

Online versus Offline World: A Thematic Analysis of Arab Women's Empowerment via Social Media

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This research study examines Arab women experiences of being empowered by existing in the virtual world. The aim of the study is to establish paper that discusses if female users of Twitter in Arab countries believe that the religious and cultural restrictions of Arabs state institutions are circumvented by the Internet. The study is questioning the Arab female experiences and feelings if and when she bypasses the restrictions, that she is associate with as being Arab, to make herself existing online and how does this reflect on her in the real world. The investigation is carried out by conducting semi-structured interviews, targeting to collect qualitative data only. To achieve the aims of the study, the sample consists of seven females from different countries who all use Twitter. The study showed that there is a gap between the action of Arab women online and offline which is due to prompting of social and political empowerment.

Keywords: Arab women, empowerment, media, virtual world

Background and Context

Arab world population have been one of the most attractable markets for media content and media consumption. Within the last ten years' Arab media policies have been changing, especially after the so-called Arab Spring or Arab Uprising since 2011 (Matta and Matta, 2016, p. 42). The citizens of Arab countries advocate these protests, they were thirsty to make their voices heard after being suppress for years under regime (Alsoudi, 2016, p. 21).

However, the shift or the most highlighted aspect within these protests was the Arab women's participation. According to Eid (2004), the Internet has provided a wide number of people in Arab world, with the opportunity to express their beliefs and declare their ideologies which are particularly benefiting and providing a platform for those who were historically deprived of their freedom of expression. Prior to that, the interest Arab women were to reinforce the negative stereotypes in the world, with new media leap this have been more effective.

The virtual world has been portrayed as providing greater freedom for users in access and expression. This also included allowing women in the Arab region to express ideas, opinion and enunciate their identities to a greater extent than conventional media (Ayish, 2001). This emerging role of online communications in empowering Arab women to construct their identities in virtual space is the focal theme of this research thesis.

After 2011 protest, social media usage continued to grow across the Arab world, along with major shifts in usage trends, from merely being used as a tool

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for social networking and entertainment to infiltrates almost every aspect of the everyday, affecting the way they interact socially, do business, interact with government, or engage in civil society movements (AG Reporter, 2015, p. 4). By the end of 2011, Arab usage of social media had evolved to involve civic engagement, political participation, business efforts, and social change. With a critical number of Arab users in many countries, governments have also begun to recognise social media's potential to develop more transparent, participating and comprehensive governance models (AG Reporter, 2015, p. 4).

Arab women have played a great role in calling for reform and protest in social media which leads to the term of women's empowerment. I seek through this research to investigate the statement that suggests that women in the Arab region have been empowered by social media network usage. The issues whether Arab women were cyber activists or as active participants on the ground are discussed widely in the Arab world and being one of this population, this research is being conducted to cleave its way to the upcoming trends in the future that connects Arab women with social media.

In spite of the anonymity afforded by social media, Arab women continue to create online identities that do not hide their gender. This remains an interesting observation because Arabic culture is frequently constructed around secular and religious requirements. This raises the question of do Arab women feel that social media offer them space where they can bypass and ignore religious, political and cultural restrictions?

Literature Review

Arab women's empowerment is a topic that, for a long time, occupied the international media and several human rights and women's rights organisations around the globe. Yet, Saudi Arabian citizens, including men and women, have a wide variety of interpretations of the reality of Arab women. Some describe the status of Arab women as a humanitarian disaster while others describe Saudi Arabia as the largest women's prison in the world (Askool, 2013). Still, others warn that this is a Western plot that aims to separate Arab Muslim women from their Islamic identity and the heritage of Arabian traditions.

Some other people assert that Arab women's status is stable, and therefore should be of no concern; Arab women live a decent life just like most women in other developed countries who have proven themselves and succeeded in every field of life. More than that, some Arabs strongly believe that Arab women live a life of luxury in modern palaces that is similar to the lives of princesses, which all women of the world dream of. This large disparity in views among Saudis corresponds to a great variation in multiple sects, socioeconomic statuses, and currents of thought within Saudi Arabian society.

Women's Empowerment

In the context of development and poverty improvement, women's empowerment is associated with community participation and the idea of self-help is the new global orthodoxy (Chant, 2016). The rhetoric of sweeping women's development groups has been appointed by international development agencies, powerful international financial institutions, states, NGOs and social movements alike to the article "Saving the World's Women: How Changing the Lives of Women and Girls in the Developing World Can Change Everything", claim that women's empowerment is the cause of our times (Kristof et al., 2009). UNESCO defines empowerment as, Empowerment is about "people-both women and men-taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance. No one can empower another; only the individual can empower herself or himself to make choices or to speak out" (Medel-Añonuevo and Aksornkool, 1995, p. 7).

The United Nations Development Programme (2013), stresses that empowerment is about "participation, empowerment, and development must be by people, not only for them, people must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their Live, but at the same time promotes a rather instrumentalist view of empowerment; Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development" (UNDP, 2013).

Gita Sen (1997) has defined empowerment as a change in power relations. She argues that empowerment is the process by which power is gained. Empowerment for her is possible only with control where individuals can take alter perceptions of themselves and take control of their lives. It is an internal process in which the role of external agents is just as a catalyst, the most important indicator being the sustainability of the empowerment process (Sen, 1997, p. 4). Regardless of how empowerment is defined, it is the new buzzword within global development practice. Women's empowerment is the new global development orthodoxy. Concomitantly, a global women's empowerment regime has emerged that is identifiable by its norms, principles, legal instruments and compliance mechanisms. Institutional efforts have been initiated to advance the cause of gender equality. This is puzzling given that economic globalisation and neoliberal policies are expected to diminish rather than expand the role of the state (Indermit and Kharas, 2007). The state is more and more involved in overseeing empowerment programs and making international commitments to improve the status of women, especially to empower Arab women.

Arab Women State in Relation to Media

According to Perse and Lambe (2001, p. 131), "media content becomes the basis for knowledge, attitude, and action". The visual media today plays a key role in the lives of the individuals and societies. In Arab societies, it is hard to find a home that is free of a TV screen. Many of the research studies that examined the

impact of media on socialisation focused on the television in particular as a medium because it is easy to use and attractive to all age groups, even children of only six months of age (Perse and Lambe, 2001).

Bentz and Mayers (1993) explain that people usually accept media messages that are more consistent with what they believe. In contrast, the impacts of media messages weaken when they are far from the reality of people. Thus, the media establishes roles that are done either through the provision of models close to the reality of individuals, or through providing them with alternatives to their realities (Perse, 2001).

The show *Tash ma Tash* is one of these media tools which combines the two strategies of roles establishment: it plays actual Saudis' roles and provides alternatives through satirical critiques. *Tash Ma Tash* is a satirical comedy social show that addresses the problems of Saudi society with criticism and sarcasm mixed with humour. It has been aired over the past 19 years, excluding 2008. The episodes are shown each year in the month of Ramadan at the time of the main meal. Due to its popularity, it is considered a very effective media tool in Saudi society especially and Arab countries generally. There are several features singled out by this show. First, each episode has a different story but played by the same main actors. The stories are written by a Saudi audience of many multitudes of authors with multiple concerns and problems and including all socioeconomic statuses and orientations. The collective representation nature of the show (since viewers send in their ideas for the show) makes it unique in terms of its credibility and accuracy in representing the society. Second, the official channel of Saudi Arabia, who was the first sponsor of the show from 1993 until 2004, refused to broadcast it on their screens because of its unrestricted critique. It ran hot topics which were considered taboo in Saudi society, where freedom of speech does not exist. In 2005, the MBC took over the sponsoring of the show until 2011 (Al-Qazzat, 1980). Because of some episodes, the actors and director received threatening letters, and some of the radical religious leaders of Saudi Arabia issued militant opinions (fatwa) prohibiting watching this show because it shook their prestige in front of many people who used to revere these characters (Al-Qazzat, 1980, p. 8). This show gave the impression to people that no one is protected from criticism.

Social Media and Freedom of Expression

The use of social media in the Arab region has created a communication technology platform for the minority to greatly influence the public domain. Through social media, the people of Saudi Kingdom, for example, have managed to reshape the political discourse. This is because blogging, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, and other social media packages have provided ideal channels through which citizens can air their political outlooks freely, exchange ideas and thoughts rapidly, launch right-based campaigns easily and raise awareness. In that respect, social media have supplemented communication that the government has attempted to cut off controlling the media, thereby inflaming public influence on political matters. Such public influence on the political sphere escalates the fall of

the government (Auter and Alkarni, 2013, p. 56) as the government is compelled by ongoing campaigns launched via social media to adjust its legislative structure so that it comprehensively includes the rights of people by deleting unjust and oppressive clauses.

Social media, powered by the Internet, have become tools to facilitate real change in Saudi Arabia. As Arab women converse and interact with the rest of the world through social media, they create and disseminate content that fuels fast-paced change. Auter and Alkarni (2013) confirm that, since the Arab Spring, the Internet industry in the Arab world has been characterised by technological development that has played a crucial role in accelerating the pace of change. It is through social media that Saudi people are mobilised in demanding and pressuring for political, social and structural change. This means that social media supersedes the power of media censorship laws enacted in Saudi Arabia, thereby portraying a strong potential to stimulate change in all spheres of the society. Furthermore, Odine (2013) contend that the willpower of Arab women to make a change principally defines the drive towards having a free press.

Odine asserts that Arab women, who have been denied the opportunity to voice their plight by the media that is under strict control by the society, are now transmitting empowerment messages through social media. This has culminated in the marginalisation of inequality in educational and professional opportunities, physical mobility, and other social rights, revealing the value that social media have added in the lives of the Arab women.

Purpose of Social Media Use among Arab Women

There are numerous previously published research studies on social media use in Saudi Arabia that are deemed to be fundamental in discussing the purpose of using social media platforms. In Cummins (2015, p. 21) study he affirm that social media has been at the root of facilitating the cultural and social transformation that Saudi Arabia has undergone over the previous decade. The use of social networking among all global societies continues to become phenomenal due to technological changes. Apparently, the Saudi society is not left behind in keeping the pace with these changes. Perlov and Guzansky (2014) confirm this statement by stating Saudi Arabia have witnessed a growth of about 300 percent of active users of social media sites in a period not exceeding four years.

In a reflection paper, Samin (2012, p. 16) also acknowledge that the Saudi society has been on the vanguard to take advantage of the widespread social media penetration that became evident with the advent of the new media. In that case, it is evident that social media sites or platforms play a very revolutionary and indispensable role among the citizens of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi people use social media packages for various functions and purposes in the corporate, cultural, economic, political, and social domains of their lives.

In the social and cultural realm, Arab women use social networking for the purpose of social entertainment. According to Simsim (2011, p. 3), the use of social networking site for entertainment purposes is typical of the Arab women. In another study that acknowledges that social media-based entertainment is

predominant among the Arab women, Alsharkh (2012, p. 9) contend that Arab women have limited entertainment options. For this cause, social media networks, powered by the Internet, become a feasible entertainment option for them.

Besides entertainment, Arab women use social media networks for the social purpose of communication. According to Nassuora (2013, p. 12), social media sites serve as companies that gather people for the realisation of the universal communication interest, along with publishing content that is valuable to these people. Based on this observation, the Arab women use social networking sites as platforms for facilitating communication (Cummins, 2015, p. 21). This is because they can publish personal blogs and post other content aimed at communicating opinions and public ideas with friends, families and acquaintances as. Consequently, virtual or cyber-based social communication expands among Arab women, leading to the expansion of the communication network. Perlov and Guzansky (2014) remark that, due to the stringent media censorship and surveillance, in Saudi Arabia, social media sites have turned into an alternative communication instrument for many citizens. Indeed, social media have rendered void the ban on public gatherings in Saudi Arabia.

As far as the corporate and political domains are concerned, social media sites are useful for the Arab women in information sharing. As Samin (2012) says, communication technologies have greatly and radically changed the manner in which people produce, absorb and share information. Arab women use social media platforms as the avenue for exchanging and sharing business ideas, cultural opinions, and political information (Alsharkh, 2012, p. 11). Besides information sharing, Arab women and the Saudi Arabian people rely on social media as in essential base for e-commerce activities (Simsim, 2011, p. 4). Through the widespread sharing of socio-political, socioeconomic, and sociocultural information on an international front, the change advocacy campaigns in Saudi Arabia have become successful. Cummins (2015, p. 22) confirms that the Saudi public has been petitioning for change for over a decade, and social media have facilitated their efforts in the same.

Methodology

This study is focused on gathering qualitative data for this research, and the method of doing so will be semi-structured interviews. This type of interviews means that it allows the researcher to use a pre-determined number of questions along with the opportunity for the researcher to explore particular themes or responses further in the conversation after he/she hear the responses (Berger, 2000, p. 25). Thus, the type of questions is what matter to target the relevant data, therefore, open-ended question is preferable as it creates space for the participant to narrate their experiences. Kumar (2005, p. 53), assessed the interview as most suitable data collecting method for complex and sensitive areas so that the interviewer has the opportunity to prepare a participant before asking sensitive or deep questions and to explain complex ones to them in person. The interviews are the primary research method which can provide rich and in-depth details about the

experiences, feelings and opinion that shaped the Arab women's experience with social media.

The reason for choosing one to one interviews especially the semi-structured is that participant can be encouraged to explain and reconstruct their own experiences and reality in their own words by being anonymous. In addition, interviews can provide the privacy and anonymity for Arab women's who are using social media, considering that some of them use it anonymously. Nevertheless, interviews still can be risky in terms whereby it can be affected by the experience, skills and commitment of the interviewer and the interview bias (Kumar, 2005, p. 53). To reduce time, I did the online interview through Skype and WhatsApp after getting the participant username from Twitter direct messages.

Sampling and Selection

Emmel (2013) defines sampling in two ways: the first one is defined population from which sampling will be drawn and representative, second is that sampling refers to ensuring that every person or thing within this population can be measured. This mean to define the sampling there should specific codes and number, therefore to understand the Arab women's empowerment that sampling is targeting Arab women.

The purposive sampling system is used for this research which is made on preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question. The sample size here can be fixed or not prior to data collection depend on the resources, time available and objectives. This type of sampling is non-probability sampling technique where the unit of the study is based on the judgment of the researcher and in most cases the sampling size would be small compared to probability sampling techniques (Berger, 2000, p. 8). This sampling is beneficial when the researcher wants to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest and which be able to answer the research questions.

There are different types of purposive research but for this study I have focused on Homogeneous sampling which refers to the technique whereby the sample units like people or cases, shares the similar characteristics or traits for example age or gender. In this respect, homogeneous sampling can describe this study sampling size, whereas the criteria chosen allow to focus on answering the research question that have been raised earlier in the study that depends on Arab women experience relating to Twitter usage. This sample size should be sharing the same ethnicity which is Arab and same gender which is females, these are the main criteria. Moreover, this research also outlines others criteria for Twitter usage for which the sample is chosen from:

- The account should be public.
- The profile name indicates she is female.
- Writing in the Arabic language.
- Every Twitter handle must have more than 1,500 posted tweets.
- Posting at least once a day (retweets do not count).

I have outlined 14 accounts that met the criteria set. To balance the sampling size, only 7 out of 14 were selected for different reasons. Initially, I wanted to cover whole Arab region but due to its vast are coverage and 21 countries it was difficult, as some of them are under war conditions where internets services can be weeks such as Syria and Yemen. Therefore, the final set consists of at least one from each of the four geographical parts of the Arab world. These four geographical parts are:

- Arabian Peninsula (Oman/Kuwait/Bahrain/Saudi Arabia/UAE/Qatar/Iraq/Yamen)
- Fertile Crescent (Jordan/ Syria/ Lebanon/ Plantain)
- Egypt and Sudan
- North Africa (Algeria/ Morocco/Tunisia/ Libya)

The reason for separating the Arab world into four groups is that countries within each group share some similar economic, cultural, social and political conditions. Hence, there would be some similar views between citizens of each group. Also, this ensures having mixed and credible data. Thus, among the 14 accounts that were outlined earlier, there were around:

Arabian Peninsula = 7 Fertile Crescent = 1 Egypt and Sudan = 4 North Africa = 2

This shows that majority of accessible Twitter female users for this research were from Arabian Peninsula which could have risk to be biased and making general sing of all Arab women. To make it equal, 5 out of 7 participants were finally selected from Arab Peninsula to be incorporated in this study.

Table 1. Selected Sample for Conducting Interviews

Participant	Language Used in Twitter and bio:	Sex	Age	Nationality	Started to use Twitter:	Number of followers until July 2016:	Type of provided content (should be within this criteria: Political/ local news/ entrainments/ social live/ religion/ personal advices/ literature)
1	Arabic	Female	20	Jordanian	2012	5571	Political/ Social/ Entertainment/ advices
2	Arabic/ English	Female	24	Kuwaiti	2012	20K	Political/ local news/ entrainments
3	Arabic	Female	22	Saudi	2010	4531	Social/ advices/ religion
4	Arabic	Female	31	Egyptian	2010	17K	Political/ local news
5	Arabic/ English	Female	28	Egyptian	2011	7601	Local news/ social
6	Arabic/ English	Female	28	Morocco	2009	370	Social/ advices
7	Arabic	Female	25	Omani	2011	5360	Local news

Data Collection

Data collection took place in July 2016. A voice recorder was used to record the interviews which have been taken place by Skype and WhatsApp call service, and all the interviews were fully transcribed verbatim. All participants were contacted first through Twitter direct messages with the message that contain details of the research and who the researcher is and my institution. After receiving their approval to be part of this research emails were send to them with the consent form. Moreover, before starting the interviews the researcher had agreed with them on the best medium to talk to them through, which led researcher choose two applications which is Skype and WhatsApp, and the reason that pushed me to choose two call service applications is that Skype is blocked in some Arab countries like Oman. All participants preferred to do audio calls only, no videos, where they felt they would be more comfortable when they answer my questions. To follow a certain way of questioning flow researcher have worked to adopt semi-structured interview type. According to (Bernard, 1988) semi-structured interview type "is the best type to use if you won't get more than one chance to interview a particular person and when you are sending several interviewers out into the field to collect data". Moreover, the interviewer here can develop interview guides that include series of questions. However, the sequence of the questions can be varied (Bryman, 2004, p. 54). In addition, the interviewer has the freedom to bring in undecided questions in response to what are seen as significant replies (Bryman, 2004, p. 54).

The questions were mainly open-ended questions with a small number of closed questions relating to information such as age, nationality and the period of using Twitter. An example of an open-ended question included in the interview guide was like is "How do you decide to post a tweet? What topics or do themes you frequently interested in to post?" Such as these questions allow the participants to have wider space to express his/her thoughts and feelings (especially when sensitive issues come cross the conversation) and can offer more details about the topic (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 21). The researcher sought to use the Arabic language as the researcher herself is an Arabic speaker and also the participants, who make it easier to understand the meaning of words and slangs. The interview schedule was structured into the following five sections:

- Participant's demographics.
- Participant's psychological/ emotional well-being.
- Their Twitter account uses, themes, followers.
- Their interaction in Twitter with others, topics, hashtags.
- Difficulties they feel getting in publishing their opinions in Twitter overcomes changes.

Using Thematic Analysis for Analyzing Collected Data

Once the collected data from interviews was transcribed, it was then analysed, decoded and verified. The process of transcribing the interviews can help the

researcher to understand the responses better than listening. Through data analysis, certain themes have emerged from participant's responses which therefore the researcher decided to do analysis data through the thematic analysis of the text. This type of analysis is used mostly with qualitative data whereby the researcher sorts the data into categories after he/she reviews it and makes notes. One more benefit of thematic analysis that it helps the researcher to move from reading a wide amount of information to discover the pattern that can be focused on most (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 16). The process of analysing then will depend on the researcher and research questions and methodology. The codes can range from being "a list of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 17). In this case, coding data into certain themes starts one all the data are fully transcribed. The codes applied are themes that have appeared between the participants through the interview which are:

- Social Rules and Boundaries.
- Self-Censorship.
- Identity and Freedom & Expression.
- Online and Social Awareness.
- Online and Offline Empowerment.

Ethical Considerations & Limitation

"Ethics is the discipline of dealing with good and bad, within a moral framework that is built on obligation and duty " (Nation, 1997, p. 92). Considering ethics in research means to come out with good conduct of the ground that determines the judgment. Therefore, the complexities of researching people private lives and placing accounts in the public arena raise multiple ethical issues for the researcher. Hence, to follow the ethical guidelines the researcher submitted a research proposal to the supervisor where he asked to be revised and then get approval. Afterwards, the researcher had gained ethical approval after submitting the ethics form to the university, and gaining the approval was the key step for data collection.

However, the most important side that has to guarantee an ethical transact with them are the participant. To make sure of this, the researcher provided all participants a consent form, which states their willingness to participate in the interview while also ensuring them confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process.

While taking this study, limitations appeared; first of all, the number of the participant or the sample meant that have to be careful with generalising the findings. Seven only out of thousands of Arab women can be risky, but choosing to establish this tidy with this sample is due to several reasons. At first, many of Arab females keeps their accounts on Twitter private which was against my criteria in choosing the samples which were based on choosing the participant from the public account on Twitter. This research needed a public account which allows everyone to access to it and have look to the content without having to

follow them. The other reason is that this research was only looking at accounts on Twitter by the language they use which in this case would be Arabic, some could be Arab. A lot of citizens from North Africa speak French which causes language barrier which prevents from understanding them or recognising their accounts.

Analysis and Discussion

This part provides an interpretation and illustration of the obtained findings from semi-structured interviews of seven female participants who are Twitter users from different Arab countries

Social Rules and Boundaries

Talking about social rules in the Arab world has been observed with all participants' responses. Each one of them has talked about the type of society boundaries they live in, that have been described by "conservative", "masculine" and collective. They have shown concern of how publishing new thoughts about women issues against the common boundaries can be risky and unacceptable. One of the participants explained said that one of the reasons that encouraged her to open Twitter account was that to share her ideas about the social role in her country.

I was getting upset when I want to go out and do some shopping because I have to wait for the driver or taxi because I'm not allowed to drive a car. I need to drive if I don't then it would be fine. I have talked about this case on many occasions with my family and friends and sometimes representative female in my society, some of them find the law is absolutely beneficial. I can't understand how come the government prevent women from driving in Saudi Arabia.

In addition, she mentioned the tweets she has posted, and the reactions she got from people. Though she has not pointed that she has made the change with the law itself, rather she was satisfied by impacting on people thoughts.

Participant five from Egypt she has activated Twitter account during the uprising events in Egypt in 2011.

I didn't have active Twitter until the uprising. The reason is that I was receiving lots of captured tweets on WhatsApp and Facebook. They were either to inform about what is happening in Tahrir square and photos. Therefore, I have started using Twitter also. My father and brother were there at Tahrir square with thousands of others. They didn't allow me to take part because I am a girl. I did want to be part of what is happening to my country. My brother did send me I was retweeting, sharing and posting every single new about the protest in 2011.

Self-Censorship

Interviews with participant have revealed that their using of the internet or social media network is subjected to social and cultural rules. Almost every Arab

country promotes the collective society and culture, therefore this has affected the rules and norms. The idea that the Arab female does not only represent herself, rather her whole family and society, is still being desirable and considered. Therefore, the participants have mentioned that how their actions online should be regulated and doesn't cross the line:

To be Moroccan in Arab social media platform is always associated with negative comments of how Moroccan females are well-known of prostitution. I do hate this. Because I am from very conservative Muslim family who are very restrictive of their girl's line and spaces. I don't mind, I do understand them because of what they see sometimes in Morocco. When I got the job in Dubai, my family didn't mind as long as I will be staying with my uncle in Dubai....

While participant seven explained how she has been forced to remain self-censorship in mind all the time if she wants to be online. She attributed this to how her tweets are being under spot by her family, and how they are being strict of avoiding any conversational discussion in social media. In collective culture, they endorse predetermining opinions by the in-group do reflect on how they raise their children and their action. She said:

I enjoy using Twitter, but sometimes I being under spot at every tweet I post. I have quite a number of followers who are from my family members and friends and they did identify me because my account is under my real name. And they do check everything I post and they deal with it so sensitively. That mean I have to be careful and sometimes delete what I have posted, though what I have written could not have any relation to them but they feel it can be unacceptable.

Identity and Freedom of Expression

Freedom of Expression have been one of the most widely discussed issues and demanded by Arab people in public spaces. Through the interviews, participants have responded very actively in a discussion about their freedom whether it is online or offline. Almost five out of seven of the participants have been using sarcastic phrases such as "Beyond the pale and guardian" and "secularism" to describe how do public interpret for those who ask for freedom of expression.

Participants responds about identity issue have focused on how they using "pseudo identity". One of the participants has described this ultimate way to be able to say what she wants.

The nickname I give it for my Twitter account refers to the imaginary character of one of the old stories that are popular in my country. I would never have my real name on Twitter. I don't someone to recognise me especially my family and friends. I want to have freedom to write, express and interact, I don't want them to scrutinize everything I am writing. It is difficult to do it if everyone knows you. They will judge me. Because I do feel free in social media as long as I am covered. I think revealing real identity for Arab women either they are famous or they are sure they will not go be held accountable. (Participant 2)

This means she does see that the freedom is associated with being hidden but this would not be irritating for her. The account uniqueness she has mentioned do touch the ground as there is a wide number of account whereby their owner is known but still doing a great job on Twitter and her account is one of them.

However, other participant sees this differently as she refers to policies or social boundaries that confined Arab women's in social media, and how this can lead to looking for alternative ways:

If I want for my voice to reach to wider audience or authorities, they need to know that I am real, I do exist there, I am not imaginary. It is hard to show all this if I still be covered as they will not recognise me, my name, age, nationality and also will be sceptical about my gender. You would say that I am contradicting myself then, but no, I can explain it.

Online and Social Awareness

Participant five has referred in this case: how the social media revolution in Egypt 2011 has exposed a lot of corruption within police firms. That she has through reading or sharing.

I don't want to go through the events of 2011, it was wide, complex and mixed stories, it was new page for Egypt, we woke up to new country. I was not highly involved in online protest back there but I have couple friends who intensively sharing tweets or post both in Twitter and Facebook. One of them got held by police for criticising the authority in Twitter. I and others started to shout out in Twitter about her case so that it reaches to people what did happen to her just because she was tweeting. We were posting photo and her and her tweets and asking people to retweet and share it so that it can get to wider number of her case.

Online Empowerment

The issue of women empowerment is the key concept in this study, as the empowering of women's is empowering for the whole society. Participants' expressions have ranged, and the empowering phrase was not mentioned directly. Participant one has said that dealing with criticism can be rough when people do criticism gets so personally. She is establishing relation between the motivation that she receives online and how does she reflect it in virtual and real world:

When someone does not agree with me or my post and criticise what is written is one thing, but when the criticism to my ethics or agendas is another thing. This could be harsh sometimes and disappoint me. But I can deal with because I don't know who that person is either do they know me personally. I can deal with online but if things get to be in the real world, I am not I can do it.

Participant four have explained the type of criticism she deals with in regard dealing with other sex online. Her main concern can be touched in the way she reflects her anonymity is in controlled setting and in the real-world things would change.

I do receive lots of comments every day, but what stop me most would be those from men's. I am interested in their opinions but because the type of conservative society we live in, people relate everything to religion and when I do replay on men most of the time to debate my tweets or them, I got to criticise of why I do so. I feel If I can say what I do believe to men online and convince him and he doesn't know who I am, I can be stronger offline and say that front more others. However, gaining empower from online is there but it needs reforms in real life to be activated.

Understanding the Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

As explained earlier in chapter one and three, the research question that intended to answer through this study is questioning how Arab women feel that social media offers them space where they can bypass and ignore political, social and religious restrictions to be empowered online and offline, where the collection of data focused on looking to the themes that arise out of the process. As expected, social rules and boundaries theme emerged across all of the participants' interviews. In the Arab world, where there are diverse cultures and traditions, still, many of social rules are shared between Arabs. Some of the rules might be inhibited from the religious and some other are culturally and socially granted. In relation to participant's experiences of social rules getting into their ways in social media, it can be seen that even though they can access to same technologies like others and legally allowed to use social media platform as everyone else, they are being fought by social norms and boundaries.

The narrative that has told by participants like the Saudi women driving carcase and women during Egypt 2011 revolution, they showed that the intention of publishing such case in social media is making a change. According to participants using Twitter offered them the platform to publish stories and discuss with others who are relevant. However, this has associated with showing self-censorship which actually in the participant cases is social-censorship. This is constraining some of the Arab women to keep their interest on certain topics and themes and avoiding other. The alternative option of this suppression can have both negative and positive result. Negative if it can stop her voices in leading issues that would reflect also in the real world regarding choices related to her. Or can be positive if this can be motivation to think and talk about it.

Some participant showed reasonable for using pseudo identities in Twitter which is because of that most legal system and policies in the Arab world are authoritative, that allows either does not allow for criticism or allowed what does fit them. Also, this does not limit on the policies, whereby Arab women justification reaches to the perception of others especially the Arab male of their online action. Consequently, for having such free zone for expression, it is best according to them to be hidden. However, to relate the whole discussion to Women's empowerment than it need to worth look the criteria that empowerment based on. According to Untied Nation documents, women's empowerment requires the success of human rights components that they are compiled in these five statements. First of all is a sense of self-worth, and by looking at the collected data, Arab women made it clear that they deserve change and they are qualified to

have a participant in their society like others. Despite social and culture constraints, the awareness of the situation does exist in Arab women mind which led some to show it online by calling for changing the rules that confined them.

In addition, another component of women's empowerment is the access to opportunities and resources, and to measure this in the virtual world, it can be said that Arab women are doing very well in this. According to Arab Social Media Influencer Summit in 2015, Arab women are 1/3 of social media users in MENA region which indicates to there are a wide number of women are getting access to technology and the seven participants interviewed in this research are a small sample of this (AG Reporter 2015, p. 4). The fourth components are the power to control their own lives, which can be related to the second component. Looking back to the themes that have emerged from collecting data, it can be said that participant power online does fit between having control and not. In other words, Arab women have still related to a certain system of life that much of it is rules are inhibited from the Islamic rules so controlling their life could be achieved for them online only especially if they are having covered identity. However, the participant did show positive awareness of how the situation is and spreading the awareness to others which fall in the fifth component; the ability to in sense the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

The first step to do so is getting aware of the issue and then do the process of changing come and this is what do Arab women are showing very seriously in social media platforms. The examples are various but the one that the Saudi Women mentioned about the law of driving car shows that the issue is no longer taboo to not discuss. It is clear from the findings and literature review that Arab women have been able to make themselves visible online through social media and fight the negative stereotypes that are associating with them like being subordinate to man.

According to Dr. Anu Dandona (2015), empowerment is wider concept than just showing the boundaries of action, instead, it is about encompassing the horizons of possibilities of what people imagine themselves being able to be and do. This mean all that Arab women need are the opportunities that are compatible both online and offline to be empowered. However, it is simple to refer to empowerment as a process of choices, action and results, but it needs constitutes more to make Arab women empowered which is the context. As how did the Arab Spring events have made a group of women be visible and raise their voices, such context is what motivating Arab women to address their voices publicly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as the result shows the notion of empowerment itself is a multi-dimensional and cross-disciplinary process. This is because it includes different fields like sociological, psychological, and economic as well as a wide range of concerns such as education, health care, governance and economic policy.

Arab women feel that social media can offer them space to engage, share, reform and point to matters of concern that they or others are experiencing. The virtual world did show Arab women the possibilities they can achieve if they start the flame of reforms whether it is social, political, economically and internationally.

However, the reflection of the online action on the offline world can be insignificant if the context of the situation is more complex than just a tweet. Overall, empowerment is the reinforcement not only of a social process, it is also of a personal process that inspires or deters women's empowerment and gender equality. Moreover, words such as identity, freedom, independence, politics, Islamic laws, and policies show that women are tackling different fields in their tweets and mind that should be considered before any word.

The Arab cultures are collectives, until this day, and for women to empowered and get their self out, the empowerment should be shared and spread. This mean in making the change of case or raising voices and calling for changes for Arab women it needs collective effort and spaces. In order to so, there should rethinking about the spaces itself. The result showed that Arab women think that social media spaces are still confined, supervised and lack of freedom. Where they can sometimes raise their voices and make their moves, and other times keep their post very general and avoid certain cases because of fear of authority and social rules. While in other cases, online empowerment means can be limited on those who can access to it. This means the whole Arab women population is difficult to consider where issues of wars, poverty and network coverage need to be solved first to think of collective empowerment for Arab women.

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