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SPEAKING FROM BEHIND THE VEIL

**Khaleeji Women's Political and Social Participation through
Social Media**

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Gulf Studies

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Abstract

With the infiltration of information technology in Arab households a unique phenomenon has been observed in the recent years. Women have learned that through the use of information technology for participating in social networks they can become socially and politically active while staying within the boundaries of their household. Facebook and Twitter have come out as two of the most often used social networking applications. Through the use of social media Khaleeji women have also succeeded in increasing awareness about their rights, and the need to bring about certain social and political changes. This study employs a qualitative research approach to exploring the research questions. Two data gathering methods are used: a) in-depth personal interviews, and b) sample of social media content. The data is qualitatively analyzed. The method of qualitative analysis is also utilized to answer the research questions. The study has relevance to the fields of mass communication, social change, use of information technology, and social demographics in the GCC region. This study is unique in the sense that for the first time the role of Twitter in bringing about social and political change by Khaleeji women has been explored within the dimensions of academic research.

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Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Communication has undergone phenomenal changes in the 21st century. The borders of mass communication have also expanded due to the impact of information technology. Today it is possible for a person to reach uncountable known and unknown people while staying indoors. This situation has provided diversified vistas to humans to express themselves in real time. In the past also people could reach out to others through print media but the delay in communication and the lack of feedback were major hurdles. The invention of social media platforms in recent times has provided humanity with a major way to bridge the time gap and overcome the feedback issue. Among a plethora of social media applications Twitter has gained prominence in the GCC countries due to a unique convenience that it provides to users. It has given the women of GCC countries an opportunity of expression and to voice their opinions with the convenience of staying indoors (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012).

The Arab culture of modesty and religious observance poses unique dynamics of self-expression on women. Twitter has bridged the yawning gap between the privacy of home and the requirement of reaching thousands of people to whom women wish to address. Now, while remaining indoors, Khaleeji women can and have utilized the ability of self-expression with a phenomenal success in recent years (Spot-On, 2009).

This study is aimed at exploring how Twitter has been used by the women of GCC to participate in social and political causes which are relevant and significant for them.

1.2. Background of the Study

The studies conducted by Tonnies and Durkheim (1893) initiated the idea that social groups could come into existence across geographical barriers with the single-minded purpose of sharing common interests and/or opinions. The idea of a social community sharing common views about a social, political, or economic cause was the next step in the development of social groups. Simmel (1908) argued about the effectiveness of social networks and theorized the impact that such groups could have over a cause or actions related to that cause. Moreno (1941) specifically studied the effect that social networking could have on individuals. He also analysed how larger interest of a social group could be channelized into concerted and concentrated efforts/actions. Mallinowski (1953) and Gluckman (1965) particularly focused on how common causes across different cultures could create a social community with common views and opinions. The social exchange theory of Parsons (1951) provided the theoretical framework to relational ties developed among different communities influencing each other. Wellman (1988) focused on how interpersonal relations could impact the effectiveness of social networks. The expansion of communication in the second half of the twentieth century witnessed development of mass movements created solely

through social networking. With the turn of the century the focus grew on the immediacy of the social networking experience.

Milgram(1969) conducted research on social networks with the view that people are quite closely linked with each other in a society. Even when people do not know they are only a few links away from all the people around them. Milgram's experiment is also termed as 'six degrees of separation' or 'small world's problem'. Milgram's research provides relevant ground of research to the present study as Khaleeji women are beginning to realize that they are not as isolated from each other as they previously thought. By making a few links with each other they are becoming part of a wider social community of common social and political interests. Callon, Latour and Law (2005) presented the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which is based on the notion that concepts and things have relations with each other which are either material or semiotic. They also presented the idea that relations may be both material and semiotic. ANT defines the social networks as operating in an environment which can include both human and non-human actors.

Researchers have also developed some laws which describe the rules which govern social networks.

Sarnoff's Law: This law is based on the view that a broadcast network is proportional to the number of people who view it. This means that all the viewers of a broadcast are members of the social network because they are affected by the view expressed in that broadcast (Bilby, 1986).

Metcalf's Law: This law calculates the value of a telecommunication network as proportional to the square of users who are connected to that system. The same is applicable to the number of devices or computers connected through Ethernet and who form a network (Shapiro & Varian, 1999).

Reed's Law: This law states that utility of large networks is directly proportionate to their size. The relationship between utility and size is scalable which means that as the network grows bigger its utility increases. On the other hand when the social network grows smaller, its utility also becomes less (Reed, 2001).

These three laws are relevant to this study in the sense that their principles are directly applicable to this study. As any one of the Khaleeji woman uses Twitter to express her opinion about political or social causes, her messages are seen by all the people within her network. The size of the network is proportionate to the followers and other people who are in the loop of the twitter user's network. In this way her opinion reaches every member of the network. These three laws show that the network of the Khaleeji women has its own force because of its size and the way it helps to spread the voice of these Khaleeji women. Moreover, the Khaleeji women are no longer individuals using Twitter for expressing personal views and opinion. Because of the size of their social network they have crossed the boundaries of individual expression and are giving voice to many like-minded Twitter users.

Social Media Platforms

Technological advancements of information technology and the Internet have culminated in the development of the social networking platforms. Some of the most prominent social networks are listed here.

Facebook: Facebook remains the most popular social network among people of all ages. According to the October 2014 statistics, the monthly active users of Facebook are more than 1.32 billion (ebizmba.com, 2014). It provides large opportunities for people to communicate with each other in a variety of ways. Users share more than 1 million links every hour on Facebook (statisticbrain.com, 2014).

Twitter: Twitter is the choice of general users of all ages for communicating with a limit of 140 characters per post. It is commonly used for micro-blogging and updates. Twitter users number around 310 million (twitter.com, 2014). Twitter is characterized by younger adult as well as grownup users, urban dwellers, and non-whites in the Western world (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Tweet is in such popular use that it generates around 5,700 tweets per second.

LinkedIn: Mostly popular among the college graduates and high income internet users, LinkedIn has above 255 million users. It is also considered a business oriented social network. According to estimates more than 50 percent of international hiring is done with the help of LinkedIn (Wagner K. , 2014).

Pinterest: Over 250 million users of Pinterest have more than eighty percent of female users (Duggan & Smith, 2013). As a tool of discovery, collection, sharing, and storage Pinterest is the number one choice of advertisers the users' pinboards(Aslam, 2014).

Google +: It started as a search engine but gradually its email started linking people with each other. At present more than 120 million users utilize the Google+ platform to link up with others. People of 25 to 35 years of age are found to be the most active users of Google+ (Miller, 2014).

Instagram: Basically started as a photo sharing platform, Instagram soon grew into a social network which links up more than 100 million users now. It remains primarily a photo and video sharing social network. Instagram has a large following on National Geographic channel.

The Arab culture is characterized by a clear segregation of genders in terms of social, cultural, and political roles. Gender roles are based on the religious beliefs, which are further defined through the Arab culture. Since observing cultural norms is the accepted social practice, the Arab society is considered a conservative society (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Gender roles provide free mobility to men whereas the social duties of women are defined by their responsibilities with the boundaries of home. This social and cultural model has been in practice for centuries. Although Islam does not put any restrictions on women's movement outside the

home for specific purposes, the normal practice is that they should observe the conservative cultural practices of gender roles (Salem & Mourtada, 2011). During the last two decades of the last century the notion of women's empowerment has increasingly taken roots in GCC countries. Women have been recognized as an essential part of national work forces in almost all the countries comprising GCC. But the degree of freedom provided to women varies across the GCC countries (Kinninmont, 2012).

With the infiltration of information technology in Arab households a unique phenomenon has been observed in the recent years. Women have learned that through the use of information technology for participating in social networks they can become socially and politically active while staying within the boundaries of their household. Facebook and Twitter have come out as two of the most often used social networking applications (Bosker, 2011). According to the statistics provided by the Arab Social Media Report, as of March 2014 there are 5,797,500 registered daily users of Twitter in the GCC region who use Twitter actively for social exchange (arabsocialmediareport.com, 2014). Earlier on, the number of active Twitter users in March 2011 was 1,150,292. The number of tweets per day had risen to 155 million in 2014 whereas in 2013 the number of tweets per day was 55 million. These statistics show an increase of 41 percent in the number of tweets per day. Although these figures are not broken down by gender, they do indicate the utility of Twitter to the people of GCC countries.

The use of Facebook has also increased to a great extent in recent years in the GCC countries. According to 2012 statistics, 5.5 million users were on Facebook in Saudi Arabia. UAE had 3.2 million users whereas Kuwait had .9 million and Qatar had .6 million users. These figures show that Saudi Arabia and UAE make up 80 percent of the Facebook users in the GCC region (arabsocialmediareport.com, 2014).

On a global scale the use of social media is divided equally among male and female users. But in the GCC countries this ratio is tilted more towards male users as compared to female users. The average female to male ratio of social media in the GCC countries is 35:65. This ratio is calculated on the average basis, otherwise in Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia the ratio is 31:69. In the UAE the ratio is 35 percent female and 65 percent male. Kuwait shows slightly higher statistics for females as 37 percent while Bahrain has the highest ratio among GCC countries of having 42 percent female users (ASMR, 2013).

The statistics of 2014 show further specific information. For example, the highest number of active Twitter users in GCC states is in Saudi Arabia which reached 2.4 million at the end of 2013. This means that 40 percent of active tweeters in GCC are from Saudi Arabia. GCC countries are producing an average of 17,198,900 tweets per day of which 40 percent of tweets are generated from Saudi Arabia per day. Twitter is being used by 36.6 percent female users in GCC countries as calculated at the end of 1st

quarter of 2014. This ratio has gone slightly higher as compared to the previous recent years (arabsocialmediareport.com, 2014).

The preceding information has highlighted the fact that GCC residents have found social media of immense use for their interpersonal exchange of information and opinions. The ratio of female users is also on the rise and gradually women are closing the gap between genders (Salem & Alshaer, 2013). The first quarter 2014 figures have shown an increase of 5 percent within the last two years. This exploration of facts and figures provides this discussion a focus to formulate the area of discussion more specifically.

The use of social media has not only provided the Khaleeji women a platform of expression but it has also raised the awareness among them that social media can be used to bring about social and political change in their countries through getting their voice heard in favour of common causes. The sweeping changes going through the GCC countries owe a lot to the rise of use of social media by Khaleeji women (Salem & Mourtada, 2012). The use of social networks by Khaleeji women has now entered into a new phase where it is no longer a tool of entertainment and social chit-chat only. Now the GCC women are using social networks to do business, to interact with governments, and to engage in movements of civil society and gender empowerment. Entrepreneurial efforts, political participation, civic engagement and social change are some of the vistas which have witnessed the active involvement of GCC women in recent

years (Saab & Haber, 2014). Governments across the GCC region have also come to recognize the potential of social media for developing more participatory, inclusive and transparent governments in the region. Fuelled by the active use of social media in contributing to political change through Arab Spring, the GCC women have utilized the opportunity to learn about women in the rest of the Arab world and how they address the challenges faced by the Arab world in general and by the women in these societies in particular. Another relevant case has been the use of Facebook by Saudi women to start the campaign of their right to drive cars (Kinninmont, 2012).

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The use of social media by the Khaleejiwomen in recent years has attracted increasing research and critical focus. The extent to which the social networks have been utilized for social and political change by Khaleejiwomen needs to be studied closely. The use of Twitter has witnessed the highest ratio among other social networking platforms by the Khaleejiwomen for exercising their freedom of expression. The use of social networks at local and international levels to increase the awareness of social, cultural, and political challenges faced by women in the GCC region has gained unprecedented momentum in recent years. Now the Khaleejiwomen feel free to express their opinions, to claim their rights, and to engage in dialogue with government officials and members of the ruling families. These communication channels had been inaccessible to the

general public before. This change is significant in the sense that without disturbing the conservative social fabric of the GCC region's households, the women have been able to express themselves freely across different countries. They have also succeeded in increasing awareness about their rights, and the need to bring about certain social and political changes. This study is unique in the sense that for the first time the role of Twitter in bringing about social and political change by Khaleejiwomen has been explored within the dimensions of academic research.

1.4. Research Questions

This study explores the following research questions:

- Has social networking provided an impetus to social and political movements for Khaleejiwomen in the GCC region?
- Has the usage of Twitter by the women in GCC countries been effective in achieving any social or political change?
- How has the use of social media helped GCC women to exercise “out of the box” thinking for breaking down traditional barriers and achieving social acceptance?
- How open are GCC women in taking part in discussing issues of social and political importance and to what extent do governments impose controls on these discussions?

- What are the topics commonly discussed by GCC women for bringing about change in their social, economic, and political status?

1.5. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to exploring the research questions. Two data gathering methods are used: a) in-depth personal interviews, and b) a sample of social media content. The data is qualitatively analysed. The method of qualitative analysis is also utilized to answer the research questions. The depth interviews part consists of thirty interviews conducted on GCC women who are active users of Twitter. The criterion of sample selection is high profile usage of Twitter for social and political participation without using it for professional or business purposes. Through the sampling method thirty female Twitter users are selected from different GCC countries who have the most followers on Twitter. The time period specified for the analysis of their Twitter activity is 30 days.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study is the first one of its type because the use of Twitter by the Khaleeji women to bring about social and political change has not been studied in detail so far. This study could set the path for further exploration

of the use of other social media platforms used by the Khaleeji women. The study has relevance to the fields of mass communication, social change, use of information technology, and social demographics in the GCC region. The study is also significant from the perspective of the effectiveness of women empowerment policies implemented by GCC governments.

Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The role and utility of social networks in modern society have been focus of much scholarly research in recent times. Several theories of mass communication revolve around the idea that social networks are formed when people having similar ideas wish to communicate with each other without interference from non-partisan actors. The influence of social networks on shaping public opinion and being shaped by it have also been of interest to several scholars within the domain of mass communication. Some of these theories are discussed here. It must be noted that some theories have been applied outside the domain of mass communication as well with equal results in implementation. This also shows how universal truths are discovered while finding relationships between seemingly limited subjects of research.

2.2. Literature Review

The Information revolution which began in the last quarter of the twentieth century and has dominated every sphere of life in the twenty first century has been overshadowed by one characteristic feature----individual free expression of common people in the spirit of democracy. These views are expressed by Lincoln Dahlberg (2010) when he propounds the supremacy of Internet democracy in modern times. Dahlberg points out three prominent 'camps' of Internet democracy of free expression:

communication, liberal individualist, and deliberative. The value of cyberspace has also been highlighted which has provided free expression to several communities across the globe. Rational critical discourse has never been possible in the past with as much ease and convenience as it is now. Dahlberg also explains how Internet democracy can be compared with earlier concepts of free expression which were propagated by political groups of specific interests. However, the Internet democracy of the present age has been able to surmount any such limitations due to the public discourse which has been structured by free public will. Dahlberg's research centres around the idea that the public sphere needs to develop deliberative spaces through the internet and attract participation of those authorities who have been hostile to public deliberation so far.

Gurak and Logie (2012) state the history of text-based protests which have taken shape due to the rise of social media websites including Facebook and Twitter. Right from the beginning Internet has been used for social networking. Part of the reason of its popularity has been that people could network and access those with whom they cannot come in contact physically. Internet has become a platform for cyber-activism which has gained major research focus in recent times due to its strong impact on other spheres of public and private life. Gurak and Logie base their opinions on two cases of Lotus MarketPlace and Cipper Chip and advance their discussion through their comparison. Apart from the subjective details of these cases the main focus of these authors is the speed, reach, and accessibility to large number of people which internet activism provides.

Gurak and Logie also point out the limitation of online protests through social media like the problems with fact-checking, credibility of the information being provided, and the traditional power-structures behind online propaganda. In this way, Gurak and Logie establish the essential background of social networks and the use of social media by general public. They also point out an important shift in the Internet usage for public opinion expression ---- the use of graphic content. The twenty first century use of Internet and social media is different from the social networking of the last two decades of the twentieth century in terms of the use of pictures and other graphic content in socializing through the internet.

Mishra and Basu(2014) elaborate this point further by discussing the dynamics of self-representation in social media. Their opinion is that as people use nicknames, avatars, photographs, and other types of pictures to display the different aspects of their identity, it provides the traditional Muslim women a new way of expressing themselves on the Internet in case they do not want to put their own photographs for public display. This performativebehavior is defined by Erving Goffman(1959) as “all the activity a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants”. The dynamics of performativebehavior gain prominence in cyberspace because of the way people interact with each other almost anonymously. Mishra and Basu argue that social websites allow the public-private space to Muslim women which they so much require to express themselves publicly while

remaining within the Islamic traditions of modesty and privacy defined for women.

According to Gimmler (2001), In the present age virtual communities of common interest are not only finding their own voice to express themselves but are also learning to recognize the influence that their voices are having in the public sphere. This recognition is new to several communities and there is still lack of understanding among many of them how their voice can be channelized to become a potent force for social or political change. The reason for this lack of recognition is that these communities have been silent for such a long time that it will take them some time to realize how to shake off the cloak of inaction resulting from silence.

The spiral of silence theory propounded by Noelle-Neumann (1984) states that when people have fear of their opinion being rejected because it is in minority in a public setting, they tend to become silent (utwente.nl, 2014). When they consider themselves in minority because of their views and opinions people do not tend to speak up. By becoming silent they try to keep their social acceptance intact. Their silence makes them marginalized and their voice has little chances of being heard. In this way, by falling into a spiral of silence, they become isolated (Noelle-Neumann, 1984).

According to Neill (2009) this theory is applicable mostly to the minorities within a large majority where more people voice the same opinion. Minority fears rejection so it keeps its views to itself. The process creates a never ending spiral which results in minority becoming totally silent and thus being totally ignored. The same theory also shows that the majority keeps becoming stronger because of hearing its own voice over and over. The spiral of silence polarizes the silent minority at one end of the spectrum while the loud majority accumulates on the other end.

According to Gastil(2000) Spiral of silence is a dynamic process in which mass media controls the public opinion by providing more coverage to the majority while ignoring the minority. In social environment the fear of isolation creates the spiral of silence when people do not voice their opinions because they want to be accepted by the majority around them. Glynn and Hayes (1997) further explain how spiral of silence also causes loss of confidence among the silent minority because people feel alone and unsupported. The final stage of spiral of silence comes when minorities withdraw themselves completely from public debated because they want to secure their social or political position among the masses.

When the spiral of silence theory is seen from the perspective of media's role in shaping public opinion Sarnoff's law is applicable which states that a broadcast network is proportional to the number of people who view it (Bilby, 1986). Sarnoff's law is also instrumental in calculating the value of a broadcast network. A broadcast network becomes a social network in the

sense that its viewers are mentally affected by the views expressed through it. However, such a broadcast network cannot be termed wholly as a social network because of the one way flow of ideas. Viewers receive the opinions but they cannot comment on or respond to them. In a social network the exchange is two way and both sides of communication are affected by each other.

A further ramification of this issue is covered by the agenda-setting theory developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972). They presented the concept that media can play important role in shaping up the public opinion. By repeating the same story or news item over and over again the media sets up public to think in a specific manner about an issue. In this way the media creates hype about a certain event or happening. It cannot be said that media uses this technique for every news item. But the media channels used by specific interest groups can use media for their own purposes in this way. The main concern covered by McCombs and Shaw is the influence that media does/can exercise on public opinion. This also means that if the agenda of media is set by a specific interest group, it can achieve its target by influencing the public opinion.

Controlling the public opinion has also been a cause of concern and research for Everett Rogers (1983) who presented the Diffusion of Innovations theory. This theory is based on the idea that when innovation is conveyed through different channels over a certain period of time to the same people within a social network, diffusion of the same innovation

takes place. Rogers presented five steps of this process: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. It is possible for an individual to reject any idea at any one of these steps. However, in order for the diffusion to take place it is necessary that the individual goes through all the phases of diffusion (Wejnert, 2002). Although Rogers' theory is not limited to mass communication only, it is relevant and highly expressive of the cognitive process that takes place in the individual's mind within a social network.

The concept of forming of individual's opinion about a certain issue through agenda-setting theory faces the challenge of diffusion of innovations. This issue is directly linked with the value and utility that a social network holds. Reed's Law states that utility of a network is directly proportionate to its size (Reed, 2001). The relationship between utility and size is scalable which means that as the network grows bigger its utility increases. Inversely, when the social network grows smaller, its utility also decreases. This may also mean that as the social network become larger its utility grows because of the diffusion of innovation taking place in it. In this way, large social networks become instrumental not only in voicing the opinion of marginalized communities but they also have better chance of avoiding the influence of agenda-setting by media. The power of social media increases with the increase in size of the network because in that way it can defend/protect against the hype created by media about certain issues (Stone, 2004).

This also allows the social networks to guard against spiral of silence because their voice becomes heard. In larger social networks since more and more people are voicing the same opinion or at least supporting the ideas raised by the marginalized communities, it becomes easier for them to express themselves (Simmons & Elkins, 2004). This is a recent development due to which it has become imperative to study the dynamics that make social networks not only successful but also influential. Social networks do not shape the public opinion but are shaped by the public opinion.

Beginning to learn that cyberspace may be of help to individuals takes a long time to settle into human mind. The research conducted by Cummings, Sproull and Kies shows that when individuals get outside help through online sources they are encouraged to overcome their individual deficiencies. When individuals with limited resources find out that community is ready to help them through online channels they take more interest in group tasks with active participation. Individuals who get support from family and friends about their online efforts in community participation they show more renewed interest and involvement in community development programs and initiatives. On the other hand, if family and friends do not show support of online group efforts, individuals lack encouragement and show less interest in participatory efforts in the cyberspace. The research is illuminating in the sense that it shows how individuals can break local limitations and participate in cyber communities

provided they receive enough encouragement and support from their direct sources of support.

Cyberspace has offered unique opportunities to women in the GCC countries who have found a convenient means of self-expression in social media while remaining within their traditional boundaries. Although as compared to the rest of the world the statistical representation of the women in the MENA region is half of that of men. Still it is a big different as compared to the past when women had no voice at all in the Arab countries. According to the SpotOn report, one third of the total messages being transmitted on Facebook and Twitter are from women in the MENA region (McNabb, 2009). This figure shows that women are gradually beginning to voice their opinions about different issues related to their lives. Although forty five percent of the users of Twitter and Facebook in MENA region admit that it is online advertising which has drawn them to these social media platforms in one form or the other, they continued to use them because of their attraction. Women found it possible to communicate with others about their likes and dislikes. This is how gradually they started to use these websites as vehicles of self-expression. A survey conducted by SpotOn revealed that fifty five percent of women use Facebook and Twitter to search new opinion about matters of their interest. This report has highlighted how women have entered the mainstream social media sites and started to use them for communicating with people with whom they can share their ideas. This is a channel of

communication which never existed before the present era in the Middle East (McNabb, 2009).

Women participation in social and political causes through social media has been highlighted by the way Saudi-Islamic feminism has been promoted by Saudi women. Philip Tschirhart(2014) comments: “The blogosphere, as a public sphere of deliberation, facilitates a forum for dialogue and discourse previously denied to women’s emerging perspectives.” Previously, the Saudi women were denied active participation in public support of social and political causes because of the traditions of modesty prevalent in the Saudi society. But cyberspace has changed many things for them. First, Saudi women are no longer taking part in public life physically, so they are not violating any social, moral, religious, or traditional family code of ethics. Second, they are can hear the voice being raised by women in other parts of the Arab world.

Since Saudi women do not identify themselves with Western women in several respects like their views on divorce, abortion, infidelity, addiction, and family structure, they find the voices of Arab women much more congenial. Saudi women feel that the women in their neighbouring countries within GCC are closer to their social life-style than those in the rest of the Middle East and MENA region women. Again the reason is a closer kinship due to matching clan structure, social restraints, economic similarities, and work-life balance issues. That is why when the Saudi women have found women in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE taking

part in social media discussions about the problems which are akin to them, they have also started to express their opinion. According to Wagner (2011) there is a potential for a Saudi-Islamic feminist revolution in the making due to the large number of women using social media to voice their views related to their own identity.

Among the rest of the GCC states the Saudi women's use of social media has been of significant value. The reason is that the Wahhabi Sharia law being practiced in Saudi Arabia curtails women participation in society to a considerable degree higher than that in the rest of the Middle East. The Saudi society is far more conservative regarding women's participation in social causes than the society in neighbouring GCC countries. That is why the unification of Saudi women on any issue of social value gains political shades because women have no such precedence of clustering in the recent Saudi history.

Having the largest female population as compared to other GCC countries Saudi Arabia poses unique challenges for authorities when women raise their voice. Their number is high because of their percentage in the Saudi population. This factor is of central importance regarding Saudi women's participation in social and political causes through social media. With the vast expanse of the Internet, Saudi women's voice is being heard far and wide. Since this is a new voice in the otherwise conservative public life dominated by males, it has its own re-percussions. Whereas this female collective voice of Saudi women should not have been threatening for

Saudi authorities in any way, the situation has been otherwise. At the same time, the current situation is not alarming either. Saudi authorities have not put any crack-down on Saudi women just because of their participation in social and political issues, like the neighbouring Kuwait has (Blake, 2013). Still, given the similarities of culture and society, the chances are high that Saudi women may be criticised if they touch any sensitive issues related to Saudi life and social patterns. So far the Saudi authorities have shown restraint in controlling the women when they have tried to stage their protest against ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia (saudiwoman.me, 2012). Although the women's effort to drive en masse on Saudi roads was a sign of public protest, it was handled with caution by the Saudi authorities. This incident has further established the women's belief that their collective voice bears considerable weight of its own.

The driving campaign was among the first and strongest public protest registered by Saudi women to get a basic right of driving on their own (bbc.com, 2013). The issue was highlighted because it came from a conservative society with no such precedence in Saudi history. The role of social media was highlighted when it was discovered that a Saudi woman used Facebook to raise the public awareness about the ban and the possibility of a public effort to remove the ban. As a result of the protest the Saudi women won the right to be heard about the issue in a Saudi public court (foxnews.com, 2012). But the Saudi government has once again denied any claims that there might be an easing of the ban on women's driving throughout Saudi Arabia (aljazeera.com, 2014).

There are two factors worthy of note in how Saudi women have started to use Internet for their self-expression through social media. One of them is the way the Saudi government encourages its people to use Internet. According to Zittrain and Palfrey (2008), the Saudi government set up Internet infrastructure on high-tech platforms and made it available to public. However, the Saudi government ensured that it had full control on the Internet content filtering before public could use it. The Saudis use Internet to a high degree in their daily lives for public and private purposes. The Internet Society Global Internet Report, providing global internet penetration data, shows that as of 2014 in a list of 176 countries Saudi Arabia stands at 59th position with 60.5 percent Saudis using internet either for their work or for personal purposes or for both (internetsociety.org, 2014). The second factor in the spread of Internet in Saudi society is the increasing trend of education. Education has given a major boost to the recent trend of self-expression among Saudi women. The rise of the education standard of Saudi women in recent years has made them more familiar with the rest of the world. According to the UNESCO Report by International Bureau of Education, at present the gross enrolment rate for females is 36.1 percent in Saudi Arabia. It is reported that 60 percent of university students in Saudi universities are women (ibe.unesco.org, 2014). Education has also allowed them to cross the language barrier of knowing English, understanding it first hand, and expressing themselves in English. Although not all of social media usage in the Arab world is done in English, yet it is the language through which

their voice is heard in distant quarters of the world. Although most of the Arab women still like to communicate on social media in Arabic, English is no longer an alien language for them.

However, Muslim women in different parts of the world are quite clear how they wish to associate with the global feminism movement/s. Faruqi(2014) comments on this aspect of Khaleeji women's quest to find a voice of their own. She opines that although Muslim women would like to participate in many of the causes that feminism has served all over the world, they see the drive to achieve their own targets of freedom with apprehension. She even goes to the extent of opposing what feminism has tried to achieve so far in the world. Her standpoint defines the attitude which Muslim women have towards getting their rightful voice through active participation in the social and political life of the society in which they live. One of the main differences between Muslim women's attempt to get their rights is that they want to do so not through opposition but through cooperation. The reason for this path of Muslim female activism is the family structure supported by Islam. Muslim women are not ready to challenge the social issues by compromising their religious faith. This is one sacrifice that Muslim women are not ready to make in any case. In this sense, living within the Muslim confines of family life and religious obligations, women wish to get their voice heard just to draw attention to their right of self-expression which is being overlooked by the authorities (Wagner R. , 2011). However, the path to get their right is very much different as compared to what feminist activists are ready to take in the West. Muslim women do not wish to

challenge or defy the moral, ethical, and social code of Islam that they wish to uphold.

This point of view is endorsed by Margot Badran(2012) who believes that the cohesiveness of family in the Muslim society is in itself a force enough to get the Muslim women their voice realized for their right of self-expression. They are sure that if their voice can play a role in getting them any of their rights like self-expression, political participation, driving, or equal employment opportunities, they would get them while staying within the societal norms. Muslim women do not have to take the path of public protest or public demonstration to get these rights. However, they would succeed to draw the public attention to important matters which Muslim women are facing in any part of the world, including the Middle East. Their method of raising the voice of protest would, however, remain within the accepted role that women have in Muslim society. In this regards, Faruqi(2014) opines that social media movements are a perfect medium for Muslim women to stage their protest to whatever degree of pitch they wish to raise their voice.

The question of cooperation or confrontation is addressed differently by Wajeha Al-Huwaider, the US based Saudi female rights activist. Jennifer Young (2009) applauds Wajeha's efforts taking the active social path to get the Saudi women their rights of social and political participation. Wajeha has been active in pointing out how individual liberties of Saudi women are curbed in the Saudi society. Her main source of

communication with women across the Muslim world is through her articles in online press. She also uses Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate directly with her followers and answers their queries. Through her Facebook messages she has been showing to the Muslim women the freedom of rights that women enjoy in other parts of world outside the GCC countries. Wajeha is also active on YouTube to spread her message through 'video protest campaigns'. Her main targets of criticism are issues of child marriage, polygamy, and guardianship laws being observed in some GCC states. Young also places Wajeha as the main voice behind the Saudi women's right to drive as a part of the campaign to get Muslim women their social and political rights. Young is of the view that Wajeha has succeeded to approach the Muslim women's hearts and minds because of the use of social media. The use of popular social media platforms allowed Wajeha to penetrate Muslim households without any social restrictions. At the same time, Muslim women could communicate with her freely without breaking any social or traditional barriers which society imposes on them. However, she has not received a very cordial response from all Saudi women. She is still questioned why she wishes to challenge the social system in which many Saudi women feel comfortable and protected, with all the rights permitted by Islam. This on-going discussion and dialogue is continued between Wajeha and other Saudi women on social media platforms. Wajeha regularly tweets her opinions and gets the feedback from Saudi and other Muslim women in different parts of the world.

At the same time it is to be noted that when Muslim women raise their voice for political and social causes, they do not expect a unified response. According to Leslie L. (2011), they expect multiplicity of voices in which different opinions are expressed. Similarly, they do not expect that all Saudi women would share their views about social and cultural oppression. There are women within the Saudi society who do not favour women's participation in public causes even from the privacy of their homes. They hold the traditional view that women should be modest and should show restraint in social and political matters. Leslie analyses that there are three types of feminists within the Saudi society: secular feminists, Islamic feminists, and Islamist feminists. All of them have different opinions about how women could/should participate in the public life. The secular feminists consider it important that Muslim women should also have basic freedom as a must in society. They do not differentiate how religion should play any role in this matter. Their main aim is political gain where women should have equal access to rights. This segment aligns with extreme left wing thought and opinion. The Islamist feminists define women's rights through Islam and hold that Islam provides sufficient rights to women to participate equally in society. They believe that within the paradigm of Islam and Quran women are not deprived any rights of self-expression. This point of view aligns with extreme right-wing politics. The Islamic feminists stand midway between right and left extremes and maintain that Islam provides them their rights but its interpretation through male scholars and taxonomy should not create any ambiguity of women

having lesser rights. In this way they wish to re-interpret how Islamic values are to be upheld while women take part in public issues and discussion while maintaining the Islamic social structure (Morin, 2009).

Each of these three segments also maintains its own standpoint about several other issues related to women and their right of self-expression and its method. This may be the material for another discussion but the focus here is that the diversity of voices within social media in the Muslim world lends it a unique flavour of its own. In short, social media which has provided Muslim women a new opportunity and means to voice their opinions, and make them heard among people to whom they had no access previously.

2.2.1. Social Media and the Arab World

The use of social media by Arabs has also received increased research focus by Arab scholars. The rise in the Arab world of the desire to express individual and collective social and political unrest is studied by various research scholars as a unique phenomenon.

Attia and Aziz (2011) comment that the events from the year 2010 onwards, mainly shaping the Arab Spring, are of significance in light of how social media has facilitated communication among Arab people sharing the same thoughts and beliefs in different parts of the Arab world. The use of social media by the Arab social and political activists helped to make the Arabs aware of how social media can be used for common

social and political struggle even when some Arab governments discourage public political activities until and unless they are initiated by the government itself. Attia and Aziz focus on Egypt and the recent political upheaval in the country and the role of social media in it. They focus on the fact that social networking is a new driving force, which is helping to shape efforts of political change in different countries. However, the use of social media acquires special dimensions in the Arab world where traditionally the public has not been taking part in political activities openly due to the oppressive regimes. In Egypt especially the public voice found a platform mainly through the social media where like-minded people started to express their political views.

According to Eltantawy and Wiest (2011), the use of social media during the Egyptian Revolution is linked with the resource mobilization theory which mainly emerged during the 1970s. The linking of information technology with social and political activities has provided the social media a novel instrumental function. Since resources like time, money, and organizational skills, are critical for social and political movements, the use of ICT has helped people in developing countries to mobilize public opinion with far less use of resources. The Arab Spring, and mainly the Egyptian Revolution, provides the example where with minimal resource mobilization efforts the public has achieved far bigger social and political effect.

Elsayed (2013) further probes these views by discussing how “Facebook-only journalism” has been able to move masses during the Arab Spring in the face of restrictions imposed by governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. Elsayed focuses on the instant nature of social media based social and political participation. As the political activity goes on in the street, its updates keep reaching far wider and larger audience than could be covered by conventional media. In this way the fast spread of news and updates by individuals taking part in the political activism seen during the Arab Spring has added a new dimension to public interest in common social and political causes. The immediate nature of experience and its photos transmitted through Twitter and Facebook were something unique in the Arab world and it created a major wave of awareness about the political situation in these countries.

Samin (2012) reflects on the use of social media in Saudi Arabia and Egypt for the purpose of social networking for social and political changes. Samin informs how the Arab Spring in other parts of the Arab World was observed with pin drop silence in Saudi Arabia except for the social media which was alive with comments and opinions by the Saudi people. Samin also provides a comparison between the use of Facebook and Twitter in Egypt and its use in Saudi Arabia. Samin also comments on how social media plays important role in propelling social and political change as has been observed during the Arab Spring.

Melkie and Mallat (2014) opine on the digital activism and its efficacy in modern times. Their article focuses on Lebanese social movement organization in particular and on similar efforts in the Arab world in general. After discussing the role of social media tools in social and political activism, Melkie and Mallat discuss the obstacles provided by digital and offline realms. For example, if the government decides to suspend the Internet service for limited time during the actual political activity people cannot use social media. In this way the whole effort of political activism based on social media may become ineffective. Similarly, the government efforts to watch over social media usage also highlight the risks involved in open political expression for individuals.

Alqudsi-ghabra, Al-Bannai, and Al-Bahrani(2011) discuss the role that Internet is playing in the GCC countries and how it is being used by general public as a vehicle of change. Although the spread of Internet in the GCC countries was rather late as compared to several other parts of the world, the public has taken up its use quite rapidly. Such a rapid adoption of information technology in the GCC society is also fuelled by the freedom that the use of social media has provided for the purpose of social networking. Although the disparities exist in how people use social media in the six GCC states, the common outcome is the large number of people who are use internet for social networking. Alqudsi-ghabra, Al-Bannai, and Al-Bahrani also discuss the role of government control on information flow and how it affects public use of social media in the GCC states.

Al-Jenaibi(2013) reflects on how the rebellion, rage and revolution in the modern age has affected the usage of Twitter. Focusing on the Arab society Al-Jenaibi points out that in the times of conflict the use of social media provides an outlet to the frustrated public who find Twitter and Facebook as open forums for self-expression. She mentions how in this decade American election of 2012 and the Arab Spring have been two major focal points where social media has played active role in shaping the public opinion about certain issues.

Lara-Zuzan Golesorkhi(2015) mentions particularly Saudi Arabia in the perspective of social media usage and how it has led to certain political actions taken by the Saudi government. Her point of view is that although the Saudi government denies any connection between its legitimization of its actions against the social media activists, the fact remains that social media watch informs the Saudi government about the direction of public opinion. Therefore, an unsaid link exists between the two which is yet unrecognized and may never materialize into actual acknowledgement of public opinion and its pressure by the Saudi government.

Younus and Qureshi (2013) analyze the role that social media usage is playing in the Middle East by helping the general public to voice its opinion. The study focuses on the use of Twitter in the developing world by marginalized groups and how they come together through social media platforms. Ever since the Tunisian uprising, the Arab nations have learnt that social media can play an important role in spreading their opinions

among masses. Younus and Qureshi attempt to draw patterns of the use of social media used by different segments of society in the Muslim world.

Chapter Three: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The importance of social media for the purpose of self-expression cannot be understated. In the recent past the use of social media has provided such freedom of expression to Khaleeji women which they could not have previously. The use of conventional media is at times in class with the traditional and conservative social set up of the GCC countries. If women want to express their opinion about any cause that interested them, they have to get out of the home and take part in public activities. But the introduction of on line social media has changed the dimensions of use of social media. The Khaleeji women have especially used this medium to expression their opinions because the on line social media provides them complete freedom of expression without violating any social, religious, or family traditions of their society. The Khaleeji women have come to realize that while staying within their home they can take part in social and political causes by the use of online social media. That is why in recent years a large number of Khaleeji women have started to express their opinions about social and political causes.

This study is significant because it explores different aspects of how Khaleeji women are using the social media to voice their opinions on matters which interest them. The current section outlines the method which has been used for this research for collecting the relevant data.

For the purpose of this study In-Depth Interview method is adopted. The main objective of using this method is that it provides several advantages as compared to other data collection methods. Some of the advantages of using this method for this study are listed here.

- The first and foremost advantage is that it is possible to explain the questions to the respondents. If there is any ambiguity about the question, the respondent can immediately ask for clarification. Similarly, if the interviewer finds out the respondent has not understood the question properly he/she cannot correct it immediately. In this study the in-depth interview method is of particular value because if the respondents want some clarifications about the questions as well as about the purpose and direction of the research, it is easy for the interviewer to clarify any ambiguities on the spot.
- In-depth Interview method is direct. In this method the interviewer has direct access to the respondent due to which he can get answers directly from the respondent. In no other method can the respondent provide answers as easily and clearly as through this method. The direct approach of the in-depth interview method is especially useful for research like this in which the respondents may want to ask some questions to clarify what they do not understand.
- The structured and semi-structured methods can be used for the arrangement of questions. The interviewer has the freedom arrange

questions beforehand or during the interview according to the situation. In this study if the respondents feel they do not want to respond to some question, the interviewer can adjust questions sequence easily.

- The topic of this research is of such nature that respondents may not be able to clearly tell about their motivation or purpose for starting their Twitter account. They may also not like to give this information. Such a situation cannot be handled efficiently in other data-collection methods like a survey.
- Respondents can answer questions in as much detail as they want to. This advantage is not available in survey or other data collection methods. In this study the respondents may like to provide detailed answers to certain questions which is possible only through in-depth interview.
- In-depth interview provides a variety of answers which can be highly useful for the interviewer. In this study different types of answers and information is required from the respondents which is possible only through this method.
- In-depth interview method gives the interviewer opportunity to develop with the respondent which is not possible in the survey method. The interviewer comes to know the respondent personally and relate the information with the personality.
- This method also provides the research plenty of time to prepare for the questions so that questions could be arranged logically. During

the interview the researcher can alter the question sequence according to the mood and response of the respondent. Since this study deals with social media usage, people may like to talk about in detail and provide some extra information which could be helpful for the study.

- One major advantage is that the completion rate of interviews can be high. The person with whom the interview is conducted can provide complete information according to the researcher's questions. In the indirect methods respondents sometimes lose interest and do not complete the survey. During the interview the research knows whether the respondent would provide all the relevant information.

3.2. Sampling Methodology

The sampling procedure for this study was based on personal exploration of potential respondents to the interview questions. For this purpose some prominent women belonging to the GCC countries were identified. The method of their identification was to see if they used their real name or used some persona. The biography of the Khaleeji female Twitter users was also a useful source of information for this purpose. In this way a number of Khaleeji women were identified as the sample of the population for this study. This method has its limitations as only the prominent women were selected which may not be fully representative of all the Khaleeji

women. But this study deals with the women who are expressing themselves on social media; therefore, only such women could be selected who are using social media regularly and who are active in voicing their opinions on social and political issues.

In the next stage the identified women were contacted through message on Twitter. Some of the messages were replied while some were never replied. Those who replied also varied in their interest for agreeing to answer any questions or not. Another method was that those agreed to respond to questions were asked to contact friends or other women who could agree to reply to the questions.

The criterion for selection of this sample was that they should not be using their Twitter account for their professional purposes. For example, some journalists, media personalities or presenters use Twitter for professional purposes. Such people could not be part of this sample because the focus of this research is on women who use Twitter for personal communication.

During the search process of finding women who used Twitter with high frequency it was also observed that some of them were just re-tweeting or forwarding jokes, poetry pieces, or quotations. On the other hand, it was necessary to find women who used Twitter for serious communication as their self-expression for social or political causes. The method of selection of such women was to send them messages and then monitor their messages for the next few days. This process greatly helped to differentiate the women who used Twitter to raise their voice for social and

political causes. Some of such women were identified in Qatar and some in Kuwait.

At the next stage, a minimum of seventy women were selected as the sample for this study. The selection method was to focus on the profile of female Twitter users who were discussing about any social or political issues. An important factor in this search was the country from which these women belonged. Since the scope of this research is limited to the GCC countries it was imperative to select on those women who belonged to these countries.

During the course of the search different women Twitter users were found who used Twitter regularly but the subject content of their Tweets was not relevant to this research. However, the researcher continued to look for the women from GCC countries. According to the rules of Twitter social media platform it was necessary to 'follow' them to find out if they regularly discussed relevant issues in their tweets. For this purpose the researcher has to mention own identity to continue following another Twitter user. After confirming that such women were serious about their views, they were contacted through Twitter. For this purpose the researcher drafted Tweet messages which would inform the receiver about the nature and purpose of the current research. Therefore, the identification of women stage was followed by the first contact stage. The women who were active in expressing their views about social and political causes were informed about the current research. They were invited to take part in expressing

their opinions. Another method was to follow the followers of these women who were active on Twitter. Finally seventy women were contacted through Twitter.

Out of the seventy women who were contacted for the current research, forty women responded. From these forty there were thirty such women who agreed for the interviews. Then these women were contacted for face-to-face for interview time and place. In this way the sample population was selected and then contacted for data collection purposes. The women among this sample were from all GCC countries but most part of them from Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman. Some representation was from Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain. In this way the larger part of the population sample for this study consists of women from Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman. The interviews with the selection population were conducted face to face to get all the benefits of the in-depth face to face interviews.

The criterion of selection of these women was purely based on their use of Twitter for social or political participation purposes. The main focus was how these women were using Twitter for expressing their opinions about social and political causes.

Other than that their age, profession, or their other interests were not inquired about. The main focus was on their use of Twitter. Sometimes women with more than four tweets per day were selected and were contacted if they were using Twitter for social and political causes.

The method of contacting this sample population was primarily by Twitter. If they replied through Twitter and showed interest in responding to the interview questions they were then contacted for further procedure of interview appointment. The secondary method was email or telephone interview method. For the purpose of this study each identified woman was contacted twice on Twitter if she did not reply the first time. The method was contact the woman first time by Twitter and wait for the reply. The waiting period was three to five days. If no answer was received a second message was sent via Twitter. Again the researcher waited for three to five days. If the woman did not reply the second time, the researcher dropped the person from the list and moved to the next identified person. In this way the whole round of selection was conducted.

The researcher has emphasized on making the interviews face to face in order to obtain first hand and clear information. So far, out of the total population size of 30 women, 17 interviews have been completed by face to face method. Among these 17 women, 4 women are those who are living out of the native GCC countries. They belong to one of the GCC countries but have now relocated to some other GCC country for different reasons.

The respondents who took part in face to face interview could sign the consent form themselves. But those who were interviewed through the telephone could not sign the form. However, the researcher read to them the contents of the consent form and asked verbally if they understood and

agreed to be interviewed. After getting their verbal consent their names were written on the consent form and the rest of the interview was conducted.

3.3. Question areas

The initial questions dealt with the basic information about the respondent's use of Twitter. For example, since when they were using Twitter, how often they used it. The main area of focus was for what purposes they used Twitter. In this respect it was useful to ask them about different topics in which they were interested for using Twitter. The respondents were also asked about the impediments they encountered in using Twitter like any criticism from family, friends, or relatives.

An important area of questions focus was how Twitter had helped these women to express themselves. Next it was important to ask how Twitter had helped them to shape their role as women in GCC countries. The contributions of their use of Twitter to their social and personal development were also important questions. Moreover, these women were asked if they had become part of any social or political circle through the use of Twitter. The overall focus of the questions was how Twitter had helped them in self-expression and increased social and political participation. The purpose of these questions was to find out the ways in which Khaleeji women were using Twitter and how it was contributing to the expansion of their social and political horizons.

The following questions were used during the interviews with the Khaleeji women.

1- Which social media platform/s do you use? (You can choose more than one)

- a. Facebook b. Twitter c. Google d. Other

2- Since when are you using social media?

3- Can you compare the use of Facebook with Twitter?

4- Which one do you consider more convenient for expressing your views?

5- Do you take part in discussions on social causes in social media?

6- What type of topics do you mostly discuss on social media?

- a. Politics b. religion c. women's status d. social problems
e. none of these

7- (If the answer is [e]) Can you please specify what do you like to discuss on social media?

8- Do you think social media has allowed you to express yourself more freely?

9- Does anybody in your close circle of people criticize your use of social media? (friends/family/others)

10- Do you think social media is providing a useful channel to Khaleeji women to participate in social and political causes?

- 11- Do you consider that use of social media violates any social or religious norms/values of your culture?
- 12- How much awareness, in your opinion, has use of social media provided you?
- 13- Have you ever participated in on-line polls about social causes related to Khaleeji women?
- 14- How do you think use of social media is helping you to be a better citizen of your country or GCC?
- 15- Do you think use of social media has allowed you to connect with women activists in GCC countries?
- 16- Have you ever joined a social circle dedicated to women's causes? (If Yes) How was that experience?

3.4. Data Collection Techniques:

For this study the respondents are first approached through a telephone call to secure an appointment for the interview. At the appointed date and time the researcher and the respondents meet to conduct the interview. The researcher provides that Consent Form to the respondents which lists various general points related to the interview. If the respondent agrees to those points she is asked to sign the form and return it to the researcher.

During the interview the researcher notes the points related to the respondent's answers. The researcher keeps a semi-structured interview questions format to follow during the interview. If any change is required in

the sequence of the questions, the researcher makes the necessary changes on the spot. All the answers are noted in the written form in point format. Later on the researcher writes the answers in detail according to the answers given by the respondents. In this way the data is collected for this research.

For the purpose of this study only the in-depth interviews are conducted on semi-structured pattern. E-mail interviews are not used for this study because they do not yield valid responses in study of this type.

Chapter Four: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter the results of the interviews are presented followed by an analysis of each question/answer group. The research method is personal in-depth interviews. The sample size is 30 Khaleeji women belonging to different social/cultural and professional backgrounds. The criterion for selecting these women is their use of social media platforms to express their opinions on different issues of social and political significance.

4.2. Demographics

- a) Participants were from six different countries within the Gulf Cooperation Council. The number of participants from each country is presented below.

Table 1: Participant Nationalities

| S. No. | Country | Number of participants |
|--------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Bahrain | 2 |
| 2 | Kuwait | 9 |
| 3 | Oman | 5 |
| 4 | Qatar | 7 |
| 5 | Saudi Arabia | 4 |
| 6 | United Arab Emirates | 3 |
| | Total (n) | 30 |

4.3. Occupation Groups of Participants

Approximately one third (11) of the participants were housewives, 12 participants had professional jobs (teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers) and 7 were students.

Table 2: Occupation Groups

| S. No. | Occupation | Number of participants |
|--------|------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Teacher | 5 |
| 2 | Housewife | 11 |
| 3 | Student | 7 |
| 4 | Doctor | 3 |
| 5 | Lawyer | 2 |
| 6 | Engineer | 2 |
| | Total (n) | 30 |

4.4. Survey Results

4.4.1 Choice of Social Media Platform

Table 3: Social Media Platform Choice

| Facebook | Twitter | Google | Other (Snapchat, Instagram, Flicker, Whatsapp, etc.) |
|----------|---------|--------|---|
| 16 | 30 | 8 | 27 |

Analysis: These results show that Twitter is the singular most commonly used social media platform used by the participants in the sample. Interviews with these participants revealed that they used Twitter for discussion or for expression their opinion and local and regional issues, news, or events. These women were also using other social media platforms like Facebook, Google, Instagram, Snapchat, Flicker, Whatsapp, etc. But most of their social and political participation takes place on Twitter. That is also how they were identified for this survey. Their use of Twitter is mainly for social and political expression while they use other social media for personal or entertainment purposes.

4.4.2 Length of Time using Social Media

Table 4: Social Media Usage Length of Time

| 1 – 2 years | 2 – 3 years | More than 3 years |
|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 13 | 17 |

Analysis: These results indicate that the participants are regular users of social media and the majority of them have been using them for more than three years. Some of the participants commented that it is in the recent past (around three years) when they have discovered the use of social media and started using it for social and political participation. Seventeen

of these participants mentioned that they had been using social media in one form or other for more than three years.

4.4.3 Comparison and Convenience of Using Facebook and Twitter

Since this was a dichotomous question the responses provided different answers which can be grouped under the following categories.

- Some participants could not compare the two because they have never used Facebook, or they left using it at early stages.
- Some participants started social media interaction with using Facebook but then they switched over to Twitter. Still they use both of them for different purposes.
- Some participants consider Facebook more private than Twitter. They believe that it can be used for family and friends, pictures can be uploaded, comments can be given, etc. Therefore, Facebook is a friendship-building platform and to stay connected with friends and family. New friends can also be found through Facebook. One can also comment on the status of others, comment on their wall and other pages on Facebook. It also helps to find others' interests and this way one can find like-minded people.
- On the other hand, Twitter is easier to use. A quick sentence can be transmitted with a maximum of 140 characters called

“tweets”. Tweets allow people to express what is on their mind, what they think about different things, and tell what they are doing. Twitter allows the opportunity and freedom to follow news agencies and celebrities and get updated news. One can also comment on different events and issues.

- Some participants commented that Twitter replaced their newspaper and news channels on TV because they could get all the news through Tweets now. Twitter can also be read any time and any place.
- One of the most popular features of Twitter is that its messages can be viewed by anyone and one can follow anybody. One can keep track of their favorite personalities through their tweets. This allows freedom to celebrities and their followers can know about them without looking up for their updated information.
- All the respondents commented that Twitter was more convenient to use as compared to Facebook because of the different features discussed above.

Some responses are added here in the words of the respondents:

- *“I think Facebook is easier to use for old people but twitter gets attention and users more between youth because you can only write a brief on each tweet so it is more practical than Facebook.”*
participant from Oman

- *“Twitter is more up to date especially about the latest events happening all over the world...more easy to use and Facebook is more personal and limited when it gets to find information and latest news...”* Participant from Kuwait
- *“I started using social media with Facebook and was so interested and liked at first because it’s like a webpage for yourself and you can upload your pictures and write whatever I want with unlimited space...But when I started using twitter I like it more because it’s easy to use and I use it every day to read the news instead of the newspapers and TV news channels.”* Participant from Kuwait.
- *“In Oman, Facebook was more active before 2010-2011 than Twitter but after that everyone in Oman started using Twitter because it’s easier to use and to reach more people and follow them... Twitter also became from 2011 a pressure tool in Oman especially for the government, I remember one story when one government institution established and they create a logo similar to another institution, people started complain about that on Twitter and after a few days the new institution announced that they would cancel the logo and they discussed the reasons on their page or account on Twitter.”* Participant from Oman.

4.4.4 Discussion Topics on Social Media

The Khaleeji women taking part in this survey were all of the opinion that they found social media of great use for social and political participation.

When given a choice from a range of topics they discussed on social media the majority of participants mentioned “social problems’ and ‘women’s status” as the most discussed topics. Along with this, political issues were also discussed with higher frequency. Actually, the participants found the two topics linked to each other. Some participants like to discuss religion on social media, while some said that they found health, media, sports, arts, and literature also as topics of interest on which they could share their opinions with others.

- *“I used to write weekly articles in newspaper but I faced some problems with the newspaper’s owner of what I should write and not to write. So, I stopped writing on newspapers and start using twitter.”* Participant from Kuwait

The overall picture of this aspect of the survey showed that these Khaleeji women considered social media an important area in their lives for interacting with others.

4.4.5 Different Dimensions of Freedom of Expression on Social Media

The interviews with the Khaleeji women reached a high point when they were asked about what type of freedom the use of social media provided them. Various opinions came through which are presented here.

- All of them mentioned the newness of the experience of being able to express themselves freely and openly.

“I think social media gives us more freedom to discuss our ideas and our opinions not like the newspapers or the magazines...still there’s some limits on freedom to use social media but anyone can have an account and write not like the newspapers who owns for certain people and not everyone could write on newspapers.” Participant from Qatar

- All of the participants agreed that the freedom they enjoyed was unprecedented and they had never been able to take part in discussion on so many different points previously.
- Use of social media allowed them the privacy of their own space while connecting openly with the outer world.
- They like the use of social media platforms because they do not have to show their faces. This is in contrast with conventional media where they have to use their real identity through in video or picture format. Therefore, they felt they had the opportunity to speak their minds and talk freely and express themselves.
 - *“I feel free to say things in my mind because I feel for that topic and can speak about it.”*
 - *“There is no check when I talk about things which interest me. Nobody checks me from participating.”*
 - *“It is not my real name so I know that my family members will have no objection on it.”*
 - *“... Easy to say things like this, like through a nickname with a picture of something else.”*

- They could express their opinions by reaching out and searching the issues of their liking and choice. So they felt more satisfied that they could voice their opinions.

“Twitter gives me the opportunity to write my comments about others’ tweets and that’s what I like about it...But still I have a limit on using social media when I discuss my ideas and my opinion.” Participant from Oman

However, the freedom of expression issue highlighted some other concerns of control and authority. Several women pointed out that they did not feel as free to express their opinions as they wished. The reasons are listed here:

- Some women believed that their freedom is limited because the government in GCC countries watches over what is expressed on the social media.
- Some participants were of the opinion that the government tried to watch and control the use of Twitter for self-expression. They thought they were not totally free to write whatever they wanted because they feared they might get into trouble because of what they have expressed.
- Some women felt that they should not use their real name and identity if they want to express their opinions and views. The reason is that official authorities watched over the social media and wanted to limit how people of GCC countries used social media.

- Some participants mentioned that in the beginning they started to use Twitter and Facebook freely for discussion purposes but they got into trouble. Therefore, they have limited their use of social media. Now they have to think before they put their opinions on the social media.
- However, most of the participants mentioned that they found the way round this problem by hiding their true identity and writing anonymously. They felt more secure that way and discussed issues more openly.
- All of the participants mentioned that example of the Kuwaiti social activist who was arrested due to her Tweets addressed to the Amir of Kuwait. That case raised the level of caution and created fear among users of social media about the level of freedom they had.
- Hence, their biggest concern was that like the conventional media in GCC countries, the social media are also controlled by the government. They thought their freedom of speech and expression was limited and that they could get into trouble if they said anything against the government or the country's systems.

4.4.6 Criticism by close circle of people over social media use

Since women in GCC usually live in a closely-knit family system, their social freedom is often compromised due to the views and opinions of the people around them, like their family members or relatives. Therefore, this researcher supplemented the issue of lack of complete freedom of

expression among Khaleeji women while using social media with the question about any other type of criticism which they might be facing from their close circle of people. While the majority of the participants said they had no such issues, some women did express a few instances where they were criticized by their family members. The criticism by their close circle of people and societal limitations also highlight the social conditions in which Khaleeji women are using social media for self-expression.

- Four women mentioned that had been criticized by their family members about their use of social media. One of them had been criticized by her family because she was using her real name and her picture and she was writing about politics and social issues.
- One of them had trouble at her job because she was tweeting about some social problems and against the government. She works in a government department and the issue she discussed was related to her work. Her managers investigated with her and gave her a final warning to stop tweeting about matters that were related to her work.
- Two women have been criticized by family members who have been watching their tweets. When one of them discovered this she registered for a new account with fake name and "nickname" and used it instead of her real name. The other one closed her account for a few weeks so that her family members could stop watching over her.

- One woman from Saudi Arabia said that she had been using Twitter for the last four years but she does not let her husband know about it because he disapproves of it. He does not agree to it that she should tweet to everybody freely. Therefore, she is using Twitter secretly.

4.4.7 Social media as a channel for social and political participation

Among other points of agreement there is one point on which all the participants agreed that through social media they have been able to channel their social and political participation. Different answers illustrate this agreement.

- *“I think Twitter gave the women especially in our conservative societies more freedom to speak and discuss issues. Twitter is available for everybody but it all depends on the country’s law on using social media.”*Participant from Bahrain
- *“I think social media and especially Twitter re-opened some subjects and issues about Khaleeji women and helped these women who use Twitter to involve and discuss some political and social issues and problems on their societies on Twitter and social media.”* Participant from UAE.
- *“Through social media you can discuss more ideas and more and many people can read it...it’s a pressure tool for the people to*

change their ideas plus for some institutions private or government...” Participant from Oman.

- *“It has more freedom and it’s easy to use, like you can write one idea or an information in limited words, and I can see your word would be considered in others. Like if you complain about services or news by the government and Twitter is an effective way to make the change in society and we saw that happen and it has an influence also on public opinion.”*Participant from Qatar.
- *“You can see many people became famous because of their discussions through social media. I think it’s the best tool ever to help Khaleeji women to raise their rights and their opinion because of our conservative society.”* Participant from Kuwait.
- *“I think social media has benefits and negative back...Like we heard about some Twitter users have been in jails for their tweets...I think using social media and Twitter should be more flexible in our societies and both government and Twitter users should understand that.”*Participant from Oman.

Some Tweets are also presented here which give a firsthand sample of the exchange of tweets between the Khaleeji women.

- We should boycott Qatar Airways if they won’t stop offering alcohol drinks on Ramadan for the passengers... (Qatar).

- Ministry of Trade has to monitor the consumer goods prices in Ramadan... (Kuwait).

- I support #Women2Drive and so you should you! #WomensNetwork. (KSA).

-Some ppl don't know the difference between corruption and administrative error. Corruption is the abuse of power for personal benefits. The error is neglect to follow the procedures (KSA).

-When people came out in #Bahrain to vote in elections in 2014 honorably dazzled the world was motivated by the love for their homeland and the fear of being kidnapped and attempts of foreign intervention (Bahrain).

- I admit that I missed so much while I thought at the moment that Twitter will give us the independence speech. (Kuwait).

- Who are the foundations of daash? Who they work for? Why we always work to destroy our countries to benefit its enemies? If we can answer this question will enable us to defeat. (Qatar).

- The basis for progress in non-oil States is investment in human resource development. (UAE).

4.4.8 Violation of social and religious norms/values due to social media use

An important aspect of the society which all the GCC states share is the uniformity of social and religious outlook. When asked if their use of social media violated any social or religious norms and values, most of the participants were of the opinion that it did not. They saw no reason why or how there could be any such violation. The people in their close circle also did not believe so. So, there was a uniform opinion that social media use conformed to the social and religious code prevalent in the Khaleeji society. Some of the participants added a few aspects to this discussion.

- *“But I noticed how some people especially ‘young and teenagers’ have been involved in politics and social speech which is not healthy when young people are not qualified enough to talk about these topics and that negatively affects other young people who use social media.”*Participant from Saudi Arabia.
- *“No, I think Twitter has more benefits than disadvantages. For example if you follow some specialists you can get information in all fields...religious, politics, social aspects, quotes about life and motivated quotes and stories etc.”*Participant from Qatar.
- *“Twitter gives me awareness in many fields especially political awareness by following some people on Twitter like writers, ministers, political activists etc, Also, my comment or my opinion about issues happening or news make me feel involved with these*

issues and being part of it. So, these issues do not violate social and religious things...”Participant from UAE.

4.4.9 Level of Awareness Provided by Social Media

This is one aspect about which there is a uniformity of opinion that social media has helped these women immensely in raising their awareness level about various issues of social and political significance. Most of the participants considered awareness as the first step towards active participation. Such awareness had never been possible before because of the limited channels of information or because the control on information by governments did not let them know about what was happening in the world around them. But now with the help of social media, the Khaleeji women have come to know about the realities of time that they are living in and how the changing world around them might impact their own futures. Previously interested users could dig up information of their interest or choice. But now social media keeps them updated pro-actively through status updates, website links, and flash news. The growing awareness among women has also increased the number of women who have started to take part in active social and political participation. Almost all the women commented that in the past they could just receive the news passively and not do anything about the issue. Now they can raise their voices and can exert whatever influence they can have through expressing their opinion.

One of the biggest examples of this phenomenon was observed during the Saudi women’s attempt to draw attention towards the ban on women

driving in Saudi Arabia. The gradual increase in the level of awareness, spread through social media, about the right of women to drive proved to be the first step. It brought about a consensus among several like-minded Saudi women that they should be given the right to drive like women elsewhere in the world. The gradual rise of awareness resulted in Saudi women actually defying the Saudi ban when the women decided to drive on the road and face whatever consequences they had to. The conventional media also covered the issue because it had reached such a high point of public interest. The main driver of this change in opinion of Saudi women was the use of social media through which they could connect with each other. This example has given other Khaleeji women impetus that their voices can also be heard. Most of the participants of this study frequently referred to the Saudi example.

- *“In the beginning no people could know what was going on inside Saudi Arabia. Then when a group of Saudi women challenged the decision of not allowing women to drive, the other women in Khaleej decided to support them.”*Participant from UAE
- *“Yes I was one of the Qatari women who strongly supported the Saudi women issue about driving cars and I was contacting with them on Twitter and support their rights...”*Participant from Qatar
- *“Driving is a personal right which every person requires..... How can a country decide to take that right away? We knew this but we could not show this to Saudi women. But social media like*

Facebook gave us the chance to show our feelings.”Participant from Bahrain.

- *“Khaleeji women could not put their voice together, that is when they were alone in different parts of Khaleej. But now it is different. If Saudi women can drive, in other parts (of Khaleej) also women can take active part in demonstration about social issues.*”Participant from Oman
- *“I supported the Saudi women right for driving cars and discuss that on Twitter.*”Participant from Oman

Some participants also mentioned other ways in which their use of social media had supplemented their social and political awareness.

- *“Twitter gives me awareness in many fields especially political awareness by following some people on Twitter like writers, ministers, political activists etc,. Also, my comment or my opinion about issues happening or news make me feel involved with these issues and being part of it...”*Participant from Qatar
- *“Many rights and laws we have in Kuwait I didn’t know about it but I learned from social media and Twitter by following lawyers, law people and political activists on Twitter.”*Participant from Kuwait.

4.4.10 Taking part in on-line polls

Table 5: Online Polls Participation

| Yes | No | Sometimes |
|-----|----|-----------|
| 16 | 6 | 8 |

Online polls are occasionally held to learn about public opinion about different issues. About half of the women said that they always took part in such expression of opinion. But around half of them said that either they did not take part in opinion polls or did not do it regularly. Although they felt that the cause was important, they somehow did not actively express their opinions about the issue. Two women expressed their reason not participating as the fear that on-line polls were not independent and that they might face trouble due to taking part in them.

- *“I felt that I was not free to show my opinion like this. Maybe government is trying to know who thinks what and I might get into trouble.”*Participant from Kuwait
- *“We feel on-line polls are not always independent. Sometimes they are used to get information about public’s opinion in indirect method.”*Participant from Saudi Arabia.

4.4.11 Better Citizenship through Use of Social Media

Most of the participants considered better citizenship an important aspect of the use of social media. They believed they have been able to become better citizens due to the use of different channels of social media. They have learned about different public duties and rights. Most of them said that through Twitter some lawyers had attempted to inform people about different aspects of law related to the general public. Also when they learn how they can utilize different public services provided by ministries and government departments, they can perform their duties as citizens in a better way. Some participants mentioned the different ways in which their use of social media had supplemented their citizenship practices.

- *“Many rights and laws we have in Kuwait I didn’t know about it but I learned through social media and Twitter by following lawyers, law people and politics activists on twitter.”*Participant from Kuwait.
- *“In Oman, Twitter is an effective way to make change in our society. I remember some of the laws in Oman had been changed by the government because some people were complaining about them on Twitter.”*Participant from Oman.
- *“I think social media ... gives me the feeling of nationalism by involving my voice and my opinion about what’s happening in Kuwait.”* Participant from Kuwait.

- *“I think each citizen could be a better citizen for his country in many certain ways and I think Twitter help to show that”*.Participant from Oman.

4.4.12 Connecting with other Social Circles and Activists

The responses to questions in this category were mixed. While most of the women said that they followed other social and political activists on Twitter, not all of them were taking part in social circles dedicated to women’s causes. Although they did not provide any specific reasons for that but most of them believed that right now they were comfortable in getting to know what was going on around them. They liked to express their views also but mostly on an individual basis rather than on a group basis. Especially when they saw that a group was trying to work exclusively for some issue related to women’s causes they did not feel the impulse to join it. One of the reasons was given as:

“I do not feel I have reached that level of awareness where I can actually take part in any demonstration or gathering for that cause”.Participant from UAE.

The responses of other participants were almost similar where an active political participation seemed something for which they were not ready yet. Some expressed the opinion that in future maybe they could feel inclined to join specific groups but currently they do not feel inclined to do so. They seemed to be content with the level of awareness they have gained and

the way they could make their voice heard in whatever limited way they were doing it now. They are comfortable in dealing with and following individuals rather than become part of larger groups where they cannot know the individuals that they are dealing with. The situation of the current phase of Khaleeji women in the use of social media was summed up well by Participant from Oman:

“Mostly I like to add my opinion to the thread or sometimes I like to open the subject and discuss it with the followers or sometimes by reply and say my opinion about someone’s tweet.” Participant from Oman.

4.5. Analysis of Tweets

Some Tweets are presented here to show the actual content of the participants’ messages on social media. The criterion of selection of these tweets is that the content is related to social and political issues of GCC women.

- *‘Agreed. Vote must be used with caution. With knowledge about the right person.’*
- *‘My 8/yo son asks me to go on tv and speak like I do @home about politics. I can’t.’*
- *‘We Khaleeji women are not things of old centuries. We are educated and know what we want.’*

- *'Work and home are harmonious with each other. My husband supports me in every way.'*
- *'Why do ppl think women not be treated like equal? Allah makes no difference with us.'*
- *'Saudi women WILL get the right to vote, soon, inshallah. I am sure.'*
- *'Our society is open to our suggestions. Our leaders also listen to what women complain about.'*
- *'Khaleeji girls know better now how to move forward in life. Not depend on parents for all decisions.'*
- *'Is anybody still following Saudi female drivers FB pages? Many updates!'*
- *'No. am not confined by my editor's advice anymore. I am free to choose now what I want to write about.'*

Analysis: These tweets show the way in which these Khaleeji women communicate with each other. The first most important aspect is their use of language which is direct and decided. Most of these tweets show that the participants know what they want to say. These tweets also show a high level of awareness of the society around them. Some social aspects like the role of family in the life of working women, the question about women's status in society, higher level of education and awareness among the Khaleeji women. These tweets also show that Khaleeji women are now aware of the difference between the present and the past. They

know that in the past they did not have education and equal rights. But now the situation is changing in the GCC states.

One of these tweets also shows the difference between conventional media and social media. The participant knows that, despite her son's wish to see her on TV, she cannot express herself as freely on TV as she can through social media. Tweets about political participation show that these Khaleeji women want to use their vote cautiously for selecting the right candidate/s. This also shows their increased level of political awareness. These women are also hopeful about their political future which, in the case of Saudi women, would start with the right to vote.

4.6. Conclusion

The interview results gathered from the Khaleeji women indicated several aspects about their use of social media for social and political participation. First of all these women believed that they had got an opportunity to exercise their right of free expression in a manner which they did not have previously. Even when there were no direct restrictions on them previously they did not take part in social or political causes because they had no channels for such participation. Secondly, they have a sense of complete privacy about their identity. They believe that if they do not want to expose their true identity, nobody forced them to do so. This aspect allowed them greater freedom of expression. This feature of freedom also did not clash with any religious or social norm of the society in which they live. This point was shared by almost all the participants from GCC countries.

Thirdly, all the participants agreed that they were becoming aware of more social and political issues around them now as they are using the social media. Before this they were not aware of the problems around them and could not do anything about them. But now that they know about the social and political issues related to Khaleeji women, they feel that they can raise their voice against any problems whenever they liked. Some of the Khaleeji women who had been discussing the issues of social and political significance felt that by taking part in such discussions they felt more active and more confident about their ability to solve those problems.

The participants of this survey interview also mentioned that they felt afraid of government checks on the social media. They feared that they might get into trouble if they wrote anything against the state or the government. They firmly believed that like the check on conventional media, the government implied some sort of check on social media as well. Although they were not quite sure what type of check it could be but they had a sense of fear about speaking about topic related to government actions. That is why they refrained from discussing or commenting on such topics. However, the newness of the experience of free self-expression and increased awareness about the world around them were the outstanding qualities of their experience of social and political expression through social media. These Khaleeji women also expressed the hope that their continued social media participation would bring them to a point where they would be able to make the changes which they felt were necessary for women in the GCC countries.

Chapter Five: RESULTS DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

The interviews of Khaleeji women revealed a number of aspects related to their use of social media for social and political participation. In this chapter these results are discussed highlighting some of the key points as expressed by the interview participants. First a summary of results is presented followed by the interpretation of results. For the sake of clarity the interpretation of results is divided into sub sections. The significance of results is discussed in relation with broader issues faced by the Khaleeji women. Then the results are related to the research questions. Next, the previous research done in the context of social media use by Khaleeji women is discussed. After that the limitations of this study are provided. Finally, the future direction is provided in the light of the current study.

5.2. Summary of Results

- The results of this study show that Twitter is the singular mostly commonly used social media platform used by the sample population. These women were also using other social media platforms like Facebook, Google, Instagram, Snapchat, Flicker and Whatsapp, yet most of their social and political participation is on Twitter.

- All the participants have been using social media for more than two years.
- Some participants consider Facebook more private than Twitter. On the other hand, Twitter is easier to use.
- For issues related to government they felt that Twitter could not be used because it was too public, and they feared open expression about government policies. Still they could use Twitter to follow prominent political figures to find out their views. Participants like to use Facebook more for discussing social issues.
- When given a choice from a range of topics they discussed on social media the majority of participants mentioned “social problems” and “women’s status” as the most discussed topics. Along with this, political issues were also discussed with a high frequency. Actually, the participants found the two topics linked to each other.
- All of them mentioned the newness of the experience of being able to express themselves freely and openly. All of the participants agreed that the freedom they enjoyed was unprecedented and they had never been able to take part in discussion on so many different points previously.
- Several women pointed out that they did not feel as free to express their opinions as they wished. Some women believed that their freedom is limited because the government in GCC countries watches over what is expressed on the social media. They thought

they were not totally free to write whatever they wanted because they feared they might get into trouble because of what they have expressed.

- Some women felt that they should not use their real name and identity if they want to express their opinions and views. Most of the participants mentioned that they found a way around this problem by hiding their true identity and writing anonymously. They felt more secure that way and discussed issues more openly.
- The participants mentioned that their social freedom is often compromised due to the views and opinions of the people around them, like their family members or relatives. The criticism by a close circle of people and societal limitations also highlight the social conditions in which Khaleeji women are using social media for self-expression.
- All the participants agreed that through social media they have been able to channel their social and political participation.
- There was a uniform opinion that social media use conformed to the social and religious code prevalent in the Khaleeji society.
- Almost all the women commented that in the past they could just receive the news passively and not do anything about the issue. Now they can raise their voice and can exert whatever influence they can have through expressing their opinion.
- Most women did not take part in online polls due to the fear that online polls were not independent and that they might get into trouble.

Although they felt that the cause was important, they somehow did not actively express their opinions about issues through polls.

- Most participants believed they have been able to become better citizens due to the use of different channels of social media as they have come to know about different public duties and rights.
- While most of the women said that they followed other social and political activists on Twitter, not all of them were taking part in social circles dedicated to women's causes. Although they did not provide any specific reasons for this, most of them believed that right now they were comfortable in getting to know what was going on around them.

5.3. Results interpretation:

The demographic section of this the survey shows details of respondents from each of the six countries included in the GCC. The occupations range is widespread covering the key areas where women's participation is the highest in GCC states.

5.4. Spread of Social Media

The initial question related to how long these Khaleeji women have been using social media platforms revealed that it mostly ranges from two to four years. This time period coincides with the expansion of smartphones which have taken over the phone market. As the popularity of smartphones grew and their prices became lower, the general public

started switching over to them. At about the same time a large number of mobile applications were also created which could be run on iOS, Android, and Windows mobile software. In this way, the spread of smartphones and social media complemented each other. Although most of the social media platforms mentioned in this study have existed for more than five years, their popularity has seen unprecedented growth over the past two to three years. Another dimension of this phenomenon is the demand and supply of mobile applications for social media platforms. As the supply of smartphones grew, the demand for mobile social media applications also grew. According to Brandt (2015) recent studies have shown that more than 80 percent of Twitter's users are mobile (See Figure 1). In this way the technology factor is important in considering how the Khaleeji women started to use social media more extensively over the last few years as compared to the past.

5.5. Choice of Social Media Platforms

The question about the choice of social media platforms shows a high preference for Twitter compared to other platforms. Facebook was the second highest choice. Although some participants continue to use both Twitter and Facebook with equal frequency, they find Twitter to be more convenient. Reasons for this are convenience, privacy, and ease of use. While Facebook works like a full website, the participants believe Twitter becomes more of a messaging type platform. In Facebook they have to do everything through their page or follow others' pages but in Twitter they

can follow with greater anonymity. This trend goes in harmony with the other social aspects of the society that these women belong to. They find that their privacy is the prime concern for them as well as for their families. If they are not exposed in following others, they feel much more secure.

This need for privacy and security speaks of the social environment in which these women grow up. The conservative nature of the Arab society does not allow open conversation between genders, especially with strangers. This social habit is so well ingrained in the minds of Khaleeji women that they cannot overcome it. While some have received education in western cultural settings their inborn beliefs remain rooted in their past. Social habits take a long time to change, if ever they change. That is why these women try to find a private space on the Internet where they can communicate with others while keeping their identity hidden. It is almost like speaking from behind a veil. These interviews developed this concept in the researcher's mind that the "veiled voice" concept is still the same however much these women may try to express themselves through social media. Twitter provides this passive participation in which they can express their opinions without drawing unwanted attention to themselves.

5.6. Different Dimensions of Using Twitter and Facebook

The sense of privacy and anonymity gained by using Twitter also leads the Khaleeji women to higher levels of freedom of expression. When they realize that the constraints of their conservative society are no longer actively stopping them to voice their opinions, they feel freer to express

themselves. That is why on Twitter they are able to participate in discussions in which they would not get involved on Facebook. The reason is that through Facebook they are more exposed to inspection if anybody wants to find out more details about them. They feel comfortable in saying things on Twitter which they might not say on other platforms. In this way they have created a dichotomy of roles of both platforms-----Facebook for friends and family, Twitter for communicating with strangers.

Many women pointed out that it was more convenient for them to follow others on Twitter as compared to Facebook or other social media platforms. They could follow people of their choice without their knowledge. Again a feeling of not drawing attention to themselves is present in this reason for choosing Twitter. This discussion leads to the conclusion that the drive of expression is very much present among the Khaleeji women, yet they lacked an outlet for such expression. The advent and spread of social media platforms have provided these women the opportunity to step up and step out to speak and have their say. Still about half of the women who were interviewed informed that they do not participate in forum discussions openly and boldly. They prefer to listen to others and avail this opportunity to increase their awareness and understanding of the contemporary issues of the world around them.

5.7. Choice of Subjects/Topics for Discussion

The results of this survey also show that the use of social media is providing two outlets to the Khaleeji women. The first is that they come to

know about the contemporary issues in the world around them. The second is that they can comment and express their opinions about these issues. Many participants mentioned that they started expressing their views after they learned about an issue from social media. Thus, from the point of view of mass communication, the use of social media is creating a cycle of response --- creating awareness and then creating participation as a result of that awareness. Time and again the women told how they came to know about the issue from the same social media platform. Sometimes they heard about a news story and then found it reflected in the views and opinions of people on the social media. At other times they 'learned' about the event from the social media. Part of the reason for preferring Twitter is that it is also fast replacing the newspaper. Several women told that they could learn about the news through Twitter instead of actively opening the website of news agency and finding out the news. In this way social media is creating awareness about the issues that these women might be interested in.

The second phase is that these Khaleeji women wish to express their opinions about that issue. Again the social media like Twitter allows them the outlet. Within the same tweet they get the link to post their own opinion. In this way the cycle of awareness and response is created.

The choice of topics of discussion is quite varied. Although this study provided the participants a close-ended question with a few topics and most of them selected "social problems" and "women's status", their

exploration of topics on Twitter and Facebook is not limited to a single topic. Once they start to follow the tweets of like-minded people they become aware of several other issues of their interest. As the social and political issues keep changing, so do the response of the followers. Sometimes a political issue is of high value but people stop focusing on it if it is resolved or some other topic of higher importance has emerged. In this way their interest and focus keeps shifting with the passage of time. The tweets of most of the participants also showed that they talked about certain issues but after sometime their focus had completely shifted to some newer issues. They could also change the focus of their interest as they found some other issue or cause of more interest for them.

Several women expressed that following social media platforms engaged their interest because they could become aware of things which otherwise they might not learn about. In this way social media participation has also allowed them to enlarge their vision and their awareness about several other issues related to their interests. This expansion of perspective is one of the most important aspects of how and why these women believe that social media is an important part of their lives now. The reason is that social media use has provided them a 'window' to the outer world that they otherwise lacked within their social confines. Some issues related to health, religion or other common interests could possibly never be discussed within their closed circle of friends, relatives and family. It was

by following other thought-leaders anonymously that they could find out about different possibilities how their voice could matter. Therefore, most of the participants considered social media participation among the most important influences in their way of thinking at present. At the same time, these Khaleeji women feel excited about the newfound freedom of acquiring awareness and adding their voice to the overall advancement of the causes that they believe in.

5.8. Freedom of expression as a new experience for Khaleeji women

One of the most important findings of this study is how the Khaleeji feel emancipated due to their ability to express their opinion through social media. While most of them are aware of or are conscious of the way government may exercise control over the social media, they express excitement about the newness of the experience. This is a new phase in the lives of most of these women. They no longer feel confined by the social and political restraints under which they have been living previously. Some women are of the opinion that this newfound freedom should be used with caution so that women do not violate any social, moral or political codes of the societies they live in. They believe that they must not be carried away by the newly acquired freedom of expression. When they were asked if they faced any control or criticism from their friends, relatives, or family about their use of social media, most of them replied in negative. Some informed that their family showed concern but that was

also a concern about their welfare lest they become involved in something that the government does not approve of. But the overall expression is that these women enjoy this freedom which they have found within the privacy of their homes. They are taking part in public activities yet they are not violating any social or religious norms. In two instances the women informed that they were reprimanded for the use of social media. In one case the family members had objected why she was using her personal name when she was commenting on some political and social issues. In another case one participant was informed by the employer to stop discussing matters related to her job on the social media. However, these occurrences showed to these women that they should not be careless and should use social media with due care and concern for others.

5.9. Significance of Results

The research carried out for this study and the interview results have pointed out several larger issues like the extent of freedom of expression, limit of female political participation, overall role of women in society, and how these women can change outsiders' opinion about them through their social media interactions.

While the Khaleeji women are happy to have freedom of expression this freedom is constantly checked by the caution and fear that the government may be watching their comments and opinions. The news about a Kuwaiti political activist arrested and prosecuted by the authorities raised alarm among the women who were using social media for political expression.

Their close friends and family also told them to be cautious. In this way a collective fear of the government clamping down on social media users for political participation is always there in the background. But most of the women commented that they took caution not to aggravate their authorities through their comments and opinions. Secondly, they believe that if they take enough measures to keep themselves anonymous, they were free to express whatever they wanted.

An important aspect of this 'fear within freedom' is that being part of Khaleeji society in general these women do not feel such a high surge of revulsion for their political systems and social norms that they could criticize them openly. Most of these participants mentioned that moderation was the best way to proceed so that that they could maintain their freedom of expression, without challenging the authorities directly. The consensus is that Khaleeji women must respect the social norms and not try to challenge them in the name of freedom like it is done in the west.

The government control over media in the Middle East is born out of the system of monarchy and its will to implement unique controls and regulations. For example, throughout the Middle East an unsaid rule exists that the general public cannot express its dislike for or disagreement with any government policy. Almost all the GCC states exercise similar rules with varying degrees of implementation. That is why the Saudi women are conscious that they must not speak about the government, its policies, or

about their work in the social media. Women from other countries are also exercising similar self-restraints.

Another aspect of political participation through social media is how free women are to exercise their political participation. In countries like Saudi Arabia and Oman where women do not have equal work opportunities as men, their political participation is also very low. In other GCC states the female representation in legislative roles is too low to have any significant effect. These are some of the issues which are being discussed on social media now in repressed voices and low tones. As more and more women join their voices in these low-key discussions, they are bound to be taken notice of by the authorities. Khaleeji women are still uncertain whether they would suffer the fate of the Kuwaiti social activist or they would face a different treatment by the government. Participation in social and political issues was highlighted in 2011 by the Saudi women defying the ban on female driving and taking to roads. Although the incident could not achieve much in terms of winning the Saudi women any social rights, it helped to guide the GCC women in using social media for voicing their opinions. At present the Khaleeji women find social media participation as a unique opportunity to be heard among themselves. They no longer feel isolated from the women in other GCC states or in the outside world.

The participants also expressed that the freedom they seek and are getting through social media is different from the western freedom of expression. These women are part of the Khaleeji society and consider its

culture, society, and political system as part of their own lives. They express the hope that in the future their collective voice in different GCC states would make the authorities accept women's points of view about any social or political changes. The Emirati women, for example, expressed that their government listens to their opinions when they use social media channels. Therefore, these women believe that the situation now is much improved from what it was in the past. Now they are educated whereas in the past female literacy was very low. Therefore, as a result of rise in education level, their voice would also be heard if they demand any special rights or changes.

5.10. Relation to Research Questions

RQ 1: Has social networking provided an impetus to social and political movements for Khaleeji women in the GCC region?

The results and findings of this study have shown that the social and political participation by GCC women has been mostly individual and it has not gained the level of a movement. However the practice of political participation through social media has provided the women impetus to voice their opinions. This implies that in future if there is a movement in the direction of social or political change, these Khaleeji women would be able to take part in it through social media. However, it is yet to be seen what the nature of such movements would be and whether they would achieve any outcomes.

RQ 2: Has the usage of Twitter by the women of GCC countries been effective in achieving any social or political change?

As far as the usage of Twitter is concerned, this study has shown that no political change has been achieved so far. However, the social change is effective to the extent that the level of awareness of the Khaleeji women has increased. Now they are more aware about the contemporary issues and events taking place around them. They are able to participate in these events also by expressing their opinions. Therefore, it would be safe to assume that, as a first step of political participation, the awareness of issues has been achieved. When this situation is compared with the level of awareness of Khaleeji women about contemporary issues ten years ago, the situation looks completely different. At that time it was difficult for women to express themselves on social or political forums without going out openly in public. Now the situation has changed and the social media has provided them opportunity to express their opinion without stepping out of their homes or without violating any social or moral code. Therefore, it can be said that the foundation has been laid for Khaleeji women's political participation through social media.

RQ 3: How has the use of social media helped GCC women to exercise “out of the box” thinking for breaking down traditional barriers and achieving “social acceptance?”

The use of social media itself was an exercise in “out of the box” thinking. Several Khaleeji women informed that it was an unorthodox step for them

to communicate with strangers with any social or religious restriction. When they communicate their opinions, they feel themselves quite different from the conventional modes of behavior by the females in the conservative GCC society. Therefore, the use of social media has helped the GCC women to break down traditional barriers and achieve social acceptance. The people around them accept their use of social media and allow them considerable freedom to participate in social and political causes, albeit with caution and self-exercised restraint.

RQ 4: How open are the GCC women in taking part in discussing issues of social and political importance and to what extent do the governments impose controls on these discussions?

The GCC women believe that their freedom of social and political participation is limited by the society and political system that they are living in. The governments exercise control and regulation of social media but it is limited to protecting the sanctity of the rulers and their families. GCC governments also do not allow open criticism of government policies because they are implemented as result of royal decrees. Therefore any person challenging a royal decree is considered to be challenging the ruling elite. Therefore, the governmental control is very much in force. But it is limited to only protection of the rulers and their decisions. Otherwise the Khaleeji women are free to talk about any issue that they want to discuss on social media.

RQ 5: What are the topics commonly discussed by GCC women for bringing about change in their social, economic, and political status?

Khaleeji women mostly discuss the topics of social and political significance on social media. They also discuss topics of sports, religion, and health on social media. But they are not actively taking part in any efforts to bring about change in their social or political status. So far, in the GCC, women have not succeeded in creating a mass movement through social media for any social or political change. The occasional movements have been to raise the level of awareness of the Khaleeji women about issues of social and political significance. In this sense, such efforts have been successful as women now feel much more aware about the issues of the modern world around them.

5.11. Relation with Prior Research

The findings of this study endorse Dahlberg's views about the Internet democracy. As democracy cannot be achieved unless the public is aware of its political rights and duties, this study has shown that Khaleeji women are gradually gaining awareness about these rights and duties. Therefore, as a precursor of a bigger change in the region towards democracy, the use of social media is already preparing the Khaleeji women to raise their collective voice for their rights. Although the stage of political participation in specific groups has not yet been achieved, this is a formative phase in the Khaleeji women's active political participation.

As Gurak and Logie(2012) pointed out that the use of text based messaging has provided a foundation for political communication between several groups across the world, the same is happening in the GCC region, but is still in its very early stages.

The findings of this research are in line with the research conducted by Mishra and Basu(2014) about the use of motifs and avatars to hide personal identity in order to gain privacy for personal expression. The Khaleeji women have also expressed that they feel more comfortable when they use nicknames and avatars instead of using their real names or using their own pictures. This behaviour is a reflection of the performative behaviour defined by Erving Goffman(1959).

Gimmler's views about the social communities and the value of their voice are also endorsed by this study. The Khaleeji women are increasingly becoming aware of the value and importance of their voice and how their support is valued in their social media circles.

However, Noelle-Neumann's (1984) spiral of silence theory is partially applicable here as the Khaleeji women are breaking the barriers of silence and are beginning to raise their voice. In this sense the Khaleeji women have succeeded in getting out of the shell of silence which was imposed on them by social and political forces. These women have a voice but so far they had not been able to express it because if they did so they would have been violating one social norm or the other of the society in which they live. Social media has provided them the unique opportunity of raising

their voice without challenging any social or religious norm of their society. That is why, instead of becoming silent due to continuous suppression Khaleeji women are now attempting to be heard with the help of social media. In this sense they are trying to break from the spiral of silence in which they have been caught for several centuries. No doubt they are doing it with caution and reservation, the direction of the social and political participation is not going towards silence but going towards self-expression. For this study 70 women were contacted to take part in survey interview, but only 30 replied positively. 40 of those contacted either did not reply or declined to be interviewed. A possible reason may be that they were afraid of the possible repercussions of such interview/s. Although they did not say it directly that they did not want to participate in the interview, they did not show positive agreement. This attitude shows the hesitation that is still found among the Khaleeji women about breaking the spiral of silence in a uniform manner. However those who agreed for the interview broke the shackles of silence and expressed their thoughts freely throughout the interview process. Therefore, this study raises the issue, in the light of theory of spiral of silence, that the Khaleeji women are not going to be marginalized any more due to their silence.

Sarnoff's law of the size of the broadcast media is applicable because the number of Khaleeji women using social media for social and political participation is still very small. If the Khaleeji women expect their voice to have any significant impact in future, they will have to increase their number otherwise their efforts may not be useful/fruitful. For this purpose

the Khaleeji women may try to make conscious efforts to ask more women to start expressing themselves on social media. At the same time, the growth in Khaleeji women's number on social media over the past few years shows that more women are joining Twitter and Facebook every year. In this way the social networks of Khaleeji women are getting stronger due to the growing number of participants. According to Sarnoff's theory the strength of the Khaleeji women's social network is dependent on how and when more women join the social networks of Khaleeji women.

Reed's Law is applicable to this study as it concludes that participation of larger number of women is required to make the voice in the social media as a potent force to bring about any social or political change. Reed's law states that utility of large networks is directly proportionate to their size. The relationship between utility and size is scalable which means that as the network grows bigger its utility increases. On the other hand when the social network grows smaller, its utility also becomes less (Reed, 2001). Therefore, as more and more women start to express themselves on the social media in GCC states their voice will acquire higher value in social and political circles. Therefore, the higher number of Khaleeji women is required to participate in social and political causes through social media.

Everett Rogers' (1983) Diffusion of Innovations theory is endorsed by this study because the use of social media is not enough if any social or political change is the target of Khaleeji women. If they continue using only the social media, their voice may not get any political attention. That is why

gradually the social media usage would become a first step through which the awareness about social and political issues could be increased. However, the political activists will gradually have to use other channels if any political or social change is to be achieved. But at this stage it is premature to say that these Khaleeji women are aiming to achieve any political change through the use of social media. At the same time these Khaleeji women seem intent to guard against the spiral of silence as they expressed the opinion that more Khaleeji women should voice their opinions on social media.

5.12. Commentary about Tweets

During the population selection stage to identify the potential participants for the survey interviews, the researcher followed some Tweeters. Their tweets showed how these women were using Twitter to express their social and political views. These tweets dealt with different topics which were of interest for the Khaleeji women on social media. Some of those tweets are presented in Chapter 4 along with their analysis. The most prominent feature of those tweets was the advanced stage at which the tweeters were in their messages. For example if a Khaleeji woman was mentioning about elections, she was mentioning the effect of casting the vote. She did not seem to be on the initial stage of the awareness about vote and its use and power. Similarly women who mentioned about their family support in their work were also mentioning a feature of their lives which was already in practice. That is why the tweets showed a picture of

Khaleeji women who were engaged in social and political discussion with other tweeters. Looking at their tweets was like a window into their social and political lives where one could see what each one of them was doing. Looking at those tweets was like starting to listen to somebody in mid-conversation. Most of the tweets that the researcher went through showed that the tweeters had already discussed the matter before. The tweets showed sentences coming from women who were conscious of their status and who spoke with a lot of awareness of contemporary issues. For example, emphasis on “I CAN’T” by the Khaleeji woman whose son wanted her to say all her political views on TV indicates all the social and political restraint amid which these Khaleeji women live. Yet they do not stop. They continue using social media as their newly acquired medium of self-expression.

5.13. Limitations of study

This study is limited to the Khaleeji women only and how they are using social media for social and political participation. During the course of this study several limitations were faced and overcome. For example,

- Very few Khaleeji women were ready to take part in the survey interviews. This limitation played important role in the unequal representation of women from all the six GCC states. Although Saudi Arabia has the largest number of tweets per day, only a few

of them responded to the request for interview. 16 Saudi women were contacted through Twitter messages about this study and asking them to take part in the interviews. Although some of them agreed for the interviews but they said that they wanted to reply to the questions through email and did not agree on telephone interviews. For the reasons of privacy they did not want to give their phone numbers.

- As this study includes only telephone interviews and not email answers, many Khaleeji women could not be interviewed because they did not agree to be interviewed on telephone. Due to this factor the number of interview participants is limited.
- The same limitation is applicable on the unequal representation of women from all GCC states because in some countries like UAE, Kuwait and Oman women were more open and ready for the survey interviews as compared to women in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or Bahrain.
- It was very difficult to convince Khaleeji women to take part in the survey interviews. Most of them did not want to participate because of the reasons of anonymity and privacy.
- The participants had to be given assurance of privacy and only academic use of their interviews. Even then, some of the women contacted declined to participate.
- Due to the geographic spread of the participants it was very difficult for the researcher to approach all of them individually.

- The sample population size is small, though within the range of an acceptable sample size for a depth interview study. However, collecting primary data from only 30 women from six countries limits the generalizability of the study's findings.
- Another major limitation of this study is the non-availability of literature produced by Arab authors about the phenomenon of social media usage in the Arab world. Most of the studies deal with only the Arab Spring and how social media was used in it. The paucity of research sources also increases the value of the current study as it fills an existing gap in the GCC countries in relation to social media usage by women in modern times.

However, in the face of all these limitations the researcher succeeded in securing 30 interviews which provided substantial primary data for this study. Those who ultimately took part in the interviews provided comprehensive answers. They showed a high level of cooperation in providing detailed answers to all questions.

5.14. Directions for Future Research

For any future research in this direction it would be important to keep the following points in mind.

- Khaleeji women are taking part in social and political issues but they are still not aware of the process in which they are involved. They are not introspective about what they are doing.

- Majority of these women do not think that the use of social media can be a precursor of any social or political change in their countries. One proof of this observation is that most of these women informed the researcher that they do not take part in online opinion polls. This attitude shows a lack of social and political commitment.
- It can be said that this study is a kind of pilot study on this topic. Future research could expand the sample sizes, types of women included and the range of questions to be asked.
- At present the interview questions were limited to broad generalizations about the use of social media. In future the questions would have to be more specific with the orientation of eliciting maximum information from the participants.
- The topic of social and political participation through social media is too broad and general. More specific research is required for exploring different fields of interest for Khaleeji women and how they are using social media.
- This study did not include how Khaleeji women are increasing the awareness about their countries among other people. More specific research can be conducted about women's efforts to erase doubts and fears about the Khaleeji women's situation in GCC countries.

5.15. Conclusion

This study is the first one of its type because the use of Twitter by the Khaleeji women to bring about social and political change has not been studied in detail so far. This study could set the path for further exploration of the use of other social media platforms used by the Khaleeji women. The study has relevance to the fields of mass communication, social change, use of information technology, and social demographics in the GCC region. The study is also significant from the perspective of the effectiveness of women empowerment policies implemented by GCC governments. This study has shown that the first phase of social and political change, namely the awareness of the issues, has already started due to the use of social media by Khaleeji women. The study has also shown how Khaleeji women are at different stages of social and political self-awareness. They have discovered a unique solution for raising their voice about social and political issues without violating the social and religious character of the Arab society. In this way the Khaleeji women are showing how social and political change can be achieved even by “speaking from behind the veil.”

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Appendix

QU-IRP Research Ethics Approval



Qatar University Institutional Review Board QU-IRB

March 10, 2015

Ms. Amna A. Al-Hamad
Masters Student
Qatar University
Tel.: + 974 66000741
Email: aa1208921@qu.edu.qa

Dear Ms. Amna Al Hamadi

Sub.: Research Ethics Review Exemption / Masters Project
Ref.: Project titled, "Khaleeji Women's Political and Social Participation through Social Media"

We would like to inform you that your application along with the supporting documents provided for the above proposal, is reviewed and having met all the requirements, has been exempted from the full ethics review.

Please note that any changes/modification or additions to the original submitted protocol should be reported to the committee to seek approval prior to continuation.

Your Research Ethics Approval No. is: **QU-IRB 410-E/15**
Kindly refer to this number in all your future correspondence pertaining to this project.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'K. Alali'.

Dr. Khalid ALAli
Chairperson, QU-IRB

