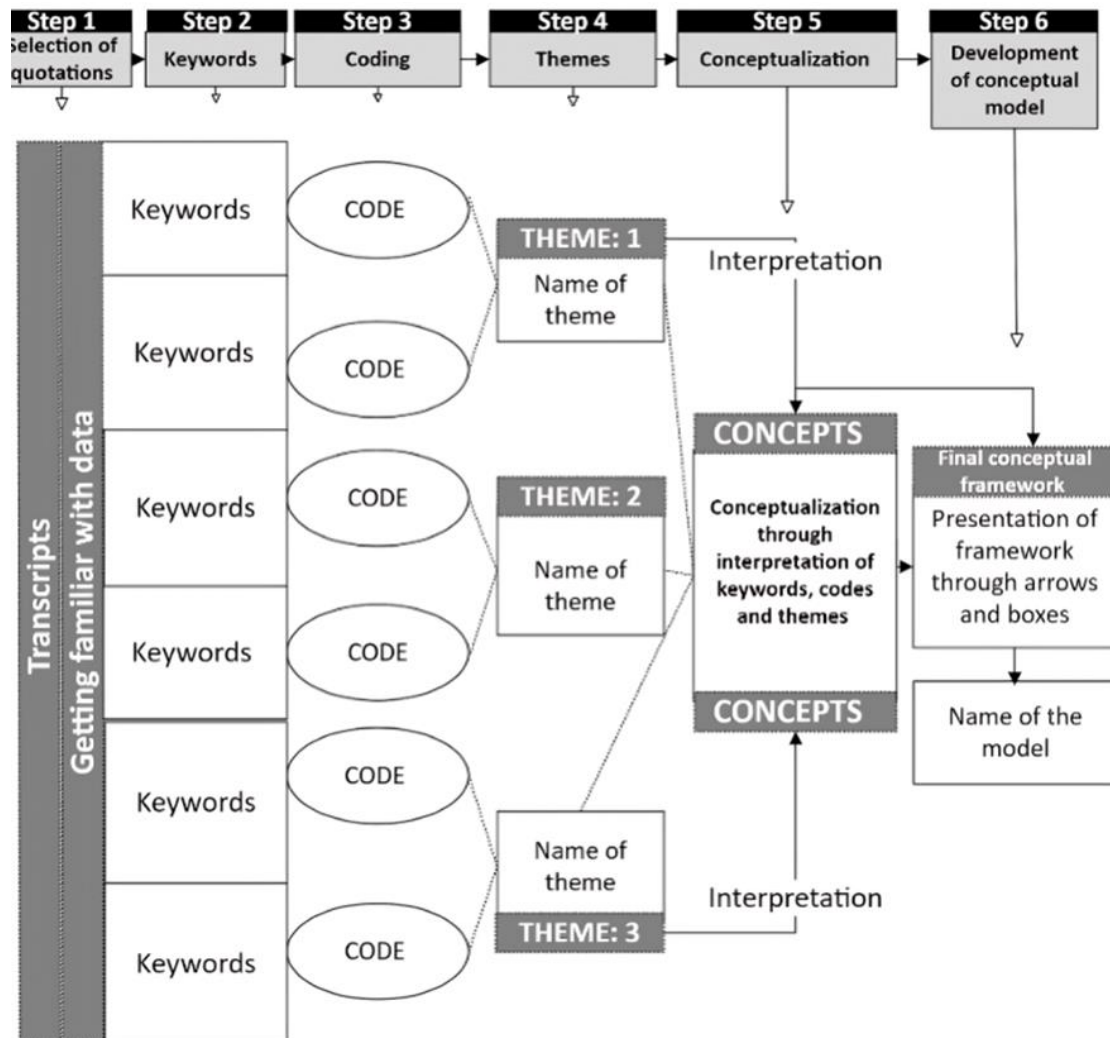
Literature Review

Theoretical background

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to examine and interpret patterns within a dataset. It involves identifying recurring themes based on the meanings associated with keywords and expressions used by participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liebenberg et al., 2020; Xu & Zammit, 2020). By systematically analyzing these patterns, researchers can uncover underlying ideas, perspectives, and social narratives embedded in the data. Additionally, this study engages with the literature on autocratization and authoritarian regime survival, positioning social media as a tool of legitimation and control (Jones, 2022; Guriev & Treisman, 2020). This theoretical framing situates King Abdullah II's digital discourse within broader debates on authoritarian resilience and regime durability. Naeem et al. (2023: 3-5) proposed six systematic steps for thematic analysis (see Figure 1), including:

1. Transcription and familiarization: Researchers transcribe data, immerse themselves in it, identify initial themes, and select key quotations that capture diverse perspectives.
2. Keyword selection: Recurring terms or visual elements are identified from the data to represent participants' experiences and perceptions.
3. Coding: Data segments are assigned short descriptive codes that distill core meanings, transforming raw information into structured insights.
4. Theme Development: Codes are grouped into meaningful themes that reveal patterns and relationships relevant to the research question.
5. Conceptualization: Emerging themes are refined into well-defined concepts, often using diagrams or models to illustrate connections.
6. Conceptual Model Creation: A structured model is developed to represent findings, linking data to existing theories and highlighting the study's contribution.

Figure 1. A systematic thematic analysis process: A novel six-step process for conceptual model development in qualitative research



Related Studies

Thematic analysis has emerged as a powerful qualitative method for extracting meaningful patterns from Twitter data, facilitating a deeper understanding of various topics, including public sentiment (Taghinejadi et al., 2018; Lowe et al., 2023), social issues (Oyebode et al., 2021; Dindar et al., 2022; Arboleda et al., 2024), and digital political discourse. The literature available on thematic analysis of tweets by politicians is limited, and only a few were found to be relatively relevant to the present paper.

Yılmaz & Özoflu (2024) applied thematic analysis to examine how Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP) leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, framed narratives of reconciliation and social cohesion through Twitter. The researchers gathered different forms of spoken and written discourse units with a total of 102 speeches. Their study revealed key themes of national unity, democratic renewal, and accountability.

Baptista et al. (2024) explored how André Ventura, leader of Portugal's Chega party, used Twitter as a gatekeeping tool to legitimize his discourse, often employing nationalist and populist themes. Praca et al. (2024) examined how Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump used Twitter during their presidencies. The study found patterns of democratic erosion, populist rhetoric, and media attacks as dominant themes. Malek (2024) explored how Tunisian politicians used Twitter post-2011 to construct collective memory and redefine political identity.

Although the studies reviewed in this section touch on the notion of analyzing themes but none of them used a theoretical framework specific to this matter. Furthermore, according to the researcher's knowledge, no previous study was conducted on Arab leaders in terms of their use of social media (from such a perspective). Therefore, we believe that applying thematic analysis to political figures' social media discourse, such as King Abdullah II's tweets, can provide insights into evolving political priorities and public engagement strategies. By systematically analyzing these tweets, researchers can identify key themes related to domestic and international concerns, including national security, economic policies, and foreign relations.

Methodology

Data Collection

The researcher gathered data from the official account of King Abdullah on Twitter (<https://x.com/KingAbdullahII>). Octoparse software was used to automatically scrape the tweets posted by the King (between 2020-2025), resulting in a corpus of 188 tweets. The data was extracted and stored on an Excel sheet to be later analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. King Abdullah posts tweets in Arabic and English, but for the study, the Arabic data was translated into English.

All Arabic tweets were translated into English by the researcher, a native Arabic speaker fluent in English. To ensure translational accuracy and preserve cultural and rhetorical nuance, a back-translation procedure was employed. A professional translator, blinded to the original tweets, translated the English versions back into Arabic. The back-translated versions were then compared with the originals by the researcher, and any minor discrepancies in tone or meaning were discussed and rectified to achieve conceptual equivalence.

Twitter/X has a comparatively smaller user base in Jordan than in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states. However, its symbolic and political value is substantial. King Abdullah II's adoption of Twitter in 2017 was interpreted as a move toward projecting modernity, accessibility, and symbolic capital in governance.

Data Analysis

Following Naeem et al.'s (2023) framework for thematic analysis, the process began with familiarizing myself with the extracted data, reviewing it thoroughly to identify recurring patterns and key concepts. This allowed for a foundational understanding of the dataset before progressing to the coding stage, where key topics such as diplomacy, economy, and defense were identified as initial codes.

The coding process was conducted manually by the primary researcher. To ensure reliability and minimize coder bias, a second, independent coder, trained in the principles of thematic analysis, coded a random sample of 20% of the tweets. Inter-coder reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, yielding a score of 0.87, indicating a high level of agreement. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. While specialized qualitative data software (NVivo) is often used, the manual process was deemed suitable for the size and nature of this dataset, allowing for a deep, nuanced engagement with the text.

These codes served as a structured way to categorize significant elements of the text, enabling a more systematic approach to the analysis. Once the key codes were established, I grouped related ideas into broader themes. For instance, discussions on foreign policy, global negotiations, and international partnerships were consolidated under the theme of Diplomatic Relations, while economic agreements and trade policies were

categorized under Economic Progress. This step ensured that the data was organized meaningfully, creating a clear thematic structure.

Beyond content, stylistic choices were also considered. Tweets are typically shorter, more affective, and more personal in tone compared with formal speeches. Many incorporate photos of official meetings, commemorations, or cultural symbols, reinforcing affective resonance and visual legitimacy.

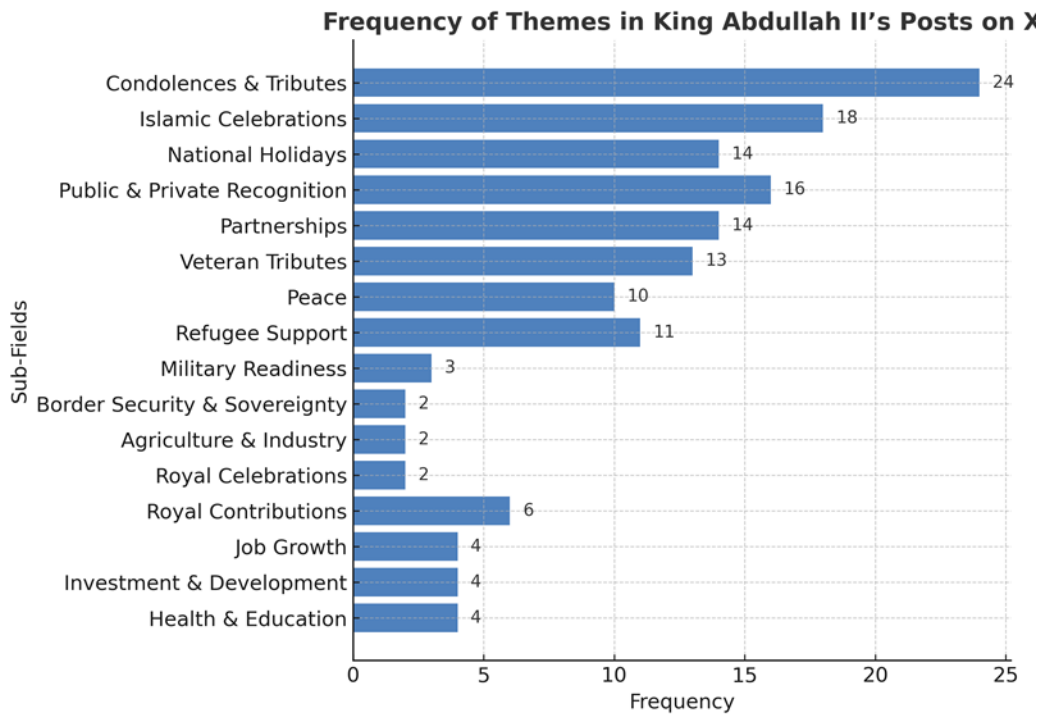
Next, I reviewed and refined the predefined themes by examining sub-fields within each category to ensure they accurately reflected the contextual meaning of the data. For example, Diplomatic Relations was further broken down into sub-themes such as "bilateral agreements" and "international cooperation," while Economic Progress included "Investment policies" and "Job Creation." Once the themes and sub-fields were finalized, I structured them hierarchically, ensuring clarity and coherence.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis shows that King Abdullah II's posts on Twitter can be classified into nine themes: Diplomatic Relations, Religious/National Celebrations, Gratitude/Condolences, National Defense, National Unity and Pride, Economic Progress, Humanitarian & Social Issues, Leadership & Legacy, and Family. By examining the frequency and use of such themes, we can understand how political discourse is strategically employed by King Abdullah II to reinforce legitimacy, foster unity, and engage with global partners. Table 1 summarizes the findings, where each theme was accompanied by an example from the data.

The analysis of Figure 1 below reveals distinct patterns in the prioritization of different sub-fields. The most frequently occurring category, Condolences & Tributes (24), suggests a strong emphasis on honoring individuals and expressing formal recognition during times of loss. This high frequency indicates that commemorative and tribute-related events hold a significant place in public and governmental engagements. Similarly, Islamic Celebrations (18), National Holidays (14), and Public & Private Recognition (16) highlight the importance of religious and national observances, as well as the acknowledgment of contributions from individuals and organizations.

Figure 1. Frequency of themes retrieved from King Abdullah II's posts on X



Another noteworthy trend is the relatively high frequency of Partnerships (14) and Veteran Tributes (13). This suggests that international collaborations and military-related commemorations play a significant role in public discourse. Additionally, the presence of Peace (10) and Refugee Support (11) demonstrates a continued focus on conflict resolution and humanitarian aid, highlighting ongoing concerns about global stability and the welfare of displaced populations.

Theme	Sub-Field	Example from the Document
Diplomatic Relations	Bilateral & Multilateral Agreements	"It was a pleasure welcoming my friend His Majesty King Felipe VI today as Jordan and Spain marked the launch of the collaboration framework between the historical gems of Petra and Alhambra, to expand tourism and cultural cooperation."
	International Cooperation & Alliances	"A fruitful and brotherly meeting with my dear brother Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, reaffirming our deep-rooted ties and shared commitment to advancing cooperation for the benefit of our nations."
	Peace & Conflict Resolution	"Had the pleasure of meeting with VP Harris today to discuss how we can take the strategic partnership between our countries forward. We remain

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Religious /National Celebrations	State Visits & High-Level Meetings	committed to working with the United States towards a more prosperous and peaceful world." "Grateful to my dear friend President Paul Kagame for the warm hospitality. Inspiring to witness firsthand how the Rwandan people, through resilience and unity, turned Rwanda into a beacon of progress and prosperity admired by all. Jordan is keen to advance its partnership with you."
	Diplomatic Crisis Responses	"Deeply shocked and outraged by the heinous attempt on former US President Donald Trump's life during a political rally. Jordan condemns this vicious attack and all kinds of political violence."
	Islamic Holidays & Commemorations	"With the advent of Eid Al-Adha, we pray to God Almighty to bring it back with goodness and blessings upon our dear country and people, and upon our Arab and Islamic nations."
	Christian Festivities & Interfaith Messages	"Wishing our Christian brothers and sisters a Merry Christmas, and we pray for a blessed New Year for us all, marked by serenity and peace of mind, with the burden of the pandemic behind us."
Gratitude /Condolences	Independence & National Holidays	"Celebrating Jordan's Independence Day, we remember the sacrifices of our forefathers and reaffirm our dedication to continuing the path of progress and development."
	Recognition of Public & Private Contributions	"Heartfelt thanks to our fellow Jordanians for sharing in our joy as we celebrated Hussein and Rajwa. Grateful to all our friends for coming from near and far to celebrate with us."
	Condolences to Foreign & National Leaders	"Jordan mourns the passing of an iconic leader. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was a beacon of wisdom and principled leadership for seven decades."
	Disaster & Tragedy Responses	"Deepest condolences to José Andrés and the World Central Kitchen over the tragic death of their team members while delivering urgent food aid to Gazans. We thank you for your sacrifice and humanity."
National Defense	Tributes to Historical Figures & Veterans	"With the anniversary of the Great Arab Revolt and Army Day, we honor the sacrifices of the brave who defended our homeland."
	Military Strength & Readiness	"Our fearless air force personnel air-dropped at midnight urgent medical aid to the Jordanian field hospital in Gaza. This is our duty to aid our brothers and sisters injured in the war on Gaza."
	Tributes to Armed Forces & Veterans	"On Veterans Day, we honor the brave soldiers who sacrificed for Jordan. Their courage and dedication will never be forgotten."
	Border & Sovereignty Protection	"Jordan's sovereignty is non-negotiable. Our armed forces stand ready to defend our land and people."

National Unity and Pride	Cultural Heritage & Identity	"Proud to preserve and promote Jordan's rich cultural heritage. Our history is our identity."
	Sports & National Representation	"Proud of our national football team for their outstanding performance. You have made Jordan proud!"
	Public Service & Civic Responsibility	"Saluting the workers and volunteers who dedicate themselves to the betterment of our society."
Economic Progress	Investment & Infrastructure Projects	"Launched a new set of development projects aimed at boosting Jordan's infrastructure and economy."
	Agriculture & Industry	"Committed to supporting our farmers and strengthening Jordan's agricultural sector for a sustainable future."
	Job Creation & Workforce Development	"Creating new opportunities for our youth through job training and workforce development programs."
Humanitarian & Social Issues	Refugee & Crisis Assistance	"Jordan continues to provide safe haven to refugees, reaffirming our commitment to humanity and solidarity."
	Social Welfare & Poverty Alleviation	"Launched new initiatives to support low-income families and improve living standards across the country."
	Healthcare Initiatives	"Expanding healthcare services to ensure every Jordanian has access to quality medical care."
Leadership & Legacy	Royal Family's Contributions	"Humbled to receive the Templeton Prize on behalf of all Jordanians. This extraordinary prize recognizes how Jordanians have always lived: in mutual kindness, harmony, and brotherhood."
	Historical Legacy & Leadership Values	"Honoring the legacy of King Hussein, whose leadership and vision continue to inspire us."
Family	Royal Family Celebrations & Milestones	"Heartfelt thanks to our fellow Jordanians for sharing in our joy as we celebrated Hussein and Rajwa."
	Tributes to Parents & Elders	"Honoring my late father, whose wisdom and love continue to guide me."

On the other hand, Military Readiness (3), Border Security & Sovereignty (2), and Agriculture & Industry (2) have the lowest frequencies, indicating that security and economic development may not be as prominently addressed as diplomatic and social concerns. Similarly, Royal Celebrations (2) and Royal Contributions (6) suggest a more moderate emphasis on monarchy-related events. Economic and workforce-related themes such as

Job Growth (4), Investment & Development (4), and Health & Education (4) also appear to be of lesser focus compared to cultural and ceremonial aspects.

Diplomatic Relations

We notice that diplomatic communication is a central theme in Jordan's leadership messages, emphasizing bilateral agreements, international cooperation, and peace efforts. Given Jordan's strategic geopolitical position in the Middle East, diplomacy is a necessary tool for maintaining regional stability and fostering alliances. The country frequently engages in high-level diplomatic meetings, reflecting an active foreign policy that seeks to balance relationships with Western nations, Arab allies, and international organizations.

Scholars such as Nye (2004) highlight diplomacy as a form of soft power, which is evident in Jordan's mediation efforts and peace initiatives. The leadership discourse repeatedly affirms Jordan's commitment to regional peace, particularly concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and broader Middle Eastern tensions. These messages construct an image of Jordan as a reliable partner and stabilizing force in the region, reinforcing the leadership's role in international politics.

Religious and National Celebrations

Religious and national celebrations serve as a medium to reinforce national unity and historical continuity. Jordan's leadership acknowledges Islamic and Christian holidays, positioning the country as a model for religious coexistence. This aligns with theories of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), where symbolic events are used to sustain a shared sense of belonging. The repeated recognition of Eid, Christmas, Independence Day, and Army Day underscores the leadership's role in shaping a collective national consciousness.

By celebrating religious events, the leadership discourse highlights Jordan's inclusive national identity, which blends Arab, Islamic, and multi-religious heritage. This is particularly significant given Jordan's diverse population and its role as a custodian of religious sites in Jerusalem. Public messages during these occasions evoke themes of unity, continuity, and moral responsibility, reinforcing the legitimacy of Jordanian leadership as a guardian of heritage and tradition.

Gratitude and Condolences

Expressions of gratitude and condolences play a key role in political soft power. Publicly acknowledging international and domestic figures who have contributed to society helps strengthen diplomatic relationships and enhance leadership relatability. Messages of appreciation towards public servants, humanitarian workers, and citizens contribute to a perceived culture of recognition, which fosters a positive leader-citizen dynamic.

According to Krebs & Jackson (2007), emotional rhetoric in politics strengthens a leader's ability to connect with both domestic and international audiences. Jordanian leadership consistently extends condolences for global tragedies, terrorist attacks, and the passing of foreign leaders, portraying itself as a compassionate and engaged actor in global affairs. This approach aligns with moral diplomacy, where expressions of solidarity are used to enhance political influence and alliances.

National Defense

A significant portion of the leadership's discourse is dedicated to national security, military strength, and sovereignty. Jordan, being in a volatile region, consistently emphasizes the importance of a strong military and counterterrorism efforts. This reflects the securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998), which suggests that states use security discourse to legitimize policies and maintain public confidence.

Commemorating military personnel, honoring veterans, and reinforcing border protection are common themes in the discourse. Jordan's role in counterterrorism—especially against Daesh (ISIS) and other extremist threats—is highlighted as a national duty and global responsibility. This reinforces the leadership's commitment to protecting the nation while collaborating with international security partners.

National Unity and Pride

Jordanian leadership consistently appeals to themes of national pride, youth empowerment, and civic responsibility. National unity is framed as a collective effort, emphasizing the role of citizens in building and maintaining the nation's progress. Anderson's (1983) concept of the "imagined community" is particularly relevant here, as the leadership

constructs a shared narrative that connects past struggles to present achievements.

A strong emphasis is placed on youth and education, reinforcing the idea that Jordan's future lies in investing in the young generations. Recognizing national sports achievements further contributes to collective pride, using athletic victories as a metaphor for national perseverance and excellence. These messages encourage citizens to see themselves as active participants in national development, rather than passive recipients of state policies.

Economic Progress

Economic progress is positioned as a cornerstone of Jordan's vision for the future. Leadership messages frequently highlight investment projects, technological innovation, and job creation initiatives. The framing of economic discourse aligns with Lakoff's (2004) concept of political framing, where economic success is linked to government competency and long-term stability.

Investment in infrastructure, industry, and digital transformation is presented as a means to empower citizens and attract global investors. By emphasizing these aspects, the leadership reassures both the public and international stakeholders that Jordan is committed to modernization and sustainable growth. Economic rhetoric thus serves as a legitimizing tool, reinforcing trust in leadership decisions and national policies.

Humanitarian and Social Issues

Humanitarian themes appear frequently in Jordan's leadership discourse, particularly about refugee assistance, social welfare, and healthcare improvements. Jordan has played a significant role in hosting refugees from Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, and the leadership consistently reaffirms its commitment to humanitarian responsibility.

Fassin (2012) argues that humanitarian rhetoric is often used by states to strengthen moral credibility and international alliances. Jordan's messaging aligns with this theory, as it emphasizes solidarity with displaced populations and vulnerable communities. Healthcare and education reforms are also positioned as key national priorities, reinforcing the government's role in ensuring social well-being.

Leadership and Legacy

Leadership discourse in Jordan frequently references historical figures, past achievements, and the royal family's contributions. This aligns with Weber's (1947) theory of charismatic authority, where leadership is legitimized through historical continuity and legacy-building.

By linking King Hussein's legacy to contemporary governance, Jordan's leadership portrays itself as a continuation of wisdom, vision, and national progress. Future-oriented messaging (e.g., reform and modernization) is framed within this historical context, suggesting that Jordan's development is both a legacy and an ongoing commitment.

Family

References to family values, royal family events, and parental tributes help humanize leadership and align with cultural traditions. Van Ham (2001) notes that modern political branding often involves personal storytelling, making leaders more relatable. Jordan's leadership employs this strategy by sharing personal milestones, royal family achievements, and parental gratitude, reinforcing themes of loyalty and heritage. These messages reflect Jordan's deep-rooted respect for family structures, positioning leadership as both a national and familial authority figure. By doing so, the discourse fosters emotional connection and trust, ensuring stability in public perception of leadership.

Strategic Omissions: Economy and Security

The relative underrepresentation of detailed economic policy and national security discourse on Twitter is itself a significant finding. This suggests a strategic compartmentalization of communication. Following theories of political communication, highly sensitive issues like security and complex economic reforms may be deliberately addressed through more formal, controlled channels such as official statements, government press releases, or speeches to parliament (Jones, 2022). This allows the monarchy to use Twitter primarily as a tool for soft power and national cohesion, projecting an image of stability and unity, while delegating potentially contentious policy details to other arenas. This strategy protects the King's symbolic role as a unifying figure above the political fray, a key feature of monarchical legitimacy.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The dataset, while sufficient for a qualitative inquiry, is limited to 188 tweets from the King's official account, which may not capture the full spectrum of his public communication. Furthermore, the analysis focuses on content and themes, not on audience engagement or reception. Future research could build on these findings by employing sentiment analysis to gauge public reaction to these themes, conducting network analysis to map the diffusion of royal messages, or undertaking the comparative studies with other regional leaders as suggested above.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that for monarchies like Jordan, digital platforms like Twitter are not primarily for policy deliberation but are crucial tools for 'image-work' and symbolic legitimation. This digital monarchy governance model emphasizes soft power, cultural stewardship, and diplomatic engagement to navigate the pressures of the 21st century. For Jordan, this reinforces the King's role as a unifying national symbol and a respected international diplomat, crucial for a resource-poor state in a volatile region. Future research should adopt a comparative framework to analyze if and how other monarchs (e.g., King Mohammed VI of Morocco, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia) employ similar or different thematic strategies on social media, which would illuminate varying models of digital monarchical legitimacy. The high frequency of condolence messages and tributes further suggests a leadership approach rooted in recognition and solidarity, fostering a narrative of compassion and moral responsibility. While security and economic topics appear less frequently in public messaging, their relative absence raises questions about alternative communication channels or policy priorities that may be addressed outside of social media discourse. This indicates a potential distinction between online engagement and behind-the-scenes governance. Future research could examine whether these thematic patterns shift over time in response to geopolitical changes, domestic challenges, or advancements in digital communication strategies. Additionally, a comparative analysis with other regional leaders could provide further insights into how digital political discourse shapes leadership perceptions across different contexts.

Overall, by embedding the thematic analysis within debates on autocratization, digital authoritarianism, and Jordan's specific political

context, this study highlights how King Abdullah II's Twitter use contributes to both domestic legitimation and international image-building. The findings underscore the symbolic role of digital platforms in monarchical governance, while also revealing the limits of Twitter as a space for policy articulation.

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