

تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي: مساحة لحقوق المرأة في الكويت

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ملخص: تؤدي تكنولوجيا الاتصالات والمعلومات ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي دوراً مهماً في أغلب مجالات حياة الإنسان. وتوفر القدرة على تعظيم قدرة الأفراد، في حين تقدم مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي الفرصة لتحسين أنشطة أصحاب العمل. وباعتبار النساء من ضمن المجموعات التي تكافح من أجل نيل حقوقها، فإن مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي تتيح للنساء إمكانية الاستفادة من قدرتها على التواصل.

هناك العديد من الباحثين الذين يرون أن تكنولوجيا الاتصالات والمعلومات تعد عاملاً إيجابياً في تمكين المرأة من نيل حقوقها، والوصول إلى حقوق متساوية. هذه الدراسة تبحث تأثير تكنولوجيا الاتصالات والمعلومات ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي في توفير حقوق متساوية للمرأة في دولة الكويت. الفجوة الرقمية والوعي ودور مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي هي العوامل التي سيتم بحثها في هذه الدراسة. ستبحث الدراسة أيضاً الشروط المطلوبة لتمكين المرأة من نيل حقوقها.

المصطلحات الأساسية: تكنولوجيا الاتصالات والمعلومات، مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، حقوق المرأة، الكويت، الوعي، تمكين المرأة.

ICT and Social Media: Claiming Spaces for Women's Rights in Kuwait

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Abstract: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the social media play an important role in almost all areas of human life. ICT offers the potential to empower individuals, while social media provide the channels to enhance employer's activities. As they struggle to gain their rights, women are among the many groups who can benefit from using ICT and social media. Many scholars believe that ICT can be a positive factor in the process of women's empowerment and gain of equal rights. This study examines the impact of ICT and social media on fostering women's rights in Kuwait. Digital divide, awareness, and the role of social media are the factors that will be focused on. The research will examine the requirements for women's empowerment on Micro and Meso levels. The findings show little evidence that ICT has a positive impact in this direction, but more collective efforts are needed to remove negative attitudes toward women and eliminate the glass ceiling to help women be part of decision-making processes and promote more women's leadership.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Women's Rights, Women's Empowerment, Massmedia, Kuwait, Social media.

Introduction

With the appearance of ICT, women were pioneers of learning and implementing this new technology to obtain their recognition in the society. ICT and social media are the tools that took women to the next

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stage of reducing cultural, traditional, judicial, and legal obstacles. The next challenging mission for women is to remove the glass ceiling and become part of decision-making processes. Internet literacy paved the way for the empowerment of women by allowing them to freely express and discuss their civil rights in cyberspace. Issues such as sexual harassment, human rights abuses, and political voting, which cannot be freely debated locally can be openly discussed in cyberspace (Miladi, 2010). A report by the European Parliament describing the situation of women in the Gulf States concluded that women's status had improved, but not to a satisfactory level, and that was due to the conservative religious, social and cultural norms that limited women's rights (Seikaly, Roodsaz, & Egten, 2014). However, Kuwait remains the most liberal country in the region in legislating rights and empowerment in the public sphere compared to other Gulf States.

In the early years of Kuwait, women had a restricted role outside the home in society. Their role was limited to teaching the Holy Quran and basic Arabic language, helping to educate many male and female Kuwaitis, but their role was not fully recognized due to cultural and traditional factors (Kazi, 2011). With the establishment of the State of Kuwait, women were constitutionally granted equal education that helped many women obtain all levels of education, and women became well educated among the Kuwaitis. Women's education was an important factor for gaining recognition and equal rights. Many women became teachers, writers, businesswomen, and scientists, but their role was not fully recognized until the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. The government recognized their role during the invasion and started to implement new laws that granted women more civil, judicial and legal rights (Nasir, 2008; The Times, 2015).

This research study analyzes the current literature about women which was collected from NGOs' reports, women's rights activists, Kuwait Statistical Bureau, UN Gender Index, World Economic Forum, and the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI). A comprehensive review and analysis of the existing literature was completed in order to obtain theoretical insights and to determine the effect of ICT and social media on women's empowerment and on their role in decision-making processes. Only little research has been done on the relationship between women's usage of ICT and women's efforts for empowerment. One example of such research was an

article written by Viju Mathew (2010) which shed light on the barriers confronting women's entrepreneurial growth and use of ICT in the Middle East, with special reference to two Gulf States. Another article written by Shahper Vodanovich, Cathy Urquhart, Maha Shakir (2010) addressed the question: How do the beliefs and values of Islamic culture affect the perception of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), as experienced by female Emirati ICT workers in the UAE?

Historical Background:

With the establishment of the State of Kuwait, women were eager to obtain all levels of education. In 1960, only six women obtained a bachelor's degree from Egypt and one woman earned a Master's degree from the USA. When the first public university was established (Kuwait University) in 1966, there were only 38 female students enrolled. Today, female students comprise 70% of all the students enrolled in Kuwait University (Al-Mughni, 2010; Central Statistical Bureau, 2014). In Kuwait University, 286 (25.8%) faculty positions are held by women (Central Statistical Bureau, 2014). Although the movement for women's rights has a long history in Kuwait, women did not call for their social and political rights forcefully until the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. In 1994, the first woman (Professor Faiza Al-Kharafi) was appointed President of Kuwait University. In the same year, the first Kuwaiti woman (Nabila Al-Mulla) was assigned the position of an ambassador. Metle (2002) indicated that Kuwaiti women were negatively influenced by the existing traditions and culture. In their efforts to gain political rights, Kuwaiti women faced many setbacks. Even when the late Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed issued a decree in 1999 that allowed women to run for parliamentary election, the National Assembly, with a majority of Islamist MPs, overruled the decree. Several women activists raised appeals to the Constitutional Court to challenge the election law that prohibited women from standing for the National Assembly, but all such appeals failed. It was only in 2005 that they obtained their first political rights: voting and running for the National Assembly. Forty-three years after a constitution that promised equal rights for all, Kuwaiti women finally achieved full political rights by a majority vote in the Kuwaiti Parliament.

The first election featuring female candidates and voters was a municipal election held in April 2006. A month later, an unscheduled parliamentary election had more than twenty female candidates but, as

occurred again two years later in yet another unscheduled election, none was victorious. In the third unscheduled parliamentary election, which took place on the fourth anniversary of the passage of the women's rights law, four women were elected to parliament on 16 May 2009 (Shultziner & Tetreault, 2011). In the same year, and for the first time, a woman became Minister of Planning in Kuwait. In 2009, the first batch of female cadets of the Institute of the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Science graduated. In October 2012, women were allowed to apply for positions as attorneys, which could lead them to become judges, a position that had previously been denied to them. In 2014, 22 Kuwaiti females became the first Kuwaitis to be appointed as public prosecutors, paving the way for women to become future judges (Izzak, 2014). In 2015, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women ranked Kuwait 80 with one woman minister (6.7%) out of 15 ministers (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT):

ICT refers to the technologies that provide access to information through the Internet, wireless networks, smartphones, and other communication tools communicating in real-time with others through social networking programs, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, instant messaging, and video-conferencing in an environment known as the 'global village' (Christensson, 2010). Many scholars believe that ICT, especially social networking tools, such as Twitter and Facebook offer women new ways to raise their voices and address themselves to the public (Dashti, Al-Abdullah, & Johar, 2015; Elnaggar, 2007; Miladi, 2010; Skalli, 2006). Many studies have tackled the impact of ICT on women's rights, but very few studies have addressed the impact of using ICT on promoting women's rights in the context of Islamic Middle East countries (Shirazi, 2012). In political processes, ICT can contribute in three stages: (1) obtaining information about specific political issues, (2) engaging in deliberation between citizen and government, citizens and their representatives, and citizen and citizen communication, and (3) participation in decision making either by enhancing or re-invigorating participation in political issues (Oates, 2003).

The multitasking functions of smartphones provided an effective tool for mobilization and socio-political participation (Shirazi, 2012).

ICT enhanced the concept of citizen journalism, especially among women, to stimulate discussions of news in the form of text, audio and video, giving people the opportunity to express their feelings about cultural, political, and economic matters as well as entertainment and sports. It also helped close the gender digital gap by showing women playing an effective and efficient role in the society through engaging in public discourse (Shirazi, 2012). ICT became a public sphere for many women and a tool toward mobilization for change.

Many Arab governments realized the positive relationship between women and economic growth and made positive progress in eliminating some legal, political, social and educational barriers that hinder women from achieving economic opportunities. However, in order for women to break the glass ceiling and be part of the decision-making processes, women's issues, such as social and cultural norms, discriminatory laws, and exclusionary economic policies, must be addressed seriously (Coleman & Abdelgadir, 2015). The Kuwaiti government is eager to eliminate these legal and social obstacles by reducing illiteracy among females, providing equal education, ICT and Internet usage, and making social and legal reforms (Al-Hamli, 2013). As Al-Hamli (2013) stated:

Today, Kuwaiti women occupy nontraditional leading positions in the fields of technology and communications that enable them to be part of the decision-making process and to act flexibly and independently to realize their ideas and aspirations, and to enrich the economic landscape of a changing world (p. 222).

Research Methodology

Studies of ICT development should be systematic, detailing assumptions to test hypotheses and substantiate conclusions (Gurumurthy and Chami, 2014). This is important for gaining a more detailed understanding of when and how women use ICTs to promote their voice and influence. In this research, we are seeking to test the impact of women usage of ICT on gaining empowerment. An impact, as defined by the international standard ISO14001: 2004, is: *“Any change to the environment, whether adverse or beneficial, wholly or partially resulting from an organization's environmental aspects”*, where *“environmental aspect”* is defined as: *“Element of an organization's activities or products or services that can interact with the environment”*.

A semi-qualitative assessment approach has been used in this research to describe and evaluate the impact of using ICT on the empowerment of Kuwaiti women. The factors taken into account to establish impact significance include awareness, digital divide, and glass ceiling. The question of ICT impact on women empowerment elicit several questions: Is there a gender digital divide in Kuwait? How can Kuwaiti women benefit from the social media to empower themselves? What is the level of women awareness of ICT impact on their empowerment?

The impact assessment used in this research is two fold. The first focuses on surveying the main social media tools to observe the women presence there. The second is done through a series of interviews with women's rights activists. Several research papers support the assumption that ICT usage empower women social status. Therefore, the hypothesis of this research would be as follows:

H: The usage of ICT tools enhances women's social empowerment

Women's Rights in Kuwait:

In his Critical Discourse Analysis of the relationship between discourse and power, Van Dijk (2001, pp. 358-362) indicates five discourses in which power difference and social inequalities occur: (1) mind control: influencing the formation and change of mental models and social representation; (2) public discourse: access to or control over the public; (3) media discourse: biased, stereotypical, sexist or racist images in texts, illustrations, and photos; (4) political discourse: enactment, reproduction, and legitimization of power and domination; (5) ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, nationalism, and racism discourse.

Some of inequalities identified by Van Dijk (2001) are applicable to Kuwaiti women although major progress has been achieved regarding gender equality in Kuwait. Besides receiving the same political rights as men, women in Kuwait have experienced the greatest gains of many Gulf countries in terms of their economic participation. The proportion of women participating in the workforce has increased by 5% since 2003. Kuwaiti women formed 27.4% of the total labor force in 2011, and 43.3% of Kuwaiti employees (Central Statistical Bureau, 2013).

At present, Kuwaiti women play a significant role in their country's development. They have more choices than women in some of the

neighboring countries. Kuwaiti women can practice as lawyers, own and manage their own businesses and work in sectors where they have male colleagues (Kazi, 2011). Kuwaiti women are not only employed in typical female occupations (78% of teachers, for example) but they also represent 52.6% of Kuwaiti medical doctors, 55.9% of lawyers and economists (Kazi, 2011). Table (1) summarizes human development statistics related to gender for Kuwaitis.

Table 1
Human Development Statistics Male vs. Female in Kuwait

	Total	Kuwaitis	Female	Male
Population	41,836,658	1,291,401	658,030	633,371
Key Indicator		Rank Score	Female	Male
Gender Gap Index		113 0.646		
Economic Participation and Opportunity		105 0.608		
Labor Force Participation			45	85
Literacy Rate			95	96
Life expectancy at birth (years)			75.9	79.7
Unemployment			6,300	4,392
Ministerial positions			7	93
Women in parliament			0	50
Students in public schools			158,749	175,816
Students at Kuwait university			9,450 (31%)	21,464 (69%)
Student at Applied Public Authority			7,732 (37%)	13,050 (63%)
Graduate students			219	321
Faculty members			801	372
School teachers public schools			22,444	4,746
School teachers private schools			4,440	9,682

Source: (Abdalla, 2015; PACI, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2014a)

Here are some facts about the legal rights obtained by women:

- 1 - By the law, women over 21 years of age have access to financial services (such as bank loans) without asking for permission from their male guardians.

- 2 - Women have the full legal right to own and manage land or carry out commercial transactions.
- 3 - No legal restrictions imposed on women's freedom to access public space.
- 4 - Two women organizations (Kuwait Federation of Women's Association and the Women's Cultural and Social Society) are accredited and permitted to advocate on behalf of women against political exclusion.
- 5 - Under Article 26, women are protected against employment discrimination on the basis of gender with regards to payroll.
- 6 - In January 2013, for the first time, Kuwait began accepting female applicants for the position of public prosecutors.
- 7 - In 2012, more than half of the public-sector employees were female, but only 40 of 518 executive positions were occupied by women.

The Kuwaiti population reached 1,275,857 in December 2014 of which 626,256 were males and 649,601 females (Gulf Research Center, 2014). Despite the closeness of the numbers of males and females, males still outnumber females in government and private sectors, especially in executive jobs (Central Statistical Bureau, 2014). For example, in 2013, there were 456 males in leadership positions in government sectors compared to 36 females (Central Statistical Bureau, 2013) (see Table 2).

Table 2
Number of Kuwaiti male vs. female working in public and private sectors
as of mid-2015 and decision making positions

Gender	Government Sector	Legislators Senior Officials	Professional	Associate Professional
Male	174,453	5,799	25,754	28,089
Female	151,818	2,404	47,233	26,960
Total	326,271	8,203	72,987	55,049
Gender	Private Sector	Legislators Senior Officials	Professional	Associate Professional
Male	47,867	1,727	1,156	19,465
Female	45,328	669	576	16,719

Cont. Table 2
Number of Kuwaiti male vs. female working in public and private sectors
as of mid-2015 and decision making positions

Gender	Government Sector	Legislators Senior Officials	Professional	Associate Professional⁷
Total	93,195	2,396	1,723	36,184
Position				Women
Minister				1 ⁽¹⁾
Deputy minister, undersecretary and assistant undersecretary, supreme court and constitutional court judge				5
Presidents, managing director, board members, senior vice president, ambassador, (banks, universities, medical institutions, industrial, commercial and investment firms, government departments)				8
Vice presidents, assistant vice president, senior regional division managers (banks, universities, medical institutions, industrial, commercial and investment firms)				12

Source:(Abdalla, 2015; PACI, 2015)

In 2012, Kuwaiti courts issued two landmark rulings outlawing legally-sanctioned discrimination against women in the judicial and educational sectors (Human Rights Watch, 2012). On 3 February 2013, the Kuwaiti Emir issued a decree granting monthly allowances to widows, divorced women, and married women of 55 and over. The National Assembly passed a series of amendments that gave women additional housing, work, and family benefits previously denied to them under existing laws. The amendments provide female citizens working in the public sector with an increase in family leave benefits, and housing subsidies enjoyed by male citizens were extended to widowed and divorced female citizens (UNHCR, 2012). Kuwait ranked 46 in the 2013 Human Development Index (out of 187 countries), with a score of 0.814.

Although women in Kuwait have achieved much progress in their

¹ The number of women keeps rising and falling each time the new government form. Currently, there is only one female minister

rights, women still suffer from injustice in many areas (al-Mughni, 2010). There are still many Kuwaitis (male and female) who hold negative attitudes regarding women's role in the society, especially among Islamic fundamentalists. Although Kuwait's constitution recognizes the principle of equality among its citizens regardless of gender, a number of laws and regulations discriminate against women. There is gender discrimination in housing rights. Housing rights offered by the government are restricted to married men. Kuwait's laws and policies still treat women as dependents of men rather than individuals with equal rights and responsibilities. In the past, divorced and widowed Kuwaiti women were entitled to receive only low-budget houses, built as part of special housing projects. Single Kuwaiti women are not eligible to receive low-budget houses and receive only a rent subsidy. Housing rights involve a large number of Kuwaiti women not covered by the current housing care program. As of July 2015, there are 35,600 divorcees, 26,082 widows, 230,183 women married to non-Kuwaitis, and 3,633 unmarried women aged 40 and above (PACI, 2015).

In another example of gender discrimination, Kuwaiti women cannot transfer citizenship to their children if they were married to non-Kuwaitis. The citizenship law confines the right to transfer citizenship to men only. There is also a restriction on women's freedom to travel. Although women have the right to obtain a passport and travel without the permission of a male family member, a husband is still entitled to impose a travel ban on his wife at the immigration authorities.

Women's Empowerment and ICT in Kuwait:

ICT has become an indispensable part of our daily lives as we work and communicate through social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter and use smartphones to send and interact with multi messages. With its massive capabilities, ICT offers human rights activists many opportunities to document abuses, build evidence, raise awareness, and publicize and mobilize support around women's rights issues. Increasingly, smartphones have been used to record current events in real time with photos and videos. This was the case in the various popular uprisings and social movements that have been taking place across the globe in the last few years. Matar (2007) noted:

New forms of media, particularly transnational satellite broad-

casting and the Internet, are providing new spaces for diverse and critical views of contemporary life in the region and putting forward diverse role models from across the political, social, economic, and religious spectrum, as well as expressing diverse opinions on issues pertaining to everyday life (p. 513).

Several studies have addressed the impact of online communication and networks on the public sphere in Islamic countries (Hoff, 2005; Kort, 2005). In this regard, Miladi (2010) noted that more and more women in the Arab world are blogging and discussing topics that are considered locally taboo, such as sexual harassment, human rights abuses, and political voting; thus social media has become a desperate alternative for women's freedom. Such freedom of expression would not have been possible through the regular channels of official media that are controlled by the government. Social media platforms also appeared to contribute to political participation of both males and females (Hao, Wen, & George, 2014). Social media provide a faster, cheaper and wider reach of coordination and cooperation among already networked groups (Brillon, 2013).

In January 2011, Facebook and Twitter went from being simply engaging social diversions to become engines of political change that ended decades of Arab authoritarianism (Altman, 2011). Facebook and Twitter spurred political change in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria (Anderson, 2011; Owais, 2011). The popularity of Facebook in the Arab world is constantly increasing. However, in 2015 WhatsApp became the most preferred social media channel in the Arab world (41%), and Facebook remains the most used social media channel (87%) (ArabSMIS, 2015).

All across the region, governments, NGOs, groups, and individuals are utilizing social platforms to impact their societies politically, culturally, and socially. Statistics released in May 2011 by the Dubai-based company Spot On show that 36 million Arabs are Facebook users and the Gulf States and Egypt dominate the top five positions in terms of Twitter users and volume of tweets. The Arabic version of Facebook is adding one million new users each month. There are now more Facebook users in the Arab world than newspaper readers. It is not just the young people signing up. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, almost 70% of Facebook users are over 25 years of age.

According to Global Internet Maps, Kuwait registered an Internet penetration figure of 75.5%, ranking it 29th in terms of global Internet penetration. Fixed-broadband connections are at most affordable prices in the Gulf region (International Telecommunication Union, 2014). With its 4 million population, Kuwait had 3 million Internet users by the end of 2014, and 6.5 million mobile subscriptions with 212%, having the highest mobile penetration in the Middle East region (Mideast Times, 2014). In terms of social networking, Kuwait has the most Twitter users per capita (Report, 2014) and comes third (10%) after Saudi Arabia (40%) and Egypt (17%) for the number of tweets in the Arab World, and the highest rate of Twitter penetration of any Arab country with 11.4% (Arab Social Media Report, 2014). Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (50%) count for half of the Arab world Twitter user population. Males remain the dominant users of Twitter in Kuwait with 64%, while women account for 36%. For Kuwaitis, the most used social media channel is WhatsApp with 84%, followed by Facebook 75%, and Twitter 41% (ArabSMIS, 2015). In Kuwait, enthusiastic young people organized episodes of protest centered on political and civil rights using Twitter. Social networks play a vital role in encouraging democracy and change in countries throughout the Middle East. Over the last few months, Kuwait's public prosecution, based on police complaints, has ordered the detention of tens of Twitter users for allegedly insulting the Emir. Few young women were among the detainees. Whether their opinions align with those of the minority or the majority, women no longer fear to share their opposing views in cyberspace with the general public (Dashti et al., 2015).

Kuwait has some of the most politically active bloggers in the Arabic blogosphere. They discuss international affairs, economic issues, and ethnic minority issues. Many of them discuss issues of women's rights (Etling, Kelly, Faris, & Palfrey, 2010). According to Rahbani (2010), online media technology played a strong role in enabling women to discuss and present their views freely on different issues, on equal footing with men, creating new opportunities and challenges for women. Although social networks such as Twitter and Facebook were intended to be social communication tools, their use has been extended to several domains, and they have also been used for political purposes. According to McClurg (2003, p. 449) this "social interaction creates opportunities for individuals to gather information about politics that allows them to

live beyond personal resource constraints, thereby supporting the political activity of many people". The substantial opportunities for collaboration available to Middle Eastern citizens through Facebook and Twitter make these social media tools exceptionally powerful, leading to the potential for political change (Ghannam, 2011). Social media played an important role in enhancing the political awareness in the Arab countries, especially during what has been known as the Arab Spring (Al-Fdahli & Al-Saleh, 2015).

The Internet in general and social networking in particular, brought in a new era for women's freedom of expression. It became the space for many women, especially in Third World nations that have not yet recognized women's civil rights to express their ideas freely in cyberspace. Many scholars have emphasized the role of ICT in empowering oppressed groups to raise their voices (Sutton & Pollock, 2000).

The Internet service was available to all Kuwaitis at the end of 1992. Since then, Kuwaiti women used the Internet access to empower themselves in both their civil and political lives. Internet usage has increased among young women and is accessible for many of them at home, in offices, and in public cafes. The Internet has provided Kuwaiti women with a forum to express their views and freely communicate with others on a variety of issues. Since early 2011, when the social media spread widely in Kuwait, women have used them to raise their voice demanding equal rights with men. Women in Kuwait used many social media tools to address women's rights in public. There have been many social campaigns through social media evoked by women to put pressure on decision makers, especially MPs, to change the laws that restrict women's rights.

Empowerment is a concept that links individual strengths and competencies, stimulating proactive behavior toward social policy and social change (Rappaport, 1984). The term empowerment is defined as people having the ability to understand and control themselves and their environments, expanding their capabilities and horizons and elevating themselves to greater levels of achievement and satisfaction (Wilson, 1996). When applied to women, empowerment is viewed as a process that enables women to gain access to the decision-making processes and instances of power (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Pillai (1995) points out that women's empowerment is an active multidimensional process that

enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. For Sikoska & Kardam (2001), empowerment is a process of transformation that leads to change. Similarly, Green (2008) notes that the ultimate aim of women's empowerment is to redress the gender imbalances created by patriarchy and reform social relations.

Moane (2003) identified three interlinked, but non-linear, stages in the empowerment process. First, the intrapersonal or micro stage of empowerment resides within the woman; it is deeply personal, historical, cultural and social (Micro level). Second, according to developmental psychology, the woman can, through her intrapersonal development, better recognize and understand her relationships within her family and community and begin to redefine these too (Meso level). Third, understanding and integration of the intrapersonal and interpersonal elements of empowerment lead to an understanding of the structural, social, cultural, and political elements that are involved in women's oppression, which women can then challenge and change (Macro level). Macro level empowerment seeks to influence and alter structures, ideologies and societies to be inclusive of women in equality with men in all areas of life. In Critical Discourse Analysis, the Micro stage is using language, discourse, verbal interaction and communication, while Macro level is a conceptual stage of having power, dominance, and inequality, and the Meso stage works as an intermediary between the two stages (Van Dijk, 2001).

To assimilate the role of ICT into Moane's description of the empowerment process, we can think of a woman's empowerment through ICT as commencing with her ICT training at the micro level (Green, 2008). At the micro level, women acquire the skills to use ICT, which increases their confidence, general knowledge and knowledge of women's rights and gender issues. Macro level engagement with ICT involves women individually and collectively e-mailing and petitioning Members of Parliament to exercise political will and express political opinions to achieve the objective of women's empowerment (Green, 2008).

Reviewing the literature, we can identify three requirements for ICT to empower women in their struggle for rights. First, access to ICT is a necessary condition for women's empowerment. Access to ICT can be measured by availability of computers, access to Internet services, and social networking applications. Second, ICT empowerment can be

measured in terms of ability to build and improve awareness among women. Awareness of women's rights is another major requirement for ICT to empower women. Without such awareness, ICT is useless. Social media can play a role as an awareness tool between women to learn more about their rights, exchange ideas, and find means that can be used to achieve these rights. Third, at the macro-level, the regulatory environment must be conducive to innovative approaches to ICT deployment. Women need to master the social and political strategies to influence the current decision making processes and help eliminate the glass ceiling.

In applying the empowerment concept and Moane's (2003) stages to Kuwaiti women, we assume that ICT and social media can be powerful catalysts for political and social empowerment for Kuwaiti women and for the promotion of gender equality.

At the Micro level, unlike women in many other developing countries, Kuwaiti women do not suffer from the digital divide. Statistics show that computers are equally available to both male and female Kuwaitis. Likewise, access to the Internet is widely available everywhere in Kuwait. In a study of students at Kuwait University (Alqattan, 2009), it was found that the average time at which female students had access to computers and the Internet was higher than male students. Almost every house in Kuwait is equipped with the latest Internet services. The great majority of Kuwaiti females have one or more mobile phones, and most of them have smartphones such as iPhone, Galaxy or BlackBerry, where the Internet is embedded (AL-Fadhli & Dashti, 2014).

At the Meso level, which is represented by awareness, the situation is completely different. It is widely believed that the main role in improving women's rights awareness relies on women's NGOs. Kuwait witnessed the establishment of NGOs that defend women's rights, such as "The Kuwaiti Union of Women's Associations" and "Women's Cultural and Social Society" (1963). The Kuwaiti Society for Advancement of Arab Children was established in (1980). Kuwait also allowed *de facto* existence, rather than legal existence, to some human rights NGOs. Women's NGOs not only play a vital role in women's movements in Kuwait, but also do so across the whole Gulf region. They helped create educational opportunities for many women, influencing the government to enhance women's rights and form a bridge between grassroots women and the states, and thus creating a platform for social change (Seikaly et

al., 2014). Although NGOs are active in face-to-face communication, they are still not fully active and communicative online. Most women are active online individually rather than collectively.

The number of women occupying positions on NGOs' board of directors remains low compared to the number of males (Kazi, 2011). At present, 16 NGOs from a total of 115 NGOs have women presidents. Nine societies are totally dedicated to women's affairs. Some of these are Islamic and others are secular NGOs. Islamic societies have largely social and charitable functions to help the needy, train housewives, and offer community services, along with other religious activities (Kazi, 2011). Only four of those women's societies are oriented toward activities and projects related to the social sector. Women's NGOs have engaged in very few activities in relation to women's rights.

In an interview, one women's rights activist, Dr. Khadeja Al-Mahmeed, expressed deep regret about the failure of women's NGOs to meet their responsibilities to manage social and political campaigns for women's rights. Al-Mahmeed believes that lack of awareness among women and the rich environment are the main reasons behind this weakness. Likewise, human rights activist and member of Group 29, Dr. Mona Al-AbdRazaq, believes that lack of awareness and social culture are two main reasons. Another member of Group29, Rana Al-Khalid, identified three main factors for the weakening of organized women's rights movements. According to Al-Khalid, the first factor is wealth, or financial wellbeing, which has to a large extent dampened the economic drive that is usually one of the key drivers of any emancipation movement, including that of women. In her opinion, the second factor for the weakness of the women's NGOs is the increase in conservative societal tendencies over the past 30 years, which undermines popular support for calls for further rights. Al-Khalid's third factor is a macro-level factor, but one of great importance, which is the nascence of Kuwaiti democracy.

At the Macro level, although Facebook women users constitute 29% of the total of Kuwaiti users, and about 36% of Kuwaiti women have Twitter accounts (Arab Social Media Report, 2014), there are very few examples that can be cited of ICT adoption empowering women's rights in Kuwait. One of those examples is an active campaign on Twitter launched by Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis calling for a right

to transfer citizenship to their children. The Twitter account dedicated to this campaign was called @kkff1300 with 3,790 followers as of 28 February 2013, but currently the account is suspended.

In terms of blogs, although there are hundreds of Kuwaiti blogs, only a few of them address women's rights issues. There are very few instances of women's NGOs exerting pressure on decision makers to give women more rights. It seems that Kuwaiti women's NGOs mainly confine their activities to seasonal in-house forums and lectures. Despite the availability of all types of ICT in Kuwait, only two out of nine women's NGOs have a homepage on the Internet. Some NGOs do have some social media accounts such as Facebook, but they are not active. One NGO has a Facebook account and the last posting was in February 2013. However, the NGOs that are not fully dedicated to women, whose CEOs are women, have been more active in social media; one example of such NGOs is the Thoughts and Creativity Club led by Haifa Al-Sanousi.

By building their collective power through different types of social movements, women can convert their demands for women rights into a political force for change that cannot be suppressed by their families, communities and governments. While resistance or rebellion by individual women is easy to squash, resistance by large numbers is not easy to suppress (Batliwala, 2012). Currently, women are active individually in social media, but not collectively.

Glass Ceiling:

The term "glass ceiling" was first introduced in the Wall Street Journal by a businesswoman explaining a new phenomenon of women's inequality that prevents women and minorities from reaching the highest levels of the business world regardless of their accomplishments and merits (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Out of the six states of the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC), Kuwait (1%) and Qatar (4%) have the lowest unemployment among females (Women Matter 2014, 2014). The Pearl Initiative Report shows that Kuwait is the highest (14%) among the GCC for women holding positions as legislators, senior officials and managers (Pearl Initiative, 2015). The Kuwaiti female labor force estimation in ICT was 14% of the adult population in 2012 (Pederson & Partners, 2015).

However, Dr. Moudhi Al-Humoud, the former Minister of

Education, believes that the glass ceiling for women has always existed and never vanished, but the Emir and the government could break it in some sectors (like granting women's suffrage), but there is still a long way to go (Roy, 2015). On the contrary, the Speaker of Kuwait National Assembly, Mr. Marzouq Alghanim denied the existence of a glass ceiling in Kuwait saying, "Women are in all leadership positions in Kuwait. They serve in the cabinet, the parliament and also in other leadership posts, both in the government and the private sector" (Hyun-kyung, 2015). Regardless of the progress women have made in Kuwait, women do face a glass ceiling, as they "occupy less than three percent of the leadership positions" (Al-Sabah, 2013, p. 81).

Currently, women account for less than 1% of top management positions (executive committees and boards) in the Gulf States compared with European countries with 10% on executive committees and 17% on boards. Furthermore, women's representation in the labor force is about 32%, less than European with 51%, and among Gulf States, Kuwait comes third with 43% after Qatar (51%) and UAE (47%) due to the higher participation rates among expatriate women (Wilkie, 2015).

Regardless of equal opportunity given by Islamic Sharia to men and women, Islamic fundamentalists still hold negative attitudes about the role of women in the society (Al-Mahmeed, 1994). Al-Sabah (2013) wrote:

Islam grants women some individual rights, but political machinations in the region sought to sew interpretations of Islamic Sharia Law as a tool for oppression, to suit hidden agendas, rather than satisfy deeply buried misogyny (pp. 39-40).

The two social factors, family and patriarchy, remain the major obstacles against women's empowerment (Groeblacher, 2012), as well as the increasingly conservative views among some people, groups and nations which do not support women's rights. Going back to the history of women's empowerment in Islamic States, it becomes obvious that a cultural factor, not a religious factor, is the one that bars women from gaining leadership. Many women have become either presidents or prime ministers in several modern Islamic countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Turkey, while no Arab Muslim country has had a female leader in modern history. Cultural heritage with legal reality ranked Kuwait poorly at number 113 scoring 0.646 (0.00 = inequality and 1.00 = equality) on the Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2014).

Kuwaiti Law grants citizenship for children based only on the father's but not the mother's nationality, and Kuwaiti women married to foreign spouses cannot transfer their Kuwaiti citizenship to their children or to their spouses, while Kuwaiti men have the right to transfer their citizenship to their children and to their foreign spouses⁽²⁾ Kuwaiti Law still lacks specific stipulations about domestic violence against women (al-Mughni, 2010). The survey of Pearl Initiative for women in managerial and senior leadership roles across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) showed that women were personally (not in pay or power) progressing to achieve senior roles, and about 80% of the respondents felt that they were not equally recognized at the workplace, which created a glass ceiling (Pearl Initiative, 2015) (see Table 3).

Table 3
Pearl Initiative report 2015

Percent	Responds
86%	Believe that education has been vital for their career progression
80%	Feel that simply being a woman put them at a disadvantage at work
75%	Believe they do not advance as quickly as men
71%	Agree that their family has been vital for their career progression
67%	Believe that gender bias has negatively impacted their career progression
64%	Perceive that society thinks it's acceptable for married women with children to work
62%	Aspire to a management role within the next seven years
45%	Believe that a good work/life balance is feasible
34%	Wish to not sacrifice other aspects of life such as family & that we would not quit all responsibilities all of a sudden for family and children. Men are taken as risk-free without any effort (p. 28).

Abdalla (2015, p. 227) conducted a survey on women occupying executive positions and revealed that factors such as stereotyping, gender

(2) However, after the death of a non-Kuwaiti spouse married to a Kuwaiti woman, the widow can apply for her children to have Kuwaiti citizenship.

discrimination, and social exclusion created negative feelings and a 'semi-hostile' work environment for Kuwaiti women working in these positions. The study concluded that women's personal achievement in the stage of micro development (competence) helped facilitate their career advancement, while factors in meso (organization culture) and macro (legal, cultural, and social) level hindered their advancement (Abdalla, 2015).

Conclusion:

A review of the literature shows that many scholars believe that the capabilities of ICT can give a big boost to the empowerment of women in their struggle for their rights. At the same time, other studies show that women's empowerment is not an automatic result of using ICT. Kuwaiti women do not suffer from a digital divide (micro level), but have serious difficulties at the meso level (awareness), and macro level (exerting social and political pressure). There are many requirements that need to be met before expecting a successful impact. Despite their various privileges (education, finance, access to ICT and social media), there is little evidence that ICT offers women empowerment in Kuwait. This finding contradicts with the widespread assumption that ICT serves as an instrument for developing a sense of gender empowerment. We can conclude that women's empowerment is a complex process that is affected by several social, cultural, psychological, political, economic, technological and legal variables. As Kazi (2011, p. 180) concluded "In Kuwait, lobbying and pressuring decision makers are a must to induce change. More women need to occupy decision-making positions. While women in the public sector are 88%, only 8.3% of them are in leadership positions". Utilizing ICT in isolation from other variables cannot offer women greater empowerment. Therefore, Kuwaiti women should try other forms of resistance in their struggle to gain their rights, and social media can be one of those tools. It is true that women are more active online as they use various social media programs to communicate with women, but they need to be more collective in their use of social media to achieve their rights. Thus, in order to overcome the obstacles of achieving the macro stage, women need to work collectively offline and online, because changing culture, tradition, stereotype, and negative attitudes need intensive work in all stages; otherwise, women will have a long way to go to be equally part of the decision-making processes and to eliminate the glass ceiling in Kuwait.

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