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**Online lead users and social change in Arab conservative societies: the case of
Saudi Arabia**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX
SCIENCE POLICY RESEARCH UNIT

May 2016

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to this or another University for the award of any other degree

Signature: Randalah Rawas

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| CONTENTS | |
| Contents | ii |
| List of Figures | v |
| List of Tables | vi |
| Abbreviations | vii |
| Acknowledgements | viii |
| Abstract | ix |
| Chapter 1: Introduction to thesis | 1 |
| 1.1 Aim of the Study | 1 |
| 1.2 Rational of the Study | 1 |
| 1.3 Research Questions and Hypothesis | 3 |
| 1.4 Thesis Outline | 4 |
| Chapter 2: Introduction to concepts | 7 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 7 |
| 2.2 Online Community Concept | 7 |
| 2.3 Virtual Communities in Conservative Societies | 16 |
| 2.4 Lead User Theory Concept | 18 |
| Chapter 3: Internet Regulation and Social Norms | 25 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 25 |
| 3.2 General View on Internet Regulation and Censorship | 26 |
| 3.3 Definition of Censorship | 29 |
| 3.3.1 Actions exercised by organizations or government | 30 |
| 3.3.2 Actions exercised only by government | 31 |
| 3.4 History of Censorship | 35 |
| 3.5 Social Norms | 41 |
| 3.6 The Research Questions and Hypotheses | 47 |
| 3.7 Authoritarian Personality Theory and Online Lead Users | 48 |
| 3.8 The Research Framework | 55 |
| Chapter 4: Research Design | 59 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 59 |
| 4.2 Research Approach | 59 |
| 4.2.1 Mixed-Methods Approaches | 61 |
| 4.3 A Digression on Theoretical Perspective and Epistemology | 64 |
| 4.4 Research Design | 66 |
| 4.5 Research Questions | 67 |
| 4.6 Research Methodology- the Survey | 69 |
| 4.6.1 Design and Piloting the Questionnaire | 69 |
| 4.6.2 Sampling | 73 |
| 4.7 Research Methodology- The case Studies | 76 |
| 4.8 Data Analysis | 81 |
| 4.9 Ethical issues | 83 |
| 4.10 The potential contribution of the research | 84 |
| Chapter 5: The Arab World through the Internet | 86 |
| 5.1 Introduction | 86 |
| 5.2 The New Media in the Arab Islamic World | 88 |
| 5.3 Authoritarian Regimes and the Internet | 95 |
| 5.3.1 The role of online social networks in the Arab spring | 97 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Chapter 6: The Arab World: The Case of Saudi Arabia | 106 |
| 6.1 Introduction | 106 |
| 6.2 Saudi Arabia Special Status: Politics and its Ideology | 107 |
| 6.3 Saudi Arabia: Women and Social Order | 111 |
| 6.4 Saudi Arabia: Civil Movements | 114 |
| 6.5 Saudi Arabia Reforms: Different Perspectives | 120 |
| 6.6 Online Social Networks in Saudi Arabia | 124 |
| 6.6.1 Internet usage in Saudi Arabia | 125 |
| 6.6.2 Online social networking sites in Saudi Arabia | 126 |
| 6.6.3 Online collective action and Women's Right-to-Drive Campaigns in Saudi Arabia: case study | 129 |
| 6.6.4 Twitter in Saudi Arabia | 131 |
| Chapter 7: Survey Data Analysis and Empirical Findings | 134 |
| 7.1 Introduction | 134 |
| 7.2 Presenting the Survey Results | 135 |
| 7.2.1 The survey findings: Demographic and Other Characteristics of the Sample | 136 |
| 7.2.2 The survey findings: Online Experience and Behaviour of the Sample | 139 |
| 7.2.3 The survey findings: Conservative and Cosmopolitan Characteristics of the Sample Respondents | 149 |
| 7.2.4 Discussion of the Survey Results | 157 |
| 7.3 Conclusion | 164 |
| Chapter 8: The Research Case Studies | 166 |
| 8.1 Introduction | 166 |
| 8.2 How the analysis and conclusion of the data will be carried out | 168 |
| 8.3 The First Case Study: The Qomami Initiative | 170 |
| 8.3.1 Data analysis: first part | 170 |
| 8.3.2 RWA analysis: second part | 177 |
| 8.4 The Second Case Study: Mizan Initiative | 180 |
| 8.4.1 Data analysis: group 1 – first part | 181 |
| 8.4.2 RWA analysis: group 1 – second part – interviewee A | 191 |
| 8.4.3 RWA analysis: group 1 – second part – interviewee B | 194 |
| 8.4.4 Data analysis: group 2 – first part | 198 |
| 8.4.5 RWA analysis: group 2 – second part – interviewee A | 205 |
| 8.4.6 RWA analysis: group 2 – second part – interviewee B | 208 |
| 8.4.7 RWA analysis: group 2 – second part – interviewee C | 211 |
| 8.5 The Third Case Study: Hit-Her Initiative | 215 |
| 8.5.1 Data analysis: group 1 – first part | 217 |
| 8.5.2 RWA analysis: group 1- second part – interviewee A | 224 |
| 8.5.3 RWA analysis: group 1- second part – interviewee B | 227 |
| 8.5.4 Data analysis: group 2 – first part | 230 |
| 8.5.5 RWA analysis: second part | 233 |
| 8.6 Analysing the Case Studies Results | 237 |
| 8.7 Conclusion | 245 |
| Chapter 9: Conclusion and Further Studies | 247 |
| 9.1 Introduction | 247 |
| 9.2 Conclusion and major findings of the study | 248 |
| 9.3 Further Studies | 254 |

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Appendix | 256 |
| References | 264 |

List of Figures:

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|
| Figure 3.1: | Online behaviour | 55 |
| Figure 7.1: | Age | 136 |
| Figure 7.2: | Level of Education | 137 |
| Figure 7.3: | Specialties | 137 |
| Figure 7.4: | Social Networks Participation | 139 |
| Figure 7.5: | Usage of Social Networks by Years | 140 |
| Figure 7.6: | Online Activities | 144 |
| Figure 7.7: | Online Activities and Social Norms | 144 |
| Figure 7.8: | Internet Regulations | 145 |
| Figure 7.9: | Internet Law for Online Expression | 146 |
| Figure 7.10: | Views on Laws Governing Online Access | 147 |
| Figure 7.11: | Subjects Requiring Laws on Online Content | 148 |
| Figure 7.12: | Modifying Online Expression | 149 |

List of Tables

| | | |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Table 7.1: | Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement of Public opinion | 151 |
| Table 7.2 | RWA Scale and Scores | 156 |
| Table 8.1 | Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for the first case study | 176 |
| Table 8.2 | Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee A | 192 |
| Table 8.3 | Summary of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee B | 195 |
| Table 8.4 | Summary of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee A-Female | 205 |
| Table 8.5 | Summary of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee B-Female | 206 |
| Table 8.6 | Summary of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee C-Female | 211 |
| Table 8.7 | Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for Third case- interviewee A | 224 |
| Table 8.8 | Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for Third case- interviewee B | 227 |
| Table 8.9 | Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for Third case- Female interviewee | 234 |
| Table 8.10 | Comparing the RWA Results of the Case Studies | 237 |
| Table 8.11 | Society Influence and Online Attitude Comparison | 241 |

Abbreviations

| | |
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| ACPRA: | Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association |
| CERN: | European Organization for Nuclear Research |
| CSR | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| HCI | Human Computer Interaction |
| HRFS: | Human Rights First Society |
| ICT: | Information Communication Technology |
| ISU | Internet Services Unit |
| ITU: | International Telecommunication Union |
| KKF: | King Khalid Foundation |
| KSA: | Kingdom of Saudi Arabia |
| MENA: | Middle East and North Africa |
| NGO: | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NITL | The National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education |
| RAN: | Rights Activists Network |
| RWA: | Right Wing Authoritarianism |

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Now... a different journey will start.

Abstract

This research examines the social use of the Internet at the level of specified online users in conservative Arab societies, who are called in this thesis online lead users. These specified lead users are the ones who are influential in shaping the innovation processes due to their leading role of practice in finding solutions to their needs and problems they have experienced before the emergence of online social networks such as the lack of public sphere and independent civic organizations etc., which led them to utilize the Internet as their new public space to pursue their goals through their online initiatives and collective actions to apply the social change they seek for their societies under the existence of society social norms and censorship.

The research has been carried out as mixed-method study, the gathered data done through means of quantitative and qualitative methods, and the chosen country to conduct the research were Saudi Arabia. A survey questionnaire link were distributed among the targeted online lead users in the country under study, and the author chose three cases form the country under study for the qualitative part. The research sought to examine to what extent society social norms and censorship influence online lead user's expression and behaviours, and their effect on the formulation of their online activities and collective actions, and analyzing the characteristics of online lead user's.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it contribute to the gap in the literature on the use of Internet in conservative Arab societies by providing insight into the roles that social norms play in influencing online behaviour, particularly in communities that are seeking to discuss social issues or mobilize collective action, and analysing online lead users characteristic to distinguish between conservative and cosmopolitan ones using the Right-Wing authoritarian measurement.

Chapter 1: Introduction to thesis

1.1 Aim of the Study:

In the course of communication technologies development, the social phenomenon arising from the use of these technologies has been a fertile area of research. One focus of research has been the nature of online communities and their role, particularly through their lead users, in the societies in which these users are members.

This research examines the social use of the Internet at the level of specific Internet users, with the aim of examining how they are utilizing this technology to address social reform in the context of conservative societies. The specific users considered are lead users in online social networks, those who are influential in shaping the innovation processes due to their leading or being at the leading edge of practice in finding solutions to their needs and problems. The needs and problems lead to a further focus on lead users seeking some form of social reform. Hence, the main goals of this research were to analyse the challenges facing this group of lead users in their societies and their aspirations for the development of civil societies. In addition the thesis addresses several ways in which social reform are being pursued (e.g. raising awareness on specific social issues, such as health and domestic violence).

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it contributes to closing the gap in the literature on the use of Internet in conservative Arab societies by providing insight into the roles that social norms of offline communities in these societies play in influencing online behaviour, particularly in communities that are seeking to discuss social issues or mobilize collective action. On the one hand, the role of social norms of these societies may be found to be influential in preventing social changes in the Arabic Islamic world; on the other hand, it might be perceived as inconsequential or irrelevant by those individuals engaged in particular online activities.

1.2 Rationale of the Study:

This thesis was motivated by the need to expand the understanding on how online lead users in conservative Arab Islamic societies are using modern communication technology and online social platforms in relation to existing social norms, official censorship and self-censorship, as well as how these uses relate to social reform in their

societies. In order to understand this, it was necessary to examine the role and influence of social norms, religion, and Internet regulation on individual's everyday lives. The research was also motivated by the desire to understand to what extent the aforementioned aspects might affect their online behaviour, and whether online networks give people in these societies what they lack in their offline life to achieve the level of social awareness and reform they want to have in their societies.

The study has been carried out in the context of Arab conservative Islamic societies. It has been argued that, in conservative societies, new information technology and the Internet's social networks offer a new and alternative public sphere in which individuals may share their needs, interests, and pursue the goals of satisfying those needs. To implement this study, one of the most conservative countries in the Arab region, Saudi Arabia, was chosen as the context in which to examine online lead users, to understand the extent to which they are utilizing this new alternative public space to raise awareness in their society through their collective actions under existing society social norms, religion, and the existing Internet regulation and censorship methods.

For the purpose of analysis, different theories were examined for their applicability in ordering the research and analysing its results. These theories were needs and gratification theory as drawn from mass communication studies, as well as capability theory. The reason for choosing these theories from media studies and related social sciences is that they provide a useful framework for examining at the micro level whether online social networks in conservative societies are able to serve as an alternative public space. The 'public space' as conceived here extends beyond the political domain that Habermas focusses upon to consider individuals' expression of their own identity, their interaction and discussion of sensitive issues, such as politics and religion, and the extent to which they are able to question authority and elites in their societies. These more micro or individual influences have an important influence on whether individuals are able to practice their social rights using communication technology and thereby to create a public sphere in a Habermasian sense.

Through survey and case studies methods, this thesis examines this micro-foundation of the creation of a public space in the context of the society of Saudi Arabia. A survey of lead users was conducted and analysed to provide contextual information about the nature of individual constraints – both internal to the user and external in the society.

This contextual information was enriched by a series of case studies [Qomami initiative, Mizan initiative, and Hit-Her initiative], which followed the experience of lead users in attempting to take specific actions in the online context with reflections on the constraints and opportunities they perceived, as well as their capacity to bring online interaction into offline change.

1.3 Research Questions and Hypothesis:

The principal hypothesis in this research is that even though the challenge of conservative societies' social norms might have an effect on lead users of online communities, they have and express aspirations to utilize ICT and the Internet with its social networks to attempt to address social reform issues through raising online social awareness or initiating online collective actions.

The research hypotheses that will be tested are:

- social norms of conservative societies inhibit or channel the formulation of social reform issues to be addressed online;
- social norms of conservative societies influence the expression of those forms of social reform that are not inhibited or re-directed at the formulation stage
- Because of their effects on the formulation and expression of social reform, official censorship and social norms influence what social reform activities are attempted online.

Through addressing these, the thesis will be able to analyse how and to what extent conservative societies social norms are affecting online lead user's attitudes, their contribution and production, in addressing social issues online.

The key questions used to assess these hypotheses are:

1. What characterises the lead users of social media pursuing social change through online collective actions and campaign in conservative Arab societies including their predisposition to follow social norms and official rules imposed by Internet regulations and censorship?

2. How does the predisposition of lead users to follow social norms and official rules affects their online behaviour- their formation and expression of social reform and their online activities?
3. Regarding online expression, how do lead users pursuing social change through collective actions and campaigns in conservative societies conduct their activities online in terms of their perception of:
 - social norms;
 - official policies 'censorship'.

1.4 Thesis outline:

This thesis contains nine chapters, the first chapter has introduced the thesis, its aim, rationale and the research questions.

Chapter 2 presents the foundational theories that the research project was built upon: the concept of online communities in order to choose the space in which the study is applied, and the concept of lead users in order to choose the intended sample to apply the research questions and hypothesis.

Chapter 3 this chapter is dedicated to enriching the context and theoretical foundation for the research project. It starts with an overview of Internet regulation and the history and definition of censorship, it also introduces use and gratification theory, the capability theory and how these are used in this thesis in relation to self-gratification and freedom of expression with the notion of human social rights.

The chapter then moved to explore the role of social norms of societies in enforcing control and restrictions on communications and people's behaviour, and how it applies to online communications.

The chapter also introduces the concept of the authoritarian personality, as this is one of the features that depicts the nature of online lead users under study, where distinguishing between conservative and cosmopolitan users of online social media is the main feature in analysing the survey and case studies results.

The chapter ends by restating the research hypothesis and questions.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methodology. The research used mixed methods approaches to collect the data, where an online survey was administrated in order to collect general information on online lead users in the conservative society under study, which enabled the author categorize the respondent: their demographical, information, background their knowledge and opinions.

The second method for collecting the data was done through 3 case studies chosen from the country under study, to provide more insight on online expression through lead users online collective actions and campaigns to spread awareness in order to apply the social change they pursue in their society.

Chapter 5 this chapter is first of two parts: this part is dedicated to review the background on the Internet usage in the Arab world, the role of online social networks in the Arab spring under authoritarian regimes, present some of the studies done on the use of online social networks in Arab countries on certain issues such as Tunisia and Egypt revolutions.

Chapter 6 this chapter is the second part and it is dedicated to give insight to the readers on the country under study Saudi Arabia, where the case studies for this research were chosen. The chapter presents the country politics, ideology, women and social order, civil movements conducted by Saudi youth. The chapter concluded with the use of online social networks in Saudi Arabia by presenting a study conducted on online collective actions on women's right to drive campaign.

Chapter 7 presents the survey results, the demographical and geographical characteristics of the respondent, their knowledge on online regulations and their behaviour online, and finally the RWA analysis for their characteristics. It is worth to mention that due to the small sample size the research results are only applied to the sample and not to be generalized to the country population or the Arab world, but at the same time it's a starting point to further studies to explore more and apply comparisons between other Arab countries.

Chapter 8 presents the three case studies chosen to answer the research third question. The cases were chosen to assemble narrative drawn from the lead users own words, which helps the author analyse the results and draw the research conclusion.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis with discussion of the implications and recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 2: Introduction to concepts

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter will introduce the two main concepts that this research will be built upon: online communities and lead users.

2.2 Online community concept:

In sociology, the term ‘community’ is a fundamental and far-reaching concept, and correspondingly sociologists have not succeeded in “achieving consensus on what exactly meant by the term” (Jankowski, 2006, p. 59). Jankowski also opines that the term is elusive and vague and, over time, has lost any specific meaning.

The term was first discussed in the work of the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) when he introduced the concepts *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The former has a sense of community and refers to the bounds and relationships between individuals in the society that “felt to be culturally homogeneous and strongly influenced by institutions such as the church and family” (Jankowski, 2006, p. 60), and the latter means society, a group of people and their relationships that is “calculative and contractual” (Jankowski, 2006, p. 60). For practical purposes, a society can be defined as a group of individuals abiding by certain institutions having values and cultural attributes that differentiate them from others, as well as tying its members into a wide range of relationships. These relationships are now often described as social networks, although with much less concern with the institutions defining behaviour, but rather taking the idea that relationships are strengthened or weakened depending upon the frequency and intensity of the interactions within the network.

Locality and consideration of a relationship are factors that “characterize the whole of society, of communion, as well as community” (Jankowski, 2006, p. 60). In sociological studies, lifestyles are determined by locality, and sociologists also consider social class and stage in the life cycle as influencing lifestyle (Jankowski, 2006, p. 60). Fernback (1995) integrates locales into the definition of the term community as a “set of social relationships that operates within specified boundaries or locales, with an ideological component that refer to a sense of common character, identity or interests” (Fernback & Thompson, 1995).

Communication can be considered to be part of any community that often defines and organizes the social interaction between individuals. The new communication technologies of the Internet age can be associated with changes to the sense of community as defined above; these changes may be one of the reasons for difficulties in defining the concept.

Boorstin (1978) argues that communication technology creates ties to bind nations into a new type of community, which he refers to as the Republic of Technology, a type of community that, in his opinion, brings nations together without any boundaries and decreases the differences between individuals [cited in (Fernback & Thompson, 1995)]. Using new forms of communication technology, the term community is employed to speak of groups of individuals interacting online or in 'cyberspace' (the proximities and concentrations that create a territory or in the online world), as Douglas Schuler (1996) explains:

“the old concept of community is obsolete in many ways and needs to be updated to meet today’s challenges. The old or traditional community was often exclusive, inflexible, isolated, unchanging, monolithic and homogeneous, where a new community-one that is fundamentally devoted to democratic problem solving-needs to be fashioned from the remnants of the old” [cited (Jones, 1997, p. 10)].

In his opinion, the new communities have different levels of awareness with principles and certain goals to be achieved (Jones, 1997, p. 10). In assaying the political nature of these new communities, numerous scholars cite the notion of the public sphere, which was introduced in Habermas (1962).

The public sphere – as Jürgen Habermas defined it – is a “sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relation in basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour” (Habermas, 1989, p. 27). In other words, a public sphere is a “domain of our social life where such a thing as public opinion can be formed where citizens deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion to express and publicize their views” [cited in (McKee, 2005, p. 4)]. Based on this

definition, the public sphere is a place, regardless of that place's location, where people form a public opinion on political, social, and economic matters to reach for agreements on them, to achieve certain goals. Reasoned opposition to constituted authority or to the policies and decisions of such authorities are examples of the process occurring in this public sphere.

The public sphere theory introduced by Habermas was mainly formed to explain the structures of that sphere in relation to the state, where the public sphere was considered as a medium between the government and the public in order to discuss and negotiate with the government, as Habermas describes it (1974), "The public sphere mediates between society and state where public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion that accords with the principle of public information which once had to be fought for against the monarchies and which made it possible to exercise democratic control of state activities" [cited in (Khan, et al., 2012, p. 44)]. In other words, a public sphere can be considered as a means for deliberative democracy, where the public, with their institutions such as civil societies, are able to oppose and question the authorities, which in other words can undermine the authority in some cases.

Thus, according to the function of the public sphere described above, any public sphere should have different features so they can be considered as a public sphere. As they are considered to be an intermediary between the public and the state to exchange information in a democratic state represented by several agencies, they should occupy the physical and virtual world of media in order to form a sort of dialogue where each participant or citizen can interact freely with each other. This is expressed by one scholar as:

"a public sphere that has democratic significance must be a forum, that is, a social space in which speakers may express their views to others and who in turn respond to them and raise their own opinions and concerns. The specific ideal forum is too often taken to be a town meeting or perhaps a discussion in a salon, coffee shop or union hall, in which participants are physically present to each other in face-to-face interaction" (Bohman, 2004, p. 133).

These democratic forum public spheres must also provide an atmosphere that guarantees freedom of expression to every individual, where they "must manifest

commitments to freedom and equality in the communicative interaction in the forum. Such interaction takes the specific form of a conversation or dialogue, in which speakers and hearers treat each other with equal respect and freely exchange their roles in their responses to each other” (Bohman, 2004, p. 133).

The third feature of the public sphere is related to the idea of face to face communications versus other forms of communication where

“communication must address an indefinite audience. In this sense, any social exclusion undermines the existence of a public sphere. This indefiniteness is required even of face-to-face interaction, since a conversation is public not simply because it could be heard by others but to the extent that it could be taken to address anyone” (Bohman, 2004, p. 134).

Some scholars have argued that the media is a platform for the public sphere in democratic countries since it

“possesses certain rules, which the players must play according to, in order to be taken seriously and to be efficient. Through deliberation, the public sphere is able to raise issues, provide arguments, specify interpretations and propose solutions. In the public sphere, demands from social movements and interest groups in the civil society become translated into political issues and arguments and articulate manifest, reflexive public opinions” (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 2).

On the other hand, when it came to advocating the Internet as a new public sphere, scholars, especially Habermas, have argued that “interaction on the Internet only has democratic significance in so far as it undermines censorship of authoritarian regimes. In democratic countries, however, the Internet serves only to fragment focused audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics” (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 2). This argument is a core point in this research as it relates to the question of whether, and if so, to what extent online lead users can pursue social reform in their conservative societies given the existence of censorship and restrictive (as opposed to permissive) social norms.

Habermas claims also that “within established national public spheres, the online debates of web users only promote political communication, when news groups

crystallize around the focal points of the quality press, for example national newspapers and political magazines” (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 2).

As the public sphere can play a crucial role in societies, Habermas and other scholars formed “normative theories which describe how the public sphere should be structured in order to ideally fulfil this role” (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010, p. 144). The strongest normative theory is the participatory model, which means that “public communication should strive for the widest range of relevant topics, evaluations and arguments, and should strive for the widest possible empowerment and extensive popular inclusion of different actors” (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010, p. 144). The representation of civil societies is one vital inclusion to the public sphere, as they are involved in everyday personal experience, where Habermas (e.g. 1998) “considers them especially autonomous (autochthon) as they are involved in ‘small, non-bureaucratically organized grassroots associations’, therefore free from the burden of making decisions and from the constraints of organizational maintenance and closer to personal, everyday experience” (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010, p. 144).

Based on the above model, Gerhards and Neidhardt (1993) identify three kinds of fora within the public sphere, and have sorted them hierarchically as follows: “(1) the elaboration of their organizational structure, (2) their openness, i.e. the degree to which they allow citizens to participate, and (3) their societal impact” (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010, p. 144).

The three fora are:

- the everyday public sphere,
- the public events where people meet, for example, in meeting halls, and
- the mass media.

Although the first two fora reach more people and have certain impact on them, the mass media forum is considered to have a more significant impact on society because it reaches a diverse audience. This is due to their “full-fledged technical and organizational infrastructure, and they are dominated by specialists like journalists, experts and collective actors, whereas ordinary citizens are usually relegated to the (passive) role of receiving, plus the mass media organizes substantial parts of societal self-observation and opinion formation” (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010, p. 144).

Thus, mass media is considered to be one of the regulated fora, hence, with the advent of communication technologies and the spread of the use of the Internet with its different social networks “many political scientists, media researchers and other scholars, as well as political activists, believe that this new medium has the potential to fundamentally change societal communication and that, in a nutshell, Internet communication makes a better public sphere than have the old mass media” (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010, p. 145).

One of the expectations of the spread of the new media is that the Internet might include different actors, especially of online lead users and those from NGOs, who use to have limited access to resources especially access to old media such as television. Moreover, due to the different nature of the Internet it is expected that an alternative evaluations and interpretations of the information will be available online, hence, the Internet might democratize the public sphere and engage the citizens more in politics (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010, p. 145)

With these expectations for the Internet, online lead users and NGOs will adapt the role of gatekeepers online where traditional journalists may play a lesser role in this new sphere:

“structure of Internet communication is fundamentally different from that of the old media – one in which gatekeeping journalists and mass media institutions seem to play a less important role. Hence, senders may find it easier to present themselves and their issues online. Actors with fewer resources, such as small NGOs or individual citizens, may be able to present information online in a way that is significantly more cost-effective than getting into television, radio or print media” [cited (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010, p. 145)].

This argument is a core issue in the research that is further explored through the analysis of the chosen case studies, where the interviewed lead users have explained more about how using online communities to promote their initiatives and awareness in their society can play a role in societal change.

Dahlberg (2001) has argued that there is an extensive deliberation in civil society (Khan, et al., 2012, p. 45) with “an enormous amount of web publishing being undertaken by individuals and civil society organizations that facilitate public

deliberation. There are thousands of civic activist groups that use the Internet to draw attention to particular issues to spark deliberation at local, national and global levels” (Khan, et al., 2012, p. 45). This new perspective of the public sphere can open new ways of investigating how these online activities may have stirred dialogues about certain issues such as political and social reform, under the existence of official censorship and society social norms.

With the advent of information and communication technology, and the wide spread of the Internet, the notion of the public sphere could play a critical role in implementing participation theory; this would be by allowing a wide range of actors to be involved in this new public sphere with the widest range of topics to be discussed online. On the one hand, according to Dahlberg (2001) “One can observe an increasing number of liberal individualist online initiatives that promote the use of the Internet to enable the individuals to access a plethora of political information and express their views directly to elected representatives” [cited in (Khan, et al., 2012, p. 44)]. On the other hand, according to Papacharissi (2002) “anonymity online helps one to overcome identity limitations and communicate more freely and openly, thus encouraging a more enlightened exchange of ideas” [cited in (Khan, et al., 2012, p. 44)].

Online communities and social network platforms may be examples of these new public spheres in the age of the Internet. Online communities are used to refer to a group of people who tend to use Internet technology in order to communicate with others sharing the same interests, knowledge, and perspectives, and, often, a similar sense of identity derived from gender, ethnicity, nationality, religious belief and similar factors (Preece & Krichmar, 2005). Whether they are alternative public space or not may depend on the society and the nature of interactions in these online communities and social networks.

Van Vliet and Burgers (1987) argue that each community contains elements such as social interactions, a shared value system, and a shared symbol system. These elements are present in distinct realms of community – social, economic, political, and cultural [cited (Fernback & Thompson, 1995)]. According to this argument, and based on the definition by Preece, communities in cyberspace include those four elements that constitute any physical community. Hence, individuals engage in online communities to find a space to share their interests and perspectives for many reasons. This space may coincide or be dislocated from the physical space in which individuals are located. For

example, freedom of speech may be limited in their physical communities, or a lack of civic organizations may stimulate the formation of groups interested in societal reform. It does not follow, however, that individuals seeking to 'work around' existing restraints, such as restrictions of freedom of speech, would necessarily form platforms in which a rational and deliberative discussion of issues is conducted. Such fora may simply be used for 'venting' frustrations and anger at the state of the current order.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that such online communities have the potential for deeper forms of engagement. The term online communities was first used by the pioneers in online community development and research, for example Roxanne Hiltz (1985) and Howard Rheingold (1993) (Preece & Krichmar, 2005). They used the term "to connote the intense feelings of camaraderie, empathy and support that they observed among people in the online spaces they studied" (Preece & Krichmar, 2005). Rheingold, for example, in his book (2000) *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, introduced his own personal experience in online communities in the WELL, the first online community, and he explained that these communities are "cultural aggregation that emerges when enough people bump into each other often enough in cyberspaces. A virtual community is a group of people who may or may not meet one another face to face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks" [cited (Preece, 2000, p. 11)].

Whittaker and Isaacs (1997) identified general attributes that he argued were the essential reasons to belong to a community: "shared goals, interests, needs, activity, strong emotional ties, shared resources, and reciprocity of information, support and services among members, shared context of social conventions, language and protocol" (Gupta & Kim, 2004, p. 2680). For sociologists, online communities mean "physical features and the strength and type of relationships" (Gupta & Kim, 2004). For example, Romm and Clarke (1997) define online communities as "group of people who communicate with each other via electronic media such as the Internet and share common interests unconstrained by their geographical location, physical interaction or ethnic origin" (Gupta & Kim, 2004).

From a technological viewpoint, online communities refer to the software supporting them as "listservers, newsgroups, bulletin boards and multi user dungeons" (Gupta &

Kim, 2004), which help in supporting communication in that community (Gupta & Kim, 2004).

2.3 Virtual Communities in Conservative Societies:

The term community has been redefined through history by sociologists, but it can be said that the essence of the community, either in an offline or online context, is often taken to be characterized based on different features such as size, location and boundaries, also on shared beliefs, the principles of free speech, equality and open access to information, and services implementing these principles that are delivered to groups of people who choose to join or participate (Preece, 2000, pp. 348-349). It is useful to confront this ‘model’ or expectation of the nature of online community with its instantiation in contexts where these precepts are not taken for granted or universally shared. This thesis examines the micro level of lead users in conservative societies participating in online communities and social networks platforms in order to understand how they utilize this information communication technology of the public sphere, and their role in applying to specific efforts at social reform in their societies.

The thesis seeks to understand the ways in which the social use of new technologies may be inflected in contexts that vary from those pertaining widely in much of the industrialized world and, in particular, in societies that are ‘conservative’.

Conservative societies referred to in the context of this research are what Anger Fog (1999) described as a “Society which sticks to old traditions and life forms and does not tolerate change”, where custom and norms are followed in every aspect of an individual’s life and any deviation from the norm will be sanctioned (Fog, 1999, pp. 108-109). An important issue in the current research is whether these sanctions are modified or limited in the online world. Conservatism is considered as an ideology, where ideology is “a system of ideas concerned with the distribution of political and social values and acquiesced in by a significant social group” (Huntington, 1957, p. 454).

As every society is marked by the interaction relationships among its individuals, there are three phenomena that can be observed, as Kendall & Cary argued in their study (1964). The first is

“there arise practices, beliefs, ideas, standards of judgment or rules which to a large extent prescribe the permissible form of inter-action among individuals and groups, the second is certain norms, values, practices, rules, standards of judgment come, little by little, over a period of time, to be regarded as more or less established, that is, to be accepted as a heritage from the past, while the third is the heritage from the past, no matter how carefully guarded, reveals itself as subject to change and innovation. The change and innovation may be unintended; that is, not consciously sought by any of the members of society or groups within society” (Kendall & Carey, pp. 407-408).

The society under study in this research is considered to be one of the most conservative Islamic societies in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia, where values, norms, traditions, and juridical systems stems only from religion, the Islamic religion in this context, to the extent that it is hard to distinguish between what is religious and what are norms or traditions, or even tribal customs. The Islamic religion is integrated in all aspects of life, in the political and social system, the education system, and government institutions. Therefore, the notion of conservatism in this society is considered to be an ideology of life, in other words a totalitarian ideology, where conservatism in that sense is expected to be practiced from each member of society. The conservative heritage is passed from generation to generation, through different agencies in society, such as family, educational system, and religious institutions such as mosques, without questioning or examining their beliefs and values.

A society that lacks any political parties and takes decisions without any citizen vote can be classified as non-democratic. In such a regime it is likely that there will be a lack of independent civil institutions, limits on expression and assembly (including associations of many types). In addition, individuals' behaviour may be measured by religious rules, to the extent that these values are internalized, they may govern how others view people's behaviour.

Confronted with a technology that provides opportunities for expression and association, such a society may rely on the social norms that people have internalized in order to suppress or moderate exercise of these capabilities, or, more likely, explicit institutions of censorship may be developed.

Some scholars argue that “innovativism threatens social stability because norms are more easily broken and because more resources are spent on trying out new ideas” (Fog, 1999, p. 108), while others argue that the advanced technology may have the unanticipated effect of rendering obsolete a series of prescriptions, and may also necessitate the development of new rules, values and norms of behaviour for the regulation of interaction between individuals and groups (Huntington, 1957, p. 408).

In this study, these arguments are revisited through investigating whether a particular group of technological active individuals, the early adopters or ‘lead users’ of a new technology offering opportunities to create new forms of expression and new types of association, are facing society challenges such as official and self- censorship in their efforts to question social norms such as women rights or health awareness. How these individuals view their use of online social networks is the essence of the investigation. For example, do they view these social networks as an alternative space to practice their perceived ‘rights’ of free expression and collective actions as a basis for the social change they seek for their society. Alternatively, might their views regarding their efforts to influence social norms be seen as consistent with social norms and largely independent of any perception of a ‘right’ to self-expression or freedom of association? In the simplest terms, might these lead users be seen as conservative or liberal in their behaviour online? The preceding rationale leads to the first of the research questions to be addressed in this thesis:

- What characterises the lead users of social media pursuing social change through online collective actions and campaign in conservative Arab societies including their predisposition to follow social norms and official rules imposed by Internet regulations and censorship?

2.4 Lead user theory concept:

The main focus of this work is on social use of the Internet at the micro level of Internet users, with the aim of examining how they are utilizing this technology in addressing

social reform in the context of conservative societies. The focus will be on individuals that are 'lead users' in online social networks, as these individuals are often influential in shaping innovation processes and because they may be harbingers of future solutions to social needs and problems.

The role of users in innovation has been highlighted by many studies and stated in general terms by Von Hippel. He is one of the scholars who, in the 1960s and 1970s, began to trace the origins of innovative ideas and technologies, focussing on individuals who are ahead of emerging markets or technology developments. He defined them as "members of a user population having two distinguishing characteristics: 1- they are at the leading edge of an important market trends and so are currently experiencing needs that will later be experienced by many users in that market, 2- they anticipate relatively high benefits from obtaining a solution to their needs and so may innovate" (Von Hippel, 2005, pp. 23-24).

Everett Rogers (1962), in his examination of the processes of technology diffusion, explains that adopting new ideas is a difficult process; hence the diffusion of innovation can take a long period of time (Rogers, 1983, p. 1). Therefore, diffusing innovation requires a kind of special communication among individuals in the social system: this type of communication is

"a process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding. This definition implies that communication is a process of convergence (or divergence) as two or more individuals exchange information in order to move toward each other (or apart) in the meanings that they ascribe to certain events" (Rogers, 1983, p. 5).

This kind of innovation diffusion is one way to create social change in societies, what Rogers (1962) defined as "the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system. When new ideas are invented, diffused, and are adopted or rejected leading to certain consequences, social change occurs" (Rogers, 1983, p. 6). In order to apply social change through innovation diffusion through communication channels, individuals with good knowledge and experience should be involved; those individuals are the lead users referred to in this research. Rogers identified the elements for the process of information exchange that involves:

“(1) an innovation, (2) an individual or other unit of adoption that has knowledge of, or experience with using, the innovation, (3) another individual or other unit that does not yet have knowledge of the innovation, and (4) a communication channel connecting the two units. A communication channel is the means by which messages get from one individual to another” (Rogers, 1983, p. 17).

The notion of lead users has been a primary focus of management and research attention, their importance relying on their innovative process as they are part of the creative consumer phenomenon. Berthon (2007) identifies them as those individual consumers who adapt, modify or transform a service or goods, as they will face the market before the other regular consumers and will benefit from being significantly ahead in order to obtain solutions to satisfy their needs (Berthon, et al., 2007, pp. 40-41). Since the recognition of this phenomenon in the 1970s, there has been a rapid increase in its use to define methods for collaboration between users and producers in the development of new products. The concept has been progressively extended by scholars, to be applied to applications beyond business-to-business setting (Marchi, et al., 2011, p. 351).

Lead users, those who make early use of such technologies and on whom others rely for opinions about the value and application of new technologies, play a particular role with regard to new information and communication technologies. Because these technologies are malleable and evolve in response to use (or there are incentives to adapt and change them to those responsible for designing and implementing the technologies), lead users are influential in setting the pace and establishing the tone of public opinion with regard to these technologies.

In this thesis the lead users studied are not only leading in adopting new technologies but also in making use of these technologies for social reform. The fundamental question motivating this investigation is whether these lead users see themselves as operating in a consistent way with conservative values, or whether they are testing and questioning the limits of the conservative society. A basic purpose of the research of this thesis is to examine which of these two characterizations is more accurate and can be empirically substantiated.

Although the Internet itself is not particularly new in the context studied – Saudi Arabia – what is new is the social network technologies that the Internet enables. The origins of the Internet in the research environment has led it to have particular features,

“There is the technological evolution where research continues to expand the horizons of the infrastructure along several dimensions, such as scale, performance, and higher level functionality, the operations and management aspect of a global and complex operational infrastructure, there is the social aspect, which resulted in a broad community of Internauts working together to create and evolve the technology, and there is the commercialization aspect, resulting in an extremely effective transition of research results into a broadly deployed and available information infrastructure” (Leiner et al., , 2009, p. 23),

which provide numerous ‘affordances’ – several of which are aligned with the precepts of free expression, freedom of assembly, and the fluid definition of communities of interest.

In this sense, the introduction of the Internet in the conservative society context is an ‘alien’ technology in more senses than its foreign origins, and the affordances provided by social network platforms are perhaps the most ‘exotic’ or challenging in this context.

As this research is conducted in the context of conservative society, and the analysis of the lead user sample population will be based on distinguishing between those users who are conservatives and those who tend to be more liberal, or what they will be called in this research, cosmopolitans, it is necessary to introduce the concept of the two terms used to analyse the results.

In any society, it is possible to distinguish two types of groups: those who tend to perceive themselves as the defenders of society traditions and roles, and those who seek change or reform. Where the former are the conservatives, as introduced in the first part of this chapter, those who regard themselves as “defenders of a tradition or orthodoxy which, though it has been reduced to a mere remnant, they continues to insist upon as the tradition or the orthodoxy appropriate to that organization or activity, in other words, these who resist or fight the change” (Kendall & Carey, 1964, p. 410). The latter are those who “advocate changes and innovation in the society heritage” (Kendall & Carey, 1964, p. 408).

John Skorupski in his work on *The Conservative Critique of Liberalism* indicates, while defining the term neo-liberalism, that conservatism can stand for different sets of meaning:

“a tough-minded version of liberalism that places emphasis on free exchange, a small but strong state, private initiative and individual responsibility. And there is the practical, down-to-earth attitude which we can call practical conservatism. Practical conservatives see virtue in keeping the show on the road – conserving and when necessary refreshing institutions and habits that work, whatever they are. And finally, there is conservatism in the sense of an attitude that sees continuity, community, tradition and hierarchy as organic elements of a good society, and gives ethical grounds for doing so” (Skorupski, 1989, p. 1).

In this research we are concerned with the third definition of conservatism when referring to conservative online lead users, those who believe that holding on to the existing heritage is a way of living within good society, or, in other words, a virtuous society.

On the other hand, the other part of the lead user spectrum consists of those whose values and outlook may be said to be ‘liberal’, in that they take certain values such as freedom of expression and association as ‘rights.’ Skorupski distinguishes between two levels of liberalism:

“At an intellectual level liberalism is a set of ideas that hang together as a moral and political philosophy; at the political level it is a political ethos that provides a framework for policy. At both levels it is a broad church with left and right wings” (Skorupski, 1989, p. 1).

Policy framing liberalism is what is referred to as

“liberal order, and it comprises (i) equal liberty for all citizens, of which an essential element is the right to act as one chooses subject to a law that protects the equal rights of others; (ii) a distinctive and special protection of liberty of thought and discussion, and (iii) the entrenchment of these principles, either in an effective legal framework that codifies them in basic laws or constitutional

safeguards guaranteeing equality of every citizen under law, or (perhaps) in a common law tradition that effectively does the same” (Skorupski, 1989, p. 1).

With these bases in mind, a philosophical liberalism was formed, which can be considered as a principal tenet that conservatism has rejected. These three tenets are:

“(i) Individualism in ethics; this is the view that all value and right reduces to value of or for individuals, or to the rights of individuals. (ii) A doctrine of equal respect for all human beings based on the belief that all are equally capable of self-governance. (iii) A doctrine of liberty of thought and discussion based on belief in the unrestricted autonomy of reason – that is, the rational capacities of individual people – as the sole and sufficient canon of objective truth” (Skorupski, 1989, p. 2).

Rights such as freedom of expression or association are derived from these tenets.

As these tenets of liberalism are not only very wide, but also very difficult to observe at the level of individual belief in an analysis of online lead users in the context of Saudi Arabia, applying the concept of cosmopolitanism is more likely to be acceptable for the context of this research¹.

Although there may be some basis for debate about the extent to which such values are implicit or inherent in some of the cultural traditions of Saudi Arabia or other Islamic countries, this thesis proceeds on the basis that these values are largely external or ‘foreign’ to Saudi Arabian culture, and thus involve interaction with other parts of humanity. Individuals that have such relationships with the external world are commonly referred to as being more ‘cosmopolitan’, and this term can then be employed to characterize a group of individuals. These individuals may not be ‘liberals’ in a strict sense, i.e. advocates of the centrality of values such as freedom of expression as basic human rights. However, their world view and behaviour is influenced by liberal values.

¹ It is worth mentioning that there are some important tensions between these tenets and religious beliefs within Islam where concepts of the collective are given precedence over the individual, and that a complete subscription to liberal tenets is therefore likely to be culturally bound to a context in which individualism has precedence.

Immanuel Kant argued 200 years ago that cosmopolitanism is being a citizen of two worlds (Beck, 2002, p. 18), where the cosmopolitan perspective becomes an alternative imagination. This means “alternative ways of life and rationalities, which include the otherness of the other, and puts the negotiation of contradictory cultural experiences into the centre of activities: in the political, the economic, the scientific and the social” (Beck, 2002, p. 18).

With the advent of the technology, especially the Internet, some have argued that

“unanticipated effect of rendering obsolete a series of prescriptions and may also necessitate the development of new rules, values and norms of behaviour for the regulation of interaction between individuals and groups. Or changes may be the long-term cumulative result of what, at any given point in the past, were imperceptible modifications of existing rules or norms” (Kendall & Carey, 1964, p. 408).

This unanticipated effect can be considered as a result of being a cosmopolitan user even in their own societies, where users of online networks for example, who are the subjects of this research, can have and pursue a different way of living, changing some of the existing norms and heritage if it does not conform to their own perspective, while at the same time maintaining their own identity. Some have called them *Cosmopolitan Patriots* (Appiah, 1997), where cosmopolitanism in this sense means “rooted cosmopolitanism, having ‘roots’ and ‘wings’ at the same time. So it rejects the dominant opposition between cosmopolitans and locals as well: there is no cosmopolitanism without localism” (Beck, 2002, p. 19).

With the flow of information guided by the advent of the technology and the use of the Internet, individuals now are free to choose

“among competing traditions and heritages, were the various cultures of the world were beginning to interpenetrate each other” (Beck, 2002, p. 18), as Friedrich Nietzsche once describe this process as ‘the Age of Comparison’, where every “idea of every culture would be side by side in combination, comparison, contradiction and competition in every place and all the time” (Beck, 2002, p. 18).

In this research, the characteristic of the lead users under study will be analysed to distinguish between those who are conservative in their use and existing online, and those who are more cosmopolitan in their online activities and collective actions, their pursuit in applying social reform under the existence of their society social norms and censorship.

Chapter 3: Internet Regulation and Social Norms

3.1 Introduction:

Studying what technology can afford to individuals and societies, different issues are involved including human interactions, illiteracy, political, economic and social institutions and so forth. The differences between democratic and non-democratic countries with a conservative ideology give these studies other interpretations.

The concept of affordance was first introduced by the psychologist James J. Gibson (1977), who defined the concept as “a specific combination of the properties of its substance and its surfaces taken with reference to an animal” (Jones, 2003, p. 108). The term then was introduced to the HCI community through the work of Donald Norman’s *The Psychology of Everyday Things* (1988), where he defines affordance as “the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used. A chair affords (is for) support and, therefore, affords sitting. A chair can also be carried” (McGrenere & Ho, 2000, p. 180).

The new information communication technologies affords a variety of choices for users, therefore, more opportunities are available to them. With new fundamental properties available, users tend to explore new ways to satisfy their needs, and in some cases utilize what these technologies afford them for certain purposes. The aim of this study is to analyse the role that online lead users in conservative societies play in order to apply social reform through their use of online social networks to promote awareness on certain social issues, and how they utilize the possibilities these networks afford to support their causes within their society.

One feature of a conservative society is resistance to indiscriminate and potentially challenging expression or association. This resistance involves explicit and implicit forms, and the most readily identifiable of these forms is ‘censorship’ as a form of governance or control of free expression using the authority of the state. However, in a conservative society, the state may not be the only form of such control. At every level of society there will be individuals who sympathize and agree with the motives for control – and their views will be directed at those that act in ways that these individuals feel or believe to be disruptive or destructive to the social order.

Censorship in such contexts is not only about the exercising of state authority, it is also about the influence of peers, family members, and others in the community to which lead users might be connected. Finally, in a conservative society, many individuals internalize some of the beliefs and values of the larger society, and thus they may act with a sense of disquiet or unease with themselves giving rise to questions such as, is what I am doing actually moral and proper, am I being disrespectful, who am I to question my society? This self-questioning may lead to self-imposed restrictions that are also consistent with the broader meanings of the word censorship, self-censorship. This section examines the broad and multi-level phenomenon of censorship, beginning with an historical perspective and extending to cover the levels of the state, society, and individual as practitioners and advocates of censorship.

3.2 General view on Internet regulation and censorship

The rise of the Internet has expanded dramatically since it was privatized in the 1990s (Castells, 2009, p. 61), alongside the fast development of digital switching and transmission capacity in telecommunication networks. According to Castells (2009), different factors have contributed to the diffusion of the Internet including: “regulatory changes, greater bandwidth in telecommunications, the diffusion of personal computers, user-friendly software programs that made it easy to upload, access and communicate content, and the rapidly growing social demand for the networking of everything, arising both from the needs of the business world and from the public’s desire to build its own communication networks” (Castells, 2009, p. 62). In addition, there has been an increase in “capacity of connectivity and bandwidth in successive generations of mobile phone, Wi-Fi and WiMAX networks and multiple applications that distribute communicative capacity throughout wireless networks, thus multiplying points of access the Internet” (Castells, 2009, p. 62).

As the diffusion of the Internet has proceeded, researchers have become more aware of the different affordances that the use of this technology offers to individuals and societies. The way in which people interact with this technology and its properties is one area of technology affordances studies. For example, social affordance focuses on the “possibilities for action that people offer one another and on the role of other people in pointing out new affordances” (Gaver, 1996). In conservative societies this new technology offers a diversity of opportunities to the people as an alternative space in

which to be engaged with other individuals, either from their own culture or from different ones, regardless of their social norms and political system.

With this relatively new phenomenon, some might argue that it offers a new environment in which new behaviours might emerge in the context of any society. With the focus on conservative societies in this research, the question becomes whether, and if so, how this new environment affords new behaviours and beliefs. The focus on lead users who are attempting to influence social norms outside of an online context provides a situated context for the examination of how these new behaviours and beliefs may be emerging in the context of the overall growth of Internet use.

The latest statistics show that, by the end of 2014, there will be three billion Internet users around the world (International Telecommunication Union, 2014). With this rapid increase of Internet users, the number of people and governments also relying on the use of the Internet and the wide diversity of services it offers, such as e-commerce, e-government, instant messages, emails, chatting, posting or viewing videos on YouTube, exchanging ideas and thoughts through blogs or fora or other kinds of social network and receiving immediate feedback from others, the use of search engines make it possible for people to discover different views, perspectives, beliefs and, to some extent, confront them with information that does not accord with their world view. While these are potentials, we do not actually know the extent to which many subgroups of this population are actually influenced or changing their views in response. Observation of these changes is complicated by a struggle for control of the use of these technologies.

As “information is power and control of communication is the level for keeping power” (Castells, 2009, p. 268), some actors believe that this new ICT technology and the flow of information within it around the world needs to be controlled by government. The logic here is that surveillance is necessary for protecting society, culture and norms from unwanted and harmful content on the Internet, for example pornography, banning anti-government and social activism, etc. On the other hand, people are always trying to find another way to reject or defeat the surveillance in an ongoing struggle between authorities and individuals. However, from a conservative viewpoint, the people trying to reject or defeat the system are deviants and criminals who seek to spread their

corruption to the innocent and vulnerable, or to inflame sectarian conflict that has the potential to lead to genocide.

While individuals around the world are exploiting their needs, dreams, projects, and goals online, at the same time governments are working on the development of regulatory policies to control this communication. Each government can control the flow of information online with its own policies, and they have their own regulations to control the Internet. Some might argue that these practices are limited to specific procedures, such as blocking access to some sites, and it may involve supervising the Internet with the aim of identifying and prosecuting those found guilty of specific laws or, in less legally constrained societies, persecuting those identified (Castells, 2009, p. 99). In other parts of the world, things might look different, where some governments see the flow of information and empowering the population through the Internet as a threat to their regimes (Hachigian, 2002); hence they can be more aggressive in their procedures against those perceived to be deviants.

Since the Internet was introduced, it has been perceived as a space that is free of any kind of jurisdiction and governance, a territory for “libertarians and cyber anarchists” (Thierer & Crews, 2003). Some argue that the Internet should be a space over which government has no control, where market forces and self-regulation are sufficient enough for imposing control and applying behaviour standards online. On the other hand, others argue that the Internet should not be treated differently from the real world when it comes to applying laws and control. However, in recent years the demands for Internet regulation and censorship have increased, where governments “along with assorted special interests” played a major role in this regard (Thierer & Crews, 2003, p. 3). This has resulted in the heavy regulation of the Internet. Authoritarian regimes around the globe are using methods to control and suppress the use of the Internet to maintain their power; hence they tend to block, use firewalls and filters to censor any activities or materials that might threaten their stability (Cox, 2003, p. 4).

Some would argue that as much as governments work on regulating the Internet, and seek to impose more laws and use different methods to censor online materials, individuals seek for more freedom, and always find new ways of using the online public sphere to achieve their goals.

To the extent to which this is an accurate statement, there is a continuing dilemma between governments and individuals, and in the context of this research, there is little separation between regulating the Internet and censoring it. The act of censorship has been known throughout history when it comes to printed materials and any kind of communication. With the innovation of the Internet as a new medium for communication, the act of regulation became one of the most controversial topics with different hypotheses and arguments among scholars and cyber activists. The question one could ask is to what extent the Internet should be regulated, and which aspects? To what extent do these regulations interfere with the rights of free expression and the flow of information?

The following discussion examines the nature of censorship and its history, in order to work on a censorship definition that takes in account different views on the matter, which draws on the literature background of the research.

3.3 Definition of censorship:

According to Kay Mathiesen (2008) there have been many works on the subject of censorship, yet there has been little work done to help in understanding the concept itself (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 573). To examine the influence of censorship on lead users, one of the purposes of this thesis, a clear concept of the meaning and the root of censorship is needed. In what follows, different definitions of censorship are examined in order to construct a foundation for this research, beginning with historical meanings and proceeding to the Internet age.

In historical terms and as a matter of definition, “The word censor, both as verb and noun, as well as in its various derivatives-censorship, censorious, censure-comes from the Latin *censere*, which means to declare formally, or to describe officially, or to evaluate and to assess” (Green & Karolides, 2005, p. xviii). “The origin of the term censor can be traced to the office of censor established in Rome in 443 BC” (Newth, 2010). This basic meaning of censoring is compatible to the American Library Association definition for censorship, which mean “censorship is based on the disapproval of the ideas expressed and desire to keep those ideas away from public access” (ALA, Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Q & A, [cited in (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 577)]. In the West’s Encyclopaedia of American Law, web censorship is defined as

“official prohibition or restriction of any expression believed to threaten the political, social, or moral order, which may be imposed by governmental authority, local or national, by a religious body, or occasionally by a powerful private group” (Censorship, 2005).

The Catholic Encyclopaedia defines censorship as “In general, censorship of books is a supervision of the press in order to prevent any abuse of it. In this sense, every lawful authority, whose duty it is to protect its subjects from the ravages of a pernicious press, has the right of exercising censorship of books” (Encyclopedia, n.d.). Censorship could also be defined as “the suppression of speech or deletion of communicative material which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, or inconvenient to the government or media organization as determined by a censor” (Tennoe, n.d., p. 18).

All the previous definitions indicate that the act of censorship lies under the notion of protecting, preventing public access, and potential threats. These definitions also give a general view on who practices the act of censor, which are the authorities either political or religious, who have the power to impose the rules and values in any society. This authority, in the author’s own opinion, gives the act of censorship its aura of respectability to some people in any society.

Some scholars define the act of censorship as an interference, which means that the authority in some content will suppress any communication between the author and the recipients. For example, in her work on censorship, Mathiesen describes the act of censorship as “an interference with acts of communication between consenting adults”. This stems from her Western viewpoint, where she defines the act of censorship as follows: “to censor is to restrict or limit access to an expression, portion of an expression, or category of expression, which has been made public by its author, based on the belief that it will be a bad thing if people access the content of that expression” (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 576).

Based upon these definitions, some common elements can be outlined to identify the act of censorship exercised by authorities (governments or other organizations in a society).

Actions exercised by organizations or government:

- the desire to protect or control;

- the disapproval of the material;
- interference between authors and the recipients.

Actions exercised only by government (due to government's monopoly of police powers):

- the prohibition, restriction of certain material;
- limit of access to information.

The above elements constitute the actions that can be taken with respect to 'freedom of expression', and hence to a definition of acts of censorship.

According to libertarian² principles, freedom of expression in speech needs an open environment involving an unrestricted (uncensored) flow of information between individuals in order for them to achieve their goals (Redish, 1982, p. 604). Martin Redish (1982) explains that in democratic societies the constitutional guarantee of free speech serves one true value, which he calls the "individual self-realization" (Redish, 1982, p. 604). According to Redish the term was chosen because of "its ambiguity: it can be interpreted to refer either to development of the individual's powers and abilities an individual realizes his or her full potential-or to the individual's control of his or her own destiny through making life-affecting decisions-an individual "realizes" the goals in life that he or she has set" (Redish, 1982, p. 593).

This raises questions about what goals might be served and what denied if freedom of expression is restricted. Cohen (1993) [cited in (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 574)], gives an answer to why we value freedom of expression, in which he "links our concern with freedom of speech to three fundamental interests: the interest in expression, the interest in deliberation, and the interest in information". Based on the uses and gratification theory on the studies of mass communication (Ruggiero, 2000), humans seek to communicate with each other in order to have some sort of interaction, to be engaged in a community, and to have the best information available; all of which give access to expression its value. These three elements will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

² Libertarianism is 'the pursuit of liberal principles as absolute guides to the structuring of society which diminishes the legitimacy of all collective actions that abridge an individual rights which are also defined expansively (e.g. to ownership of property and freedom of all actions that do not directly harm others)'.

According to Cohen, the notion of interest in expression is defined as “a direct interest in articulating thoughts, attitudes and feelings on matters of personal or broader human concern and perhaps through that articulation influencing the thought and conduct of others” (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 575). As humans, people tend to communicate with each other in order to have some sort of interaction. One way of satisfying this need is through the simple example of listener and the recipient, developing ideas and having some feedback on them. The second reason for the importance of access to expression, according to Cohen, is to satisfy the interest in deliberation, which means “the deliberation interest concerns our ability to revise and gain a deeper understanding of our individual and collectively held beliefs and communication” (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 575). In order to be engaged in a community, people adapt values, beliefs and norms. This act needs an access to expression that gives the opportunity to individuals to communicate and have different understanding from the one they adopt.

The last reason why access to expression is important is the fact that people satisfy interest in gaining information, which defined as “the fundamental interest in securing reliable information about the condition required for pursuing one’s aims and aspiration” (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 575). The importance of having access to information is to have the ability to communicate under the condition of having the best information available to satisfy certain needs for the individuals. In a free environment, which protects the individual’s freedom of expression for both the speaker and the recipient, access to expression fulfils each of the three fundamental interests above. This leads to a ‘gratification theory’ of communication, which libertarians argue is a basic right for every human (Taber, 1999; Ruggiero, 2000).

Within the uses and gratification theory, people tend to seek out the sources for information that best fulfils their needs, and it is assumed that people will always have alternative choices that will fulfil their needs (Smatei, 2010). In some research in the mass communication field, applying the uses and gratification theory, researchers found that the most factors for using social networks sites was “socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking and information, need of information seeking, social needs to be the most prevalent” (Park, 2009) (LaRose and Eastin, 2004) [cited in (Gallion, n.d., p. 3)].

Similarly Michael Traber argues for the fundamental need of communication as:

“It is fairly easy to demonstrate that language is part of being human. Language in action, that is communication, is an individual human need – as basic as food, clothing and shelter. Basic needs are those that are essential for our existence and our very survival. They are the very preconditions of human life. Because of this, basic human needs become fundamental human rights. While this logic is now generally acknowledged with regard to physical human needs – food/drink, shelter, clothing, perhaps in the descending order listed – the non-material human needs like language and communications are more controversial. Most people seem to survive solitary confinement, exclusion and excommunication, partly because they somehow manage to retain some sort of intentional interpersonal communication, and maintain or renegotiate a sense of longing even though they are silenced. Being silenced never quite succeeds, because nobody can deprive us of our relational nature” (Taber, 1999, p. 3).

While the above primarily deals with freedom of communication, the other line of argument offered by those favouring a ‘rights approach’ is that there is a human right to freedom of expression, which, for Taber is intertwined as “language and freedom” (Taber, 1999, p. 3). If we are not using our language in a free environment that means we are under pressure of fear and isolation, hence we lose our opportunity to communicate with each other. “The gift of language is at the same time a gift of freedom. Deprivation of freedom makes genuine communication impossible, and the first sign of repression in groups and societies is the curtailment of freedom of speech. This can be very subtle. Intimidation or the inculcation of fear, the exposure to ridicule may suppress freedom, as are the building up or maintenance of authoritarian structures that allow little or no dissent” (Taber, 1999, p. 4). In other words, human expression will be restricted, either by overt censorship as discussed above, or by social pressures that serve to curtail or restrict communication.

The rights to freedom, or specifically the freedom of choice, and hence social change, could be also explained through the capability approach, which has been pioneered and analysed by the economist Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum. In their studies, the capability approach includes different entitlements, which is also part of the human rights movement, such as “political liberties, the freedom of association, the free choice of occupation, and a variety of economic and social rights” (Nussbaum, 2003, p.

36). In Sen's work on capability, he gives a clear idea that capabilities are "freedom conceived as real opportunities" (Robeyns, 2011), which refers to "the presence of valuable options or alternatives, in the sense of opportunities that do not exist only formally or legally but are also effectively available to the agent" (Robeyns, 2011).

While the notion of rights means different things to different people, and is understood in different ways among different people, the capability approach gives "important precision and supplementation to the language of rights" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 37). For example, when talking about fundamental rights such as "political participation, the right to religion free exercise, the right of free speech" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 37), we cannot secure these rights in societies without having the capability for them to function (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 37). In other words, we cannot expect that these rights will be secured and function to the extent that people could achieve their well-being without having the capability to do so. Even if some of those rights were applied in society, without addressing them in a position of capability to function well, it does not mean that these rights have been achieved. In other words, this means that the people do not have the choice of doing what they believe in and value, to achieve their legitimate expectations.

The capability approach has two core normative claims: "the claim that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance, and that freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value" (Robeyns, 2011). "The capability approach purports that freedom to achieve well-being is a matter of what people are able to do and to be, and thus the kind of life they are effectively able to lead" (Robeyns, 2011). While the language of rights emphasize people's "choice and autonomy" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 40), the capability language "is designed to leave room for choice and to communicate the idea that there is a big difference between pushing people into functioning in ways considered to be valuable and leaving the choice up to them" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 40). In applying censorship, individual's freedom will be limited, and the suppression of people's expression will limit the capability available to them in society. Without such constraints, when the individual's freedom of expression is protected, for both the speaker and the recipient, access to expression fulfils each of the three fundamental interests above.

Limits to access to expression can be considered as an important normative question. When considering these limitations some scholars focus specifically on government censorship. LaRue (2007) [cited in (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 578)] defines censorship as “the action by government officials to prohibit or suppress publications or services on the basis of their content”. One could argue that this act of censorship is to avoid some consequences for unfavourable acts such as (Mathiesen, 2008, p. 582):

- Creating a market: providing access to some content might create a market for that content and will lead to more harm to the individuals. This applies to child pornography.
- Hostile atmosphere: such as pornography, terrorism and racism.
- Influence: such as access to violent information or media that might influence children to be more violent.
- Implementation: information provided here might lead to instructions that cause harm, such as information on how to create a bomb, how to commit suicide or how to make drugs.

One could ask what the reasons for the existence of censorship are. One possible answer is given by Caso’s (2008) work on censorship. He argues that there are three basic reasons for censorship that “sometimes overlap, these reasons are: retention of political power, upholding of theological dogma and maintaining community standards. The historical examples of these reasons are the USA Sedition Act of 1798 (retention of power), Index Librorum prohibitorum (upholding theological dogma), and banning books from a school system (maintaining community standards)” (Caso, 2008, p. 11).

When governments apply censorship, it means that it will be responsible for controlling the flow of information, censoring individual’s activities, and to a certain level individuals might be under threat to their lives, their relatives, and friends. To understand the role of government censorship, it is useful to consider its history in more detail.

3.4 History of censorship:

The history of censorship is linked to the history of communication, as communication has “been always subject to control” (Green & Karolides, 2005, p. xix). It has always been argued that every new technology proves to be a threat to authority, and is thus

seen “by those in power” to require regulation (Smith, 1996, p. 151). This observation is relevant to “Gutenberg’s printing press with movable type, and it is also equally true of the film industry silent pictures” (Smith, 1996, p. 151).

Throughout history, people have known different type of censorships based on many reasons imposed either by authorities, clergies or even society. “In ancient societies, for example China, censorship was considered a legitimate instrument for regulating the moral and political life of the population. In Rome, as in the ancient Greek communities, the ideal of good governance included shaping the character of the people. Hence censorship was regarded as an honourable task. In China, the first censorship law was introduced in 300 AD” (Newth, 2010).

Authorities have always found ways to impose censorship in the context of political issues, such as republican sentiments in monarchies, or religious issues, such as preventing texts and books or even thoughts that might affect society negatively. Smith (1996) argued that “governmental forces have used rhetorical strategies in simple and sophisticated ways to silence opponents” (Smith., 1996, p. xi). He continued “government suppression of opponents is an inevitable cycle in times of crisis, their methods of suppression have become more and sophisticated as old methods are exposed and new technology are developed, and the wider the gulf between the oppressed and the oppressors the more militant and extra-legal the forms of suppression become” (Smith., 1996, p. XI). All these reasons challenge the ‘right’ to communicate and freedom of expression, and seek to suppress these ‘rights’.

Perhaps the most familiar case of sanction for expression is the case of Socrates in 399 BC, when he was accused of corrupting the youth with his ideas and heresy, and was sentenced to drink poison (Newth, 2010). Socrates was found guilty of “violating political and moral code of his time” (Newth, 2010).

It has been argued that censorship primarily originates from fear (Green & Karolides, 2005, p. xviii). This fear originates from the belief that if speech, books, plays, films or, at the extreme, state secrets are disclosed or published, then authority and ultimately the stability and order of society will be threatened. Thus, governments and societies have always found ways to censor materials that they consider injurious to themselves and society. The first censorship known in human history was purely political, for example,

treason defined as expressions subversive to the state (Green & Karolides, 2005, p. xviii).

As suggested above, in considering the actors who may engage in censorship, censorship acts can be divided into political censorship and cultural-religious censorship (which includes moral censorship). Both types of censorship acts share the notion of protecting society and individuals, and correspondingly critics of censorship also criticize the capacity to engage in these acts. As Green states, all categories of censorship “represent the downside of power” (Green, 2005, p. xix).

Political censorship, mainly practiced by government, can be observed in the way governments deal with the information they want to be delivered to the public through news outlets, and the way it acts against any anti-government expression (Anon., n.d). These acts of the state may overlap with those of cultural institutions, such as those of religion when religious authorities are able exercise authority in society. Thus, Green argues that, during pre-reformation times, the Roman Catholic Church exercised censorship in its wars against heresy, although “ its determination to suppress heresy derived as much from a desire to maintain its political power as to propagate true belief” (Green & Karolides, 2005, p. xix).

The idea underlying this censorship is to suppress free speech, which under different circumstances is considered a threat to the authorities, hence this assumed threat must be controlled. “Free speech, which implies the free expression of thoughts, was a challenge for pre-Christian rulers. It was no less troublesome to the guardians of Christianity, even more so as orthodoxy became established. To fend off a heretical threat to Christian doctrine church leaders introduced helpful measures, such as the Nicene Creed, promulgated in 325 AD. This profession of faith is still widely used in Christian liturgy today” (Newth, 2010).

Since the invention of the printing press in Europe in the mid-15th century, authorities have felt the need to increase the act of censorship. Even though the printing press was an aid to the people in power, and to the printing of religious books, their authority still assumed threats were there to be controlled (Newth, 2010).

One example of censorship that came together with the printing press was the introduction of the ***Index Librorum Prohibitorum***. Pope Paul IV ordered the first *Index*

of Prohibited Books in 1559: the *Index* was issued again 20 times by different Popes. The last *Index of Prohibited Books* was issued as recently as 1948, and then finally abolished in 1966. These lists of books banned for their heretical or ideologically dangerous content, were issued by the Roman Catholic Church. Zealous guardians carried out the Sacred Inquisition, banning and burning books, and sometimes also the authors.

Another space in which the Catholic Church applied the act of censorship was universities and its scientific publications. In 1543 the Church decreed that each book to be printed should first get Church permission. Following, in 1563, Charles IX of France decreed also that every printed book should have special permission from the king, which after a while became a practice followed by other rulers in Europe. This alliance between Church and politics was the path to invent government licences for the printing press, which made it easier to control scientific and art publications (Newth, 2010).

When the service of post was introduced, “first in France in 1464”, it became another tool of censorship, especially during war time. Moreover, most of the colonial countries enforced the act of censorship in their colonies to take control of political publications (Newth, 2010). “The British Empire efficiently employed censorship of mail during the first half of the 20th century. Even today, the postal service remains a tool of censorship in countries where the import of prohibited literature, magazines, films and etcetera is regulated” (Newth, 2010).

Some might argue that the act of censorship had lost ground by the 18th century, but most of the governments kept their own laws to suppress freedom of expression when it came to national security, criminal acts on obscenity or blasphemy, or libel laws (Newth, 2010). “History shows that person to person instantaneous electrical communication has altered the relation of states to their citizens. Such communication can be used to organize domestic opposition to governments; they can also cross national borders creating vulnerability and threats to national security” (Hills, 2006, p. 195). In this new age libertarians, now sometimes referred to as cyberlibertarians, argue that “with the disappearance of the locus of action the state no longer has the legitimacy to either command or control” (Klang, 2005). They believe that the Internet space is a distinct sphere, thus the rules of the real world cannot be applied within the Internet content.

Cyberlibertarians refer to those who believe that people should have the liberty to pursue their own goals online, and the rule of the state should only be voluntary in finding solutions and “mutual consent-based arrangements” (Thierer & Szoka, 2009). This echoes the earlier parallels between libertarian doctrines of sexual freedom, where consenting adults become the locus of freedom of choice. It was thought that they needed to be protected from the interference or regulation of state under the precept that their ‘consent’ means that no other person in society will be harmed by their actions. Conservatives, including religious authorities, are generally not convinced by these arguments, citing the hazards of such freedoms to the individuals exercising them, as well as damage to others in society by these ‘deviations’ from what these authorities regard as moral and proper behaviour.

Early expressions of cyberlibertarian views could be traced in the Esther Dyson article (1994) *Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge*. She explained that after the first wave economy and the second wave economy, the third wave economy will benefit from the technological revolution (Dyson et al, 1994):

“The industrial age is not fully over. In fact, classic Second Wave sectors (oil, steel, and auto-production) have learned how to benefit from Third Wave technological breakthroughs, just as the First Wave’s agricultural productivity benefited exponentially from the Second Wave’s farm-mechanization. But the Third Wave, and the Knowledge Age it has opened, will not deliver on its potential unless it adds social and political dominance to its accelerating technological and economic strength. This means repealing Second Wave laws and retiring Second Wave attitudes. It also gives to leaders of the advanced democracies a special responsibility, to facilitate, hasten, and explain the transition”.

At that time (1994) Dyson did not know that communities in cyberspace would emerge or what they would look like, or to what extent or where these communities would lead societies. She was, however, clear that communication would play a very important role in connecting communities, bound together through shared interests. These cyberspace communities, according to Dyson, would provide a good opportunity to help maintain the diversity and freedom of the society (Dyson et al, 1994). According to Dyson, this third technological wave in the economy needed to create “third wave government

which should focus on removing barriers to competition and massively deregulating the fast-growing telecommunications and computing industries” (Dyson et al, 1994).

Based on Dyson’s point of view, regulating cyberspace at that time seemed a very important part of developing the third wave concepts of government; cyberlibertarians thought that cyberspace was beyond regulation and government control. As John Barlow (1996) declares in his *Declaration of the Internet Independence of Cyberspace*:

“Government of the industrial world, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from cyberspace the new home of minds. On behalf of the future I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us, you have no sovereignty where we gather, we are forming our social contract. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear”.

The debate between cyberlibertarians and their critics continue. Regulating the Internet has become an extension of the long historical debate on censorship, especially in non-democratic regimes, although the issue is raised around the world even in democratic countries. For example, Henry Perritt (1998) argued for a relativistic position where the “effect of the Internet on the state depended very much upon the state in question. Liberal democracies, for example, would be improved by the Internet since the freedoms of the press and speech within these states would be enhanced. While autocratic states would be threatened by the technology since it provided an element of uncontrollability” [cited in (Klang, 2005)].

When applying the Internet freedom notion, cyberlibertarians distinguish between two kinds of freedom (Thierer & Szoka, 2009):

- Social freedom: which means that people “should be granted their liberty, conscience, thought, opinion, speech and expression in online environment” (Thierer & Szoka, 2009).
- Economic freedom: which means that people “should be granted their liberty of contract, innovation and exchange in online environment” (Thierer & Szoka, 2009).

This research concentrates on social freedom on the Internet, to analyse to what extent the censorship system in the Arabic world could prevent any social or political change under non-democratic regimes.

In modern societies, the advent of new communication technology has led to dramatic increases in the amount of information available for the public to access, and to expanding opportunities for individuals to communicate and express themselves. Authorities in government, and other parts of society, correspondingly feel the need to impose ever more tools of censorship to protect their societies and vulnerable individuals from harm, and in non-democratic countries to suppress political freedom and social development. After the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, there was a legalization of the means for governments to spy on their own citizens' private electronic communication, under the pretext of protecting national security from terrorist attacks (Hills, 2006, p. 196). While the government argued that "national security and civil rights are opposed to each other, civil rights groups in both the USA and Britain argued that the new laws breach human rights and expand state power against the citizens" (Hills, 2006, p. 196). This is the era when surveillance over the Internet was booming.

3.5 Social norms:

The previous sections have examined the role of the State and other authorities within societies in restricting communication and freedom of communication from both an historical and a contemporary perspective. The desire for control, and the hazards of freedom of expression and communication, provides a rationale and justification for acts of censorship. Restriction of communication is, however, not solely achieved by the State and other social authorities. Such control is not only justified by reference to social norms, it is also exercised through processes of social interaction. Such an understanding suggests that the act of censorship is "an international, continuous and pervasive, but is not a seamless monolith" (Green & Karolides, 2005, p. xxi). In other words, what seems important to be censored in one country, might be irrelevant to another; hence the conditions of censorship are varied from one culture to another.

This thesis argues that these conditions differ based on the differentiation in social norms between cultures. In order to understand why and how censorship conditions

differ from one culture to another, especially with respect to social processes of control of expression and the internalization of values and expectation that give rise to what will be called in this thesis, self-censorship, we need to explore the notion of social norms.

The concept of social norms is “invoked by social scientists in the explanation of human behaviour” (Sills, 1968, p. 208) [cited in (Hechter, 2001)]. For sociologists social norms are fundamental, although there is not much consensus on what they are, who they enforce in the society and how they emerge (Hechter, 2001, p. 1). Some have argued that norms do not have any influence on human behaviour, “for them the concept is too vague, and the evidence we have about norms compliance is too contradictory to support the claim that they appreciably affect behaviour” (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 1). However, this is an exceptional argument rather than the broad consensus of sociological thought on social norms.

One of the reasons behind Bicchieri’s argument is the confusion between the norms definitions, because “norms can be formal and informal, personal and collective, descriptive of what most people do, or prescriptive of behaviour” (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 1). More consistent with other sociologists views, Gary Alan Fine identifies norms in their way of “constituting frames within which individuals interpret a given situation and from which they take direction for their responsibility as actors in that domain” [cited in (Hechter, 2001, p. 4)]. This mainstream view of social norms is reflected by Hechter: “norms are social statements that regulate behaviour, which they ought to be followed in any society they exist in” (Hechter, 2001, p. 4).

Formal norms, also be called “legal norms” (Hechter, 2001, p. xi), refer to law, which is different from social norms. The former is designed in a deliberative process, text written, “Linked to particular sanctions and enforced by a specialized bureaucracy” (Hechter, 2001, p. xi), on the other hand, the latter are, “spontaneous, unwritten, and enforced informally, although the resulting sanction sometimes can be a matter of life and death” (Hechter, 2001, p. xi).

As social norms refer to a “variety of behaviours, and accompanying expectations” (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 2), people conform to norms of their society for many reasons. These reasons for feeling obligated to obey them might be accompanied by guilt and

remorse in case of transgression. This guilt and shame, and to some extent the sanctions that people might face, is one way that norms are enforced in a society (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 8). This ‘internalization’ of social norms may affect an individual even when they are not subject or do not experience the disapproval of others.

Social norms could be traced through generations in every society. Some of these norms are associated with religions to the extent that any attempt to differentiate between norms established within society, and norms compatible with religion became very difficult: this case can be observed significantly in Arab Islamic societies. Social norms are usually associated with expectations, how society expects an individual to act in certain situations, although “we cannot identify norms by their recurrent, collective behavioural pattern” (Muldoon, 2011). Usually people conform to social norms because they feel the need to fulfil other individual’s expectations in society, which Bicchieri (2006) identifies as “Normative expectations” (Bicchieri, 2006).

Normative expectation can be found in descriptive norms, “such as fashion and fads” (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 34), and in conventions “such as signalling system and dress codes” (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 34). As in descriptive norms, people tend to conform for several reasons that are “dictated by self-interest” (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 29). In other words, people tend to conform because it makes their life much easier, or it is another way to fit in the society or group through adopting certain behaviour. On the other hand, while some descriptive norms might fade away others become a stable convention, which is helpful in “coordinating people expectations or facilitate communication between them, and violating these conventions might detriment the coordination mechanism in the society or the group and fail to fulfil the normative expectations” (Bicchieri, 2006, pp. 29-35).

Abraham Maslow argues in his theory *Hierarchy of Needs* (1943) that individuals tend to gratify their needs in order to function within society. According to Maslow, the levels of needs represent different needs that each person strives to satisfy. The cost of not satisfying one level might slow movement to the next level. The first two levels represent basic physiological, safety and security needs, while the three upper levels represent social needs such as love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Social needs are those with which this study is concerned. Esteem needs “are two types, self-esteem which is the result of competence or mastery of tasks, and the attention and

recognition that comes from others” (Griffin, 2009, p. 129). David McClelland Harvard, a psychologist, calls the former “need for achievement” and the latter “need for power” (Griffin, 2009, p. 129).

Generalizing these observations, one may conclude that individuals in any society strive to accomplish their goals by being part of a group or tribe, connect with people sharing the same passion and interests. By fulfilling this level, they move upward to the next level to achieve the self-esteem they looking for in society. In this way they gain the power that each individual is looking for, either personal or non-personal. These might include being part of a social movement, political parties, taking part in implementing any social or political change in society, and thus reach the ultimate goal. According to Maslow’s theory, this is the process of self-actualization.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has been very influential in Western thinking, but it is not necessarily a universal theory of individual behaviour. The concept of self-actualization is particularly problematic in that it suggests that the individual is entitled and capable of directing their own course. A variety of conservative perspectives contest this relativism at an individual level, often arguing that there is a higher moral authority that should guide an individual’s beliefs and actions, and that this higher authority is often embodied in religious dogma and belief.

One could ask how norms can be enforced in a society. “Social norms proscribe and prescribe behaviour they entail obligations and are supported by normative expectations. Not only we expect others to conform to a social norm, we are also expected to conform to it, both expectations are necessary reasons to comply with the norm” (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 42). As norms are expected to coordinate people’s interactions in different situations, conforming to society norms therefore becomes a matter of acceptance for individuals in their society. Accordingly, enforcing social norms in any societies or groups could happen through different ways.

According to Michael Hechter (2001), one of these ways is social sanction. Sanction occurs when an individual deviates from society or group norms. When the transgression of a norm occurs, an individual may be subject to ostracism, and in some cases it might endanger the individual’s life. The threat that individuals might face for violating society norms, in the author’s opinion, could be one of the reasons why people

conform to their society norms, even though when they do not have full belief in it. This leads to one of the principal hypotheses of this study: to what extent will people deviate from their society norms to express their thoughts and practice their right of freedom of expression, or does the fear of social sanction prevent them from doing so. This point will be explored through the case study conducted to answer the third research question.

Some scholars argue that “individuals punish others unconsciously without necessarily being aware that they are doing so” (Hechter, 2001, p. 19), with neglect and expressions that the individual should feel are ones of unconscious behaviour. Furthermore, sometimes more explicit sanctions include the risk of losing relationships, losing money and time, or emotional discomfort. People who sanction deviations do so for several reasons, including the intent to change deviant behaviour and discourage others from doing the same and hence reduce deviations from social norms (Hechter, 2001, p. 19).

Others argue that when groups of people organize themselves in order to react on deviant behaviours they “can have an effect as well” (Hechter, 2001, p. 20). This point can be investigated through research in order to understand how, in conservative societies, people respond to such deviance, where members of groups in notable social networks work together in order to organize virtual trials for others whom they mark as deviants from their social norms, and culture society. These virtual trials were in some cases exposed and used by society members as a means to pressure governments to take action to enforce law. In other words, online groups became another way of suppressing freedom of speech in societies where there may be several means by which freedom of expression is already suppressed.

Another way of enforcing social norms is through the legal system of the state. This way might reduce the likelihood of the society or group members imposing sanctions on the deviant, by “Providing formal responses to the deviance that may directly affect the extent to which behaviour complies with social norms” (Hechter, 2001, pp. 20-21). The question one could ask here is, if freedom rights are inconsistent with social norms, to what extent this conflict can prevent freedom of expression, and social change. To examine this issue the concept of social rights is of value.

Social rights are described in the European Parliament (the EU’s main law-making institutions, together with the Council of the European Union):

“fundamental social rights mean rights to which the individual citizen is entitled, which can be exercised only in his relationship with other human beings as a member of a group and which can be made effective only if the state acts to safeguard the individual’s environment” (Butt, 1999, p. 9)

Nussbaum included different entitlements in her study on capability approach, such as “political liberties, the freedom of association, the free choice of occupation, and a variety of economic and social rights” (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 36); some scholars differentiate between social rights, civil rights, and political rights. Thomas Marshall in his studies indicates that difference. He describes civil rights as necessary rights for individuals in any society to practice their freedom, “liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the rights to own property, and the right to justice” (Browne, 2002, p. 1), while political rights are “characterized in terms of the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the member of such a body” (Browne, 2002, p. 1). Finally, as Marshall indicates, a social right includes different entitlements such as “rights to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the rights to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being” (Browne, 2002, p. 1).

The recognition of these rights is by no means universal and they are most often articulated in countries where democratic forms of governance are well established. In other countries these rights may not be recognized, and individuals who advocate such views may be seen as a threat to the social and political order.

When it comes to applying the notion of social rights to the new communication technology sphere, what was once considered as a luxury becomes “more integrated into the fabric social life” (Wang, 2008, p. 3). From the perspective of social rights, Internet access becomes a social right to all individuals. The question here is whether the social order and political regulation would support or deny such ‘rights’ from being exercised by their citizens, and to what extent this promoting or advocating of such rights might play a role in social change within the society.

Analysing the role of social norms on people’s behaviour in the Arab world, and the link between social norms and social rights, is an important part in completing this study. Specifically, this thesis examines the extent to which lead users’ online behaviour

conforms to societal norms, and what the consequences of deviating from them may be. As these individuals may be expected to be leaders in applying social reform in society through their awareness and collective actions, the other question here is, to what extent social norms may or may not play in imposing self-censorship online in these societies.

3.6 The research questions and hypotheses:

In order to present the other theories used in this research then proceed to the research design chapter, it is important to re-state the research hypotheses and questions.

The principal hypothesis in this research is that even though the challenge of conservative societies' social norms might have an effect on lead users of online communities, they have and express aspirations to utilize ICT and the Internet with its social networks to attempt to address social reform issues through raising online social awareness or online collective actions.

The research hypotheses that will be tested are:

- Social norms of conservative societies inhibit or channel the formulation of social reform issues to be addressed online;
- social norms of conservative societies influence the expression of those forms of social reform that are not inhibited or re-directed at the formulation stage
- Because of their effects on the formulation and expression of social reform, official censorship and social norms influence what social reform activities are attempted online.

By addressing these, this thesis will be able to analyse how and to what extent conservative societies social norms are affecting online lead user's attitudes, their contribution and production, and their innovation community in addressing social issues online.

The key questions used to assess these hypotheses are:

- What characterises the lead users of social media pursuing social change through online collective actions and campaign in conservative Arab societies including their predisposition to follow social norms and official rules imposed by Internet regulations and censorship?

- How does the predisposition of lead users to follow social norms and official rules affects their online behaviour- their formation and expression of social reform and their online activities?
- Regarding online expression, how do lead users pursuing social change through collective actions and campaigns in conservative societies conduct their activities online in terms of their perception of:
 - social norms;
 - official policies ‘official censorship’.

In the next section, the development of the theory of authoritarian personality is presented in order to explain the analysis carried out in this research. By applying the concept of right-wing authoritarianism theory to the research the author will be able to categorize the sample populations into two categories; the in-groups, and the out-groups. Individuals who are considered to be conservative will be under the former category, while individuals who are considered to be more cosmopolitan will come under the latter.

3.7 Authoritarian personality theory and online lead users:

In late 1950, a group of researchers from the University of California published their study on authoritarian personality. Theodore Adorno et al.’s theory rests on the idea that “some stable attitude of individuals, such as personality or enduring beliefs causes them to hold prejudiced and ethnocentric attitudes in general” (Duckitt, 2001b, p. 42). Adorno characterized the authoritarianism by “a propensity for cognitive rigidity, intolerance and aggression” (McHoskey, 1996, p. 709). Their work is based on previous researches done on measuring political ideology and fascist attitudes for example, Stagner, Thurstone and Maslow were they provided the initial steps for quantification of different political attitudes (Norris, 2005, p. 8).

The use of attitude measuring scales has flourished in the social science, and “research is continually expanding and new examples of phenomena often emerge that require interpretation using theories that have already developed” (Norris, 2005, p. 54). The first attempted to use attitude measurement was in 1936 by Stagner, who used Thurstone method in measuring political ideology, and he concluded with two limitation for using this measurement, the first is that “researchers should be able to

understand the concept they are measuring, and second is the subjects taking the attitude scale will be willing to allow their true attitude to be known” (Norris, 2005, p. 57).

In Adorno’s study, the findings “indicated that generalized prejudice, ethnocentric in group glorification politico economic conservatism and pro-fascist attitudes covaried powerfully to form a general attitudinal syndrome as an expression of a basic personality dimension, consisting of nine covarying traits, which they termed the authoritarian personality and which they attempted to measure with their F scale” (Duckitt, 2001b, p. 42).

The contribution of the study was valuable as it attempted to define the concept that “until 1950 had been largely a jumble of individual suppositions and deeply philosophical writing” (Norris, 2005, p. 11). The researcher’s manner in conducting their study was to “gather and focus ideas as well as incorporating new techniques of personality measurement within existing psychoanalytical theory” (Norris, 2005, p. 11), they presented their project including “interviews and analysis of projective testing. Comment was made in one methodological critique loaded with tables, statistics and replete with technical terminology” (Norris, 2005, p. 11).

Scholars usually refer to the concept of Authoritarian Personality as the F Scale, which was the most notable product of Adorno et al project (Norris, 2005, p. 12). The F scale used in the research “utilise a multi-faceted structure in its construction and each element being the product of various research endeavours. Viewing personality as consisting of many layers, their aim was to develop a methodology that would allow the recognition of various surface traits and attitudes, especially those that would reveal the more inhibited, deeper, unconscious patterns of dynamically related factors” (Norris, 2005, p. 12). The authors of this research employed different techniques in order to validate various measures against each other to discover the deeper layers of personality that characterize authoritarian figures (Norris, 2005, p. 12).

While the authoritarian personality theory and its F scale measurement attracted massive interests among scholars, the scale did not escape criticism from others. In 1960s the significance of the F scale has dropped due to the flaws in it (Duckitt, 2001b, p. 42). The first weakness as some scholars argue is that the F scale has a psychometric flaws which are “derived from its lack of reliability and unidimensionality when

acquiescent due to the all positive formulation of its items was controlled” (Duckitt, 2001b, p. 42). As the F scale was used for measuring authoritarian personality, some scholars argue that “its items did not pertain to behavioural consistencies or personality trait terms as those of personality scales typically do. Instead the F scale items consist of statements of social attitude and belief of broadly ideological nature” (Duckitt, 2001b, p. 42). In another words, the theory approach did not work on defining the concept of authoritarianism, instead “it composed of groups of items written specifically to represent each of the nine traits” (Duckitt, 1989a, pp. 64-65). Altemeyer concluded that the F scale “cannot measure the construct it was intended to measure [cited (Duckitt, 1989a, p. 65)], although the F scale was valid but the “nine trait model therefore did not appropriately conceptualize authoritarianism” (Duckitt, 1989a, p. 65).

After all the criticism and obscurity that faced the authoritarian personality theory and other measurement scales, due to the realization that the responses to the outset statements might not be measuring what they aim to because of the interaction between the subjects and the motivations (Norris, 2005, pp. 57-58). In 1981s Bob Altemeyer revived the theory again with his research, where he re-established the theory as a “central explanatory construct in social and political psychology” (Duckitt, 2001b, p. 43).

Out of nine facts of authoritarianism described by Adorno et al. Altemeyer conceptualized his right-wing authoritarianism scale, and he defines it as a “combination of three attitudinal clusters in a person: (1) authoritarian submission to authority perceived as established and legitimate in society, (2) authoritarian aggression- general aggressiveness directed against various persons that is perceived to be sanctioned by established authorities, (3) conventionalism, a high degree of adherence to the social conventions that are perceived to be endorsed by society and its established authorities” (Tarr, 1991, p. 307).

Altemeyer described different traits of right-wing authoritarians as those who “believe strongly in submission to established authorities and the social norms their authority endorses, and they believe in aggression against those targeted by the authorities” (Altemeyer, 1998, p. 86). According to Altemeyer this personality could be observed through early adulthood where it can be explained by social learning more than psychoanalytic theories, and it is developed through adolescence by early training in

obedience, conventionalism and aggression (Altemeyer, 1998, p. 86). He characterized authoritarian's by their tending to be "highly ethnocentric and heavy users of the consensual validation pill, and they travel in tight circles of like-minded people so much, and they often think their views are commonly held in society that they are the moral majority or the silent majority. It has been hard to miss that certain kinds of religious training have sometimes helped produce their ethnocentrism and authoritarianism" (Altemeyer, 1998, p. 86).

Altemeyer theory is unique in that it not only regarded as a personality scale per se, but "rather of collection of attitudinal clusters, he rightly acknowledges the presence of situational factors in the study of authoritarianism also" (Norris, 2005, p. 78).

The research focus on individuals who are lead users in online social networks as these individuals are influential in shaping innovation processes and they may be harbingers of future solutions to social needs and problems. Lead users in this research are those making use of new technology for applying social reform through the diffusion of innovation which helps in creating social change in societies. The question proposed here is whether those lead users see themselves as operating in a consistent way with conservative values, or whether they are testing and questioning the limits of the conservative society.

In every society, there are two types of groups: those who tend to perceive themselves as the defenders of society traditions and rules, and those who seek change or reform. In order to distinguish between those two groups, the analysis for the sample population is based on the RAW scale, where authoritarianism is the distinguishing feature between conservative and cosmopolitan users in online social media in conservative societies such as the country under study, Saudi Arabia. This distinction reflects the extent to which users will follow social norms and official rules of the Internet.

In order to distinguish those two groups, through the RAW analysis, it was important to use one of the concepts that emerged in the field; the concept of in-group/out-group. This concept "has been materialized through the endeavours of a number of researches and gives a possible explanation for authoritarian behaviour. In particular, the proposition that it is this identification with and commitment to ones chosen in-group

that could determine an authoritarian style demeanour has consistently emerged in the discourse” (Norris, 2005, p. 85).

The concept was first introduced in 1906 by Sumner “as an explanation of ethnocentrism and further elaborated upon regarding prejudice by Allport in 1954, the notion of in-group/out-group distinction as a dimension of authoritarianism has been proposed as a new view of an old construct by Duckitt in 1989” (Norris, 2005, p. 85).

Many researchers have worked on understanding the relationship between group nature and authoritarianism, however “these studies and theoretical implications they pose for understanding authoritarianism have failed to register the influence that Duckitt has provided in this domain” (Norris, 2005, pp. 85-86). Duckitt commended Altemeyer’s work and his RWA scale. Through using Altemeyer’s three constructed traits of authoritarianism, Duckitt combine them into “the common theme of inter-group cohesion, believing that each can be seen a quite directly reflecting the intensity of the individual’s emotional identification within a given social group” [Duckitt, 1989 Cited (Norris, 2005, p. 87), all in which give the work of Duckitt its novelty and innovative way in studying authoritarianism.

Extending the three constructed concepts of Altemeyer authoritarianism, Duckitt listed six criteria, two to each component identified by Altemeyer, these criteria are, quoted below: (Duckitt, 1989a, pp. 71-72):

a- Conformity to Group Norms and Rules- Conventionalism:

- 1- How many behaviors and beliefs of individual’s are or should be regulated by group norms and rules as opposed to self-regulation by individual’s personal needs, beliefs and inclination?
- 2- How strictly do or should individuals have to conform to these in-group rules and norms?

b- Tolerance vs. Intolerance of Nonconformity- Authoritarian Aggression:

- 3- How sever should be or are punishments and condemnation for non-conformity to group norms and rules?
- 4- How strictly are or should be such punishments and condemnation for non-conformity enforced?

c- Unconditional vs. Conditional Respect and Obedience- Authoritarian Submission:

- 5- To what extent should be or are in-group leaders and authorities accorded respect and deference unconditionally because of their role status, as opposed to respect and difference conditional upon their actions and role performance?
- 6- To what extent should be or are in-group leaders and authorities accorded unconditional obedience as opposed to obedience conditional on the dictates of individual's personal conscience or interest?

Through this approach, combining Altemeyer's traits and Duckitt criteria, can determine individual's relationship to any group, in its both extreme dimensions, as Duckitt explained it "At one extreme would be the belief that the purely personal needs, inclinations and values of group members should be subordinated as completely as possible to the cohesion of the group and its requirements. At the other extreme would be the belief that the requirements of group cohesion should be subordinated as completely as possible to the autonomy and self-regulation of the individual members. These two extremes positions could be labelled authoritarianism and libertarianism, respectively" (Duckitt, 1989a, p. 71).

As this research captures the predisposition of online lead users to follow the official Internet rules and social norms of their conservative society, measured by their level of authoritarianism, hence distinguishing between two types of online lead users; conservative lead user(the in-group) and cosmopolitan one (the out-group), it is important to point out that equating conservatism and authoritarianism is not possible due to the fact that not all authoritarian traits can be considered to be the defining feature of a conservative person.

A conservative person is one who conforms to his society social norms, values, religion, the society heritage, and believes that holding to these is a sign of a good society which gives ethical grounds for their attitudes. They also believe that deviating from the society norms could cause one to be punished or at least to be excluded from the group or the society as whole. This traits of a conservative individual is one of other features that defines authoritarian personality, on the other hand, we might find that some individuals conforms to the society norms in order not to confront the society authorities

od even other individuals within the society. This conformity in some individuals might be seen as a way in pursuing their goals in seeking certain social change in their society, as the case studies in this research shows.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter that using the term liberal for the out-group in this research is not applicable for the country under study, Saudi Arabia, as certain liberalism tents and values, such as freedom of expression and association as rights, cannot be absorbed within the political and social system in the Saudi society. Hence, using the term cosmopolitan is more acceptable within the context of this research, as cosmopolitanism is seen as a citizen of two worlds, where they might not be seen as a liberal individuals in a strict way, but at the same time their world view and behaviour is influenced by liberal values.

A conservative lead user in this research is the one who conforms to the society social norms, shows a tendency to agree with the authorities, resists changes, and in some cases might play a major role in defending and applying certain tenets, either religious or social norms in order to maintain social order. A cosmopolitan lead user in this research applies to individuals who seek change in their society, apply a different way of thinking to problems they face in achieving their goal, and confront their society social norms and authorities.

These two groups will be analysed under the above mentioned general framework, and each frame contains criteria that can be traced within different written phrases:

- social norms and cultural values (transgression, conformity, obedience, acceptance, patriarchal, and social change);
- religion (conflict, guilt, shame, obedience, power, elites, patriarchal, control, authorities, and punitive);
- state regularity (authoritarianism, obedience, patriarchal, power, condemn public opinion, freedom of expression);
- self-censorship (conformity, obedience, punitive, fear, condemn public opinion, social change).

3.8 The research framework:

The examination of the research hypotheses and questions will be done using the following framework, which depicts the conceptual lens in the analysis in the research:

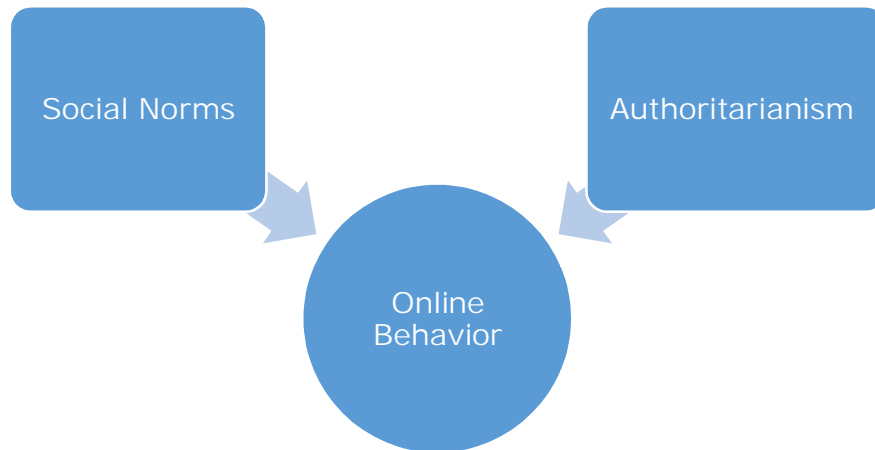


Figure 3.1: Online behaviour

Source: Created for the data collected for thesis

The main focus of this research is illustrated in Figure 3.1 above. The thesis captures the tendency of online lead users to follow the official Internet regulation and social norms of their conservative societies, measured by their level of authoritarianism, and the extent of the effect of social norms and Internet rules on their online behaviour, the formation and expression of their social reform and online activities.

In conservative societies, social norms can play a role in influencing individual behaviour and lives. This influence may differ from one person to another, from men to women, and may also be influenced by the level of education and experience. In addition, being in a very religious society can also influence individuals' social norms to the extent that it will be impossible to distinguish or segregate between what is religious and what is social norm. Although not pictured nor examined in this thesis due to limitations in sampling, regions within a country may also be relevant, i.e. social norms may differ between urban and rural areas, or between one area of a country and another.

As individuals in conservative societies will be under different kinds of apprehension of being exposed to their family and friends if they violate common social norms, this will raise the issue of self-censorship online. For example, gender may affect social norms online, i.e. what is within the norm for males may not be for females. Similarly, the level of education and experience affects individual's social norms online. For example, having secular sentiments in a religious conservative society with strong social norms will influence individuals' online behaviour, including their willingness to reveal their real identity. In addition, the extent to which individuals in these societies would be willing to deviate from social norms online to pursue their own goals is a matter for empirical investigation. For example, to what extent individuals would be able to explore their ideas and feelings freely online will be influenced by the extent to which they have internalized social norms (the views of others) in ways that lead to practicing online self-censorship. The analysis of the data gathered for this research is to capture to what extent online lead users will follow the Internet official rules and social norms in their online collective actions to pursue social reform in their societies, measured by their level of authoritarianism.

This domain is the main subject discussed in the research, and it is examined by analysing the case studies carried out in this research. This answers the last research question, on online collective actions and social awareness, by examining to what extent social norms in conservative societies have an effect on lead user's behaviour, and in what ways does self-censorship influence' online behaviour in specific contexts. Nonetheless, the role of official censorship on online behaviour in conservative societies cannot be overlooked. Therefore, knowing which of the two types of censorship might affect online behaviour more will give the result different perspectives.

As this thesis is mainly developed based on two concepts, lead users and online communities in the area of ICT, specifically the use of online social networks in conservative societies, it was necessary to revisit the theories from media and mass communication studies, and other social theories in order to analyse the data collected to understand online lead users' behaviour under the notion of the existing social norms and censorship in their society. It has been advocated by scholars, as in this research, that the Internet and its platforms are the new public sphere. In some societies

individuals might use it as a venting tool to pursue their own goals, and work on applying social change through their online collective actions and awareness campaigns.

Based on that, analysing the micro level of Internet users³ under the framework above is done through the three case studies conducted here. Lead users here are those who are not only leading in adopting new technologies but also in making use of these technologies for social reform. Applying social change in societies is usually practiced through social freedom that is granted by social rights (where individuals are entitled to their own liberty, thoughts, opinion and speech), and is safeguard by the state.

With the technological advances and applying the notion of social rights, it can be said that accessing the Internet has become a social right rather than being a luxury for individuals. According to Nussbaum, the language of rights gives the people choice and autonomy (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 40), and thus they are able to achieve their well-being based on the capability theory. Therefore, the question addressed here is whether social order or political regulation will guarantee or disapprove this right. In this research, the aim is to analyse online lead users' behaviour in seeking social change through their online collective actions and awareness campaigns under the existence of their society social norms and censorship.

First it was important to choose a region to which to apply the study, the Arab region. Due to some limitations and issues of generalization it was important to limit the scope of the research and focus on one Arabic country, Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it was necessary to understand the role of social norms in affecting online lead user behaviour in conservative societies, and how it gives them different ways of thinking in applying social change through their online collective actions.

In addition, are these social norms related to online lead users' behaviour? The fundamental question here is whether these lead users see themselves as operating in a consistent way with conservative values, or whether they are testing and questioning the limits of the conservative society. Also to what extent might the gender of a lead user can play a role in behaviour.

In this thesis the lead users studied are not only leading in adopting new technologies but also in making use of these technologies for social reform. Thus, the aim is to

³ Referred to as lead users in this research using the presented theories.

extend our understanding on how those lead users are utilizing online social networks to pursue their goals in spreading awareness on certain issues in their society, despite the fact that their work might interfere with their society social norms and the existing censorship system.

This will be the base for drawing the general picture on the use of online social networks in the Arab region, which can be a starting point for more studies with different scales and other theories to be used. Thus, the result of this research will be generalized to the sample generated for the purpose of this research.

Chapter 4: Research Design

4.1 Introduction:

This research is motivated by the need to expand the understanding about how people in conservative Arab Islamic societies are using modern communication technology and online social platforms in relation to existing social norms, and how these uses are related to social reform in their societies. For this analysis, we must attempt to explain the influence of social order, religion, and culture of these societies on individuals.

With the introduction of the Internet and the expansion of the use of online social networks, individuals in Arabic Islamic conservative societies face different challenges in utilizing modern information technology; these challenges differ from technical, to social or political ones. As governments around the world seek to regulate the Internet, for different reasons, decisions to regulate the Internet in the Arabic Islamic world is one of the challenging factors that face Internet users in these countries; hence, online censorship and limitation of expression could be an outcome of this regulation. Social norms are another factor that affects the utilization of online social networks in these societies.

Accepting that these factors may influence behaviour, the main focus in this study will be on lead user behaviour and the effects resulting from these factors on their online collective actions in the Arabic Islamic conservative societies. The specific study of the nature of Internet regulation and censorship informs the background of this study and establishes a framework for considering these behaviours. However, the analysis of Internet regulation, *per se*, is not a primary objective of this study.

4.2 Research approach:

This research used mixed methods approaches in order to collect the data to answer the research questions, the decision was taken to design the tools with multiple methods that combine both qualitative and quantitative methods. This means that the collection of data is done by means of a quantitative approach while the qualitative approach was required to analyse and understand the data to find patterns. Finally, a narrative approach was required to outline and list the findings and understanding on the data collected and analysed.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) argue that “Multiple methods are useful if they provide better opportunities to answer the research questions; and where they allow the researcher to better evaluate the extent to which the research findings can be trusted and inference made from them” (Saunders, 2009, p. 153). There are arguments in academic fields about the benefit of combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, and the differences between the two approaches. “Critics of combined methods research argue that the assumptions behind qualitative and quantitative methods are fundamentally different both in terms of what we are able to know and how we can know it, issues of epistemology, together with the assumptions about the nature of the social world, issues of ontology, which makes the approaches incompatible” (Seale, 2004, p. 294).

The differences between qualitative and quantitative research have provoked a great deal of discussion by social and cultural researchers, with the emphasis being on the methods used in each of them. Bryman (2008) stated that “the status of the distinction is ambiguous, because it is almost simultaneously regarded by some writers as a fundamental contrast and by others as no longer useful or even simply as false” (Bryman, 2008, p. 21).

On the other hand, others assert that there is a fundamental distinction between qualitative and quantitative research. As quantitative research is usually linked with positivism, qualitative research tends to be linked with interpretivism and postmodernism (Seale, 2004, p. 294). Postmodernism in social science “implies diversity, both in term of embracing multiple truths and that are, and should be, multiple standards by which the human and social world can be understood” (Seale, 2004, p. 296). For a conservative society, it is useful to examine the extent to which this discussion is applicable.

The above remains true for a conservative society, although the approach to gain understanding and the hurdle to collect the facts to reach a decision might vary. For example, Philip (1998, p. 261) argues that “employing a range of methodological strategies means that the researcher does not necessarily privilege a particular way of looking at the social world, I would suggest that such postmodernist diversity encompasses methodological plurality as well as postmodernism encourage different

voices to be heard and facilitating the exploration of different truths”, [cited (Seale, 2004, p. 296)].

While the above considerations are likely to apply in a conservative society, the level of tolerance for different individual ‘truths’ might be subject to change over time and hard to define quantitatively. The extent of variation of revealed ‘truths’ might point to social inconsistency suggesting further research. Studying people in naturally occurring situations is another factor used to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research; in quantitative research the studies usually happen in artificial situations to control extraneous variables (Seale, 2004, p. 295). The other important distinction between them, which is applicable to this research, is the fact that “quantitative research entails constructing hypotheses and subsequently testing them through empirical research, while qualitative research implies an inductive process in which theory is derived from empirical data” (Seale, 2004, p. 295).

Thus, in the light of the above discussion and defined framework, the research has made an effort to identify the social characteristics of the people who are influenced by the use of ICT and how they individually or in combination with others to form a group and become lead users. The premises that the use of ICT for social advancement and as a means for self-expressionism could be beneficial whilst also facing challenges in a conservative world view are at the core of the research. At this core, the research thus tries to identify behavioural patterns of users which create a pattern of ICT use to gain social and personal benefit and to establish a path for social advancement. Towards such accomplishment, an attempt has been made to discover both the aspirations and the challenges for the ICT users through primary research.

4.2.1 Mixed-Methods approaches:

This research used mixed methods approaches, which is less known tradition than qualitative and quantitative traditions because it was only emerged relatively recently. As a leading writer on social science methodology states “the concept of mixing different methods probably originated in 1959, when Campbell and Fiske used multiple methods to study validity of psychological traits. They encouraged others to employ their multimethod matrix to examine multiple approaches to data collection” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15) Mixed methods research (MMR) has been defined as “research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences

using qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (Tashakkori, 2007). It has been argued that the MMR “present an alternative to the QUAN and QUAL traditions by advocating tools are required to answer the research questions under study. In fact, through the 20th century, social and behavioural scientists frequently employed MMR in their studies, and they continue to do so in the 21st century” (Tashakkori, 2009). Therefore, this study employed two different strategies and methodologies for collecting and analysing data; an online survey and case studies to answer the research questions.

First, literature review was presented to build a foundation in theory, and to indicate what research data might be collected from a survey and case studies. A link to an online survey was designed to address the first two of the three research questions, social norms and online behaviours, self-censorship and, to some extent, official or government censorship.

In this research the ‘natural setting’ is the ongoing change in the Arab countries accompanying the growth of Internet use, and various forms of populist uprising and agitation. In this ‘natural setting’, the aim is to gain an understanding of how lead users from Arabic conservative societies are utilizing online social networks in accordance to their heritage of culture and social norms, and using these to address their communication and expression needs and engage in various forms of collective behaviour addressed at making social change. Due to the wide range of Arab countries, one country was chosen to which to apply the research questions. This was because of the need to relate lead user behaviour to their social context and to their specific use of online social networks in which they are situated⁴.

The conservative Arabic speaking society chosen for examination was Saudi Arabia and the case studies and evidence in this thesis comes exclusively from this country⁵.

⁴ Online social networks are rarely transnational, and even in cases where the technology allows transnational interaction, the incidence (prevalence) of transnational exchange is limited. It may be argued that this is a transitory phase in Internet and social network development, particularly within social groups sharing the same language. However, it is an accurate statement of the current context in which this research is conducted.

⁵ It was considered whether it might be possible to examine regional differences within Saudi Arabia, but eventually a smaller sample was chosen in order to penetrate more deeply into the primary issue of self-censorship and other processes governing the specific motive of lead users aiming to influence social norms. With a smaller sample, no reliable distinctions can be made between different regions.

The importance of this study is to present a case study that represents the social use of the Internet at the micro level of Internet users with the aim of examining how lead users are utilizing this technology. It also describes what happens in social settings and how they see their actions, and the contexts in which actions take place, under the factors that rule conservative societies. These include cultural, social norms and religion in order to address social reform in the context of conservative societies such as the case study country, Saudi Arabia.

The reason for choosing Saudi Arabia to apply the research study is that it is a conservative culture due to the guidance of Islamic belief and principle on various issues. As interpreted by both religious and secular authority, this guidance is often misaligned or in conflict with some of the tenets or norms that are common in other parts of the world, and that are predominant on the Internet. In the context of social networking and online social networks, this guidance and its implementation in the form of regulation, and its influence on social norms widely held within Saudi society, may affect the use of social network platforms and their use by particular individuals to pursue social reform. Based on the theories discussed in the last two chapters, and because the author is from the society, she was able to interpret communications from respondents (not only because of language but because of specific cultural references and contexts that would only be familiar to someone from the society being studied).

The significance of this study is that it will provide insight into the roles that social norms of offline communities in conservative societies play in influencing online behaviour, particularly when such communities seek to discuss social issues or mobilize collective action. On the one hand, the role of social norms in these societies may be found to be an influence in moderating or preventing social changes in the Arabic Islamic world; on the other hand, it might be perceived as inconsequential or irrelevant by those individuals engaged in particular online activities.

In this matter, the main focus will be on the role of social norms in these societies. The role of the state and its regulatory role will be examined primarily as background and context to the behaviour of individuals in making use of the Internet for processes of social reform and collective action. In addition, the concepts of 'social reform' and 'collective action' need to be examined in a reflective and reflexive way.

Although these concepts are viewed by some as transcendent and higher order ‘rights’, others view these ‘rights’ as shields or excuses for a disruptive and harmful introduction of ‘alien’ concepts to conservative views of a ‘proper’ social order, an issue that becomes even more difficult when this ‘proper’ social order is thought to be a consequence of a different hierarchy of rights, one determined by a particular theology rather than humanism or some other theological framework.

4.3 A Digression on theoretical perspective and epistemology:

“Social epistemology is the study of the social dimensions of knowledge or information” (Goldman, 2010). The research epistemological orientation of this thesis is based on interpretivism, and adopts constructivism as its ontological orientation.

The study of the social world requires different aspects and logics than studying natural science. The notion of epistemological orientation of interpretivism is concerned with the hermeneutics (Bryman, 2008, p. 15), which is a term that has been imported from theology and is concerned with “the theory and methods of the interpretation of human action” (Bryman, 2008, p. 15). Max Weber, one of the sociologists who advocated the approach *Verstehen* (1947, p. 88) has “described sociology as a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects” as cited in (Bryman, 2008, p. 15)].

On the notion of ontological orientation, this research adopts a constructionism approach. This approach confronts the idea that, for example, organizations and cultures are “pre-given and therefore confront social actors as external realities that they have no role in fashioning” (Bryman, 2008, p. 19). In culture, organizations and cultures can be seen as facets of an emergent reality that is in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction, and that not only constrains but also enable people’s actions (Bryman, 2008, p. 20). For example, Becker (1982:521) suggested that “people create culture continuously, no set of cultural understandings, provides a perfectly applicable solutions to any problem, people have to solve in the course of their day, and they therefore must remake those solutions, adapt their understandings to the new situation in the light of what is different about it” [cited (Bryman, 2008, p. 20)].

Bryman (2008) asserts that constructionism is a “social phenomena and their meaning are continually being accomplished by social actors, which implies that social

phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision” (Bryman, 2008, p. 19).

In focussing on online lead users in conservative societies, this research examines whether, and, if so, how these users are utilizing online social networks as an alternative public sphere and interacting online under the existence of their society social norms and official censorship, in order to achieve their goals to address any social reform in their societies by promoting social awareness through online collective actions.

Hence, in pursuing the research goals, choosing mixed method design was one way to address the research hypotheses and form the questions. Also by choosing leading users it was possible to interrogate certain online communities and social networks such as Twitter as a focus group to address the research questions, including issues such as practicing social rights, social freedom, and freedom of speech.

In order to achieve the research goals, a literature review was first built on the social theories, to develop the research questions and test the hypotheses through them. The research was then divided into two methods to answer the research questions: first an online survey link was established and circulated among online lead users, either chosen by the author or through her social networks, in order to generate a snowball sample and answer the first two research questions. The other method was to undertake three case studies from the country under study, Saudi Arabia, which was the main component of the research and answered the third research question.

As stated previously, the author chose the country under study, Saudi Arabia, to apply the research for two reasons. First, it hosts the conservative tenets of the Islamic religion, and the is society considered to be a conservative one to the extent that it is hard to distinguish between what is norms and what is religion principles.

The other reason, is because the author is from the Saudi society. Therefore it would be easier to interpret the communications from respondents with appropriate knowledge, not only because of language but because of specific cultural references and contexts that would only be familiar to someone from the society being studied.

The significance of providing insight into the roles that social norms of offline communities in conservative societies play in influencing online behaviour, is one of the

contributions of this study, together with the wide range of other studies that can be investigated further, as discussed in the last chapter of the thesis.

4.4 Research Design

The mixed method has been adapted as the primary research framework for this research. This research framework encapsulated two research approaches, one quantitative, the other qualitative. For example, quantitative data was gathered and descriptively used to outline findings. Thus, an empirical approach has been adapted as part of the research design presented in this thesis. The other approach used in the data collection is a qualitative one, where case studies are presented and analysed using a narrative strategy.

The research has addressed the social phenomena related to the Internet and online culture of a specific region of the globe where an attempt to outline the balance between two different phenomena has been made. The country of interest in this research is Saudi Arabia, which fosters a conservative society where it is possible to hypothecate between this conservative characteristic and various social norms and official censorships, to eventually draw an outline on the effect of such traits within the research domain.

Online expression is the specific characteristic of interest in this case. It has been found that a special focus group or group of users can be found who are termed as the lead users in this research. The lead users are the specific group of users identified who take online culture and the use of Internet and social network to be an effective tool for social reform, and who thus use the Internet and associated tools as a means towards total social development and advancement.

The fact that a lead user group can be identified and shown to exist over time indicates that the effects of social norms and official censorship are ineffective in suppressing the behaviour of addressing social reform issues online. However, there are multiplicities of ways in which social norms and official censorship might influence the formulation, expression, or consequences of online social collective actions promotion by the lead users. Tracing these effects requires an empirical examination by means of mixed approaches of standard research methods. Thus, one of the major concerns of the research is to outline the total perception of online culture as well as social media, and

to find the existence of a particular group of individuals who persist in using online communications to effectively use it as a tool of social development.

4.5 Research questions:

Within the investigative framework outlined above, there are several sub-hypotheses that have been examined through the empirical research. The major concerning aspects and key points in this regard are as follows:

- Social norms of conservative societies inhibit or channel the formulation of social reform issues to be addressed online;
- social norms of conservative societies influence the expression of those forms of social reform that are not inhibited or re-directed at the formulation stage
- Because of their effects on the formulation and expression of social reform, official censorship and social norms influence what social reform activities are attempted online.

The key questions used to assess these hypotheses are:

1. What characterises the lead users of social media pursuing social change through online collective actions and campaign in conservative Arab societies including their predisposition to follow social norms and official rules imposed by Internet regulations and censorship?
2. How does the predisposition of lead users to follow social norms and official rules affects their online behaviour- their formation and expression of social reform and their online activities?
3. Regarding online expression, how do lead users pursuing social change through collective actions and campaign in conservative societies conduct their activities online in terms of their perception of:
 - Social norms
 - Official policies ‘censorship’

In order to answer the first two questions, an online survey was distributed among a sample of lead users, using a snowball respondent recruitment method. The major objective of such an approach was to gain an understanding of the extent to which the

context of the lead users exists. More details on the snowball sampling will be discussed later in this chapter. The variation of responses from the samples were clear evidence that the determination of the domain and extent of the lead users was worth investigating, which will become apparent in the later sections where the findings of the research are presented and analysed.

The last question is tested through the case studies that represent online collective actions, campaigns and YouTube production. The three case studies were selected from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the country under study, due to its nature as one of the Islamic conservative societies in the Arab world.

This research is designed as combining quantitative and qualitative research methods in collecting the data. The use of combining multiple research methods here is to allow for more understanding of the use of online social networks in conservative societies, by examining the micro level of Internet lead users in these societies in relation to the existing norms in their societies.

The multiple methods approach was used in different contexts. For the purpose of this research, and to test the research hypotheses and answer the research questions, the author worked on two levels of methods; a quantitative online survey that was distributed among a random online lead users sample with 29 questions divided into 3 parts, and a qualitative case studies using narrative approach to present the interviews and analyse the outcome of it. More details in the following sections on the survey and the case studies.

There are three case studies that address the third research question. The first and the second case studies represent an initiative campaign and collective actions online. The first one, called The Qomami initiative campaign حملة الأكل القمامي, had the aim of creating an aware consumer that would question the food he consumes, mainly dealing with junk food consumers.

The second initiative, called Mizan ميزان, is a health support and consultation group, dealing with promoting health awareness online through a group of young doctors who encourage their followers to pursue a healthy lifestyle by changing their health habits and pushing them to practice fitness, and even joining the initiators in their daily jogging exercises.

The third case study is a campaign called Hit Her اضربها of two parts: collective action and an online YouTube production⁶. A promotional production for the YouTube video was uploaded on YouTube and circulated among online social networks. With the slogan 'Hit her', it was organized to end domestic violence and to condemn violence against women. It was launched online by a group of young men and women through 'Libra production' company, and with online lead users participating with them.

4.6 Research methodology- the survey:

4.6.1 Design and Piloting of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed using the literature review and discussing the main factors that affect lead users' attitude and behaviour online. With 29 questions divided into three sections, an online link was developed and distributed among the lead users. The survey was divided into three sections, each section included opinion scale questions, opinion attitude scale questions, and open answer questions.

The first page of the online survey included the title of the study, an introduction to the study, and an indication to the participants that their responses would be confidential, their participation would be voluntary, and they could withdraw from participating at any time without any consequences.

The first part, named general information, contained 17 questions, 5 open, 3 closed and 7 Likert scale with a two rating format. This rating was from 1-7, between strongly disagree and strongly agree; the other format was, 1) almost always, 2) sometimes, 3) every once in a while, 4) rarely, 5) never. These questions were used to obtain quantitative estimates of certain opinion trends and knowledge information about the participants on Internet regulation and the roles of electronic publication within their country, their point of view on those roles that control online expression, and their involvement in online activities and voluntary work. The reason for these questions was to capture the cognition of the lead users, their knowledge, the utility of their online activities, and hence their ability to pursue their online goals, which gave an insight on who the lead users are and how they perceive online social networks., in order to

⁶ The online YouTube production was not completed due to the satisfaction of achievements that the initiator reached during the first part of the campaign.

categorize the participants in the sample into the two identified groups, the in-group and the out-group.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed as a right wing authoritarianism scale (RWA) (Adorno, 1969; Altemeyer, 1998), to measure the level of individual acceptance and point of view to categorize and distinguish between two kinds of lead users based on their level of authoritarianism; conservative and cosmopolitan. The question here is a collection of statements, which were formulated to cover the wider context of an individual's view on issues that other research (Altemeyer, 1998) has employed to gauge the nature and extent of 'authoritarian' views following the definition of personal characteristics of this type, as identified by Adorno (1969), McHoskey (1996), Altemeyer (1998), and Butler (2009). Participants were asked to express their opinions toward each of these statements with different level of measures, starting from very strongly disagree up to very strongly agree.

The third part was designed to obtain general information to identify lead user classifications and geographical position. Eleven demographic items were used, such as education, specialty, gender, age, whether they have lived outside their country, their exposure to non-Arabic literature and friends, and how often they communicate with them, etc.

In analysing the results, for the first part the outcome of each question was presented as a total percentage, and then the data were interpreted and linked to the theories discussed in the theory chapter. This gave an indication and background on individuals in the sample, which led to the second part in the survey; to measure opinion using the RWA scale. This enabled the analysis to distinguish between cosmopolitan and conservative figures among the sample, and their tendency to be engaged or at least encourage social reform through supporting issues such as freedom of speech, limiting online regulation, supporting women rights, narrowing the influence of the elite authorities.

In analysing the findings for the second part of the survey, the main categories that compile the 18 statements are:

- the existence of Internet regulations;
- attitudes toward Internet regulations;

- society influence;
- online attitude;
- online activities;
- youth and online public sphere
- promoting awareness online.

For the purpose of the analysis, the main categories to be analysed as identified in the previous chapter are the in-group and out-group. In the process of designing the questionnaire and case study methods, the author identified two categories in order to trace the consistencies and differences in lead user answers; the final object of analysing these categories is to understand the role these categories play in preventing or encouraging individuals to apply social reform and establish independent civil society organizations. These main categories are:

| Lead Users | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| In-Group: Conservatives | Out-Group: Cosmopolitans |

These two groups are analysed through different frames, and each frame contains criteria that can be traced within different written phrases:

- Social norms and cultural values (transgression, conformity, obedience, acceptance, patriarchal, and social change);
- Religion (conflict, guilt, shame, obedience, power, elites, patriarchal, control, authorities, and punitive);
- State regularity (authoritarianism, obedience, patriarchal, power, condemn public opinion, freedom of expression);
- Self-censorship (conformity, obedience, punitive, fear, condemn public opinion, social change).

The measurements used in this research are the Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) for authoritarian personality. The scale was applied here to distinguish between two kinds of personality lead users in conservative societies based on their level of authoritarianism; cosmopolitans, and conservatives. The following paragraph presents the criteria on how this scale has been used:

- The more the results show a tendency to conform to the society social norms the more those lead users will be identified as conservative, which means they fall into the in-groups.
- The more the results show a tendency to conform to authority roles, and follow the official Internet roles, the more those lead users will be identified as conservatives.
- The more the results show a tendency of online lead users to practice self-censorship in their online behaviour and collective actions, the more they will be identified as conservative users.
- The more the results show a tendency to accept others that are different, new ideas, the more those lead users will be identified as cosmopolitans, which means they fall into the out-groups.
- The more the results show that online lead users tend to override official censorship and society social norms, the more they will be identified as cosmopolitans.
- The less those lead users practice self-censorship online, the more they tend to be identified as cosmopolitans.
- The more the results show a tendency among the lead users to seek change, apply different ways to overcome certain problems such as lack of independent civil societies, limitation in the public sphere, the more they will be identified as cosmopolitan users.

Before distributing the survey, a pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire for validity and reliability. One of the advantages of conducting a pilot study before more extensive surveying is to “give advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated” (Teiylingen & Hundley, 2001).

A group of five candidates was chosen from the main sample population; they were asked to give feedback on the following:

- the quality of the questions
- the group categories identified at the beginning;
- ease of understanding all questions;

- if any questions should be added;
- an estimation of the time needed to complete the questionnaire.

The group were accurate in their response and timing. Most of the comments were positive, but there was one concern among the group about the duplication between two questions in the survey that would give the same outcome when it was translated into Arabic⁷. The author therefore made the necessary changes by deleting one of them and carefully revising the questions. After finalizing the minor issues with the questions and ensuring that deleting one of the questions did not contradict the sequence of the rest of the survey questions, the actual study began by communicating with the targeted sample, sending them an email with the link to the survey, which was created through the SurveyMonkey website.

4.6.2 Sampling:

Due to the nature of this research, all sampling techniques were checked to decide which one would be more appropriate to collect the data. Non-probability sampling was found to be the most practical choice to do so, and among different types within it, it was decided that snowball sampling was suitable for collecting the survey data. Snowball sampling is not a random sample: according to Becker (1963: p. 46) “the sample is, of course, in no sense random; it would not be possible to draw a random sample, since no one knows the nature of the universe from which it would have to be drawn” [cited (Bryman, 2008, p. 184)].

The reason for choosing the snowball sampling technique was that the targeted population, online lead users, was wide with no limitation, plus some of the lead users were anonymous and their identities were hidden due to legal, social, political and ideological issues. This made it hard to identify all of them; hence creating a snowball sample was practical, since online lead users are known for each other. On the other hand, once the link was created and the first initial contact was made with some of the known lead users, the rest of the snowball sample was created and the survey link was circulated among online lead users.

Snowball sampling was “developed by Coleman (1958, 1959) and Goodman (1961) as a means for studying the structure of social networks. Several years after Coleman’s and

⁷ The survey was published in Arabic.

Goodman's development of snowball sampling, what was also termed snowball sampling emerged as a nonprobability approach to sampling design and inference in hard-to-reach, or equivalent, hidden populations" (Heckathorn, 2011, p. 356).

For the purpose of this research, lead users are identified as being pioneers in their online communities, users who started using communication technology to satisfy certain needs in order to overcome social restrictions, and to reach out to their community and mobilize their collective actions online in order to apply social reform in their conservative society. Those users were the first to produce online programmes such as satirical reviews; they also produced certain online programmes to spread awareness on health issues such as obesity, and spread awareness on women's rights on different social issues, such as domestic violence.

The first stage in answering the first two research questions will be through online survey created on SurveyMonkey. Due to the nature of this kind of online survey, and to generate a sample at this stage, the author used snowball sampling where the "respondent are obtained through referrals among people who share the same characteristic. This approach is used most often when the survey population is hidden or when there is no available sampling frame" (Seale, 2004, p. 177).

The sample for the study was first initiated through the author's social network of close ties, where the author contacted a certain lead user through email, and explained the purpose of the study with a link to the survey to be completed. At the same time, the contact was asked to start circulating the link among other lead users known from his or her own online social networks. Within two weeks, the first wave resulted in 60 users; this included one user who received the link twice from two different sources, who confirmed that he completed the questionnaire once only.

Following that, for the second wave of the survey initiated by the author, immediate contact was made through one of the online social networks, Twitter, where another group of online lead users, 15 one, had been identified by the author, and the link of the survey was sent to them. This stage resulted in the final size of 159 surveys, although a number of participants did not finish completing the survey. It is important to note that the online nature of the questionnaire and the means of distributing the survey link and the importance of the subject of the research made it possible to have responses from

other Arab nationalities, which resulted in receiving back 159 questionnaire responses. After closing the link to the survey, and giving the scope of the study, the author filtered the responses to exclude the non-Saudi respondents from the result analysis, out of 133 respondents that finished filling the survey, 105 (78%) participants were from Saudi Arabia but only 66 (50%) finished filling the survey. Giving the focus of the study on online lead users only rather than ordinary ones the sample was expected to be small while the fact that 50% of the responses were from Saudi online lead users made the small sample more acceptable.

Although the snowball method is widely used in the field of qualitative sociological research (Biernacki, 1981, p. 141), it is not a well-established method for conducting a survey, where the sample individuals are not selected from a sampling frame (Katz, 2006). Hence, the method might be subject to biases; one of these biases is what occurred in this research recruitment, where one of the respondents with different links in the social network ties was known to have received the survey link twice.

In addition to the possible issue of multiple receipt of the survey link, this sampling technique can also recruit opportunistic individuals, who might complete the survey more than once in order to influence the research result. However, this seems less likely to occur than the possibility that actual respondents might not be eligible for the survey, such as the non-Saudi who got interested in the subject and filled the survey, and they were excluded from the analysis.

One of the issues with the snowball sampling technique is that there is no assurance that the sample will be representative of the population. Given the virtual impossibility of identifying a representative sample and the novelty of the issues investigated, the possible lack of representativeness is inevitable. Because individual characteristics are identified, this research contributes to knowledge by providing a foundation for further research confirming or questioning the results found here.

Another issue with the use of snowball sampling is that some of the respondents might not complete the survey for any number of reasons, which happened with this research; hence, some of the information may be missing.

The author took measures to limit the biases that might occur while distributing and completing the survey, such as carefully choosing the first two lead users to which the

link to the survey was distributed, which resulted in the first wave of response with 60 individuals. The other decision taken was to choose online lead users that the author had been following for a period on Twitter, and to send them the link directly, while at the same time asking them to circulate the link among their follow lead users, especially those well-known in participating in online activities and production.

Hence, with all the measurements taken, and due to the nature of the research which was focusing on certain online users those who are lead users in the virtual communities which resulted in a small sample, the author does not claim that the sample is representative of the lead user population but rather that it is indicative, leaving opportunities for other researchers applying different methods to quantify the sample in different ways in the hope that more robust generalizations will emerge over time.

4.7 Research methodology- The case studies:

For the second stage, which is the case studies, purposive sampling is the best way in selecting the case studies. This technique enables the researcher “to use his own judgement to select cases that best enable to answer the research questions” (Saunders, 2009, p. 239). The strategy in this kind of sampling is to use critical case sampling, which is to “select critical cases that can make point dramatically or because they are important to understand what is happening in each case so that logical generalisation can be made” (Saunders, 2009, p. 240).

There are different strategies used in collecting data and analysing it (Denzin, 2008, p. 538); one of these strategies is the qualitative case study. Because of the nature of this research, this strategy is particularly useful. The term case “associates the case study with a location such as a community or organization. The emphasis tends to be upon an intensive examination of the setting” (Bryman, 2008, p. 53).

There are different kinds of case studies, such as:

- the critical case;
- extreme or unique case;
- the representative or typical case;
- the revelatory case;
- the longitudinal case.

The case studies for this research will be representative cases, also called “exemplifying case” (Bryman, 2008, p. 56). In this kind of case, “the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation” [[Yin 2003:41] cited in (Bryman, 2008, p. 56)], and the word exemplification “implies that cases are often chosen not because they are extreme or unusual in some way but because either they epitomize a broader category of cases or they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered” (Bryman, 2008, p. 56).

In qualitative research, there are three types of case studies. The instrumental case study is “examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization”. The collective case study is “studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition”, and the intrinsic case study which is “undertaken because, first and last, one wants better understanding of this particular case. It is not undertaken because the case represents other cases, or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but instead because in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest” (Denzin, 2008, pp. 121-123).

As there is interest in understanding how lead users in conservative Arabic societies, under the existence of official censorship and social norms, can express themselves through online collective actions and campaign to spread awareness and apply social change in their society, the case studies in this research are instrumental cases that will provide insight into the addressed issues.

Although the Internet contain different types of online initiatives that works toward pursuing different kind of changes in the Saudi society, it was decided to exclude one of the most controversial online initiatives, the Women2Drive initiative, given the sensitivity of this initiative and the controversial issues it raises in the Saudi society at all levels politically, socially and religiously. Therefore, and within the limits of time, the author has chosen three case studies from Saudi Arabia, the country under study, to assemble narratives drawn from lead users’ own words that, in turn, are interpreted by the author. This was because, through conducting online collective actions and campaigns, each of these cases provided an insight regarding online expression in order to apply social change in their society, under the existence of official censorship and social norms. This approach will answer the research third question.

The three cases are:

- the Qomami initiative الأكل القمامي (one person);
- Mizan initiative ميزان (five people);
- Hit-Her initiative حملة اضربها (four people).

Members involved in each of these groups were interviewed, a total of 10 people. It had been planned to have 12 individuals to interview, but two of them withdrew at an early point in the project as one of the females felt that the study is beyond her work with the group, while the other female did not give any reasons. The interviews were administered by emailing them the interview questions together with the consent form developed for the ethical review of this PhD project. Face-to-face interviews were not feasible given time constraints.

The author knew the leaders of each group, and met them several times on her visits to Saudi Arabia. In first stage the author contacted the each leader in each group asking if they are willing to participate in the study, after they agreed verbally, the author sent them the consent forms, and they were asked to contact the people who worked with them on their initiatives to join the study. The author also was provided with all the contact information needed to follow up with the others. Each member of the group was contacted through emails to send them the interview questions and the consent forms. Within two weeks after the first contact, the author was able to gather all the interviews and revised them for any additional information might be needed.

Each of the case studies selected here epitomize a broader category of elements that is concerned with the issues discussed in the research. These issues are censorship, social norms, and how they are related to online expression, behaviours, and the types of online collective actions and campaigns that lead users adopt in order to spread awareness in their society about their way of seeking social reform.

To explore the case study in detail, the data is gathered on the following points (Denzin, 2008, p. 125):

- the function and activity of the case;
- the historical background;
- the physical setting;

- other factors related to the case, such as economic, political, legal and aesthetic;
- other cases through which this case is recognized;
- those informants through whom the case can be known.

The first case study, The Qomami initiative الأكل القمامي, is what we call a 'one man initiative', where the initiator started an online campaign on his own through Twitter with a hashtag called 'Qomami food', based on his own personal experience with junk food and its bad effects on health. This case was instrumental in providing an insight into how society would respond to a shocking name that contradicted their own beliefs, and to what extent the lead user took the initiative regardless of the censorship issues, especially self-censorship and social norms.

The second case study, the Mizan initiative ميزان, was an instrumental case that provided insight into online behaviour and censorship in regards to gender matters; this initiative involved five people, two male and three female. This gives the author the opportunity to compare how both genders respond to issues of censorship and online behaviour.

The third case study, the 'Hit-her' initiative حملة اضربها, was an instrumental case because it was initiated by an independent individuals through the 'Libra' production company. The main issue that this initiative served was domestic violence, especially against women. It was launched in April 2013 through a hashtag on Twitter with the name of the initiative, just months after another campaign initiated by King Khalid created a foundation. This one was mainly publicized through official media such as national newspapers and television (a brief on this campaign is given in Chapter 6 of this thesis). Another instrumental element of the Hit-her case study is that it involved an immediate interaction with the public, where the pictures of the volunteers were published through the hashtag on Twitter and each volunteer's personal account on Twitter and other online social networks. This gave the initiative live interaction with others in the society.

The interview questions were divided into two parts, the first part consisted of open ended questions where the interviewee had the chance to use their own words to explain and express their role in the initiative, together with the way they viewed it. The second part used the same opinion measurement as the survey, Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), to determine which category the lead users from the chosen case studies fell

into. Among the issues that might be affected by this distinction was the question whether, and if so how, social views might affect lead users seeking to use social media to pursue social reform in their societies. Another important issue to be assessed was the question of whether or to what extent these lead users might, in practice, deviate from their society social norms or conform to other challenges in seeking to influence other members of society. A link to the survey's findings and the outcome of the cases will be applied whenever is convenient. This is in order to understand how lead users utilize social networks to mobilize their collective actions and awareness online in conservative Arabic societies, such as the country under study. This will help in generating a claim to a generalizable set of findings that support a testable theory that can be employed in future quantitative and qualitative studies.

Although the focus of this research has been how lead users view their own activities in seeking social change, it is inevitable that one would wish to know whether their actions have had any effect. Addressing a question such as

- 'How do others respond to lead user's online initiatives in conservative societies'

would be of great intrinsic interest, but would require different methods from those used in this investigation. In particular, the most rigorous way of addressing this question would be to develop a means of identifying individuals who were exposed to the social media generated by the lead users considered in this study and identifying another group who were not exposed. One might then be able to frame a 'treatment' type framework to assess whether exposure to the social media had a discernible effect on attitude or behaviour. Such a study would take into account the 'proximity' of individuals in each group to the 'lead users', using various measures to ensure that the 'untreated' were relatively isolated from individuals that had been exposed to social media (otherwise there is the possibility that the 'untreated' were actually influenced by the social media exposure of friends and family that *were* exposed). While such a study is possible, it is not one that would be feasible for a lone researcher operating at a distance from the groups studied with limited time and resources.

4.8 Data analysis:

In order to analyse and interpret the data collected from the survey and case studies, the author used one of the qualitative analysis approaches, the narrative analysis approach. The narrative approach, which is derived from literary and philosophical analysis (Smith, 2000, p. 327), “provides access to subjective experience, providing insight into conceptions of self and identity and opening up new ways of studying memory, language and thought, and socialization and culture” (Smith, 2000, p. 328).

Contemporary studies of narrative analysis started in the 1960s, although the use of narrative analysis in literary goes back to Aristotle’s Poetics period: “Early 20th century influences on the study of narrative include Russian literary criticism and linguistics, Russian psychological theories regarding the social determinants of language and thoughts, in England, Bartlett’s research on memory” (Smith, 2000, p. 327).

Although part of the analysis of the data can be considered as a thematic analysis, the main analysis is undertaken as a narrative one. By using this analysis approach the author was able to obtain information on the issues of censorship and online behaviours that could not be gathered through other methods. Narrative analysis is characterized by perspective and context, where perspective “refers to the fact that a narrative contains a point of view toward what happened, telling us what is significant” [(Gee, 1991) cited in (Smith, 2000, p. 328)], while context “and the related term frame are used variously to refer to external influences on the narrators, ways in which the narrator constructs the narrative, and characteristics of the resulting text. External influences include the historical period, physical surrounding and culture as well as the immediate social setting” [(Gee, 1991) cited in (Smith, 2000, p. 328)].

Some scholars argue that “narrative structure is common to all cultures, whereas others have identified both cultural and individual differences in narrative structures” (McCabe, 1997) cited in (Smith, 2000, p. 328). However, Propp (1928) has suggested the common structure through analysing of the Russian fairy tales (Smith, 2000, p. 328), together with the traditional European American tales, where they included “certain common characteristics: a setting, a time-ordered sequences of events, a problem solving, or goal orientation, and a conflict or difficulty to be re-solved” (Mandler & Johnson, 1977) cited in (Smith, 2000, p. 238).

Research on new technology does not suggest a different approach to these issues, especially given the assumption that “the advent of new media technologies are forces of social change, with either liberating or detrimental effects; sometimes even simultaneously” (Davis, 2013, p. 160), and social science has “addressed these questions by, for example, assessing the impact of the rise of the Internet on social equity (Castells, 2001) and the democratization of the public sphere (Bohman, 2004)” (Davis, 2013, p. 160), e.g. see Davis.

In doing the analysis for this research, the author used the narrative approach so that online lead users were both the object and frame of inquiry. In other words, the ‘on and through’ approach (Davis, 2013, p. 160), which is important because it “serves inquiry regarding the supposed modernizing, transformatory power of new technology” (Davis, 2013, p. 160).

The focus or the object of the research is on online lead users in Arab countries, specifically the country under study, Saudi Arabia, from where all the results come and from where the case studies were chosen. The framework is the analysis of how these lead users utilize online social networks in their society to pursue their goals and achieve social reform through their online collective actions and campaigns that promotes social awareness, in regards to the existence of censorship and their society’s conservative social norms.

Thematic categories were applied in order to categorize the questions under the issues addressed in the research in order to answer the research questions. The case studies were presented individually under the same categories addressed below, following the narrative of each individual in the case study to analyse their stories in order to understand to what extent their online presence and work is affected by the society social norms and the existence of different censorship types.

“As narrative analysis deals with verbal material, and the techniques is used to study individuals, groups, cultures” (Smith, 2000, p. 313), for both qualitative and quantitative research, the data collected for this research comes from two sources: a survey and case studies. The results of the survey will be considered as a foundation for the research, with the questions containing the main issues needing to be discovered in more detail in the case studies. The response from the targeted lead user sample will open new areas

that will reveal more information when interviewing the key figures in the case studies chosen: this information will be used to complete the data collection.

In the process of designing the questionnaire and case study methods, the author identified different categories in order to trace the consistencies and differences in lead user answers. These categories are:

- censorship;
- social norms/culture values;
- conservatism/cosmopolitanism;
- religion;
- women's position in society.

The reason for the use of this approach is to focus more on the lead user's stories, and how they make sense of the changes that accompanied the use of social network platforms. It would also focus on how they used these changes to elicit and analyse how they pursue their goals in applying any social reform under the challenges and difficulties of their conservative society, with the consideration of the identified categories above.

4.9 Ethical issues:

“Social researchers work within a variety of economic, cultural, legal and political settings, each of which influence the emphasis and focus of their research” (Association, 2003, p. 10).

The ethical issues in social research revolve around four main principles:

- whether there is harm to participants;
- whether there is a lack of information consent;
- whether there is an invasion of privacy;
- whether deception is involved.

According to the British Sociological Association statement of ethical practice, social researchers “have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research. They should strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and

privacy, while recognising the difficulty of balancing potentially conflicting interests” (British Sociological Association, 2002, p. 2).

As Saudi Arabia does not deny having their own regulation involving online censorship, the nature of this research has needed to be sensitive to the issues that might arise for respondents in engaging in this online activity. Therefore, this research was examined through a research ethics committee to evaluate the level of risk that might be associated with it, either for the researcher or for the participants. After providing the committee with all the documents to support the developed proposal, the project was approved to be carried out.

A full informed consent was secured from the participants in the case studies, prefaced with an explanation of the aims of the study and its importance, and addressing the respondents’ privacy and right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

4.10 The potential contribution of the research:

In social science studies the quality of research is judged by its validity and reliability. The validity is “the true value of a research project” (Seale, 2004, p. 72), while reliability refers to the “consistency with which research procedures deliver their results” (Seale, 2004, p. 72).

The motivation of the research lies in its efforts to establish distinct findings about the nature of lead users in a specific context. It is important to understand how self-publication and self-expression can be undertaken in a conservative society where the lead users can use online tools as an agent of social advancement. A principal purpose is to avoid the pitfalls of viewing censorship and regulatory controls as necessarily being barriers, without examining how the lead users work through, within, and around these features of their society’s use of the Internet.

To a great extent, the expression on different social and personal aspects might not be subject to censorship, but there is a limiting line beyond which personal expression might not be entertained or motivated by the social norms and official regulations. In other words, the extent and context of influence on lead users, the various forms of censorship might not a significant affect, or at least might be associated with other

issues raised. This would surely create a deadlock situation in the mind-set of the online users who are termed as lead users in the context of this research.

The logic behind the research design is that, given its vast potential, online cultural and social networks are emerging in ways that do not contravene self-expression in Saudi Arabia to such a level that it hinders the core objectives of social advancement being pursued by lead users. Where the advantages of the Internet, social networking and other Internet based tools can be enjoyed within the regulatory framework (given the drawbacks of the Internet and associated technologies if used in an abusive manner), the provision of using such technology in a society such as the one existing in Saudi Arabia does not erect major barriers to their use in making social advancement.

As this research is an analytical approach to study new phenomena that have not been studied in this depth or with the perspective employed (the use of ICT in conservative societies), judging its quality can be done through its originality and discovery of the use of ICT by the lead users in conservative Arabic societies to achieve social reform, despite the pressure of their society social norms that are influenced by religion, and the notion of censorship. Some scholars expressed this originality as “theoretical generalization” (Seale, 2004, p. 76), which means that the phenomenon under study is original in its contribution to the body of knowledge and the use of existing theory (Seale, 2004, p. 76).

Using different theories, from sociocultural, communication and media studies combined into different ICT domains, this research generates its originality. The empirical findings of this research can be considered as a basis for further, more detailed studies, and from different perspectives such as politics, women’s studies, media and cultural studies.

Chapter 5: The Arab world through the Internet

5.1 Introduction:

One could ask why we need to go through the examination of the macro level while the study mainly focuses on the micro level of individualism. To answer this question, we should first give a concise view on the linkage between the macro and micro levels of analysis.

The terms macro and micro have been “prominent of the sociological theory in recent years” (Gerstein, 1987, p. 86). Since 1980, there have been three leading publications on the linkage between macro and micro analysis in sociology (Jones, 1995, p. 76). The first published work was Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel in 1981 where the authors “tend to identify micro-processes with face-to-face interaction and micro-sociology with ethnomethodology, symbolic interaction and related approaches, while they see the macro-sociology dealing with social institutions” (Jones, 1995, p. 76). The second publication arose from the German and American Associations conference where Munch and Smelser defined “7 different usages for the term micro-macro sociology” (Jones, 1995, p. 76), and the third publication was also from the annual American Sociological Association in 1989 where they discussed various issues without reaching any definite result about the use of the term micro-macro. However, they concluded that “when researchers formulate problem in a micro-macro framework they must think simultaneously about the interaction of population, organization, ecology and technology” (Jones, 1995, p. 77).

In his essays, Gerstein (1987) argues that “the concept of micro-macro have not been systematically analysed in sociology, and they are taken to refer to two level of analysis: individual mental processes, personal preferences, or primary interaction versus very large-scale social organization such as transnational corporate capitalism, modern occupational prestige hierarchies, the formation of nation-states or technological rationality” (Gerstein, 1987, p. 86).

As stated above, the macro level of analysis mainly focusses on the social structure on a large scale, with the aim of studying the general factors that affect the construct of the whole society, economy, and politics of a population within a given society. The micro

level of analysis mainly focusses on studying on a small scale such as processes and individuals and their interactions within a given society.

In this research, the aim is to examine the behaviour at the micro scale of individuals, specifically online lead users in conservative Arab Islamic societies. Hence, in order to understand the general background of the Arab Islamic societies and the technology functions within society and then move to present the country under study, it was important to use the top-down approach in deriving a general framework for reaching the final goal.

The context in which this study takes place is a motivation for considering the nature of conservative societies, the role of censorship and social norms, the applicability of theories about the use of media, and the specific role of a group of individuals identified here as 'lead users' in negotiating the process of social change in this context. An overview of what this context is informs not only the motivation but also what was sought in characterizing these lead users' behaviour and attitudes. This chapter is the first of two devoted to that overview, and considers the regional context of Arab societies. The next chapter considers the specific context of one of them, Saudi Arabia, the principal focus of this thesis.

This chapter will examine the usage of the Internet in the Arab world, and will give more detailed background on the country under study, Saudi Arabia, in order to understand its political, social, and religious order. With the advanced usage of information communication technology in the Arab world, the online world has become one of the widest players in people's lives. All discussions have transferred to the online social networks, as it becomes a preferable medium to the public to gather and discuss private issues that used to be considered once as taboos in Arabic Islamic societies, either political, social, or religious taboos.

The focus on the Middle East ICT and online social networks usage began with the expansion of the new media, such as the diffusion of TV and satellite networks, and studies of these developments expanded with the Internet diffusion in the Middle East in the 1990s. With the 'Arab spring', the desire to explore the role of online social networks in these societies has increased. This research aims fill the gap of existing studies that often focus at the macro level.

In particular, by focussing on online lead users in the Arab societies, and their aspiration in achieving social reform in their societies, this thesis is engaged with micro to macro effects. The pursuit of these objectives in the absence of civic institutions, and the existence of social and official censorship, reflects a macro to micro interaction.

A study on ICT and freedom of democracy undertaken in 2008 at the *Institute for Research on Innovation and Technology Management* in Canada, stated that, in January 1994 while the number of Internet users around the world was over 2.2 million, Middle Eastern countries had no Internet connectivity (Shirazi, 2008, p. 10). By January 1995, “Kuwait and Iran had established the first Internet connection in the Persian Gulf region. Since the debut of the first Iranian weblog in 2001, more than 700,000 weblogs have been created. According to NITL Blog Census, Farsi is the most common weblog language after English, Portuguese and Polish (as cited in Greenspan, 2003). During the period of 2000 to 2005, the Middle Eastern countries had the largest World Internet growth – 370% according to the World Bank Report (2005)” (Shirazi, 2008, p. 10).

The first part of the chapter is background information on the Arab world, and its use of the Internet; the second part is on Saudi Arabia, to give insight to the reader about the country under study and from which the case studies were chosen. Although the background will cover general information on most of the Arab countries, most of the detailed information will cover two countries, Saudi Arabia as it is the country under study, with some comparison with other countries, particularly Egypt.

5.2 The new media in the Arab Islamic world:

With the advancement in the use of the Internet and its social platforms, and the role it plays in many aspects of people’s lives, individuals have become more dependent on the use of the Internet as a source of information, news, and a place to interact and communicate with others to supplement their communication and social activities. Hypothetically, “situated outside formal state control” (Eickelman, 2003, p. 1), the Internet and online communities increasingly became an open and accessible source for individuals in Arab Islamic societies for information and communication, which played significant role in undermining the constants of the societies, either the political, social or religious authorities.

The emergence of the Internet has helped individuals in the Arab world providing new tools to participate in live debates on different issues, and interact with different ideas and ways of thinking, which were not available for them before. In other words these debates were not available to the general public, due to the absence of a public sphere in most Arab countries. This new phenomena resulted in so-called new publics, new people, new thinking, and a new religious public sphere (Eickelman, 2003, pp. 7-15).

In their book, Eickelman and Anderson (2003) introduced several observations about these developments. They refer to the new public as the integration of Muslims from all around the world in live debates on “what it meant to be a Muslim and how to live a Muslim life frequently translated in highly divergent ways from one context to another, which means that the available publics are significantly expanded not just in numbers or reach, but also in diversity of opinion” (Eickelman, 2003, pp. 7-8). New people are referred to as the people “who have emerged and have benefited from the high increase in modern mass education, especially higher education”, which resulted in the mixture of new ideas (Eickelman, 2003, pp. 10-11). At the same time, the notion of new thinking in the new public sphere means “intellectualization of Islamic discourse by the new people, who joins the global and local communities of discourse and reach wider audiences than their predecessors” (Eickelman, 2003, p. 12).

Finally, by converting religious and political issues into the new media this resulted into what the authors called the new religious public sphere. This has wider implications, such as “the translation or movement of messages from one medium to another changed the balance of what gets into circulation and who introduces it, which led to the fragmentation of authority and increasing the number of people involved in creating and sustaining a religious and political civil public sphere” (Eickelman, 2003, p. 14).

As a result of the emergence of the new people and new thinking, and with the diffusion of ICT in Arab Islamic countries, a new space has been created, which Bunt (2000) once called, “virtually Islamic” (Bunt, 2000). The notion here can refer to “an identity” (Bunt, 2000, p. 1) or ideology of Islam, in which Arab Islamic individuals can be digital with the new identity of Islam, being able to introduce a new discourse of Islam and create new perspectives on the interpretation of Islam. This has resulted through interacting frequently with Muslims from all around the world, from different doctrines and religious schools. Although “various reform movements have appeared throughout

the Muslim world, and was coloured by local national and regional contexts” (Kersten, 2013, p. 1), the diffusion of ICT showed that these movements share specific commonalities such as the tendency of “challenging existing interpretative authority” (Kersten, 2013, p. 1), hence the origination of an online Islamic civil society.

The importance of the idea of civil societies emanate from groups that struggle to build better lives for individuals in their societies. Throughout history it has been an inspiration to politicians and philosophers, regardless of their political orientation (Edwards, 2009, p. 2). The Libertarian Cato Institution in Washington DC defines civil society as “fundamentally reducing the role of politics in society by expanding free markets and individual liberty” (Edwards, 2009, p. 2), and the Advocacy Institute see it as “the single most viable alternative to the authoritarian state and the tyrannical market” (Edwards, 2009, p. 2).

The importance of civil society is based on the idea that it is the connection between the government and the public. John Dewey describes these organizations as public spheres that are an essential element for democracy (Edwards, 2009, p. 9), which means that these organizations are the network communication, information, and point of view between the state and society (Castell, 2008).

Traditional civil societies exist in every democratic and semi-democratic society, for example, labour unions, interest groups, religious groups, and civic associations to “defend local or sectoral interests, as well as specific values against or beyond the formal political process” (Castell, 2008, p. 83) However, according to many analysts, the notion of traditional civil societies are in decline, for instance, Putnam’s argument (2000) [Cited in (Castell, 2008, p. 83)]. The new wave in the contemporary scene of what are called non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is the adoption of an international scope of reference in their action and goals, and observers refer to it as a “global civil society” and are usually funded through public institutions [(Kaldor, 2003) Cited in (Castell, 2008, p. 84)]. These non-governmental organizations and the new online public sphere that emerged with the advance and diffusion of the new technology, paved the way for the popularity of online civic groups. This is especially true in authoritarian regimes, where the practice of civil societies are limited and controlled by the government, and cannot be established without the authorization of the government. Hence, people in Arab Islamic countries, and more precisely the Gulf

conservative countries, have found the Internet, with its social platforms, to be an intermediary way to establish and practice civil rights online. Although civic societies in Arab countries and Gulf countries are still restricted by government control, but they are effective in terms of community building (Bakkar, 2006, p. 50) which has expanded the public interaction within the online public sphere. In the next chapter, the author introduces two cases on civic societies in the country under study, Saudi Arabia, presented previously in her MSc dissertation, to show how online civic societies can open up societies and build community sense among them.

Although the Internet is widely diffused in the region, this does not mean that every individual is a member of online civic fora. However, the advance of the ICT infrastructure has made the Internet a primary means for individuals in Arab Islamic countries to form their political opinion, develop their identities, and practice civil rights online (Howard, 2010, pp. 136-137). The first Arab Islamic civil society online was “Diasporas in global cities” (Howard, 2010, p. 142), and the more individuals are integrated with online civil communities the more diversity it brings to these communities. For example, “they created lifestyle content about the music and culture, contributed to listservs about political life in the communities they lived in or the communities they had left, and shared information about the challenges of continuing cultural practices in their adopted countries” (Howard, 2010, p. 142).

Over time, the capacity for online debate has grown significantly, and, as Hofheinz (2006) describes, in these debates “two features are characteristic of the Arabic corner of the Internet as it presents itself today: first, religion has greater weight than anywhere else in the world, and secondly Arab users are particularly eager to engage in discussion not least of politics, religion, and sex” [Cited in (Howard, 2010, p. 143)].

With the new media introduced into Arab Islamic societies, new challenges came along with it, either to the government or society elites, or even to the harmonious being of the society. The rise of new media that, hypothetically, give power to the people by accessing information, instant news, books that were banned but became available to the public, society taboos have been challenged. With the diffusion of the Internet and the wide use of online social networks, private issues are now brought to online public spheres for dissection. The most frequently asked questions are whether the Internet will spread democracy into the Arab world, promote more civic organization involvement

independency in some countries, strengthen democracy in these societies, or whether the existing regimes in the region will exercise their power to prevent the hypothetical role of the Internet in liberalizing and democratizing the Arab world.

The latest statistics on the number of users online from ITU (2013) show that 2.7 billion people, almost 40% of the world's population, are online, with 38% of people in Arab countries being online users (ITU, 2013b). Since 2012, the number of active Internet users in the Arab region has increased by 23%, which is 1.6 times higher than the world average growth of 13% (ITU, 2012a):

“social media account memberships have increased by 20-30 percent in the Arab world in the last two years, adding that the UAE has the highest penetration of online purchases which is 12% compared with a world average of 20%. In 2006-2011, the number of Internet users increased to a great extent. This is reflected by the high percentage of YouTube playbacks in the Arab world compared with the rest of the world. 85 per cent of Internet users in Saudi Arabia use YouTube, 83 per cent in the UAE and 74 per cent in Egypt. The overall figure for YouTube users in the MENA is 167 million” (ITU, 2012a).

A study conducted by the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology in Qatar on attitudes of online users in the MENA region in 2014 reinforced the above findings. The sample results showed that the majority of Internet usage among MENA surveyed in the study took place at home, and they 40% stated that they access the Internet for over 20 hours a week, while 13% of them stated that they use the web for between 0-5 hours a (Technology, 2014a, p. 12). The report also shows that “three in four people in the United Arab Emirates own a smartphone with the UAE topping the list of countries with the highest smartphone penetration in the world just ahead of South Korea and Saudi Arabia” (Technology, 2014a, p. 12).

While many conservative Arabic Islamic regimes promote the penetration of the Internet for business, education, e-commerce and modernization of communication, they are trying to prevent other roles that the Internet may play in applying changing society morals or, especially, empowering the existence of online civil societies. In some parts of the Arab world, online civil groups usually use the Internet in the same way as in the West, for example, raising funds and mobilizing people. In some other

parts, especially in the Gulf, online civil societies are used to empower people and mobilize them in time of crisis.

Some might argue that these online civic groups cannot challenge the authoritarian government due to their lack of legal legitimacy to resist or protest or even assemble people for demonstrations. However, the rapid events and news on the slow yet progressive changes accruing in Arab countries with links to online social civic groups, gives indications that changes in the long run can happen in these closed regimes and conservative societies. For example, in Kuwait civil groups on the Internet and mobile phones were major players in promoting awareness among society about the “role for women in politics evolved into constitutional changes” (Howard, 2010, p. 154)⁸

A further example is a case study from Saudi Arabia on how online civil groups have contributed to the mobilization of people in time of catastrophe, “the campaign for saving victims of Jeddah’s flood”, through one of online civil groups called Muwatana. This was when Jeddah city in Saudi Arabia suffered from a massive flood that badly affected certain areas in the south of the city in 2009, which resulted in high numbers of fatalities. This event caused anger among the citizens, especially as it happened at the time of Hajj when the entire government in Mecca was mobilized to make sure that pilgrimages occur without problems. The group initiated a campaign to help the people in damaged areas, and, within a day, managed to assemble 400 volunteers to help in distributing food and other aid. In time, through their own well connected networks (through their strong and weak links) they managed to get a small space in one of the exhibition centres in Jeddah to be headquarters for their campaign and to store all the supplies they received through donations: by the fourth week the campaign managed to reach 3,000 volunteers (Rawas, 2010, pp. 41-42).

In conclusion, these two cases, from two conservative countries in the Gulf, indicate that establishing online civic groups can play a major role in promoting civic engagement in their societies where every civic organization is usually established under the supervision of the government. Through these online civic groups people are able to promote awareness and achieve their goals or even mobilize individuals and assemble them to support any cause, or even add any kind of pressure on the

⁸ Women gained their full political rights in May 2005, and in May 2009 in national elections for the new government, four Kuwaiti women were elected to the parliaments (Al-Mughni, 2010, p. 2).

government. Although there are a growing number of scholars studying the relationship between Internet diffusion and the spread of democracy in authoritarian regimes, reliable data on this matter is still really hard to acquire, due to the nature of these regimes (Kalathil & Boas, 2003, p. 4).

On the one hand, with the diffusion of the Internet scholars have sought to study and analyse the effects of the usage of the Internet on individual's everyday life, and the extent to which these effects could change societies, especially under authoritarian regimes and the degree to which the Internet could open up these regimes hence spread democracy. Many studies have been published with strong focus on the importance of the Internet in overcoming the gender issues in closed societies such as Islamic ones, the role that online networks played in opening up public space for individuals under authoritarian regimes to discuss politics and religion. On the other hand, and despite the growing number of these studies on these matters, less attention has been paid to the role of the Internet with its online social networks and the tendency of Internet users in conservative societies to apply social reform through their online initiative and collective actions, through discussing sensitive social issues and spreading awareness about different social matters such as domestic abuse, despite their society social norms and official censorship. At the same time less attention has been paid to studying and understanding the characteristics of online users in Arab conservative societies who works on applying social reform in their societies under the existence of their society social norms and Internet roles, and analysing to what extent they might work in accordance to these norms or not in order to apply the social change they seek in their society.

In conducting this study the author has tried to fill the gap in this matter and contribute to the academic debates as well as to policy discourse on how online lead users in conservative societies utilize online social networks and examine the role they take to spread awareness on social issues that matters to their society under the existence of social norms and censorship in order to impose social reform in their society through their online initiatives and collective actions.

5.3 Authoritarian regimes and the Internet:

As the Internet diffused around the world, and into closed regimes and conservative societies, scholars and observers were optimistic that this new technology would bring democracy into authoritarian regimes, precisely to the Middle East, the Arab countries. This would then open conservative societies to a wider range of verities that will change these societies. Thomas Friedman (2000), in an article in New York Times magazine said:

“In the 20th century, the Arab states thrived by developing oil. In the 21st century they will thrive only if they develop their people, and the only way to do that is by democratizing. The battle is on, the Internet and globalization are acting like nutcrackers to open societies and empower Arab democrats with new tools” (Friedman, 2000).

In 1985, Daniel Lerner, in his book *The Passing of Traditional Society*, “considered the role of newspapers and the mass media as drivers of political modernization in the region” [cited in (Kalathil & Boas, 2003, p. 103)]. Today, with the diffusion of ICT and the Internet taking place as supplement communication and social activities, scholars have come to believe that the Internet will pose threats to non-democratic regimes. On the other hand, even though the Internet eased access to information that was previously difficult to access, the regimes in the Middle East are always looking for ways to ensure that they have control over the Internet and the flow of its information. For example, “Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are elaborate censorship schemes for the Internet employing advanced technology to block public access to pornography, political and religious websites, while Egypt and Turkey promote self-censorship in the population making well publicized crackdowns against uses of the Internet that are considered politically and socially inappropriate” (Kalathil & Boas, 2003, p. 103).

Lessig, in his study, *Internet regulation in advanced democracies* (1999), identified four specific mechanisms that the authoritarian regimes might apply in order to control the Internet: “law, social norms, the market, and architecture that governments can use to control the Internet” [cited (Boas, 2006, p. 364)]. Boas grouped the first three mechanisms as *institutional constraints*, which can influence behaviour in a very straightforward way: “laws threaten punishment for prohibited activities, violators of

social norms may incur ostracism, and the market can encourage or discourage particular activities based on their cost” (Boas, 2006, p. 364). However, in spite of this, and as the society constructs, every element is capable of evolving and changing over time: “Laws are challenged and overturned; social norms evolve; markets fluctuate, and the degree to which any individual is constrained by them varies with wealth” (Boas, 2006, p. 364).

The question that could be asked here is whether the Internet in authoritarian regimes and conservative societies can be one of the major roles that helps in applying social reform and evoke modern civic society institutions into their lives.

Despite the idea presented above, and because of the nature of Arab countries, their political, economic and social conditions, one should bear in mind that even though the practice of self-censorship existed in these societies, from the early days of the Internet, the regimes of the Middle East countries established technological measures to control the flow of the information. The most common reason for wishing to control the Internet was to protect society’s traditions, and protect the weakest individuals in society from being exposed to inappropriate materials online that might affect their morality, traditions, and religious beliefs.

Nonetheless one should not lose sight of the political conditions of these regimes. In fact one of the most important reasons for imposing control over the Internet in authoritarian governments is to protect their regimes from opposition. With the beginning of the diffusion of the Internet throughout Arab countries in the late 1990s, and the speculations that it would have quite positive effects on Middle East countries in every aspect, such as enhancing freedom of speech, open debates and dialogues with the government of these countries, hence leading to the spread of democratic decentralization, the governments of these societies started to take measures to implement more extensive censorship mechanisms.

As the notion of censorship remains a thorny matter in the Middle East countries, not all countries in the region applied the same degree of censorship. For example, “Filtering and banning of certain sites deemed inappropriate for moral or political reasons is common in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Jordan have decreased filtering, focusing on a few political opposition

sites. Qatar filters only what it deems pornographic. Unfiltered access is available in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Kuwait” (Hofheinz, 2005, p. 79).

Despite these arrangements to control the flow and access of information through the Internet, it has proven to be a “vital factor in opening and expanding the realm of what can be said in public” (Hofheinz, 2005, p. 80). One can say that the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ can be considered as providing evidence of the role of the Internet and online social networks as a major contributor to these events in Arab countries. Although the validity of this claim will not be examined in this research, we cannot overlook the role that online social networks have played in this matter.

In the following subsection, I will give a brief conclusion on the role of online social networks in the Arab Spring from a report prepared by Dr Philip N. Howard and others under the *Project on Information Technology and Political Islam*, just to support the statement on the role of the Internet in opening closed regimes. Although the report only focused on two Arabic countries, Egypt and Tunisia, and each case has its own circumstances, these cases give an overview of the ongoing situations within the Arab world.

5.3.1 The role of online social networks in the Arab spring:

History shows that the movement for democratization in the Arab world began long before the existence of new technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet. This started with the liberation movements from colonization, and then the political social and economic movements after liberation. With the diffusion and expansion in the use of ICT, the tools for these movements changed and expanded. This expansion uncovered government corruption and human rights’ violations, and led to advocacy for more democracy in their societies, and for political and social reform.

Some writers trace the role of the new online media and link it to the historic role of print media in fostering nationalism, which Benedict Anderson once (1991) called ‘print capitalism’ [Cited in (Khondker, 2011, p. 678)]. Some other writers concentrate on the role of literacy in raising consciousness in pre-revolutionary 18th century France, as elucidated in the work of Robert Darnton (1982) and John Markoff (1986) [Cited in (Khondker, 2011, p. 678)]. Markoff’s work illustrates that the level of literacy in any

region will play a significant role in revolution activities, therefore, any revolution will be more organized in these areas when compared with regions with a low level of literacy (Khondker, 2011, p. 678). This matter is debatable considering the existence of many other factors that might cause the acceleration of revolutions.

On the one hand, the questions raised here ask whether the Internet with its social platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter or their combined effects, might be sufficient to cause social revolution leading to more freedom. On the other hand, what about the use of the same instruments of the new media by political powers as tools of repression? And finally, what are the ancillary factors that may tilt the contest one way or the other? (Khondker, 2011, p. 676).

Many would argue that, although the new media is considered to be one of the factors in the social revolution that erupted in the Arab regions since 2010⁹, it nevertheless played a crucial role, especially in light of the absence of an open media and government controller over civil society (Khondker, 2011, p. 676).

In his paper, *Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring*, Khondker (2011) stated that “New information technology has clearly the transformative potential to open up spaces of freedom. The recent political transformations in the MENA region provide us an opportunity to examine both the limits and potential contributions of the new media in paving the way for freedom and openness” (Khondker, 2011, pp. 666-676).

The sociological discussion over the potential role of the new social media in shaping societies started in earnest with Manuel Castells’s trilogy (1996-2009). Since the last decade of the 20th century, a growing number of writers have been interested in the role of the Internet as a medium for disseminating democracy [(Poster, 1995) Cited in (Khondker, 2011, p. 676)]. More recently, many writers have been concerned with the identification of the nuances as well as limits to the role of the new media in politics [(Howard, 2011) Cited in (Khondker, 2011, p. 676)]. Many of the discussions on this matter are divided between two points of view: those who emphasize the controlling role of the new media, as a new tool of repression in the arsenal of the dictators, and those who see it as a tool for democratic openness. However, some writers have pointed

⁹ Other factors include social and political factors under authoritarian regimes.

out that, even in democratic societies, the new technology might pose a grave threat to the freedom and privacy of citizens (Khondker, 2011, p. 676).

Moreover, there are some writers who were somewhat carried away with the potential role of the new media in shaping politics and in opening up a new public sphere, especially in societies where a real public sphere does not exist. However, on the other hand there are some writers who have presented a more balanced view of the pitfalls and potential of the controlling as well as emancipatory role of the new media (Khondker, 2011, p. 676).

Before the revolutions in Arab countries in 2010, most of the work on the role of online social media had its own speculations that ICT might impose threats on authoritarian regimes, but could not be the cause of removing authoritarian regimes. Some writers assumed that online civil movements and successful mobilization against these regimes may be short-lived (Howard, 2010, p. 155), and the only impact would be on certain aspects of political life. These aspects included areas such as “improvement in the justice system of courts, increased political competition within single party states, more open elections at particular level of government, and more transparency” (Howard, 2010, p. 155).

In this research we will not attempt to answer the question whether online social media was the cause of the revolutions in the Arab regions, although it is important to present the outcome of some work on this matter. At the beginning, all the revolutionary events occurred in two Arab countries with semi-democratic regimes, Tunisia and Egypt. There were assumptions that online social media played a crucial role in the commencement of the revolutions and helped cause the ousting of the ruling regime. Most observers commented on those revolutions as “revolution was well organized, coordinated, and civil” (Khondker, 2011, p. 677), therefore most of the information presented in this section will be on those two countries.

The data presented in the following paragraph was prepared by the *Project on Information Technology and Political Islam* at the University of Washington’s Department of Communication in 2011 (Howard et al., 2011) during the uprising of the Arab Spring, focusing especially on Egypt and Tunisia; the main findings of the report resulted in three key findings:

- “Social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 2): the data collected shows that online users used social media intensely for online political conversations by “key demographic groups in the revolution, from young, urban, well-educated individuals and women’s” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 2). They used Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to publish many critical materials that put added pressure on the governments. Key blogger figures in these countries were the main source for international broadcasting news channels to “spread credible information” to their supporters all around the world (Howard et al., 2011, p. 2).
- “A spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 3): although it is difficult to determine whether the ongoing online political and social conversations were driven by the numbers of street protests or the other way around, the data collected nonetheless showed that “online conversation has played integral part in the revolutions” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 3), which made the government recognize the power of opposition movements using online social media. This resulted in bloggers being arrested, the tracking of online conversations, and closing websites and Internet access (Howard et al., 2011, p. 3).
- “Social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 3): the collected data showed that spreading news online of the ongoing events on the ground helped online users to “pick up followers” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 3) from around the world, either from the West or from countries where similar situations later erupted. These ongoing online interactions raised a “cascade of conversations on freedom and democracy across North Africa and the Middle East” (Howard et al., 2011, pp. 3-4), which helped to raise people’s expectations of the success of political change in the authoritarian regimes (Howard et al., 2011, pp. 3-4).

Online users, especially bloggers, were active online even before the revolutions erupted, constantly publishing the most critical materials online that condemned the actions of their governments. In addition, Egypt benefited from its position as a “cultural hub and media centre with robust media information infrastructure” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 6). All of this helped suppressed people, from youths and others, to adapt

online social media to their advantage and “build a vibrant online public sphere” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 6).

One of the reasons for the popularity of online social media among the revolutionists as a tool for democracy within the two countries, was the fact that they have “relatively young tech-savvy populations” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 5). For example, at the time of finishing this report (2011), the “in Tunisia youth median age was 30 years old, 23 per cent of the 10 million people who lived there were under the age of 14, while in Egypt the median youth age is 24, 33 per cent of the country 83 million population is under 14” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 5).

Because in both countries the governments had censored the media, individuals turned to the Internet as a reliable source for information. The figures presented in the report show that 25% of the population in Tunisia and 10% in Egypt had used the Internet at least once (Howard et al., 2011, pp. 5-6). Facebook and Twitter contributed to the ongoing online democratic conversations, whether by users from inside the countries or from users outside the two countries. For example, the report showed that “18 percent of the Tweets came from inside Tunisia, 8 percent from neighbouring countries and 32 percent from outside the region, while in Egypt two weeks prior to Mubarak resignation 34 percent of the Tweets were coming from people outside the region, and with the public getting more engaging in the public political protest the percentage dropped to only 12 percent Tweets from outside the country, with the vast majority of the Tweets coming from inside Egypt” (Howard et al., 2011, pp. 10-17). Women’s involvement in online political and social conversations also has grown due to the facility of this technology; 41% of Tunisian Facebook population, and 36% of Egypt’s Facebook population is female. Also Twitter has its share of women’s participation in political conversations; some well-known women became vocal opponents in the media (Howard et al., 2011, p. 6).

In conclusion, the project analysed Twitter feeds and hashtags, blogosphere, the structure of political websites, Facebook groups, and viral videos from YouTube, and concluded that the existence of these advanced technologies enabled people with shared interests in democracy to build their online public sphere; “their extensive networks, create social capital and organize political actions, which resulted in the materialization

in the streets in early 2011 to help bring down long standing dictators” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 5).

The dataset in the report reveals much about the “role of different social media in the uprising of the Arab Spring. In Tunisia the blogosphere opened the space for political dialogue about the regime corruptions and the possibility for political change, while in Egypt Facebook played as a central node in networks of political discontent” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 23).

“Twitter relayed stories on successful mobilization among individuals and social movements within and between countries, YouTube played a crucial role during the protests using mobile phones cameras to broadcast and circulating videos on stories that the mainstream media could not or did not want to cover” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 23).

Finally, one could ask if the emergence of online social media has changed the goal and the way social movements function, or if it caused the political revolution in the Arab countries on its own. “Social movements traditionally defined as collective challenges based on shared purposes and social solidarity and sustain interaction with elites, opponents and authorities, in order to support the public claims and engage in political interaction with authority” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 24). The emergence of online social media did not change its course of action, however it gave the capacity to people and civil society movements to change the way they interact with governments and opponents with new tools and opportunities; through this they altered domestic politics (Howard et al., 2011, p. 23).

The project conclusion also reported several impacts on the political communication order from different aspects, through the use of online social media such as Twitter and YouTube:

- “Social media opened new opportunities and provided new tools for social movements to mobilize and respond to the events in their societies, hence the ability to consume and interact with political content became important, because the public sense of shared grievances and the potential for change can develop rapidly” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 23).
- “Online social media fosters the links between individuals and groups, which mean that networks ties from between international and national democratization

movements, and that compelling stories told either by short texts or video documentaries is circulated around the world” (Howard et al., 2011, p. 23).

Although no one can deny the significant role that online social media played in the political movements in Tunisia and Egypt, this role should not be overstated compared to other conventional media such as television (Khondker, 2011, p. 678). One reason for this is the uneven outcome of online social media around the Middle East region. For example, in Saudi Arabia one can debate that online social networks are playing a significant role in spreading society’s awareness of different topics and mobilizing online social movements for certain causes, especially women’s rights to drive, however, the tangible result of these online movements in offline life are barely noticed. In other words it has not resulted in any changes in offline life, at least for the time being, even though it aroused many controversies on the matter from both parties in society, the conservative ones and the more open liberal ones.

To illustrate this issue, there is the example of two recent cases of women attempting to drive in Saudi Arabia as a way of protesting against the government banning women from driving, and drawing public attention to this matter in the hope that it would shed light on the problem. Although women claiming their right to drive in Saudi Arabia goes back to the 1990s, this issue came to public attention with the spread of online social media in Saudi Arabia. Saudi women therefore found online social media to be a good tool for their civic movements for women’s rights in a country where the right to protest or the right of free assembly is banned by law.

Maha al-Qahtani, a 39-year-old Saudi woman decided to practice ‘her right to drive’ her car in Riyadh, one of the most conservative cities in Saudi Arabia, accompanied by her husband. On 17 June 2011 she was arrested and later released. However, her defiant action received great attention in the media at that time, which encouraged her fellow citizen, Ms Manal al-Sharif, a 32-year-old IT consultant, to follow that protest and launched a campaign on Facebook called women2drive. She uploaded videos on YouTube to promote the campaign and encourage Saudi women to participate in this movement. She was also arrested on 21 May and then released [Allam, 2011, Cited in (Khondker, 2011, p. 677)].

These two cases encouraged Saudi women to continue their movements to protest and claim a right to drive their cars. Manal Al-Sharif's Facebook page remains an essential place for women's rights' advocates to express their solidarity with Saudi women and their attempts to launch any campaign, not only from Saudi Arabia but also from activists from all around the world. Supporters include Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, who posted a message on that page to support Saudi women's movements (Khondker, 2011, p. 677).

The campaign, women2drive, continues to accelerate. Twitter was also included in this campaign, and women's rights advocates launched hashtags that include videos of women driving their cars around their cities in Saudi Arabia. There are articles from different writers, not only from Saudi Arabia but also from all those who are interested in this matter.

Ironically, online social media not only served women rights activists: also the anti-women's rights groups and the conservatives in the society used it to disparage those who are involved in these campaigns and their families through creating websites, pages on Facebook and hashtags on Twitter. Online social media therefore became a contested site between the two parties in the society: those who support women's rights, and those who are against it (Khondker, 2011, p. 678).

Finally, although the "cyber protests signify a window of change in societies" (Khondker, 2011, p. 678) with all its assorted tools, nevertheless it is inappropriate not to pay attention to two important points when talking about social movements. First we should look at the new media as a "means rather than the end of social movement" (Khondker, 2011, p. 678). Therefore, the role of new media depends on the movements on the streets. Second, as the new media became a contested site of resistance for all the interest groups in the 21st century, one should not overlook the crucial role that the conventional media, such as television, played in these movements (Khondker, 2011, p. 678), which led to the emergence of a new wave of mass communication systems, as illustrated in Manuel Castells statement (2011) [cited in (Khondker, 2011, p. 678)]:

"Al Jazeera has collected the information disseminated on the Internet by the people using them as sources and organized groups on Facebook, then retransmitting free news on mobile phones. Thus was born a new system of mass

communication built like a mix between an interactive television, Internet, radio and mobile communication systems. The communication of the future is already used by the revolutions of the present. Obviously communication technologies did not give birth to the insurgency. The rebellion was born from the poverty and social exclusion that afflict much of the population in this fake democracy”.

Chapter 6: The Arab world: The case of Saudi Arabia

6.1 Introduction:

The number of Internet users is constantly growing in Saudi Arabia. With a large complex number of new media in the society, the use of the Internet has drawn great attention to the field of study and research. In a study done by two Saudi scholars on the use of the Internet by youths between the age of 16 and 19 in six schools in the Hafer Al-Baten region, three for boys and three for girls. They concluded that 93% of the boys and 94% of the girls at secondary schools use the Internet. Their findings show that the average number of hours per day for using the Internet is between four and five for girls and four for boys. Moreover, they found that 55% of the boys and 30.3% of the girls have made friends in foreign countries online, and 91% of those have claimed that they acquired their knowledge and skills through the use of the Internet [cited in (Wagemakers, et al., 2012, p. 49).

In a study that examined the ICT access and usage behaviours and patterns of residents in Qatar in 2014 the report results showed online activities accessed through mobile phone by individuals in benchmark countries where 89% of Saudi Arabia users browse the Internet, 87% of them send/receive MMS either videos or pictures, 92% send/receive text messages and 87% send/receive emails (Technology, 2014b).

Online censorship remains as of the main concerns that individuals face in Saudi Arabia, with the government being adamant on the appropriateness and value of Internet regulation. In 2011, the Ministry of Culture and Information issued a revised law for online media and publications. The articles of the new regulation detailed the forms of electronic publishing that the new law covers, such as electronic journalism, blogs, fora, websites, the rules for those who seek to license their electronic work, and if they want to be register their online domain. The Ministry said that the reason behind this regulation was to “support benevolent electronic media, regulating the activities of electronic publishing in the Kingdom, protecting society from malpractices in electronic publishing, declaring the rights and duties of workers in electronic publishing, etc.” (Ministry of Cultre and Information, 2011).

The other article in this regulation that is a distraction from the existence of censorship is the statement that content is not censored, but that “the editor is held accountable for all content published on the website” (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2011). Although the regulation’s articles are clear in not stating directly the existence of censorship, but most of the regulation articles are implicitly imposing official censorship in the methods applied.

Nevertheless, the fact is that with all the limitation, online social networks remain the only platforms that give the Saudi’s their alternative public sphere they have been striving for to express themselves, and overcome the society taboos. These obstacles did not hinder young individuals from finding their own way online to avoid control, and claim their online private space to influence their society and their attitude. Ideas that were accepted by previous generations are now being questioned by the new generations and liable for change.

6.2 Saudi Arabia special status: politics and its ideology:

Located in the furthest part of South-western Asia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies about four-fifths of the Arab Peninsula, with a total area of around 2,000,000 square kilometres (Information, 2012). When the current Saudi state was re-established in 1932 as the third Saudi state, its unique geographical location in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula meant it was awarded the annexation of the two holy cities for all Muslims around the world under its governance.

Since the first state was established in 1744, it has been ruled by the Al-Saud family, under the alliance and support of religious authority. The first pact was established between Muhammed ibn AbdulWahhab and the local ruler of Diriyah (a small settlement in Najd), Muhammed ibn Saud, when ibn AbdulWahhab declared ibn Saud as an *imam* (leader of Muslim community) in return of guaranteeing an oath to ibn AbdulWahhab to perform *jihad* (holy war) against the unbelievers (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 16). In other words it was a “sort of merger of religious legitimacy and military might” (Kapiszewske, 2006).

As with any social or religious orthodoxy movements, the Ibn AbdulWahhab movement addressed perceived weaknesses in Islamic societies. They applied a strict interpretation of *sharia* “Islamic legal code and rules” (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 15), which gave Saudi

Arabia its peculiarities as an Islamic country, and one of the most conservative societies in the world. This was because they adopted Wahhabism orthodoxy, which was accepted in the beginning when the country was young and did not have an immediate influence from Western society. Therefore, the Salafism ideology was enforced into the society through schooling and religious institutes, although the differences between regions within the Kingdom in accepting this ideology still prevail.

In the Arab Islamic world, Saudi Arabia is considered to be the most theocratic state in the contemporary Sunni Muslim world. The Saudi constitution is based on the *Quran* and the *Sharia* as a source of legislation (Nevo, 1998, p. 35): “Moreover, in order to underline that there is no other, mundane source of legislation, the use of terms such as qanun (law) and musharr’i (legislator) are practically forbidden as they imply Western-style statutory enactment. They are substituted by nizam (regulation) and marsum (decree), which are supposed to complement the shari’a, not to take its place” (Nevo, 1998, p. 35). Even though Saudi Arabia is a Sunni state that does not support religious pluralism, there are other religious minority groups in the kingdom; these include Shi’iah in the Eastern province, the Isma’iliyya of Najran in the southern province, and Sufis in the Hijaz in the West province of the Kingdom.

Before the first political reform that the late King Fahd started in 1992, the activities and voices of these different religious groups became more visible when they started to send petition’s to the rulers of the Kingdom. Although Saudi Arabia includes different regions that are highly heterogeneous culturally and religiously, the descendants and followers of Wahhabi Salafism today still have authority over theological, social and cultural affairs, with domination of religious institutions of the state that issue fatwas to justify the policies of the Al Saud. However, in recent years, especially after the 9/11 attacks, the alliance between the regime and clergy became much contested by opponents (Kapiszewske, 2006).

The total population of the Kingdom (Saudi and non-Saudi) according to the last census done in 2010, it is estimated that the total population of the Kingdom as **31,015,999** million Saudi citizens account for **20,774,906** million; this is made up of **10,571,443** males and **10,203,463** females (Arabia, 2016). Saudi Arabia is one of the world’s largest producers and exporters of total petroleum liquids, the world’s largest holder of crude oil reserves, and the world’s second largest crude oil producer behind Russia (Energy

Information Administration, 2013). The country's economy depends heavily on petroleum, which in 2011 accounted for almost 90% of the total Saudi export revenues, according to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) *Annual Statistical Bulletin 2012* (Energy Information Administration, 2013).

As a result of being one of the richest big countries in the Arab Islamic world, with its stewardship of the two holiest shrines of Islam, Makkah and Al-Medina, Saudi Arabian politics and society structure not only became a concern of its own citizens or the Gulf area, but also a concern of millions of Muslims around the world. This means that this reality has brought the country's transformation into the modern 21st century with reluctance, and in order not to sabotage its Islamic heritage or its position as a destination for millions of Muslims around the world. This is not only for the pilgrims, but also as direction for their five daily prayers (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 5).

The wealth and fame of the Saudi Kingdom have distinguished the country as one of the important key players in the region at both the political and economic level, which has led to significant change in the homogeneity of a society that may be considered a conservative tribal one. One of the most important changes observed in the Saudi Kingdom as a result of the wealth generated from oil revenue is "the significant change in the role of religion within the country, and the constant concern of the ruling family after the growth of the wealth transformation was to maintain a delicate balance reaping between the economic benefits of wealth and trying to minimize the political and social impact of the changes brought about wealth" (Cavendish, 2006, p. 80).

Although the political parties in Saudi Arabia are illicit, and therefore the idea of political reform through a public revolution is considered to be a perilous endeavour, the 1990s are still considered to be a crucial period in the Kingdom's political life. During the second Gulf war, political activities against the Kingdom policy began; these activities did not question the Islamic base of the country's identity or people's integration, through signed petitions it nevertheless addressed the activists' demand for change in the manner of how the state was governed. In that period we can say that opposition movements became organized without any official acknowledgment, due to the government prohibition of any political parties or activities in the Kingdom.

There were three petitions issued during that period (Kapiszewske, 2006) that shaped the coming political and social movements of the Kingdom. These petitions were (Kapiszewske, 2006):

- Petition of December 1990: where group of 43 liberal, secularist academics, writers, businessmen and government officials, wrote a petition to King Fahd demanding that he introduce basic laws regulating the functioning of government, and for the strengthening of the principle of equality of all citizens. The petition also demanded the elimination of discrimination based on religion, tribal affiliation, family background and social status. They also advocated for more media independence, the legal system, introducing a framework for issuing *fatwas*, establishing the long-proposed Consultative Council and providing it with broad powers, including the right to oversee the work of executive agencies (Kapiszewske, 2006, p. 460).
- Petition of May 1991: where group of 400 Islamist and *ulama* demanded King Fahd pursued “extensive reform of the political and judicial system with restrict application of Islamic norms and values in public life, kingdom economic, and foreign policy, build-up of strong army, plus criticizing the government corruption” (Kapiszewske, 2006, p. 461).
- After that, “leaders of the Shi’ite citizens wrote a petition to King Fahd with the aim of supporting the establishment of the consultative council, and demanding the discontinuation of all discrimination against the Shi’ites citizen in the country in labour market, universities, army, plus cessation all harassment they face when they perform their religious rituals” (Kapiszewske, 2006, p. 461).

The aforementioned petitions are believed to be the main movements that shaped the next chapter of the coming Saudi Kingdom, where, in 1992, the late King Fahd started by announcing a decree for “basic Laws, a constitution for a new consultative council and system for regional government for the Kingdom’s 14 provinces, with the assembly of 60 members assigned by the King” (Kapiszewske, 2006, p. 461).

The Kingdom has a well-established media industry run through the Ministry of Culture and Information, as well as the private sector media industry: both reflect the Kingdom’s national and international politics. The print and non-print media are strictly controlled, and journalists practice self-censorship. Nonetheless, in recent years,

especially in the reign of King Abdullah Ibn Abdullaziz, freedom of speech has increased to a certain limit, and there has been more tolerance with the media criticizing some policies, ministers and official individuals in the government (Al-qudsi-ghabra, et al., 2011, pp. 54-56).

Paradoxically however, Saudi Arabia invested heavily in establishing several pan-Arab satellite television stations from the 1990s with the first MBC television station, which was based in London then moved to Dubai, the Bahrain based Orbit Satellite Network, now called OSN, and Rotana television station based in Saudi Arabia, all of which serve the policy of Saudi Arabia (Al-qudsi-ghabra, et al., 2011, p. 54). However, at the same time, they offers western-style entertainment such as movies and programmes, and also produces programmes that are considered by the conservative parties in the kingdom as outside the conservative Islamic social pattern of Saudi society. “However, while Saudi Arabia invested in those networks, the media environment within Saudi Arabia continues to be one of the most tightly controlled in the region, a conflicting image and a phenomenon that is very much reflected in the Saudi Internet situation as well” (Al-qudsi-ghabra, et al., 2011, p. 54).

6.3 Saudi Arabia: Women and social order:

Despite all the changes that the Saudi society is going through, the impact of the Islamic religion still prevails, not only as a source of legitimacy but also affecting all aspects of life. The integration between the Islamic religion and individual’s life reaches the limit that it becomes difficult to differentiate between religion, culture and social norms of the society. As a consequence of the rule of Wahhabi’s ideology in Saudi’s daily lives, social order is based on the segregation by gender between men and women (Cavendish, 2006, p. 90); this is in order to protect women’s chastity, which is also a tribal tradition, as the Saudi society is a conservative tribal one.

Although Saudi Arabia is a modern country, and has achieved a remarkable literacy rate of 96%, religious institutions still play a crucial role in the education system (Central Department of Statistic and Information, 2013). However, Saudi culture is considered as a rigid patriarchal tribal culture, thus the patriarchal system in the society depends heavily on the religious legitimacy, just like any other aspect in life, in order to maintain the male dominance in the social system. Hence, every step that the government takes to

modernize the country that involves Saudi women and their mobility, they usually seek not to challenge the social patriarchal order of the society, but they tend to use the religious institutions as a medium to create a debate that might, in time, apply certain changes in the society (Hamidaddin, 2013a).

Consequently, this social order and the role of segregation created what we can call “separated women’s world culture”, where the educational system, banking and commercial institutions are established to serve women and staffed by women only (Cavendish, 2006, p. 90). The only exception in the educational institutions is King Abdullah University for Science and Technology KAUST, which was founded just three years ago, the first co-educational post-graduate university in the country.

As stated in the CEDAW report in 2007 (which the Saudi government signed and ratified), the Kingdom has devoted great attention to the role that women play in society. This is regardless of government reservations about some of the items of the convention that are considered to contradict some of the norms of Islamic Law, therefore they will not be obligated to obey these areas (CEDAW, 2007, p. 7).

The Saudi government made intense efforts to promote gender equality that will not contradict to *Sharia* law, by ensuring equal access and minimizing differences between both genders to all services such as education, health service, job opportunities, equal wage, pensions, etc. (Islam, 2014, p. 71). However, there still many differences that need to be eliminated to reach gender equality in the Saudi society.

As a conservative society, there are some topics that are considered taboo, which are usually dealt with in a very sensitive conservative way; religion, sex and politics, especially before the Internet was introduced into Saudi society at the end of the 1990s. Women’s subjects are one of these sensitive issues that are complex and controversial. Most of the criticism from the West focuses on how Saudi society and government laws are dealing with women in society, suppressing their essential rights and their mobility. Saudi society has been always resistant to change, due to long influence of the Wahabbi orthodox, which to a certain extent was integrated with the tribal norms. This resistance had an impact on the status of Saudi women in society, where “the constraints on Saudi women have long been out of line with those on women in other Muslim countries” (Islam, 2014, p. 77).

These constraints on women fall under the discrimination that the CEDAW convention defines as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (CEDAW, n/d). This is because of the segregated lifestyle, and the male guardianship system that hinders every aspect of women’s daily lives; all of which affected women’s opportunities and meant they were lower compared to those for men.

In recent years, more precisely during King Abdullah’s reign, the conservative Kingdom started to change its image significantly. The changes came in many directions, in politics, economic growth, freedom of speech, education institutions, etc.

In spite all of the constraints they face, with the constant changes happening in the Middle East region in general and in Saudi society in particular, and regardless of the patriarchal order in the society, women in Saudi society continue to struggle for their rights; we can state that King Abdullah’s reign is considered being the period of most notable change for women’s empowerment and movement in Saudi society. In September 2011 King Abdullah granted Saudi women the right to run and vote for the Municipal council election in 2015. He also appointed 30 women (20% of the total members) as members of the consultative *Shura* council, stating in his declaration that “We refuse to marginalize the role of women in Saudi society” (Islam, 2014, p. 77).

In 2012, the Ministry of Labour regulated women’s work in clothing stores, amusement parks, restaurants, and in stores in shopping malls, without the need for them to seek their male guardian’s permission, although sex segregation still exists. In 2013, the Ministry of Justice issued the first four licenses for Saudi female lawyers in the city of Riyadh. This allowed them to open a law firm and represent their clients in all different courts, together with providing legal advice. In 2012, Saudi women were able to join the Saudi Olympic team for the first time in Saudi history, even though they were not as prepared as their fellow athletes.

Despite all this, Saudi women still “remain marginalized in Saudi Arabia and suffer from many restrictions that challenges and limit her freedom mobility, however, young

Saudi women's nowadays are becoming more assertive in demanding greater opportunities and independence, and with the combination of King Abdullah's futuristic vision and intrepidity they continue to demonstrate vigorous pursuit of their rights, challenge the authority of their patriarchal society" (Islam, 2014, p. 77).

6.4 Saudi Arabia: civil movements:

Civil societies in Saudi Arabia are weak in the sense that they are not free from government control. No civil society can be established in the Kingdom without being licensed through the government. In the 1980s and 1990s, religions provided large space for civil societies in Saudi Arabia (Kalathil & Boas, 2003, p. 113), but with the changes and developments happening today in Saudi, new, different disciplines of civil societies are brought into a new social, political and intellectual environment (Wagemakers, et al., 2012, p. 42). Some might argue that with the desire of the Saudi government to control some of the power of conservative Wahhabi establishments, they encourage the activities of civil societies that challenge society's conservative ideology, to slowly diminish their power, all of which creates more structural space for civil society (Wagemakers, et al., 2012, p. 42).

There are three civil organizations in Saudi Arabia that cover a range of associate organizations (Wagemakers, et al., 2012):

1. Non-political:

- Charitable organizations;
- Business community, well-being work and empowerment;
- Chamber of commerce;
- Community centres and neighbourhood centres;

2. Semi political:

- The literary and cultural clubs;
- Virtual civil society and new media;
- Diwaniyyat¹⁰;

¹⁰ Informal groups that are mainly based on families, tribal, intellectual or business ties; they are privately held weekly social meetings in homes of prominent families. It is similar to those literary Salons in the 19th century in Europe.

- Different organizations in the Eastern province;

3. Political organization:

- Saudi civil and political rights association (ACPRA);
- Human rights monitor - Saudi Arabia;
- Human rights first society (HRFS);
- Rights activists network (RAN);
- The association for protection and defence of women's rights in Saudi Arabia.

Because of the increased political and social awareness among individuals in the Saudi society, people have become more interested in the work of civil societies. However, civil societies face big obstacles, which have prompted most of the young individuals in the society to exploit advanced ICT to promote more civic activities. In this way, virtual civil society has become more popular among Saudi youths, and forced the NGOs structures to add virtual civil societies as a semi-political organization that will play a major role in re-shaping society's point of view. Below, two cases on the work of civic engagement in Saudi society are presented to shed light on volunteer youth work and their engagement in civic work in the Saudi Arabian context. The aim for presenting these two cases on Saudi youth civic engagement in the Saudi context is to show the level of enthusiasm from Saudi youths for civic engagement and volunteer work outside of frameworks of government control. With the advent of the new technology that provided the individuals within the society an alternative public space to meet and share interests, young individuals turned to the use of the Internet and online communities to fulfil their passions and desire to be more involved in the society civic work, without many of the restrictions from the government. Although none of these events have yet to be conducted without the concerned authorities' knowledge, it was mainly a group of individuals' initiative.

One of these cases was part of the author's MSc dissertation literature review on online communities and civic engagement and online groups, an initiative called Think 'N' Link Youth Advancement Project (Rawas, 2010).

- ***Think 'N' Link Youth Advancement Project:***

This case was presented in a study conducted for the author's MSc project in 2010 to introduce part of the youth civic engagement in the Saudi society. The Think 'N' Link project is a Saudi business management consultancy that offers a wide range of services to local, regional and international companies [Bundagji, 2008, Cited in (Rawas, 2010, p. 39)].

The company was an individual initiative to create a strategy and guidelines for empowering the unofficial efforts of a volunteer group established on Facebook. Their specific aim was to increase the volunteer capacity of 120 youths through a series of 5 training programmes by the end of 2009, and to identify 5 key development projects (Rawas, 2010, p. 40).

The outcome of this project was as follows (Rawas, 2010, p. 40):

- created first grassroots civil society youth groups database in the Saudi Arabian context;
- created a network of 38 individuals from 15 various grassroots civil societies;
- built the groups' knowledge of the importance of grassroots projects, civil society organizations, in addition to the systematic process of engaging in community organizations;
- built the capacity of group leaders (individuals that are similar to the 'lead users of the present study);
- marketed five social projects and link groups with top businessmen and organizations in Saudi Arabia.

The second case example on the Saudi youth engagement in the civic work is:

- ***The Young Initiative Group:***

The second volunteer initiative in this research was established in Jeddah in 2010 under the name of the Young Initiative Group (YIG). It was founded as a volunteer community on Facebook by a group of proactive leaders in the community who pursued efforts to 'do good' under one organization. The page was called "Ramadan volunteer meeting" and they had 200 people signing up at the beginning, which led to changing the name of the group to YIG. They had their first annual conference in a hospital in Jeddah with the participation of two other volunteering organizations that provided

them with speakers to talk about different issues that interested the volunteers (Al-Bakri, 2014b).

Due to the extensive demand from the society for supporting young peoples' initiatives, services of facilitation and consultation in matters related to social development were provided by this group, which expanded their services to fulfil community needs (Al-Masri and Al-Bakri, 2014). By 2014, YIG Consulting started to offer Community Solutions design, execution and impact reporting, with a focus on Community Development. Their approach was to design, execute and assess sustainable community solutions in partnerships with private, public and non-profit sector entities (Al-Masri & Al-Bakri, 2014).

Part of their role was to act as an intermediary between the community and any entity looking forward to create a positive, lasting and measurable impact on the relevant community, and they have worked with several companies and civil societies in the Kingdom. Examples of such bodies include the Saudi Environmental Society, Majid Society, Friends of Jeddah Parks, Effat University, and Dar Al-Hekma College, and others (Al-Masri & Al-Bakri, 2014). Their values concentrated around embracing and driving change in society, pursuing growth and learning, building positive team and family spirit among the volunteers and the community. They pursued these values by offering community engagement advice, employee volunteer programmes, volunteering and entrepreneurial training courses to students, and CSR benchmarking and programme design and execution (Al-Masri & Al-Bakri, 2014).

A recent achievement for this consultancy group was their contract with one of the civil organizations in Saudi society, called the Majid society¹¹, where they have signed a retainer based contract to manage the volunteering unit within the Majid Society. This is the result of a one month audit that YIG carried out to audit the volunteering unit set up and performance for 2013. They also signed a contract with the Rabea Tea brand to

¹¹ The founding of the Majid for Community Development dates back to the year 1419 H (1998 G). The society was founded through the initiative of His Royal Highness Prince Majid bin Abdulaziz (may Allah rest his soul in peace) under the name of "The Mecca Society for Development and Social Services". In 1427 H (2006 G), the Society was re-launched with a new vision and direction and bearing the name of its founder: "Majid for Community Development". The Society operates through the Ministry of Social Affairs' license #174 and is considered a publicly owned entity under the supervision of the ministry. The Society is based in the city of Jeddah, although its activities extend to all parts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Majid for Community Development, n.d.)

facilitate community engagement activities on their behalf for the coming five months (Al-Bakri, 2014b).

The achievements of the group between 2010 and 2013 consisted of 35+ initiatives, 6,327 followers on Twitter, 2,327 likes on Facebook, and 500+ active volunteers (Al-Masri & Al-Bakri, 2014) With their qualifications, YIG consulting continue to be an active group engaging with youth groups and the private sector in projects that serve the community and take a vital part in developing it.

In their latest society civil engagement, they took a group of 20 young individuals on a trip to Jordan – 10 females and 10 men aged from 18 to 35 years – in order to promote the concept of ‘volunteer tourism’. The aim of the trip was to develop ways for youths to perform volunteer work, spread the concept of volunteering as a worthwhile and entertaining activity, and exchange knowledge between countries’ volunteer groups (Al-Bakri, 2014b).

Both of those cases presented above started as a small initiative in order to help and gather interested youths in volunteer work, and uses online communities as a starting point for their work. After their success, both groups turned their small groups into two successful consultancy organizations that provide consultancy and work on designing solutions to their interested clients who use the Internet and online communities to promote to their work.

There is a high proportion of young people in the Kingdom, a generation that is faced with many challenges as well as wealth, a generation that differs from their parents, with high expectations and strong ambitions to be heard and participate in public life and politics as well. Of the population, 64% is under the age of 30, with a population growth rate of 2.51% (Central Department of Statistic and Information, 2013). In a recent survey of Gulf youth, 63% of those surveyed answered that their government should give young people more access to the policy of decision making of their countries, and 58% of those surveyed wanted their government to build more local youth councils for effective involvement in society (Murphy, 2011, p. 5).

Access to the new information technology and the advance of ICT gives the Saudi youth wider opportunities to decrease the distances between them and the outside world, and expose them more to different cultures with different norms and religions. This

gives them alternative ideas that compete with their conservative society norms and challenge the Wahhabi ideology establishment in Saudi society.

Given all the developments within Saudi society, one can say that the advent of the Internet and online communities encouraged Saudi citizens to enhance their involvement in virtual civil societies where they can act freely. In her book, Caryle Murphy (2013) interviewed Saudi youth studying in the US and in Saudi Arabia. She concluded that the young Saudi generation are “a revolutionary lot, preferring gradual, step-by-step change, they want change, but not at the cost of safety and security, most favour more tolerance for diversity, including in the realm of religion” (Murphy, 2013, p. 6).

Mai Yamani, a Saudi Arabian independent scholar, author, and anthropologist, in her book on the challenge of the new generation in Saudi Arabia, puts emphasis on the politicization of youth in the Kingdom as a consequence of their massive exposure to the Internet and online social networks [Cited in (Wagemakers, et al., 2012, p. 49)]. According to her study, Yamani sees that with the growing numbers of youth in Saudi society, and with their extensive use of new technology, young individuals are seeking more “civil freedom, citizenship and patriotism” [cited in (Wagemakers, et al., 2012, p. 49)], through developing their identities and making it more visible, which, in her point of view, is considered to be a big challenge for the Saudi government. One of the examples she gave was on the Saudi Shiites’ and Ismailis’ use of the Internet in order to defend their religious identities from discrimination, and to emphasize their patriotic affiliation in Saudi society [cited in (Wagemakers, et al., 2012, p. 49)].

Evidence shows that, under government control over official civil organizations in Saudi society, and the restrictions on group mobility, the capacity to publish messages through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and get an immediate reaction on them, is far more important and effective than using other media in Saudi society (Wagemakers, et al., 2012, p. 49). The example of the Muwatana online group during the flood of Jeddah in 2009 can be an indicator of the use of these online civil groups to work in time of catastrophes¹².

¹² This case was presented in the author’s MSc dissertation, 2010.

To conclude, although under the autocratic regime Saudis managed to create an alternative space for their political and social debates, even before the emergence of the new advanced technology, we can, however, state that the Saudi political and intellectual environment are conscious enough to favour more development of civil societies and enhance its ability. In addition, while the Saudi government is working, to a certain extent, towards more reform, Saudi civil society is still confronted with authoritarianism, status which aims to control most of the important parts of its work and depolarize them.

6.5 Saudi Arabia reforms: different perspectives:

Since the 1990s, Saudi Arabia has faced radical changes that altered the country politically and socially, even though it did not, according to many observers and activists, reach the desired level. As mentioned earlier, the first radical change was during the second Gulf war, when activists, scholars, elites, religious clergy and other parties started to send petitions to the late King Fahd, demanding political reform and more democratization of the government. This resulted in the establishment of the Consultative Council in 1992 and a system of regional government for the Kingdom's 14 provinces (Kapiszewske, 2006, p. 461).

In late 1999, Saudi society faced a radical technological transformation with the introduction of the Internet, enabling the general public to access information through national ISP providers; before this the Internet was only available to the wealthy through Bahrain. This transformation challenges the conservative culture through creating an alternative public sphere that opened up society for the new arrival of competing ideas that challenged conservative forms of thinking, and society's religious ideology. This was achieved through online discussions in forum sites, blog sites, and more recently Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; these became popular among lead users in Saudi society, where individuals and groups are able to create civil groups, upload short films, and support different causes in their society.

As the number of Internet users grows, Saudi citizens have become more active participants rather than just recipients, "they are no longer spectators, but are avid participants in global communication forums" (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 273). The number of Internet users in the Kingdom has grown significantly from 1 million users in 2001 to

13 million users by 2011, up to 16.4 million users at the end of 2013, with a population of 55% (Communication & Information Technology Commission, 2011) and “it is expected that the demand for Internet services will increase significantly in the next few years, due to the availability of fibre-optic networks (FTTx) at very high speeds (initially in large cities), growing Internet content, and the spread of handheld smart devices and applications” (Communication & Information Technology Commission, 2013).

From the beginning, the government sought to control the flow of information on the Internet through a gateway maintained by the Internet Services Unit of King Abdullaziz City of Science and Technology in Riyadh.

The Saudi government appears to maintain an online censorship system, managed through an Internet Services unit that filters the content of webpages through the only proxy server having general access to the Internet. This unit is able to edit content and filter any information that can be considered as immoral or illicit as listed in the Internet services main webpage: this list is updated daily. This was summarised by Al-Jaber in the following way: “All incoming Web traffic to the Kingdom passes through a proxy farm system implementing a content filtering software addresses for banned sites is maintained by this filtering system. This list is updated daily based on the content filtering policy” (Al-Jaber, 2013, p. 164).

The Saudi government manner of censorship relies not only on its filtering and blocking system, but also on encouraging citizens to be involved by promoting self-censorship. The webpage that informs them that they accessed a blocked website also gives them the option to submit requests to ISU to block sites they believe to be contrary to society’s moral and religious beliefs. In addition, the ISU gives another option to users to submit requests to review the blocked sites, “Many Saudi citizens actively participate in the censorship of the Internet as the Internet Services Unit receives hundreds of requests daily from Internet users to have webpages blocked based on their content some reformists decided to use the tense situation in the region and in the Kingdom itself to intensify pressure for political, social and educational changes” (Al-Jaber, 2013, p. 164).

Although the content of the Internet is censored in Saudi Arabia, government censorship tends to overlook online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter; they both transcend official censorship giving the people the alternative public sphere they have been hoping for to express themselves freely. However, there are still topics that, in the eyes of the government as well as some Saudi citizens, are considered to be a violation of society culture and Islamic religion. Therefore, Saudi citizens act as overseers in order to protect their society from any unwanted ideas that contradict society culture and religion.

In 2012, a young journalist, Hamza Kashgari, wrote an article in his blog that portrays what he would say to the Prophet Mohammed (May peace be upon him) when he saw him, and was retweeted on the day of the Prophet *Mawlid*¹³: online users found this piece offensive to the Prophet. People were furious with his words, and went far online by hash-tagging him on Twitter with 30,000 responses, and on Facebook 13,000 people joined a group called ‘Saudi people want punishment for Hamza Kashgari’, which resulted in banning him from working with any newspaper and he went to jail for a while (Al-Jaber, 2013, p. 164).

While the government has accepted the presence of online social network sites, other figures in society, the religious figures, explicitly condemned these sites. For example, the Grand Mufti of Saudi, Arabia Abdullaziz Al-Sheikh, announced that online social sites are not a legitimate source for information and their only purpose was to spread lies and create chaos among society (Al-Jaber, 2013, pp. 164-165).

Although the Saudi government have not yet started censoring social networks, even though some social networks, such as Twitter, started filtering and censoring its content on a country by country basis, the existence of the Internet in the conservative Saudi society remains one of the unique transformations that has occurred. This has shaped its current sociocultural changes with people utilizing the Internet’s alternative public sphere to express themselves more, and to become involved in online civil groups that, in the long run, will provoke changes in society. It can be said that it is now up to the people how they utilize these social networks, and how it will serve their goals. For some of them the Internet is considered to be an outlet for their silent voices because of the political, cultural or gender issues in their societies; for others it may serve as a

¹³ The observance of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad.

source of information. Although some believe that their importance should not be amplified, nevertheless, “the role that SNSs played not in initiating or carrying out social movements, but by providing a worldwide meeting place that incited discussion and resolution has been solidified in history” (Al-Jaber, 2013, p. 165).

It is possible to say that the most noteworthy changes that have occurred in Saudi Arabia was when King Abdullah Ibn Abdullaziz came to power in 2005, and declared his reform projects at all levels – political, economic, and social. The first significant change was when the government announced the formation of new platform for National Dialogue sponsored by King Abdullaziz, the Center for National Dialogue. This new centre focussed on pluralism, dialogue and national unity through promoting dialogue and the notion of citizenship. The new platform became an annual event that assembled selected intellectuals and professionals for the rapprochement of social, religious and cultural issues, discussing different topics such as terrorism, extremism, religious excess and moderation, religious tolerance and difference, youth problems, education, labour and women’s rights (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 243).

Even though some might see the measures the Saudi government has taken on political reform and citizen’s participation as being just to relieve international pressure on the Kingdom or as paying lip service to human rights, one cannot overlook the changes that have occurred in the Kingdom. In 2004 a group of activists established the first independent human rights organization in Saudi Arabia, and, in the same year, the National Society for Human Rights was established in order to implement human rights treaties that the Kingdom signed, with 41 members, most of them working in governmental organizations. The Saudi government also took an initiative and established the Human Rights Commission to protect human’s rights, with 18 full-time and 6 part-time members appointed (Al-Rasheed, 2010, pp. 250-251).

The other significant change happened more recently and made an enormous change to Saudi society. This was the establishment of the King Abdullah scholarship programme in 2005 for sponsoring male and female Saudi students to continue their studies abroad in qualified universities at all levels. This programme is by far the largest scholarship programme in the history of Saudi Arabia, and has recently been extended to run until 2020. The King addressed the launching of the programme to the media by saying “for them to know the world and for the world to know them”, and since then, the

programme has grown to serve over 130,000 students in 46 countries worldwide, over 20% of which are women (Ministry of Higher Education, n/d; Saudi-US Relation Information Service, 2012).

While this programme has received enormous recognition both inside the Kingdom and from all around the globe, the conservative parties in society, the religious clergy, have criticized the programme and tried to draw government attention to its flaws and the danger of sending young students to study abroad; they feared that being abroad might have an effect on their norms and religion while they are away from home. The most controversial issue from their point of view was the female enrolment in the programme, and the effect on them when they were exposed to the outside world.

Now, 10 years after the programme was established, and with all the changes that the Saudi Kingdom has gone through, and regardless of all the criticism that the programme faced from the conservative party in Saudi Arabia, this programme remains one of the most developed programmes that has contributed to the development of the country. This has been through the creation of different transition of Saudi society, socially and economically, meeting youth needs in education, and opening society for more diverse cultural dialogue, which is consistent with the theory of subculture that varies between countries. At the same time, those students will break conventional patterns and extend bridges between nations, while conforming to values most suited to their beliefs and unique scientific culture and integrate them to their own culture.

6.6 Online social networks in Saudi Arabia:

Online social networks have quickly emerged as important new platforms as part of the advancement of information communication technology; hence, the importance of their influence on society has increased at the same time. Scholars have argued that “the power of social media to affect society is based exclusively on its social aspects: interaction and participation” (Center for European Studies, 2012), and in authoritarian regimes these online social platforms changed the way people communicate. It gives them an alternative space to express themselves with the multi-source of information that it offers to the public.

Like any other country, Saudi Arabia, with its wealth and its way of modernizing the country, has embraced new ICT since the beginning with the expansion of phone lines,

TV and radio channels, mobile phones, and the diffusion of the Internet. With government control over the official media, social media has become integral to the social realm. Hence, social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as blogging, became an alternative public sphere that “increased polarisation of the Saudi society along ideological, religion, tribal and sectarian lines, where previously prohibited messages is published” (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 274).

The Internet has transformed Saudi society from being a very closed society to a more transparent one. With the situation being more open to different new ideas, it became impossible to “go back to the status quo ante” (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 272). Nevertheless, in Saudi society online censorship, together with self-censorship, remains one of the obstacles that people have to face. However, it is a fact that, with all the existing limitations in Saudi society, online social networks remain the only platforms that give Saudis their alternative public sphere. So it is important to focus on their role in the society, as well as their role in applying social reform in one of the most Islamic conservative societies in the Middle East.

This section is organized as follows: first a review of existing online social networks in Saudi society is presented, as this is the general view on the diffusion of these platforms in society. Following this, two of the existing research on online collective actions and the use of alternative public sphere have been addressed. The following discussions depict the case studies for the research to be carried out.

6.6.1 Internet usage in Saudi Arabia:

Regardless of online censorship in Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom is working to build an information based society, e.g. by opening the telecommunication market to competition and by taking strategic initiatives to put the country among the fastest developing information and communication technology markets in the region (Communication & Information Technology Commission, 2007-2009). By the end of 2013, the number of fixed broadband subscriptions had reached 2,082 million (this included DSL, Fixed Wireless, and FTTx), with a penetration rate of 44.3% of households (Communication & Information Technology Commission, 2013). These developments have made a significant contribution to the growth of Internet users in the Kingdom, where, as mentioned previously, by 2013 the number of Internet users in Saudi Arabia had reached 16.4 million users with a population of penetration of 55%.

The Saudi government is open about its filtering system for Internet content, especially when it comes to politics, religion, and pornography; a reflection of the common observation that the Saudi society is more conservative than any other neighbouring country. Some might argue that Saudi citizens are “significantly more conservative than those of their own government” (Zuhur, 2005), however, with the introduction of the Internet at the end of the 1990s, this commonplace observation has changed.

Today, the restrictions on social and political uses of the Internet have begun to dissolve with its wide use in society leading to important behavioural change. This has included the use of different chat rooms such as Pal-talk and Yahoo, etc. Together with different fora such as al-Sahat, Elaph, Tuwa, the Saudis have begun to discover themselves and others, especially revealing the “myth about that they were essentially a religious society with few non-religious exceptions” (Hamidaddin, 2013b, p. 128). Saudis or non-Saudi individuals are now able to interact regardless of geography, religious or gender differences. Therefore, individuals have started to reveal “their doubts about a variety of highly sensitive issues such as class, religion, gender and the legitimacy of the state” (Hamidaddin, 2013b, p. 128), at first by using pseudonyms, but after a while individuals started using their real names with their own pictures; this behaviour was once considered as disrespectful, especially for women (Hamidaddin, 2013b, p. 129).

The rate of population growth in Saudi Arabia is 2.51%, with 64% of its population under the age of 30 (Central Department of Statistic and Information, 2013). One can observe that the social dynamics in the Kingdom are enriched by the younger generation who are well educated and considered to be tech-savvy. With the penetration of technology in the society, and the widespread and popularity of online social networks, young people have found new places to express themselves, achieve their goals and question the norms, politics, and religion of their society as well.

6.6.2 Online social networking sites in Saudi Arabia:

Online social networks have become prevalent with the expansion of Internet use and its penetration in peoples’ lives. This has made them exponentially subject to academic studies to understand its effect on human lives, and the extent of its role towards the success or failure of individual’s online projects, their civil activities, and online collective actions.

When trying to define online social network sites, it can be said that, in its most simple form, it is a way for people to connect with others with similar interests regardless of geography, time and background limitations. Wellman and Gulia (1995) characterize them as “a relational community, concerned with social interaction among its members” [cited in (Lin & Lee, 2006, p. 480)]. Rheingold described online communities as “social relationship aggregation, facilitated by Internet-based technology, in which users communicate and build personal relationships” [cited in (Lin & Lee, 2006, p. 480)].

Boyd (2007) defines such sites as “web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system, which may vary from site to site” (Boyd & Ellison, 2010, p. 211). Breslin and Decker identified online social networks groups as sites that “share common functions such as a list of friends with the ability to search for more people, the ability to interact with others using private or public messages, discussion forums, and blogs, or communities, share and manage events and upload media” [Cited in (Al-Jaber, 2013, p. 162)].

Like any other successful product, during its lifespan online social networks experience peak growth. Hence, users’ requirements have evolved based on the technological development of those sites and what the sites were able to offer its users. Nevertheless, because of its massive growth among Internet users due to its unique fast interactive capabilities, the number of social network users has grown exponentially, and online communities provide wider opportunities for individuals to transform activities from offline into online activity and vice versa. Subsequently the effect of these sites began to be widely recognized.

Online social networks also contribute to the development of weak and strong ties online, where ties are developed between individuals whenever they exchange information and share resources (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 386). People usually look online not only for information, but also for companionship and social support – the more time individuals “stay in contact online the more stronger their ties tends to become” (Preece, 2000, p. 177). On the other hand, weak ties still exist in online social networks groups, mainly for information exchange, but they do not require emotional or financial support (Preece, 2000, pp. 177-178).

“Social network studies of offline relationships have identified a number of features that distinguish ties by strength, and which are important for understanding the interaction between tie strength and media use” (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 386). Strong ties are usually determined through “frequency of contact, duration of the association, intimacy of the tie, provision of reciprocal services, and kinship have been used as measures of tie strength” (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 386). Studies have shown that those who report weak ties online usually have limited relationships with low intimacy in the shared information, while the reported strong ties “exchanges a higher level of intimacy, more self-disclosure, emotional as well as instrumental exchanges, reciprocity in exchanges, and more frequent interaction” (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 386).

It is assumed that “online exchanges are as real in terms of their impact on the tie as are offline exchanges, for example, that social support given online is an exchange that adds to maintaining the tie, and is not neutral” (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 388). In the preparation for this research, and during the field work, the author contacted online lead users through her own strong ties, both online and offline, to gather the information needed for the research. During the research the author developed a certain level of ties with some lead users who used to be connected to the author or author’s friends with weak ties. They themselves developed an interest in the topic of the research, hence the type of ties between the users and the author went from being weak to strong at the time of conducting this research. In other words, this indicates that those ties stemmed from the numbers and types of information exchanged and supported, not just from the maintained online relationships.

Furthermore, online social analysts usually analyse not only the attributes of individuals in consideration of relationships and exchanges among social actors, but they also analyse the nature of exchanges that create and perpetuate work and social relationships. They argue that the types of benefit vary from being tangibles, such as goods and services, to the intangible, such as influence or social support (Garton & Haythornthwaite, 2006). This point is precisely at the core of this research (the intangible factor that online lead users have as an influence on their conservative society) to explore the possibility of online collective actions and campaigns undertaken by online lead users, and the effect on society awareness and social uprising. In this

research the author has focused on two social networks, namely Twitter and YouTube, where the lead users sample had been targeted to collect the data.

In the following section, a study has been presented, which was undertaken by Nitin Agarwal, Merlyna Lim, and Rolf Wigand in 2012 to study the role of online social media in mobilizing opinion, through examining a case study from Saudi Arabia on women's right to drive campaigns using the theory of collective actions.

6.6.3 Online Collective Action and Women's Right-to-Drive Campaigns in Saudi Arabia: Case study:

Since the spread of online social networks in Saudi society, the struggle of Saudi women who fought for their right to drive in Saudi Arabia took a different approach by starting online campaigns using different platforms such as Twitter and YouTube. This reached out to the world and gained worldwide attention from different media channels around the world. Hence, this research was performed in order to understand the role of online social media in mobilizing opinion on this matter.

The author of this study sought to understand the “fundamentals, complexity and dynamics of online collective actions theory” (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 119) through the case of Saudi women's online campaigns to mobilize public opinion on the case of women's fight for a ‘right to drive’ in the Kingdom. By mapping the existing social media they wanted to analyse, they employed the Social Network Analysis methodology to observe and explain different useful patterns such as community extraction, expert identification, and information diffusion. Based on this, their overall effort was attributed in three phases: individuals, community, and traditional perspectives (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 119).

Agarwal (2012) links the study of such activities to the notion of collective action that goes back to the work of Vilfredo Pareto in the 1930s and Mancur Olson in (1965) (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 100). The classic definition of collective actions in Sandler's work (1992) is “the pursuit of a common goal by more than one person, presumably, the achievement of the goal will then benefit all of society” [Cited in (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 100)], and with the act of collective actions comes a different kind of problem, such as transaction costs when the work of the group results in what is called collective irrationality. However, with the diffusion of ICT and the extensive use of the Internet,

the notion of “landscape of collective action has transformed totally with almost no cost involved in case of putting off the initiative” (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 101).

In the case of women in Saudi Arabia, the issue of banning them from driving came under the spotlight. Saudi women took advantage of the Internet and its social platforms to promote their cause, and tried to mobilize public opinion and win the confrontation against the societal and clerical views. The case study data was collected through different approaches, from individuals to group blogs, and statistics derived from search engines and different social media sites.

The first initiative was undertaken by Wajeha Al-Huwaider in 2008, a Saudi activist, writer and co-founder of the Association for the Protection and Defense of Women’s Rights in Saudi Arabia. She started her online campaign series by Saudi writers and journalists, and then became a regional phenomenon. On the International Women’s day in 2008 she posted a YouTube video showing her driving a car in the East region of Saudi Arabia, which successfully attracted global attention. Thereafter, she continued her campaign online to promote her ideas, analysing Arab social situations, criticizing the statutes of human rights and vehemently protesting against discrimination and violence against women (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 104).

Her campaign was particularly focussed on YouTube videos and propagated through the blogosphere, which became an influential voice for other collective actions calling for reform, mainly initiated by women. In 2011, Eman Al-Nafjan, a well-known Saudi blogger, initiated another online campaign, called Women2Drive, which was started on 17 June to encourage Saudi women to drive. Manal Al-Sharif took the initiative to promote this through a video uploaded on YouTube that she would drive a car on the day; unfortunately she was arrested while doing the test drive, and was only released after signing a pledge not to drive again. This campaign used not only YouTube and blogs, but also other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter where the hashtag #Women2Drive was used to tweet all related events, upload videos for Saudi women driving cars in the Kingdom, and articles regarding this cause (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 104).

The campaign and its repercussions drew national and international attention to the movement, and with the accumulation of the initiative, the movement gained global

coverage from different media channels such as CNN, Al-Jazeera, the Guardian, and the Huffington Post (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 104).

The study found that using social media has “played a key role and irreversibly transformed organization and mobilization of collective movements” (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 118). They have used the individual, community and transitional perspective to analyse the collective movements via ICT, which resulted with significant viewpoints where

“the findings from the individual perspective indicate the effect of social ties on the diffusion of issues in the network. The issue diffusion network is further analysed in the community perspective to identify the naturally emerging communities and the leaders within. The findings indicated that the leaders of the community tend to be the major influencing factors on the individual’s issues and concerns and hence the collective concerns of the community. The transnational perspective helped in analysing how the communities distributed globally that shared similar concerns helped in the convergence of individual and community concerns into a collective movement” (Agarwal, et al., 2012, p. 118).

The outcome of the campaign has not yet changed the fundamental culture or the legal rules that prohibits Saudi women from driving. Nevertheless, it put the Saudi government in the international spotlight and under pressure.

6.6.4 Twitter in Saudi Arabia:

Online social networks have created the possibility of an alternative public sphere that enables individuals in authoritarian societies to learn, discuss, debate and share information online. With the expansion of the use of online social networks, recent studies often focus on the percentage and distribution of the use of different online social networks among online users around the world. In this research I will study online lead users and their initiatives through Twitter networks, hence, it is useful to give general background on the use of this mean in Saudi Arabia.

In latest report undertaken by the Dubai School of Government (2013), it was found that the Arabic language is one of the growing languages online in different social platforms. For example, “Arab tweets account for over 76% of all tweets in the Arab

world. This represents a growth of over 10% in the number of Arabic tweets since March 2012. The high number of new users in Saudi Arabia may have contributed to this growth, where 90% of tweets are produced in Arabic. Over 50% of tweets produced in other countries which have seen strong growth of users, such as Egypt the UAE, are also in Arabic. This growth also contributed to the 5% drop in English tweets” (Dubai School of Government, 2013, p. 23).

The report also revealed that, in the Arab region, the number of active users on Twitter reached 3,766,160 as of March 2013, with 335,792,000 tweets with an average of 10,832,000 tweets per day by March 2013 (Dubai School of Government, 2013, p. 19). The report showed that although Kuwait has the highest penetration rate at 7.60%, Saudi Arabia produce 47% of total tweets in the Arab region with a penetration rate of 6.64%, while Egypt produced 12% and the UAE produced 11% (Dubai School of Government, 2013, pp. 19-20).

According to a recent study undertaken by PeerReach, users from Saudi Arabia are more attracted to the use of Twitter compared to other countries, with the highest percentage of Twitter users relative to its online population. About 32% of Saudi Arabia’s online population uses the San Francisco-based microblogging service (Neal, 2013; Boghardt, 2013) . Thus, the question of the possibility that social media would facilitate political mobilization in the country had become a focus of attention. The study affirmed that:

“The Saudi Twitter-sphere reveals significant public discontent with the government’s performance on addressing domestic problems like unemployment and corruption. However, persistent efforts by a relatively small number of Saudis using Twitter and other social media to mobilize their fellow citizens for reform have generally failed to translate into large-scale action. The fact that some of the Kingdom’s most popular Twitterati are clerics underscores the conservative nature of Saudi society, including the Twitter-happy youth” (Boghardt, 2013).

Regardless of the various online communication social platforms, and for all of the above mentioned statistics studies, Twitter would be the appropriate platform for this research as it “offers specific features that are effective for information sharing and for

supporting activism and mobilization, where most Twitter profiles are open” [(Comunello & Anzera, 2012) Cited in (Chaudhry, 2014, p. 944)]. Twitter offers an interesting environment for cases that started through it that can have an impact in people’s real lives, either politically or socially. Manuel Castells in his *book Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (2012) outlined “although movement’s activities usually start on Internet social networks, they become movements by occupying the urban space” (Castells, 2012, p. 222).

Although Saudi Arabia does not conform to the same role due to its restriction of public assembly and prohibition of protests, online initiatives and collective actions on Twitter could give an understanding on the way these initiatives might play a role in spreading awareness that might be one of the reasons in applying social changes, or even political change.

The following chapter is dedicated to analysing the survey results, in order to answer the first two research question formulated for the research carried out.

Chapter 7: Survey data analysis and empirical findings

7.1 Introduction:

The motivating question for the empirical research of this thesis is to explain the balance between two different phenomena. On the one hand, in conservative societies, social norms and various forms of official censorship may be hypothesized to have an effect on online expression. On the other hand, it is possible to identify a group of individuals referred to here as lead users. These lead users have and express aspirations to utilize the Internet and other social networks to attempt to address social reform issues. The fact that a lead user group can be identified and shown to exist over time indicates that the effects of social norms and official censorship are ineffective in suppressing the behaviour of addressing social reform issues online. However, there is a multiplicity of ways in which social norms and official censorship might influence the formulation, expression, or consequences of online social action promotion by these lead users. Tracing these effects requires an empirical examination of a particular group of individuals who persist in using online communications.

Within this investigative framework, there are several sub-hypotheses, which have been examined through the empirical research:

- Social norms of conservative societies inhibit or channel the formulation of social reform issues to be addressed online;
- Social norms of conservative societies influence the expression of those forms of social reform that are not inhibited or re-directed at the formulation stage
- Because of their effects on the formulation and expression of social reform, official censorship and social norms influence what social reform activities are attempted online.

Although most of the studies on online social networks are associated with the characteristics of the west, it is fair to say that in the country under study in this research, Saudi Arabia, as a conservative society, things look different.

The argument in this research is centred around the role of online lead users' initiative and collective activities that they launch in order to pursue social reform in their society.

On the one hand, under the conditions of conservative societies, such as social norms and official censorship, this will raise the issue of what social reform activities are brought online, and to what extent these social norms and censorship will influence online lead user's activities. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is a monarchy: the lack of democratic representation, lack of modern civil institutions, and lack of freedom of assembly will create barriers limiting the social reform that online lead users will achieve.

The effects of these conditions can only be partially examined in this research. However, at the same time this research can contribute to an understanding of the nature and extent of these barriers in conservative societies, and how they may prevent social or political reform through online activities and initiatives.

The key questions used to assess these hypotheses are:

1. What characterises the lead users of social media pursuing social change through online collective actions and campaign in conservative Arab societies including their predisposition to follow social norms and official rules imposed by Internet regulations and censorship?
2. How does the predisposition of lead users to follow social norms and official rules affects their online behaviour- their formation and expression of social reform and their online activities?
3. Regarding online expression, how do lead users pursuing social change through collective actions and campaigns in conservative societies conduct their activities online in terms of their perception of:
 - social norms?;
 - official policies 'official censorship'?

In order to answer the first two questions, an online survey was distributed among a sample of lead users as described in Chapter 4. What follows is an examination of the results of this survey and how it informs the above hypotheses and the first two of these questions.

7.2 Presenting the survey results:

As the survey is divided into three parts, the data of the survey will be presented as follows: 1) the demographic and other descriptive characteristics of the sample respondents, 2) the online experience and behaviour of the sample respondents and 3) the conservative and cosmopolitan attitudes of the sample respondents. This is followed by a discussion of the results (7.3) and a conclusion (7.4).

7.2.1 The survey findings: Demographic and Other Characteristics of the Sample Respondents

In order to present the results, it is important to describe the demographic and geographical dimensions of the sample the data was generated from, based on answers to the demographic questions in the survey. The sample (after excluding the non-Saudi Arabian respondents) contained 35 (53%) males and 31 (47%) females; their ages ranged between 16 and 65. This can be seen in the figure below shows, which indicates that 75% of the sample are young individuals. In the sample, 29% of the respondents are between 16 and 25 while 19.3% of the entire Saudi population is between the ages of 15-24 (2,832,538 male and 2,458,339 female). (Central Intelligence Agency , June 2014; Islam, 2014).

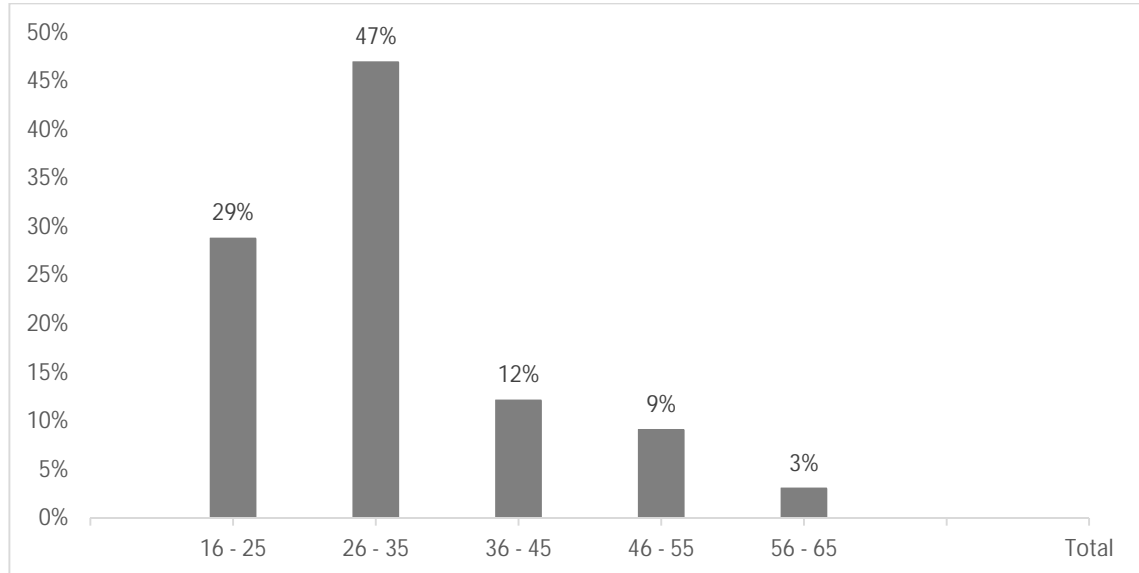


Figure 7.1: Age

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

11 out of 66 responders are residing outside Saudi, the level of education within the sample ranged between 32 of the respondents (49%) holding a bachelor degree and 19 of the sample (29%) holding post-graduate degrees. This indicates that the level of knowledge among the respondents is high, as shown in Figure 6.2 below:

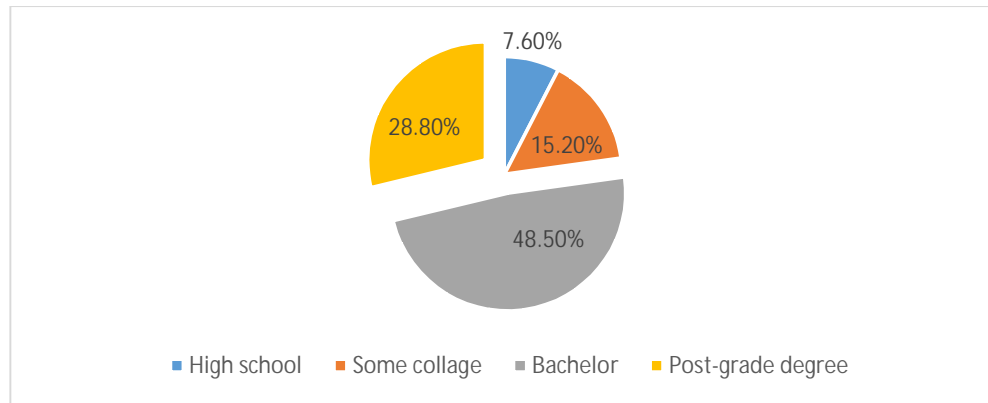


Figure 7.2: Level of Education

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

The education attainment of higher education in Saudi Arabia, the country under study, shows that the total number of students enrolled in higher education in 2013 was 1,356,602, consisting of 706,401 males and 650,201 females. The total number of new students in 2013 was 441,639, consisting of 244,301 males and 197,329 females (Central Department of Statistics & Information, 2013a). The total number of students in formal learning in 2013 was 6,682,730, consisting of 3,475,414 males and 3,207,316 females (Central Department of Statistics & Information, 2013b).

The respondents exhibited a range of specialties and background, an indication of the diversity of knowledge represented by these individuals.

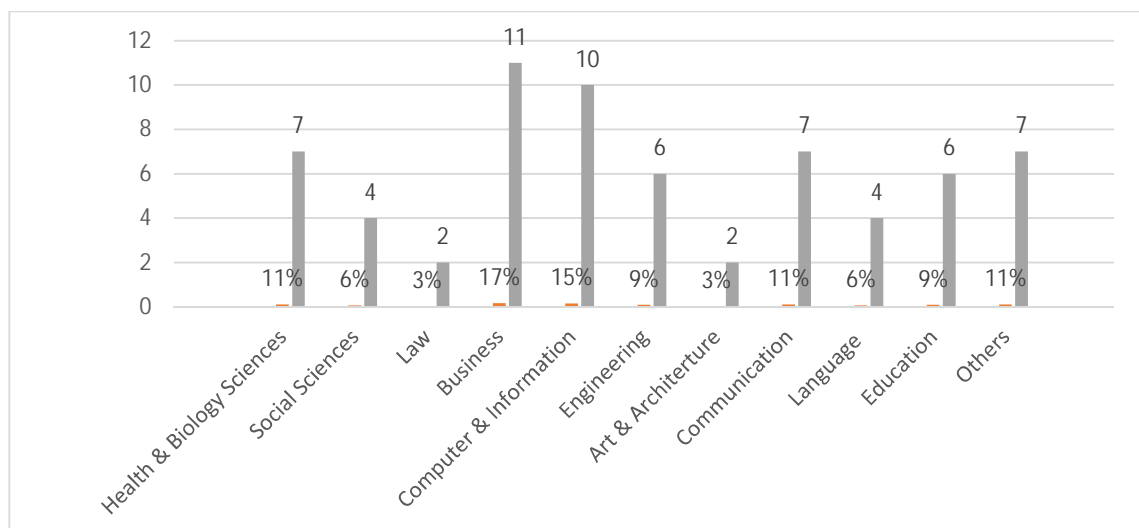


Figure 7.3: Specialities

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

The sample was asked if they had visited non-Arabic countries. Of the total respondents, 80% (53) indicated that they had visited a non-Arabic country, while only 13 respondents (20%) indicated that they had not visited any non-Arabic country. The respondents were also asked if they had lived abroad, and 24 of them (36.36%) responded positively, while 35 (53%) of them have not lived abroad. The latest statistics on the number of students studying abroad through the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme reached 199,285 (Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2013c). In another words, this trait may be taken as a link where one group (those who have visited non-Arabic countries) has experience of different cultures, or at least have been influenced by different cultures (either negatively or positively). The group who had not visited a non-Arabic country may not have experienced different cultures or opinions (in terms of either openness or closeness). Being in a different social context and being part of different practices may potentially embed the participants' opinion or thought with 'local blend', which may lead to further openness or conservatism compared to those who did not have experience in a non-Arabic context.

These results can be associated with the level to which the individuals tend to be more cosmopolitan and open (or even more conservative) in accepting the new types of online awareness and interacting with different types of people from different background. Again, these two groups can be taken into account based on having experience or being influenced by different cultures or opinions, as explained in the previous paragraph. These indicators could be used in a large scale survey to find factors that can be associated with living abroad and the effect of this on individuals who come back to their societies, and whether this factor has any effect on their interaction and behaviour online or not. On the other hand 7 respondents (11%) are currently living abroad, which can be associated with the King Abdulla Scholarship Programme for studying abroad. It's worth noting that with the small sample in this research this percentage could be different in other researches with bigger sample size.

The sample respondents were asked if they interacted with their non-Arabic friends online, and 15 of the respondents (23%) said that they interact with their non-Arabic friends and 21 of them (32%) said they interact every once in a while. This result is consistent with the previous results where 36.36% indicated that they had lived abroad, 11% of them are currently living abroad and 80% had visited non-Arabic countries.

This can also be considered as an advantage for the lead users in promoting their online work and introducing their work to non-Arabic online friends. However, 30 of the respondents (32%) said that they do not interact with non-Arabic friends: we cannot determine the reason why, but it might be related to the language, or other factors that need to be investigated further.

In the same context, 25 of the respondents (38%) indicated that they read non-Arabic literature in its original language, while 24 of the respondents (36.36%) indicated that they do every once in a while; this is consistent with the previous result. Only 17 of the respondents (26%) indicated that they do not read non-Arabic literature. This result may be an indication on having experience of different social contexts and opinions, or having knowledge of global views on any issue or topic.

7.2.2 The survey findings: Online Experience and Behaviour of the Sample Population

One of the important characteristics for categorizing the respondents from the sample, is to know who they identify their online participation: they were presented with different categories to choose from. The results are shown in Figure 7.4 below:

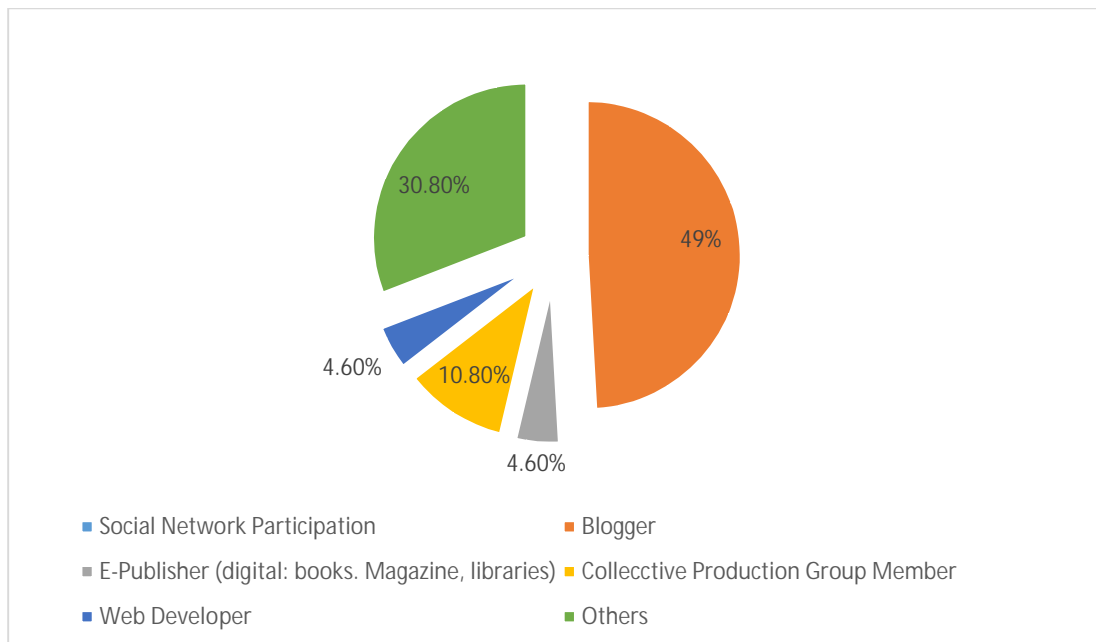


Figure 7.4: Social Network Participation

Source: Created from the data collected for thesis

The results show that 32 of the respondents (49%) are bloggers; this indicator shows that the highest number of participants in the sample are mainly independent electronic

publishers. This indicates a desire among the lead users to utilize open online public space to promote their work away from the intricacies of publishing and communication through official media.

For these individuals, this sub-section examines their general knowledge about online social networks, their point of view on how they see these networks, and how they observe its role in their lives. In order to understand these concepts, some questions were designed as open ended. Some of the results are shown in diagrams: for those questions with a related scale tables will appear in the indexes; for open ended questions the results will be interpreted based on the elements criteria presented in chapter 4.

Together with identifying the sample characteristic, the respondents were asked to state when they started joining online social networks; Figure 7.5 below shows that 2007 was the peak time for the sample individuals to start participating in online social networks:

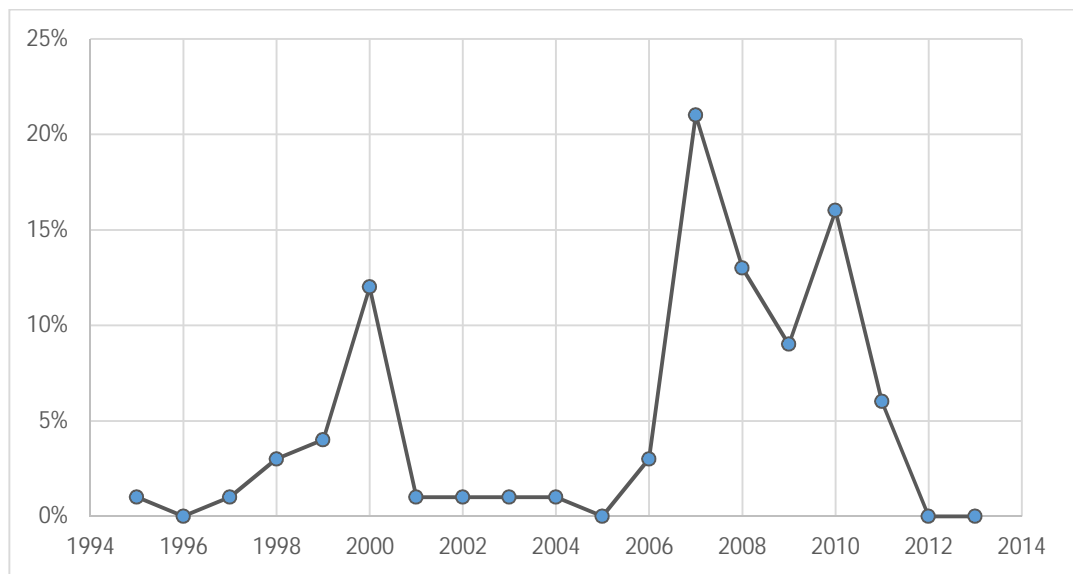


Figure 7.5: Usage of Social Networks by years

Source: Created from the data collected for thesis

Of 66 respondents, 65 answered this question, and of those 65, 14 respondents (21%) said they joined online social networks in 2007. Compared with the survey results from the Communication and Information Technology Commission in Saudi Arabia between 2007 and 2009, Internet user penetration in 2007 was 31%, in 2008 increased to 36%, and in 2009 reached 40% (Communication & Information Technology Commission, 2007-2009, p. 7). In the 3Q 2013 the estimated number of Internet users in Saudi Arabia was 16.4 million with a population penetration of 55% (CITC, November 2013, p. 4).

The respondents also were asked to identify which online social networks they used. Each of the 65 who answered this question identified different social networks they use, they all identified Twitter as one of the most visited site for the daily participation online, followed by Facebook. According to the latest study from Statistic in October 2013, one of the top 10 countries with the highest Twitter penetration is Saudi Arabia with 33% (Richter, 2013).

The respondents were asked an open question on their point of view of what is the limitation they face while using social networks. As the survey was in Arabic most of the respondents were expressing their view using their colloquial language, and the author coded the answer based on her understanding of the language and the orientations of the study. Categorization was generally unambiguous and there are no biases arising from different people doing the coding, therefore, the author believes it to be robust. Answers were classified into groups based on phrases that the participants used to express their ideas.

For example they wrote; ‘between taking care of the house and the family I don’t find much time for the Internet’, and ‘time constraints’; these two answers were categorized under the ‘time and responsibility limitation’. Another example: ‘I don’t like to be followed by any of my family members’, and ‘uncertainty of other users identity’; these two answers were categorized under ‘privacy’. A final example, ‘being a women I should not be talking a lot with men’, and ‘norms, especially tribal ones’, were categorized under ‘community and religion’. The questions with a scale were as follows:

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------------|
| Strongly low | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly high |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------------|

The question, what is the limitation faced while using online social networks, 65 people answered this question from a total of 66. Those who did see problems identified social context to be the reason for such issues; 23 (35%) stated that privacy and censorship (including freedom of expression, government and self-censorship) are the major limitation they face while using online social networks, 14 (21%) of the respondents stated that community and religion are the limitation they face online, 9 (14%) of them stated that time and responsibility limitations are a major problem they face online and

only 3 (5%) saw that access and connection is a limitation to them. On the other hand, 16 (25%) of the respondents stated that they did not see any problems in their use of social networks; this is concluded based on the fact that these participants stated explicitly 'nothing', 'no problems' and 'nothing specific'.

The participants were asked how high was their expertise in interacting with any online programmes, from strongly low to strongly high on a scale from 1 to 7. Of 65 of the sample participants, 21 (32%) indicated that their expertise was strongly high, 17 (26%) were on scale number 6, 10 (15%) were on scale number 5, and 8 of the respondents (12%) were on scale number 4. The level of technological knowledge among the sample ranged from 5 up to strongly high, with an average rating of 2.80, which indicates that the average answer among respondents was high in their level of expertise. This shows that online lead users have different levels of knowledge based on their field of interest and work.

The participants were asked to which degree they find online social networks to be a new opportunity to solve an old problem, from strongly low to strongly high on a scale from 1 to 7. The results show that the highest percentages among the participants were between strongly low and strongly high. 12 respondents (18%) voted strongly low (1) on the scale, this high percentage could be regarded to the fact that 35% of the respondents believe that privacy and censorship are limitation for them while using online social networks as indicated previously. At the same time 11 respondents (17%) voted strongly high on the scale, while 11 respondents (17%) voted 4-5 equally on the scale indicating their belief that online social networks considered as a new opportunity to face an old problem. This might refer to the new space to express their freedom, even with the existence of Internet regulations and censorship. The average rating of 4.40 indicates that the ranking among the sample is distributed along the scale with minor differences.

The participants were also able to identify different problems they formerly faced before using online social networks. As this was an open question, the participant's answers were gathered under different categories that summarized their answers. The results showed that 18 of the participants in the sample thought that they used to face lacking of immediate interaction with friends, extended family and others; 17 of the participants thought that, lacking good access to information, use to be a problem for them, while 8

of the participants thought that lacking reference to intellectual figures and people with same interests in the society, used to be a problem for them before the use of online social networks.

Among these, lacking of immediate interactions with others seems to be the most important issue they had, and with the emergence of the Internet and the rapid deployment of news and reports online, social networks seem to be a solution for most of the people. On the other hand, 17 of the participants believed that they did not face any problem that made it hard for them to cope with lack of access to information, for example. One of the reasons why those participants may not have stated any problems might be due to the reasons noted above for non-response due to conformance and the various possible motives for this conformance with social norms.

The other 5 participants had different problems, varying between e-commerce, publishing their work, loneliness, introversion and shyness, and phobias about talking with people of the opposite sex.

When the participants were asked to evaluate on a scale from strongly low to strongly high, between levels from 1 to 7, to what extent they believed that online social networks such as Twitter, blogs, Facebook and YouTube had an effect on changing people's view, 22 of the sample (34%) voted strongly high, while 16 of the sample (25%) voted 6 and 7 on the scale, with average rating of 2.37. This gives a good indication that online social networks, can play a major part in applying social change in societies, if lead users invested in it appropriately.

The following figure shows that the participants' involvement in online activities such as volunteer work:

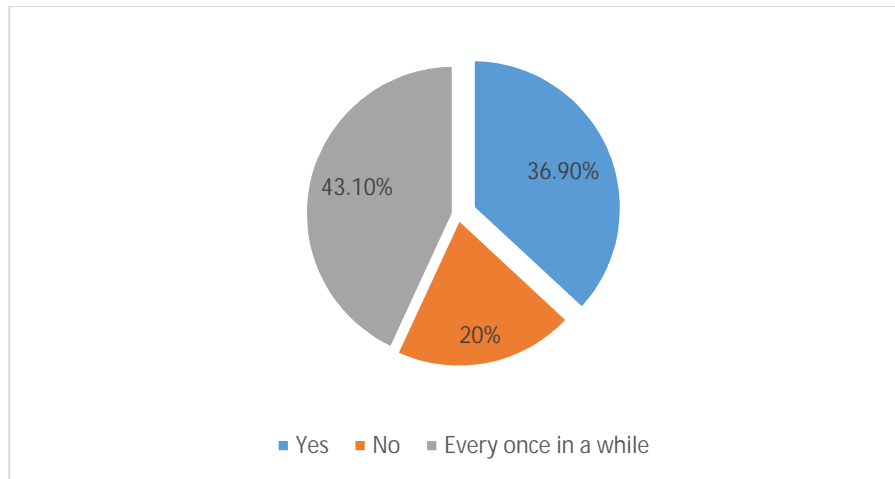


Figure 7.6: Online Activities

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

The results show that when it comes to joining online activities such as volunteer work, 28 of the sample respondents (43%) would join every once in a while, 24 (37%) were taking part in online activities that served their community, and 13 (20%) would not participate in these activities. This can be regarded as being for different reasons, such as the genre of the activity, the social norms of individuals, and the level of civil society working involved in the activity.

The participants were asked to evaluate on another Likert scale to what degree they thought that the social norms of those with whom they interacted affected their involvement in voluntary work as a collective action: the scale levels are 1) never, 2) rarely, 3) sometimes, 4) almost always, 5) always. Figure 6.10 presents the results.

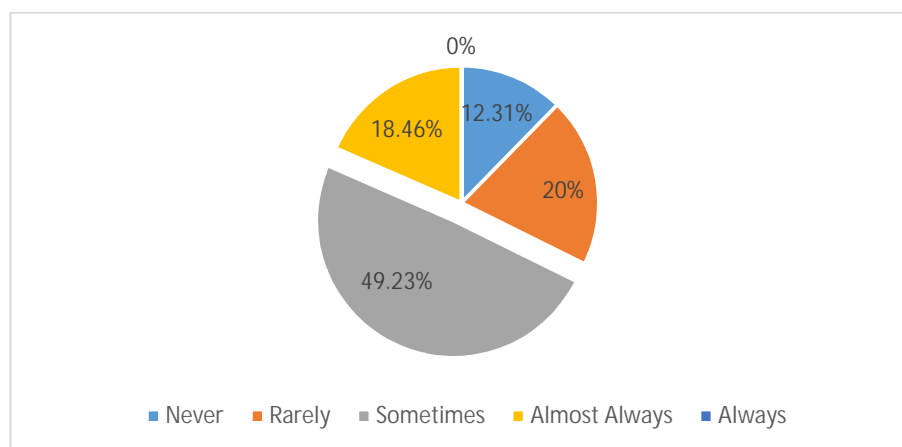


Figure 7.7: Online Activities and social norms

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

From the respondents, 32 (49%) stated that sometimes the social norms of others affected their involvement in voluntary work, while 13 participants (20%) rarely got affected, and 12 participants (18%) stated that almost always their involvement decision get affected by others social norms. The average rating of 2.74 indicates that the average sentiment among respondents is their social norms, which play a major role in deciding to be part of an online activity or not. This result supports the previous one.

The participants were asked to evaluate on a scale from strongly low to strongly high, between the levels from 1 to 7, to what extent they think that online social networks were a major contributor to social awareness. Responses to this question show that 23 (35%) of the participants in this sample voted strongly high (7), 19 (29%) ranked number 6 on the scale. The responses to this question were among the two highest ranked choices for all questions. This could refer to the kind of involvement they are in, health awareness, civic awareness, women's right awareness, etc.

In responding to the question, are you familiar with the regulation list for electronic publishing within your country, the results showed that 44 (68%) of the sample indicated they were not familiar with Internet regulations for electronic publishing within their country.

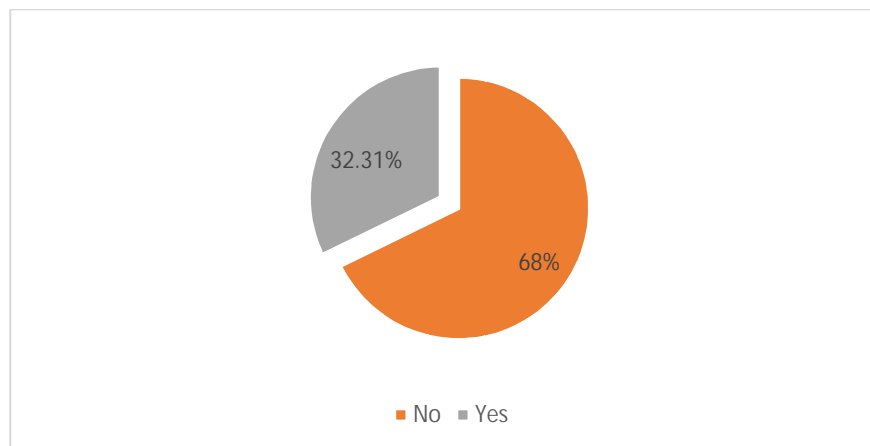


Figure 7.8: Internet regulations

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

This can be interpreted in different ways; one is that these regulations are not widespread online, or, on the other hand, it might be that they do not want to disclose their knowledge about Internet regulations in their country for their own reasons.

In the same context, the sample were asked if they knew about Internet laws regarding controlling expression within their country. The results show that participants are not aware of that law, as can be seen in Figure 6.12 below:

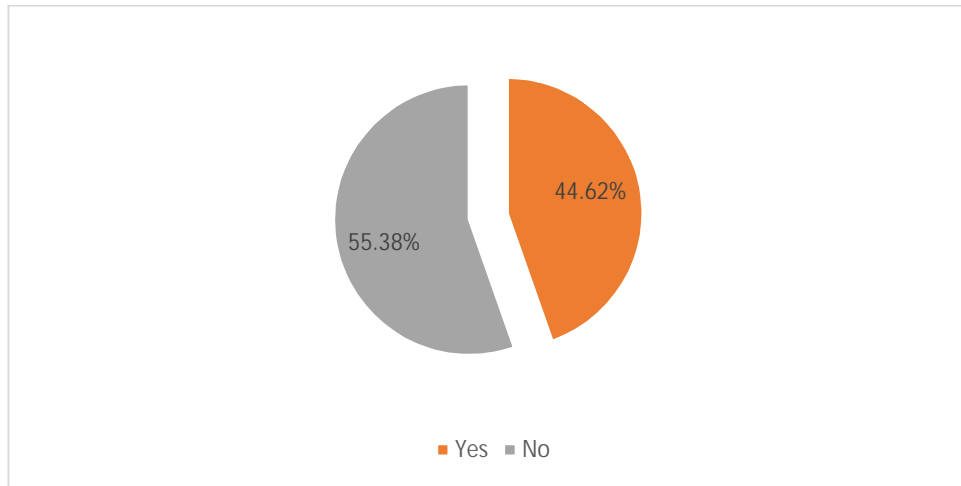


Figure 7.9: Internet law for online expression

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

The results here are close to some extent: although 36 individuals in the sample (55%) indicated that they were not familiar with the regulation of online freedom of expression, 29 individuals (45%) indicated that they are aware of that law. This might be related to the fact that most of the sample in the previous result indicated that they were not familiar with Internet regulations within their country, which usually contain paragraphs on the limits and punitive measures of freedom of expression online.

The participants were asked if they supported laws governing the content of what is posted for common access in online social networks, on a Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, between levels from 1 to 7. The results shows the extreme responses, where 16 individuals (25%) of the sample voted strongly disagree on the scale while only 7 participants (11%) voted strongly agree on the scale, 11 participants (17%) voted 4 on the scale and 10 participants (15%) voted 3 on the scale, which skew to disagreeing on supporting the existence of Internet regulation regarding what people might post online.

This is an indicator of the desire to have an uncensored public space, as the reality might lack the existence of a public sphere for people to practice their rights. The

average rating for this question was 5.80, the more you move toward agreeing on having laws to govern online content the less respondents agree to this.

In the same context, the results showed that the sample thought that laws should be enforced sometimes when asked to what degree they think these laws should be enforced, which can help explaining the previous result. The following figure present results:

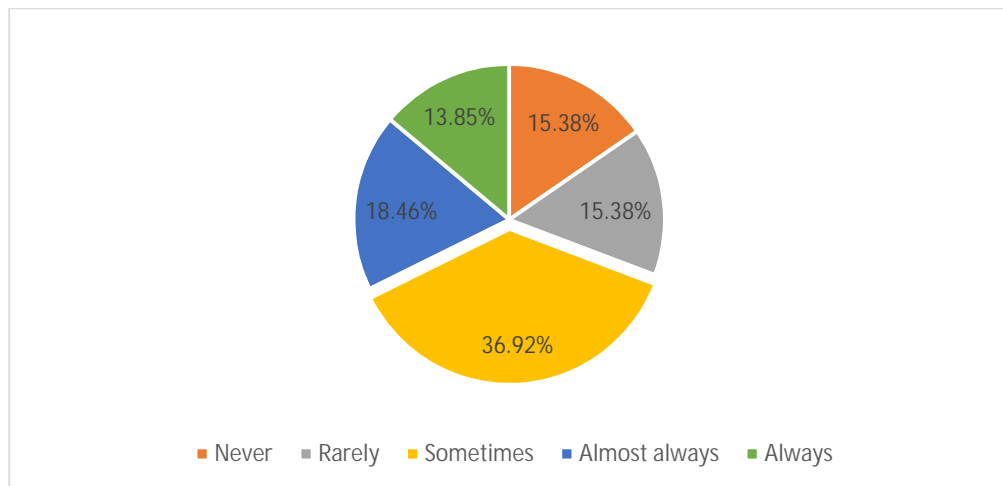


Figure 7.10: Views on laws governing online access

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Of the respondents, 24 (37%) felt that the laws of regulating online content should be enforced sometimes, and 12 (19%) felt that it should be enforced almost always. What the respondents meant in choosing ‘sometimes’ is a matter of speculation. However, it might be that they regarded some situations, such as national security, cybercrimes, or religious issues, as being ones that deserve enforcement. The average rating for this question was 3, indicating that the average sentiment among respondents regarding enforcement of laws on ‘online access’ to be diverse.

The answers for the following question support the outcome of the previous one, where the respondents identified different situations where they thought that the laws of governing online access on some content should be enforced. As this was an open question, the respondents were able to express their opinions freely, and the author gathered the answers under the following categories:

- national security;
- cybercrimes;

- moral values and religion;
- pornography;

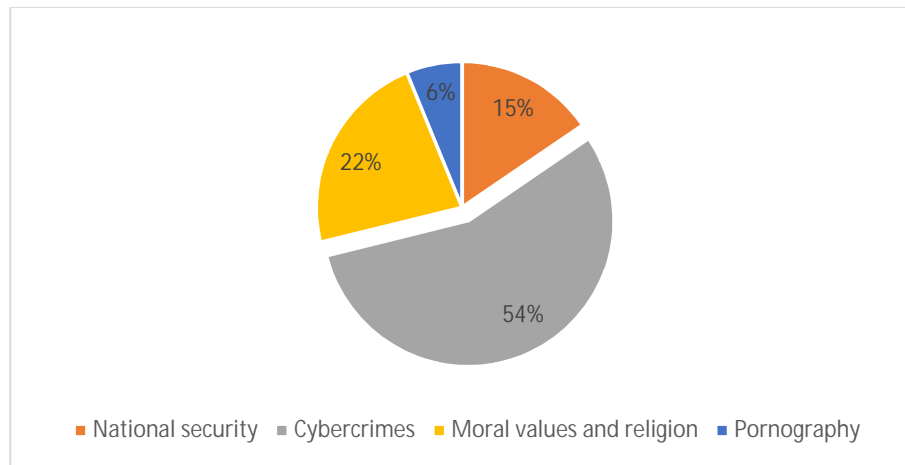


Figure 7.11: Subjects requires laws on online content

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

The result shows that out of 44 who answered this question, 24 participants (54%) believed that the laws on online content should be enforced in cases of cybercrimes. This result is consistent with the previous one where 37% of the sample believed that online content should be governed in certain cases. 10 participants (22%) believes that these laws should be enforced when it comes to violating moral and religion values, while 7 of them (15%) believes that laws should be enforced when it comes to national security, and 3 of the participants (6%) believe it should be enforced when it comes to pornography.

The respondents were asked if they use any language technique to modify their words while expressing their opinion online, and the survey results show that sometimes individuals do this:

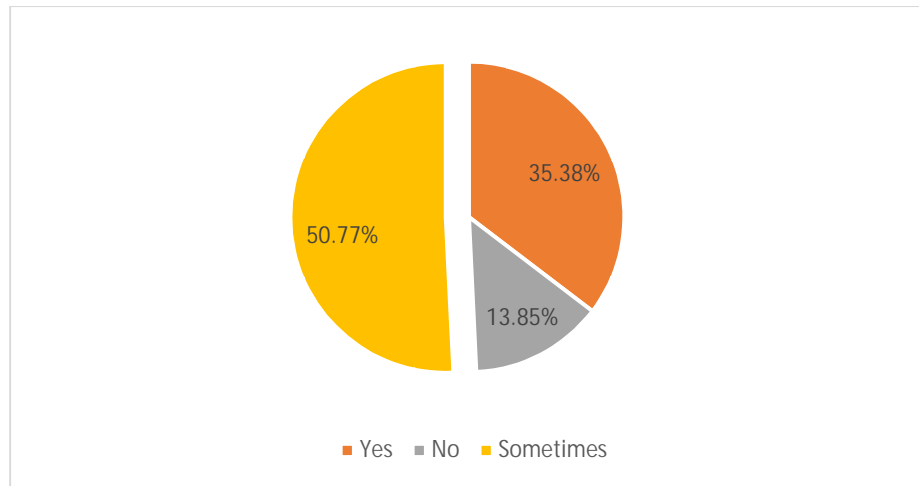


Figure 7.12: Modifying online expression

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

The results show that 33 respondents (51%) sometimes modify their words when replying or writing online, and 23 individuals (35%) indicated that they modify their online expression. This response suggests that the majority of respondents exercise some circumspection in their online expressions. There may be many reasons for this response, but it is one that suggests that self-censorship or concerns over official censorship are credible sources of influence on the online expressions of the respondents. There were 9 individuals (14%) who claimed that they do not modify their expressions online, and this might be regarded as an indicator of the belief that the online social network is a domain in which they may exercise free expression.

The respondents were asked to specify the reasons for modifying their language online; out of 66 only 33 participants answered this question. 29 participants answered agreed that the main reason is: make the language understandable so the writer will not be misunderstood, especially when using slang phrases that they try to simplify so that every follower from different backgrounds, age, and countries will be able to understand their meaning, plus seeking the society acceptance for the idea presented online. A few participants (three) stated that fear of government censorship, and legal prosecution was responsible for their modifying their language.

7.2.3. The survey findings: Conservative and Cosmopolitan Characteristics of the Sample Respondents

The final part of the survey was designed to measure the sample population's opinion based on the Right-wing authoritarianism scale (RWA), to measure expression of authoritarian personality. The question here was a collection of statements, each one concerned to cover the following categories:

- the existence of Internet regulation;
- attitude toward Internet regulation;
- society influence;
- online attitude;
- online activities;
- youth and online public space;
- promoting awareness online.

The participants were asked to express their opinions toward each of them with different levels of measures. The question was asked as follows 'with the level of measurements':

Please indicate your opinion on each statement below by agreeing or disagreeing with it according to the following scale:

- 4 If you very strongly disagree with the statement
- 3 If you strongly disagree with the statement
- 2 If you moderately disagree with the statement
- 1 If you slightly disagree with the statement
- +1 If you slightly agree with the statement
- +2 If you moderately agree with the statement
- +3 If you strongly agree with the statement
- +4 If you very strongly agree with the statement

As mentioned before the result generalization of the study will only be applied for the sample of this research. Therefore, the outcome of this part is to generate general findings about how the lead users of this sample feel and view certain social issues that are concerned with the general framework of the research, in order to categorize the sample lead users in this research into conservative or cosmopolitan ones. In other words, RAW scale is used in this research for categorization of online lead users to

draw the final conclusion for the first part of the study. The results are presented in the following table, with the statements and the highest percentage that each of them received from the participants followed by the interpretation of the data. This can express a general trend among the two identified groups, the in-group and the out-group.

Table 7.1: Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement of Public Opinion

| | Statements | Ranks(Values From -4 to +4) Participants / Percentage | Average rating |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | (16) 25% (13) 20% | 5.23 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society | (17) 26.15% (15) 23% | 3.77 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | (14) 22% (10) 15% | 4.34 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | (23) 35.38% (13) 20% | 6.11 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | (17) 26% (13) 20% | 5.68 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | (17) 26% (15) 23% | 5.17 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | (14) 22% (11) 17% | 4.71 |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | (16) 25% (15) 23% | 3.14 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | (29) 45% (19) 29% | 2.11 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | (27) 42% (15) 23% | 6.48 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | (13) 20% (12) 19% | 4.31 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees | (26) 40% (25) 39% | 7.08 |

| | | | |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------|
| | with those that are generally accepted. | | |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | (29) 45% (22) 34% | 7.02 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | (24) 37% (15) 23% | 6.46 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | (22) 34% (15) 23% | 6.25 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on economic issues. | (22) 34% (15) 23% | 6.42 |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | (25) 39% (20) 31% | 6.65 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | (23) 35% (16) 25% (13) 20% | 6.34 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Note: The average for n=65 respondents is computed

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: As it is evident from the table above, 16 of the respondents (25%) moderately agreed that the existence of Internet regulation is important to protect society values, with an average rating of 5.23. This result is consistent with the result of previous questions where 37% believed that the law to govern online content should sometimes be enforced. This can also be related to the fear among individuals from punitive punishments, which is consistent with the respondents of 24 (54%) individuals in the first part of the questions where they agreed that laws should be enforced when it comes to cybercrime.

At the same time, 17 respondents (26%) strongly disagreed when they were asked if they thought that Internet regulation existed to regulate individual's opinion in society, while 15 respondents (23%) very strongly disagreed. In other words, the participants believed that those laws were not for regulating individual's online opinion, which is consistent with the fact that 24 of them identified cybercrime as the main reason for enforcing Internet regulation, with average rating 3.77.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: 14 of the respondents (22%) strongly disagreed that those who support Internet regulation believe that the society elites have good judgement on how things should be done, while 10 of the respondents (15%) strongly agreed that the authorities are suppressing public

expression, with an average rating of 4.34, this result is consistent with the fact that 10 respondents (22%) believe that laws should be enforced when it comes to protecting moral and religion values of the society. At the same time, 23 respondents (35%) very strongly agreed that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression, and 13 (20%) strongly agreed on the same statement, with average rating 6.11.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: 17 of the respondents (26%) strongly agreed that online opinions are influenced by the view of a majority of people in society, while 13 (20%) slightly agreed on the statement. At the same time, 17 respondents (25%) moderately agreed that online opinions are influenced by the view of a few people in society, while 15 respondents (23%) strongly agreed on the statement. Both statements are close in their average rating, 5.68 and 5.17 respectively, which can indicate agreement in the existence of the third person effect online. This result is consistent with the fact that 49% of the sample in the first part of the survey, agreed that social norms of the people with whom they interact sometimes affect their involvement in online collective actions.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: 14 of the respondents (22%) slightly agreed about the influence on their online opinion by others, who they respect, while 11 respondents (17%) slightly agreed on the statement, and the high average rating of 4.71 supports the previous answer about agreement on the existence of the third person effect.

Of the sample participants, 16 (25%) very strongly disagreed that they were looking to create a certain image about themselves in other people's minds, and 19 respondents (29%) strongly disagreed on the statement, with an average rating of 3.14. This result is consistent with the next statement, where 29 of the respondents (45%) very strongly disagreed and 15 of them (29%) strongly disagreed with the thought of just creating a certain image about themselves in the mind of others, and they preferred to say the truth instead of just trying to gain more followers, with an average rating of 2.11.

The previous statement is also consistent with the following one, where 27 of the respondents (42%) very strongly agreed and 15 of them (23%) strongly agreed about their desire to tell the truth online instead of just creating a certain image in other people's mind about themselves, with an average rating of 6.48.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: the average rating of 4.31 indicates that the average rating among respondents is almost fairly distributed between the two extreme votes in the scale, where 13 of the respondents (20%) slightly agreed that their participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of their milieu, and 12 (19%) strongly disagreed on that matter. The contrast between these two groups is consistent with the result from the first part of the survey, where 43% of the respondents answered that they participate every once in a while in online activities, and 49% of the respondents said that their milieu affected their involvement in voluntary work as an online collective action.

This indicates that the sample in some aspects can be categorized into the two groups, the in-group and the out-group, depending on the issue discussed and how the respondents see it from their own perspective. A detailed study could be based on this question to determine to what degree there is this involvement, and what factors could play a part in this involvement.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: 26 of the respondents (40%) strongly agreed that young individuals have a good opportunity online to express themselves regardless of the collective opinion of mass, and 25 of them (39%) very strongly agreed, with an average rating of 7.08. Furthermore, 29 of the respondents (45%) strongly agreed that young individuals have good opportunities to express themselves and criticize existing social norms, while 22 of them (34%) very strongly agreed, with an average rating of 7.02. at the same time, 24 of the respondents (37%) very strongly agreed that young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities and 15 of the respondents (23%) strongly agreed on the same matter, with average rating of 6.46. These high average ratings indicate a cosmopolitan mind-set group. This result is consistent with the fact that the average age of this sample falls into the category of young individuals.

The demographic questions in the first part of the survey showed that 47% of the sample were aged between 26-35, 29% of the sample were aged between 16-25, and 12% of the sample falls into the ages between 36-45. These results are consistent with the result of the first part finding of the survey, where 11 respondents (17%) of the sample voted strongly high on the scale indicating their believe that online social

networks could be considered to be new opportunities for their old problem, such as having an open space to communicate and interact with fewer restrictions.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: 22 of the sample respondents (34%) strongly agreed about the contribution of online social networks to promote awareness on health issues in the society, and 15 of them (23%) very strongly agreed on the same matter with average rating of 6.25. Of the respondents, 22 (39%) strongly agreed that online social networks contributed to the awareness of economic issues in the society and 15 of the respondents (23%) very strongly agreed on the same statement, with average rating of 6.42. on promoting of political issues online, 25 (39%) strongly agreed on the rule of online social networks in promoting awareness in political issues and 20 of them (31%) very strongly agreed on the same statement with average rating of 6.65. of the respondents, 23 of the sample (35%) strongly agreed that online social networks promoted awareness in the society on women's rights issues, 16 of the sample (25%) very strongly agreed on the same matter, and 13 of them (20%) moderately agreed on the statement, with average rating of 6.34.

All these results have a very high average which indicates that, with the existence of social norms and censorship, online social networks play a major role in promoting awareness in conservative societies to a certain level. These results are consistent with the findings of the first part of the survey, where 34% of the respondents voted strongly high that online social networks, such as Twitter and YouTube, have an effect on changing people's view, and 35% of them voted strongly high that online social networks are a major contributor to social awareness. This gives an indication of the rule of online social networks in applying social reform in their societies through the role of online lead users and their work.

7.2.4 RWA analysis

The RWA analysis states that the total score is an indication of whether people tend to fall or be treated as an authoritarian or not. The RWA scale has a range from 18-162, and the score 90 is defined to be the mid-point of the scale. If the total score falls below 90, then the group of people on whom the survey and subsequent RWA analysis has been carried out can be treated as "non-authoritarian followers in absolute terms" (Butler, 2009). The RWA scale and the score to be allocated are given below:

Table 7.2: RWA scale and scores

| Response | Response Value | Corresponding RWA Score |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Very strongly disagree | -4 | 1 |
| Strongly disagree | -3 | 2 |
| Moderately disagree | -2 | 3 |
| Slightly disagree | -1 | 4 |
| Neutral | 0 | 5 |
| Slightly agree | 1 | 6 |
| Moderately agree | 2 | 7 |
| Strongly agree | 3 | 8 |
| Very strongly agree | 4 | 9 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Based on the above defining criteria for RWA analysis, the findings depicted in the previous section can be interpreted in terms of RWA analysis and scale. For all the 18 statements that have been formulated and asked of the participants with a view to carrying out the analysis, the total score has been calculated by following the above approach. For each statement, each participant was given a corresponding score, and the total of the 18 statements' score when added made up the total RWA score for that respective participant.

The analysis was done to find the total on the 18 questions stated earlier. The details of the analysis and their corresponding score was calculated, and the findings analysis is presented in the following points:

- total participated: 65;
- participants with score 90 and above: 63;
- participants with score below 90: 2;
- percentage of participants with score 90 and above: 96%;
- percentage of participants with score below 90: 3%;
- average RWA score of the group participated: 112.

Based on the above calculations, and the definitions stated earlier, it is apparent that only 3% of the participants are 'not authoritarian followers in absolute terms'. On the

other hand, 96% of the sample population, due to their RWA score being 90 or above, fall within the group that can be considered as authoritarian followers in absolute terms.

On the other hand, one could suggest that some of the sentences are ambiguous in its construct, and it might raise issues with duplication or it is misunderstood form the respondents ends. Hence after reporting the first RWA results for the 18 sentences, the author sought to apply another RWA scale for the first 12 sentences and report its results. Based on that, for the second RWA scale the range is from 12-108 with 60 as the midpoint of the scale. If the total score falls below 60, then the group of people on whom the survey and subsequent RWA analysis has been carried out can be treated as non-authoritarian followers in absolute terms.

The details of the analysis and their corresponding score for the first 12 questions stated earlier was calculated, and the findings analysis for the second RWA measurements is presented in the following points:

- total participated: 65;
- participants with score 60 and above: 46;
- participants with score below 60: 19;
- percentage of participants with score 60 and above: 71%;
- percentage of participants with score below 60: 29.23%;
- average RWA score of the group participated: 68.

Based on the above calculations, and the definitions stated earlier, it is apparent that only 29.23% of the participants are ‘not authoritarian followers in absolute terms’. On the other hand, 71% of the sample population, due to their RWA score being 60 or above, fall within the group that can be considered as authoritarian followers in absolute terms. It is clear that the results between the two RWA scales applied here are similar, where the conservative character is predominant among the population sample.

7.3 Discussion of the survey results:

The survey was designed through SurveyMonkey, and was circulated among online lead users. Although the aim was to generate an overview opinion on how online lead users in Arab societies view online social networks under the existence of their society social norms and official censorship from Saudi Arabia the country under study, but the

circulation of the survey link attracted different Arab nationalities to participate in the study. Of the completed sample population 28 respondents (21%) were from different Arab nationalities, which indicates the wide usage of online social networks from the country under study, and complies with the recent statistics from the ITU (3013) that 38% of the Internet users are from Arab countries as indicated in chapter 5.

The survey outline was designed into three parts: the first part were used to obtain quantitative estimate which aims to generate overall opinion and patterns from the sample population about general issues related to their general knowledge about online social networks, their point of view on how they see these networks, and how they observe its role in their lives etc. The second part of the survey the public opinion measurement was designed to be the core of the analysis of the data gathered, where the RWA scale is used for categorisation of the sample online lead users as conservatives or cosmopolitans based on their RWA score. And finally the third part was intended to describe the population sample to draw a demographical information about them; their age, level of education and specialties, their interaction with others out of their society, their online participations,

Of the population sample, 47% are young users aged between 26-35, and 29% are between 16-25, which indicates that online lead users are young individuals who tend to use online social networks as an alternative online public sphere in order to seek social change by applying social awareness online. Of the population sample, 47% were females while 53% were males. This very close result can be used as an indicator for future studies to explore to what extent online female and male lead users in Arab Islamic countries rely on online social networks for promoting their initiatives and compare the results between genders, to evaluate to which extent gender could play role in seeking social and political rights online in conservative societies.

The peak year for using the Internet among the sample started during 2007, with 21% of the sample population indicating that they began using the Internet during that year. Twitter is the most popular online social network among the survey with usage among 46% of the sample population. The sample also shows the high level of education among the respondents were 49% of them holding bachelor degree and 29% of them holding post-graduate degrees, which indicates the high level of education and knowledge among the respondents, together with the wide diversity of their background

knowledge in different specialties. Of the sample population, 49% are bloggers, which indicates that the highest number of participants in the sample are mainly independent electronic publishers. This reveals the lead users' desire to utilize open public space to promote their work away from the other official channels.

The results also showed that 80% of the sample population have visited a non-Arabic country, 36% of them lived abroad, 32% of the population sample interacts with their non-Arabic friends every once in a while, and 38% of the sample pointed that they read non-Arabic literature in its original language. All these results indicates to the respondent's tendency to the level of interaction with different people from around the world from different social, political, and religious backgrounds, which could be a good sign for the cosmopolitan mind-set and openness in accepting new types of online awareness, which also could be an advantage for promoting their online initiatives on a world scale and gain support for their work. At the same time, 53% revealed that they have not lived abroad, 20% of them have not visited any non-Arabic country, 20% doesn't read non-Arabic literature in its original language, and 30% of the sample population pointed that they don't interact with non-Arabic friends online. All these results while it indicate to non-cosmopolitan personality, it cannot be determined whether it is related to the language, or other factors that need to be investigated further.

All the results above describes the general information and background of the sample population, and shows the diversity of the sample respondent's mind-set, whether it indicates a cosmopolitan mind-set or a conservative one.

One of the observations from the survey results is that 35% of the respondents stated that privacy and censorship are the major limitation and obstacles they face while using online social networks, and 21% stated that community and religion values are the major obstacles they face. These results indicated to the existence of the effect of social norms and Internet regulation online, where individuals using online social networks might find it hard to express themselves freely without the pressure of being exposed to official authorities or the society. At the same time, 25% of the respondents stated that they did not face any problems while using online social networks. There can be different reasons why participants believe that there are no problems that limit their use of social networks. For example, they may conform to the social norms and values for different reasons, such preventing themselves from the pressure of shame and guilt, or

fear of punitive action either from the government, family, or society. In other words, they might be practicing self-censorship, but they do not reveal this explicitly, or it can be said that they may be entirely comfortable with their conforming behaviour, although this cannot be confirmed in the absence of a response regarding why. Alternatively, it can be said that the ones who seek change in society hence they are practicing their social rights by confront the authorities and elites of the society by questioning society social norms and regulation.

When the participants were asked if they find online social networks a new opportunity to an old problem, 18% voted strongly low on the scale. This high result can be associated to the previous result where respondents stated that privacy and community and religion values to be the major obstacles they face while using online social networks, hence, it can be said that those respondents don't see the Internet with its platforms as a public space for them to participate freely and be engaged in deliberative communications with others in the society, due to the restrictions on their expression. On the other hand, 17% voted strongly high on the scale indicating that they believe that online networks are new opportunity to an old problem, which mean that these respondents might found in online social networks their new public space to peruse their goals in seeking change in their society through their online initiatives and collective actions. In other words, and according the gratification, the respondents are gratifying themselves through seeking better self-status and their information and their needs to be the most prevalent.

Lacking of immediate interactions with others, and lacking of information are the major problems the participants in the sample used to face before the emergence of the Internet and the rapid deployment of news and reports online, where social networks seem to be a solution for most of the people, which gives good indication that even with the existence of the effect of censorship and social norms of the society, the participants found in this new public space ways in fulfilling their personal according to the use and gratification theory.

34% of the respondents believe that online social networks such Twitter and Facebook etc. could play major role in changing people's view, and 25% of them voted 6 & 7 on the scale for the same question. These high rankings indicates that online social networks considered to be the new public space for individuals to participate or just to

reach out for new source of information and interaction with others, even under the existence of social norms and official censorship.

When the sample were asked if they participate in online activities such as volunteer work, 43% stated that they would join every once in a while, 37% are actually taking part in online activities, and only 20% would not participate in these activities. On the other hand, 49% stated that sometimes the social norms of others whom they interact with may affect their decision in getting involved in online activities, 18% stated that their decision almost always get affected with others social norms, and only 20% stated that their decision rarely get affected by the social norms of others. These results are consistent with the fact that 35% of the sample respondents believed that online social networks are major contributor in increasing social awareness, and 20% of the sample voted 7 on the scale for the same question, which gives high indication on the role that online social networks are taking as a new public space, even under the existence of society social norms and censorship, also indicates that online lead users are utilizing these platforms to seek changes in their society.

On the matter of censorship and regulation, the results showed that 68% of the sample population are not familiar with regulation list for electronic publishing, and only 32% are aware of it. It can be said that some lead users extracted certain articles from the regulation list, and circulated them among others, to shade lights on them. At the same time, 55% of the sample indicated that they were not familiar with the laws regulating online expression, while 45% of them stated that they are aware of these laws. This results supports the previous result on the limitations that online lead users face while using online social networks, where 35% of the sample stated that privacy and censorship are the major limitations they face online, which supports the research hypothesis; that social norms and censorship influence the expression of online lead users.

On the same subject, the sample were asked if they support laws governing the content of what is posted online, 25% of them voted strongly disagree, which could indicate to the fact that online lead users support the idea of freeing the Internet, as it is their new public space, from censorship and regulation, in order to practice their social rights to reach their capabilities in seeking available opportunities to achieve their well-being, according to the capability theory.

On the other hand, 11% of the sample voted strongly agree on the scale for supporting laws governing what is posted online. This result could be understood through the following question, where 37% of the sample voted that sometime laws should be enforced online, 19% of them voted that it should be enforced almost always, and 15% voted never. This result is consistent with the fact that 54% of the sample population believed that these laws should be enforced when it comes to cybercrimes, and 22% of them believed that it should be enforced when it comes to protecting moral and religion values, and 15% stated it should be enforced for national security.

51% of the respondents stated that they sometimes modify their words when interacting with others online, and 35% stated that they modify their online expression, this result is consistent with the next question, where 29 respondents indicated that they modify their expression in order not to be misunderstood, which also supports the research hypothesis that society social norms and censorship affects online lead users behaviour and expression.

The result of the final question of the survey is used to categorize the sample online lead users, using the RWA score for the respondents to determine whether the sample population is conservative or cosmopolitan ones. For this the author applied two scales with different range to test the sample population, the first RWA scale was done for the whole 18 statements stated earlier with the range from 18-162, and the score 90 is defined to be the mid-point of the scale. The second RWA scale done for the first 12 statements only with the range from 12-108 with 60 as the midpoint of the scale. The reason for this strategy was to exclude any issues on the statements being ambiguous or misunderstood from the respondents ends. The results of the two scales are reported.

Based on the two RWA score results it is evident that That the predominant character among the sample population is the conservative characteristic, where in the first RWA result only 3% of the sample participants are non-authoritarian followers, while 96% of the sample respondents falls in the group of authoritarian followers. In the second RWA result 29.23% are non-authoritarian followers, while 71% the sample respondents falls in the group of authoritarian followers.

In other words, the sample population based on the above results is authoritarian followers who fall into the conservative in-group. One of the major outcomes of the research is that the lead users in general like to see the authorities retain the openness

and freedom of the Internet for the interest of larger groups, rather than regulations that might work as barriers towards freedom, where 25% of the participants strongly disagree on supporting laws governing the content of what is posted for common access in online social networks, but at the same time 25% moderately agreed that the existence of Internet regulation is important to protect society values, which is also consistent with the result from the first part of the survey where 22% of the sample believed that these laws should be enforced when it comes to protecting moral and religion values in society.

Of the sample, 26% strongly agreed that online opinions are influenced by the view of a majority of people in society, while 20% slightly agreed on the statement. At the same time, 25% moderately agreed that online opinions are influenced by the view of a few people in society, and 23% strongly agreed on the statement. These results indicate to the fact that society social norms are affecting online lead users behaviour and influence what social activities are attempted online, which support the research hypothesis's and indicate to one of the authoritative personality traits presented in chapter 3, where Duckitt and Altemeyer indicates that conformity to group norms and rules-Conventionalism is a sign of an authoritarian personality. However, 25% of the respondents very strongly disagreed that they were looking to create a certain image about themselves in other people's minds, and 29% of them strongly disagreed on the statement, and 42% very strongly agreed about their desire to tell the truth online instead of just creating a certain image in other people's mind about themselves. This contradictory results indicate that even with the existence of society social norms and censorship on online lead user's behaviour, the respondents are looking to tell the truth and not totally surrendering to the society, it could also indicate that the respondents are practicing self-censorship in order to avoid certain confrontation with the society elites and authorities.

On the other hand, 20% slightly agreed that their participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of their milieu, and 19% strongly disagreed on that matter. The contrast between these two groups is consistent with the result from the first part of the survey, where 43% of the respondents answered that they participate every once in a while in online activities, and 49% of the respondents said that their milieu affected their involvement in voluntary work as an online collective action. All in which

indicates to the existence of society social norms and censorship effects on online lead users behaviour and the formulation of online activities, which also support the research hypothesis's and indicate to one of the authoritative personality traits presented in chapter 3, where Duckitt and Altemeyer indicates that unconditional and conditional respect and obedience- authoritarian submission is a sign of is a sign of an authoritarian personality.

To sum up, it is evident from the results presented above that online lead users, and according to the capability theory, are facing difficulties in practicing their social rights in expressing themselves freely online, and they tend to modify their online expression to avoid any consequences, and while they tend to fulfil their personal needs by using the new public space available online based on the use and gratification theory and seek to apply social change within their society through their online activities and collective actions and their tendency to have unregulated online space, they exhibit signs of authoritarian traits based on their RWA score analysis, which indicates that this group of lead users sample falls into the conservative in-group category.

7.4 Conclusions:

The substantial purpose of this chapter was to present and analyse the survey findings in order to answer the research first two questions, and provide general categorization for online lead users sample participated in this research, and determine whether the respondents sample falls into the conservative in-group or the cosmopolitan out-group based of their RWAS score analysis.

It is evident that although the respondents are young individuals based on their age and tend to disagree on regulating the new public space- online social networks- except in certain cases, that the conservative character is the predominant characteristic among them, even when applying two different RWA scale measurements with different ranges. The first RWA scale results showed that only 3% of the sample population are non-authoritarian followers and 96% falls into the conservative in-group. For the second RWA scale 71% falls into the conservative in-group, while only 29.23% are non-authoritarian followers. However the analysis showed tendency among the sample to protect the society moral and religion values, modify their online expression to avoid certain consequences, which also indicates to the existence of the effects of society

social norms and censorship on online lead user's behavior and activities. Hence, based on the traits introduced by Duckitt and Altemeyer in chapter 3. In other words, regulatory bodies are a barrier to freedom where a number of participants were found to be authoritarian. In essence, it can be said that there have been social and cultural barriers, which is concluded based on the findings presented in this chapter.

Nevertheless, the overall findings and their subsequent analysis has shown that online lead users have influential aspects on other people. The level of that effect is worth further investigation to measure the trend among the conservative society population. It is also evident that the users in the country under study have a mind-set where lead users can have tremendous effect on the people's mind-set to set new trends.

Chapter 8: The Research Case Studies:

8.1 Introduction:

The rise of the phenomena of new media technology and online social networks develop and question the canonical narration of modernization, “the promise that comes with, and that helps legitimate the application of calculative reason and its technologies to what the future might bring” (Davis, 2013, p. 159). Some scholars argue that these technological developments can be a force for social change in societies, either positively by ‘liberating it’ or detrimentally by introducing disruptive and destabilizing effects: some expect both types of effects simultaneously (Davis, 2013, p. 160).

Lead users may provide an early indication of emergent trends in the social-economic effects of technical change. Therefore, examining the narratives that such users, particularly those that seek to make social changes, make about their use of social media is one means to gain insight into the ways in which these speculations about social change might accrue in societies.

Developing such insights is the motivation for the last of the research questions to be addressed in this thesis.

3. Regarding online expression, how do lead users pursuing social change in conservative societies conduct their activities in terms of their perception of:

- social norms;
- official policies ‘official censorship’.

Within the limits of time, the author has chosen three case studies from Saudi Arabia to assemble narratives drawn from lead users’ own words that, in turn, are interpreted by the author using the theories discussed in the first chapter.

There are several sub-hypotheses, which have been examined through the empirical research in the case studies that follow. The major concerning aspects and key points in this regard are as follows:

- Social norms of conservative societies inhibit or channel the formulation of social reform issues to be addressed online;

- social norms of conservative societies influence the expression of those forms of social reform that are not inhibited or re-directed at the formulation stage
- Because of their effects on the formulation and expression of social reform, official censorship and social norms influence what social reform activities are attempted online.

The three cases are:

- the Qomami initiative الأكل القمامي (one person);
- Mizan initiative ميزان (five people);
- Hit-Her initiative حملة اضربها (four people).

Members involved in each of these groups were interviewed, a total of 10 people. It had been planned to have 11 individuals to interview, but one of them withdrew at an early point in the project. The interviews were administered by emailing them the interview questions together with the consent form developed for the ethical review of this PhD project. Face-to-face interviews were not feasible given time constraints and financial resources.

The interview questions were divided into two parts, the first part consisted of open ended questions where the interviewee had the chance to use their own words to explain and express their role in the initiative, together with the way they viewed it. The second part used the same opinion measurement as the survey, Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), to determine which category the lead users from the chosen case studies fell into. Among the issues that might be affected by this distinction was the question whether, and if so how, social views might affect lead users seeking to use social media to pursue social reform in their societies. Another important issue to be assessed was the question of whether or to what extent these lead users might, in practice, deviate from their society social norms or conform to other challenges in seeking to influence other members of society.

Although the focus of this research has been on how lead users view their own activities in seeking social change, it is inevitable that one would wish to know whether their actions have had any effect. Addressing a question such as ‘How do others respond to lead user’s online initiatives in conservative societies’ would be of great intrinsic interest, but would require different methods from those used in this investigation. In

particular, the most rigorous way of addressing this question would be to develop a means of identifying individuals who were exposed to the social media generated by the lead users considered in this study and identifying another group who were not exposed. One might then be able to frame a ‘treatment’ type framework to assess whether exposure to the social media had a discernible effect on attitude or behaviour. Such a study would take into account the ‘proximity’ of individuals in each group to the ‘lead users’, using various measures to ensure that the ‘untreated’ were relatively isolated from individuals that had been exposed to social media (otherwise there is the possibility that the ‘untreated’ were actually influenced by the social media exposure of friends and family that *were* exposed). While such a study is possible, it is not one that would be feasible for a lone researcher operating at a distance from the groups studied with limited time and resources.

The chosen case studies, especially the first and second ones, are considered as the same as those two cases presented in this section. They both started as an online individual initiative concerned with helping others in society in health issues such as obesity. They did this either by providing them with clear information about the ingredients of the fast food they consumed, the ‘Qomami case study- حملة الأكل القمامي’, or by providing them with a healthier way of living through changing their eating habits and exercising, the ‘Mizan case study- حملة ميزان’. They both started as online initiative and after their breakthrough, they turned their work into official organizations that provided the same work but on different bases.

The third case study ‘Hit her- حملة اضربها’ is different from all these case studies. It is a case study of a project implemented by a media production company who believed in the concept of giving back to the community, and, therefore, it was important to focus on the best practices of making a positive change in society. Therefore, they took the initiative to promote awareness about domestic violence in general, and violence against women in particular.

8.2 How the analysis of the data will be carried out:

As this chapter is directed at answering the third research question of this thesis, which is concerned with online expression, there are different issues that are involved under this category, such as:

- Internet regulation;
- official censorship;
- social norms (self-censorship).

All these issues might have an effect on the type of activities undertaken, and these might be conducted online by lead users in Saudi society attempting social reform. Considering the role of these issues might also give an indication on the extent to which those online lead users prefer to use online social networks to promote their initiatives for their attempt at social reform in society.

The general framework analysis of each case study in this chapter will be divided into two parts. In the first part, the questions and answers on the initiative of each case is examined with the aim of finding the key points in the interviewees' answers that will reflect the categories identified previously. The second part of the case study analysis is to examine opinion measurement to indicate, in addition to the answers from the first part, the type of individuals they are, either cosmopolitan or conservative ones based on their RWA scores with all of the responses to the RWA statements reported for each of the interview respondents.

On the other hand, and due to the nature of each case study, there will be a specific framework for the two cases, Mizan and Hit-Her, because each of them have more than one interviewee. Therefore, their analysis will follow the general framework, but will also be divided into two groups to combine the long interview: the first group will contain the males, while the second group will have the females in the initiative.

The Mizan case study حملة ميزان will have two groups of interviewees: the first group contains the two males, while the second group will have the three females in the initiative. The Hit-Her case study حملة اضربها will also have two groups, the first one contains the three males and the second will have the only female who agreed to participate in the interview. The purpose of this framework is to combine the long interview questions and thereby present the results more concisely.

At the end, after presenting each case study with the analysis, the final part of the chapter will integrate all the analysis with the theories used in the research to draw the final conclusion and answer the last research question.

8.3 The First Case Study: The Qomami Initiative- حملة الأكل القمامي:

In March 2013, a Twitter user took the individual initiative to start an Arabic hashtag called 'Qomami Food', which was used to spread messages dealing with the culture of junk food, its negative impact on health and its contribution to the problem of obesity in the Kingdom. The hashtag at first struck a chord among Twitter users as it focussed on MacDonald's fast food in Saudi Arabia (Al-Bakri, 2014).

Since its beginning, the hashtag was maintained by the contribution of 27 individuals, including the team of volunteers who make up the Qomami. During the first period prior to its launch as a branded campaign, the content posted under the Qomami hashtag received 2,789 likes on the social networking application Instagram over the course of 188 days. As the campaign gained momentum and support, in the beginning and only 37 days later after its launch as a branded initiative, the content managed to accumulate 6,938 likes, and their official account on Twitter gained 5,576 followers overall (Al-Bakri, 2014).

One of the reasons why the Qomami initiative was chosen as a case study was the cause they stood for, trying to change societal perspectives on fast food, to create a sense of awareness in society. It was also chosen because of how it was first initiated by one person who believed that in a consumer society and with individual's busy lives, there is an absence of questioning the ingredients of food. As this has been a one person initiative, the interview was with one person only, a 30 year old male individual who signed his interview questions with his full name¹⁴. In later discussions, his answers to the interview questions, as well as comments on some of the important ones, have been presented in order to analyse his online behaviour toward society social change.

8.3.1 Data analysis: first part:

8.3.1.1 The starting point and the aim

To start, the interviewee was asked to explain the initiative in detail, his aim of making social change through addressing a critical case (which is consuming junk food), and its effect on health. Due to his personal experience, he also explained his use of online social networks to promote to his initiative instead of using other forms of media, and the initiative's achievements. The following answer reflects his position on the use of

¹⁴ The individual is not named here in deference to the social norms of ethical research protocols at the University of Sussex.

online social networks as a preferable medium for lead users, which will enable them to raise issues that are inconsistent with the existing social norms:

The initiative aims to create an aware consumer. A consumer who asks, what is in this product, before he decides to consume it. It also aims to educate the public on the dangers of junk food and the effects of consuming it on a regular basis. The initiative aims to create a sense of personal awareness within the individual's mind that junk food is harmful, and should be dealt with in the same manner as tobacco and alcohol.

He explained more about the name of his initiative, which can create controversy in Saudi society: 'the word Al-Akil Al-Qomami which in Arabic الأكل القمامي means describing food as general waste, which is in the religious collective mind is considered as an offence to the blessing for God for the provision of food'¹⁵:

My role is to introduce the term (Al-Akil Al-Qomami) and to explain to users why this food is Qomami by relying on medical research and sharing the information written in them with the local community.

His use of online social networks as a preferable medium to promote the initiative has another advantage, as he acknowledged, where he could raise a critical issue on the use of the terms of the initiative, which might be interpreted by a conservative individual as an offence to the blessing for God for the provision of food. At the same time he used modern facts that also attracted the users, the fact that junk food is a significant cause for harming peoples' health and causing obesity:

I have also displayed how consumer activism can force a company like McDonald's to invite you for a meeting with seven of their top management personnel, including the supply chain manager and head of food engineering. So the aim is: An educated and aware consumer who sees junk food for what it really is, and who may decide to consume junk food but at the same knowing that he/she is consuming a harmful product. Now we are building a website, distributing stickers and creating a YouTube show based on the hashtag.

His answer reflects the extent of the engagement with online social networks, where the use of online social networks in this case was not only to address the issue on junk food, but also to act as a means of engaging its users with the experience of taking up a social issue. In other words, the use of online social networks here made it obvious how to make social action possible.

¹⁵ It should also be noted that even the non-conservative, or less religious, individuals might find it offensive to name the food a Qomami, as it is still a blessing for God for the provision of food.

8.3.1.2 *The achievements and benefits of using online social networks*

As the interviewee was asked about his observations of the achievements of the initiative as an outcome of the use of the online social networks, his answer below reflects his perception of the advantages of the use of this technology, which gives individuals such as himself opportunities to channel certain issues in society that was never easy before:

The adoption of the term by the general public, the acceptance of the fact that junk food is junk and is harmful beyond a shadow of a doubt. Hashtag participation is steady and increasing; people start questioning junk food restaurants on their ingredients through the restaurants account via Twitter, and included the Qomami hashtag and official account in their tweets. Also, the tone of the tweets in the hashtag is less resistant to the term and more positive tweets are being observed in support of the term. More and more people are approaching letting me know they and their kids have quit junk food thanks to my initiative.

One of the features of this answer clearly gives evidence that some members of society were questioning the term the initiative used, as part of the Islamic culture that the society was brought up in. Translating some of the Twitter messages appearing on the site, it is possible to conclude that one reason for hostility toward the site is that it is openly questioning other elements of society, such as schools' choice of food for their students, or engaging in a general anti-Western bias involving statements about the hazardous features of internationally branded (usually Western-originated) products. With all the resistance the initiative went through at the beginning due to the name of the hashtag, this later became a little part of people's concerns. The focus has shifted from questioning the term of the initiative to looking up the information presented in the hashtag.

On the matter of whether online social networks, as opposed to other forms of communication media, are a contributor or negative factor to lead users' online initiatives, the interviewee replied':

It is free. It gives me a direct method of reaching hundreds of thousands and it levels the playing field with other junk food traders who rely on paid media. And the interaction happens live with the targeted segment (youth and general community)

To a certain extent his answer showed that young initiators preferred online social media for several reasons. One of the facts behind it was being free to subscribe and

use, the numbers of the targeted segment they were looking to spread their initiative toward, and the immediate response they were looking for.

At the same time, the interviewee provided evidence that the use of online social networks, as opposed to other forms of media, can affect the views of others using persuasive communication, saying:

Smart and entertaining communication (tweets, pictures, infographics) are always more effective than classical preaching.

This indicates the power of the new information technology, from the point of young individual users. Hence their reliance on this technology was to engage and promote their initiative and civil work.

As supporting evidence, his following answer to the question of whether he considers his online collective action and campaign to involve persuasive communication messages, reflects positively that his initiative contains persuasive communication messages:

Yes. It cannot be offensive to those who consume junk food or are overweight. It has to sway the target audience rather than offend them.

8.3.1.3 The issues of official and self-censorship, and social norms

In the following and final section of the first part of the interview, the interviewee was asked questions on matters that are related to official censorship, self-censorship and social norms, and how they deal with it when they face it.

The interviewee observed that using open online platforms can limit the expression to a certain point, due to the existence of religious principles and social norms. In other words due to the existence of official censorship and the practice of self-censorship, the more the platform was used to open the initiative to the public, the more the initiators practice self-censorship in their use of works and interactions with others.

The more the social platform is subject to public scrutiny, the more cautious one has to be. Private platforms like Path are more lenient since you can control who accesses your digital space. But on Twitter, you have to be smart and politically sensitive to avoid any negative occurrences that might distract the initiative from its original purpose, which is consumer awareness.

He provided examples on how others ‘the society’ responded to his initiative through questioning his use of the term ‘Qomami’, which means junk or trash, and applying it to food. In the mind of the people in society, this was not respectful enough to God’s food:

At first the usual response was: How can you call God’s food junk? Then after explaining to them that this is not food but rather a mixture of organic matter and a lot of chemicals that are more harmful than beneficial to your body, people have begun to see the logic. As interactions increased and more and more explanations were being provided, more individuals have begun to accept the term and advocate its use.

The resistance that the initiator faced from those who kept questioning the sanctity of the Arabic term used, Qomami food, did not stop the initiator from explaining to the masses that what they had been consuming did not fall in the category of God’s blessed food, providing them with facts and evidence that it was only a harmful component to their health.

At the same time, the ties social network lead users had on social media gave them and their initiative strength. This was because some of the ‘celebrities’, as the initiator called them, the online lead users, promoted their social ties initiative through their accounts or online YouTube videos, which, in other words, gave the initiative a boost of recognition and followers.

I have received support from local YouTube celebrities as well as health gurus like Mizan.

When the interviewee was asked if his online attitude could be affected by the views of others in society, and this is where they practice self-censorship in their initiatives, he answered in a very short but affirmative response

I always seek the truth, and if I am presented with a valid point I welcome the learning experience.

Together with this answer, the initiator indicated in his previous answers that his online behaviour was censored, and in any case if other users drew his attention to some attitude he would be willing to consider changing it. This indicated that the image of online lead users was far important than expected, due to the nature of the conservative society in which they were raised and lived. This can also be explained based on the gratification theory where they fulfil their personal needs, such as socializing and

creating certain image about themselves. Hence, the notion of self-censorship is more present in the picture than official censorship.

Even though the initiator indicated that he censored himself online due to official censorship and social norms of the society and his need to create certain image about himself, his following answer shows that he received full support from his family:

My family has supported me by giving me legal counsel and by defending my initiative whenever criticism is brought to surface by junk food restaurant owners.

And he continued describing the way they supported him in a positive effects:

I have, and continue, to rely on the family business's legal resources. I run my tweets, texts and altered Instagram pictures, when I have any concern about any potential legal liability. Also my father and uncle, who are both well-known businessmen in Jeddah, have publicly voiced their support even though they are in business with an entity that owns junk food restaurants among its other business. The effect has been very positive and it also forces me to practice what I preach. I have lost 15 kilos through exercise so I can embody the lifestyle I am preaching.

This reflects that the family support played a crucial role in his initiative: their support and legal advice as well as the freedom and space they offered him to enable him to continue practicing what he believed in, even though it might have some contradiction to their own work. In other words, this indicates that this user did not change his point of view due to fear of isolation. This is also reflected in his following answer, when he was asked if his activities online might create the possibility that he would be socially isolated, he asserted firmly:

No. What is right is right.

Finally, the interviewee was asked to identify any recognition his initiative received from society, media, or other official agencies:

I have received recognition from junk food outlets, and graphic designers have approached me to develop a brand for the initiative. I have been approached by YouTube show's producers and the show is in the making. Newspapers have interviewed me but refused to publish the interview citing fear of losing junk food restaurants' advertising money. Official organizations are too dormant to react to any of this.

Even under the existing official censorship and self-censorship, the initiative was able to reach the recognition of the food junk industry in the Saudi society. This is a sign of the role of online social networks in promoting any initiative within the Saudi society, but at the same time this answer raised the question of whether online initiatives are far from being recognized from official media, due to the contradiction that might face official media when it comes to their own business interests. Hence, the effect might be confined only within the users of online social network and their ties that will affect the process of applying social change.

To sum up the first part of the interview presentation, the questions' analysis for this part was divided into three points, each of them is related to the sub-hypotheses introduced at the beginning of this chapter, and each one is also linked to the questions asked to the interviewee.

When he undertook this initiative online, the initiator in this case study was aiming to create an aware consumer who is well educated on the harmful effects of consuming junk food. This aim indicated that this lead user prefers to use online social networks as opposed to other forms of media because it is free and you can reach the targeted public. In other words, this means that they found in this medium an alternative public space to practice their rights and to be more engaged with the society in order to promote social awareness and civic engagement. This would satisfy their needs under their lack of open public sphere in the society 'the capabilities theory'.

As he started promoting the initiative online he faced disapproval from the public due to his use of the Arabic word 'Qomami food', which means rubbish, and started facing the argument on 'how could you name God's blessed food Qomami'?

As he 'did not forego the name, in other words he refused to censor his use of the term, he started relying on medical research' that supported his claim against junk food and shared it with the public online. In turn over time this helped to change the public viewpoint on the use of the word. At the same time, with his online social ties with other well-known lead users, his initiative got promoted with their support. All of this played a role in creating a certain image about the initiator in the public eye.

In addition to creating a certain image of the initiator, i.e., to be more sociable, applying social change satisfied personal needs under the gratification theory. At the same time,

although he preferred to speak his mind without also disrupting the public, especially in open social networks like Twitter as he mentioned in his answers, ‘the initiator did not fear being socially isolated, on the contrary he received full support from his family and friends.

8.3.2 RWA analysis: second part:

In the next part of the interview, a set of phrases were put forward to be graded by the interviewee, to understand more about the lead user on certain social issues and behaviour online. Using the same categories from the survey analysis, the collected statements are interpreted according to the characteristics of the interviewee, which would indicate the orientation of this lead user as either conservative or cosmopolitan based on each individual RWA score.

Table 8.1: Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for the first case study

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | +3 | 8 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual’s opinion in society | -1 | 4 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | +2 | 7 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | -2 | 3 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +3 | 8 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | +4 | 9 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | +3 | 8 |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | -4 | 1 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | -4 | 1 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what | +4 | 9 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| | really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | | |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | -4 | 1 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | -1 | 4 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | +4 | 9 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | +4 | 9 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on economic issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | +4 | 9 |
| | Total RWA | | 117 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 63 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: The interviewee strongly agreed that the existence of Internet regulation is to protect society values, at the same time he slightly disagreed that these regulations were to regulate public opinion. In other words, he believed that the regulations of the Internet were to protect society values, which is important, but it did not mean that these regulations were essentially to stop people from voicing out loud what they think about or believe in. This could give an indication that even though young people were seeking social change, at the same time they conformed to the society social norms and values of their including Islamic values.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: He moderately agreed that the people who stand against Internet regulation believe that their governments are suppressing personal expression. On the other hand, he also moderately disagreed that authorities have good judgement on how things should be done. Despite this respondent's general agreement with the regulation of the Internet (indicated by responses to the previous pair of questions), he appears to be suggesting

that those with a responsibility for regulation may not have the best judgement as to what needs to be regulated.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: When it came to measuring the extent of how society might influence online opinions, the interviewee scored high in both of the questions in this category; his responses reflect the existence of social pressure on expression in the context of conservatism in Islamic society. While the respondent appears to believe that the online expression of others is influenced by others (generally and more strongly by ‘a few individuals in society’) the next set of questions reveals a very complex personal position.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: The respondent is clearly influenced by a desire for others to form a particular image of him. However, he seems adamant that the image should be based upon ‘telling the truth’, as he perceives it, rather than pleasing other individuals in general or individuals that the respondent holds in high esteem. In other words, this individual recognized that others will form a view of him and this is important, but is content to have that view based upon his expressions of what he believes to be true (i.e. not first taking account of what others might think, but hoping that ‘truth’ will out, that remaining true to his own views will lead to a positive view of others).

This online lead user seeks social change through their online initiative and civic engagement, even while recognizing the possible transgression of these views by others in society. This also complies with his answer to the question in the first part of the interview when he said that only truth is what matters to him; on the other hand he would not reject other people’s opinion and he was willing to learn. The scores here gave an indication of the tendency for social contribution and social change.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: His negative score here reinforces the conclusion of the previous paragraph. The respondent very strongly disagreed that his work could be influenced by the approval of others. This can be seen in the first part of the interview, where he indicated that he received recognition from junk food outlets, in addition to having all the legal support he needed from his family even though they are in business with an entity that owns junk food restaurants.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: He slightly disagreed that young individuals have good opportunities to express themselves online, but at the same time he very strongly agreed that young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to criticize social norms and question their authorities. This indicated that, even with the opportunities available online for young individuals in a conservative society, they were not utilizing them sufficiently to question the existing social traditions and the authorities, which might also be indication of the social system in their society and the effect of social norms and the practice of self-censorship.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: The high scores here reflect the initiator's tendency to use online social networks to promote his initiative, and to be engaged in civil work and collective actions online in order to apply the changes he envisioned to see in the society. His belief that these platforms could contribute to spreading awareness in the society was very high. Subsequently, the social change they sought to reach in the long term could accrue in the society.

In conclusion, the interviewee sought to apply social change through his online initiative; he still had a tendency to conform to his society conservatism as long as it 'did not contradict his own beliefs in social change and civil work. On the other hand, as much as he agreed that he wanted to create a certain image about himself online, he still sought to tell the truth to people; his family support made him continue practicing what he believed in, even though it might have some contradiction with their own business.

Based on the RWA score for this initiator for the two scale ranges it is evident that this lead user falls into the conservative in-group, where in the first RWA scale he scored 117, and for the second RWA scale range he scored 63 and both of them falls above the midpoint presented in the previous chapter. He conforms to his society norms, even though he indicated that he still believed in telling the truth through his civil work and maintaining his image.

8.4 The Second Case Study: Mizan initiative- حملة ميزان:

Two years ago, a small group of doctors started an online initiative through a Facebook group and Twitter hashtag (the official account had 51,000 followers), concerned with promoting a healthy way of living and fitness in Saudi society. The group offered

discussions and health support for the public, with the aim of providing a place to shed light and focus on lifestyle, diet and exercise. The group conducted monthly brainstorming meetings to discuss solutions for common problems. The #hashtag Mizan on Twitter is open for people to participate by posting their healthy habits, exercises, questions, concerns and share their experiences. The Facebook group is used for discussion, documents and videos of peoples' experiences, as well as for providing information.

This case started out as an online health initiative, with the aim of promoting health awareness in Saudi society. Each of the group members joined the initiative based on their own personal experience and medical background. After all the success they had, they became a well-known name in providing online health awareness among society, hence, they have now started to build up their own company offline to continue their work. At the same time, they continued to organize their work online as a non-profit activity, continuing to provide health awareness for their followers.

As this is a group work, the author interviewed the five people involved in this initiative – two males and three females. Some of them wanted to have their full name shown in the analysis (due to the deference to the social norms of ethical research protocols at the University of Sussex their names will not be mentioned), while the others opted to mention only their initials.

In the following discussion, the author has presented the aforementioned participants' answers according to the framework presented at the beginning of this chapter in Section '7.4' to the interview questions and comments on some of the important ones, in order to analyse their online behaviour toward society social change.

8.4.1 Data analysis: group 1 – first part:

8.4.1.1 The starting point and the aim

The first group interviewed contained two males aged 25 years, both doctors recently graduated from medical school. They were asked to explain the initiative in detail, explaining how they have pursued their aim of making social change through addressing the case of promoting a healthier way of living by encouraging people to change their eating habits and take part in more exercise. Interviewee A started by introducing himself and his initiative by saying:

I am an MD by education, but have a start-up business on social media in wellness and health promotion. The company is called Mizan and specializes in Arabic health promotion and support. Currently we have the first evidence-based Arabic wellness and lifestyle website in the Middle East. We also have an account on Twitter that sends out motivational tweets daily. We also have Instagram and YouTube. Our business also focusses on promoting healthy companies in wellness, creating content for them on social media, and perhaps campaigns and offline activities if needed. We have a YouTube show that will air soon.

On the other hand, his fellow partner, interviewee B, expressed more on the nature and the future of the initiative, saying:

It's an awareness initiative, beginning with a simple friends' meeting since we decided to meet to support our personal health objectives, which differ from one person to another (overweight, weight loss, structure improving... etc.), it was a great passion to me and to my partner. We enjoyed the help and support being the most experienced in this field due to that passion and our medical background (medicine students at that time). We decided, with time and the great amount of interaction from people, to take it to a higher level and to change it to a social initiative on social media networks. With the increase in public demand, we began thinking to change it to a social commercial business to serve the social and health objectives. We have to ensure its continuity since most social initiatives in Saudi Arabia expire or, at best, become limited due to a lack of resources and support.

He continued by explaining his role in the initiative and the future of their work, saying:

I work in Mizan as a general manager and my main role is office work in preparing contracts and documents, attending meetings, following up financial accounts, planning for future projects. Mizan is currently considered one of the biggest health groups on social media networks in Saudi Arabia, with a number of followers that exceeds 160,000 in its network. We are publishing daily tips and weekly sketches for general education. The next step is to expand our activities with "Activities calendar" where we specify the international days we want to take part in to design awareness campaigns with different parties.

8.4.1.2 The achievements and benefits of using online social networks

Then they were asked about the achievements they observed as an outcome of the initiative. The answer by interviewee A reflected his perception of how it is important to connect to the audience in their own language, saying:

Saudi Arabia is the #1 consumer of Twitter in the world. The Middle East in general is up there too. Arabic content is something that is little in amount compared to other main languages. We've found that offering content in Arabic disseminates very fast, and is appreciated by people who suffer from this

scarcity. Also, forms of entertainment (or lack of) in the area naturally push people towards this alternative way of expressing and appreciating people who do.

From his point-of-view; he believed that offering Arabic content on health issues online was the most important achievement.

Interviewee B's answer for this question identified several issues:

There were a lot of unusual things that I noticed in the Mizan initiative, whether as an orientation or a business that were both positive and negative. An example of the advantages is that we did not anticipate such a quick response to the health call made by Mizan. The numbers we have recorded in questionnaires last Ramadan '2013' and the one proceeding it, which signified the number of people who responded to the weight loss campaign, were excellent and beyond expectations. Furthermore, one can indicate the difference in the crowded walking routes and in the amount of exercising in Jeddah, which rose simultaneously with Mizan's emergence. This showed a certain group of society that needed a bit of a push to respond to health awareness.

Also, Mizan inspired many campaigns and other awareness movements that apply the same way in awareness spread via social media networks. This wave attracted the media attention and some companies as they found that our way, in spite of its simplicity, was the easiest and the best to reach people. So, that has led to different forms of cooperation with some health companies in different sectors to reach our desires for a health audience that represents a certain class of customers, which means a lot in the marketing sector.

When they were asked if they thought that online social networks as opposed to other forms of communication should be considered to be a positive or negative factor to the their initiative, interviewee A answered simply that it was a 'huge positive contributor', which also reflected the way the group initiative went from just offering online discussions on health and changing the way of living, to actually participate in community activities such as giving lectures at public events, universities, and conferences; and now starting to build up their health company consultancy.

Interviewee B on the same question thought that:

Having these means of communication made it easier for us to reach people. Using traditional means and media doesn't have the same flexibility as the social media networks, whether economically or logistically, or even from the user's point of view, since he has to sit in front of the TV or switch on the radio for listening, in contrast to social media networks, where it is only a button away on his/her personal phone.

On the other hand, both respondents thought that using persuasive communication online helped in changing the view of others. The following answer from interviewee A gives evidence on the view of online persuasive communication, where he thought that their initiative involved persuasive messages:

I think it provides them with the how to, and the positive motivation. The rest is up to them.

This also indicates that whatever social change is sought by this group is within the mainstream of allowed expression.

The respondents were asked to provide examples about how the public responded to their initiative. Interviewee A noticed that it was a:

Huge huge positive response. One thing we've noticed is that it is possible not only to spread awareness or entertainment, but also have a call of action. People WILL actually show up to physical locations if they believe in you, and you give them the attention, care and positivity they are looking for. We've sold out and filled several events and campaigns through social media announcements. We are also called upon by companies and entities who have similar interests, and this has generated some interesting business for us.

Although the outcome of this online initiative was huge, as is apparent in this answer, the group gained big attention from other entities in the society. Hence they moved to the next level, which was to build up their own business, and to become the first lead user's health initiative group that established their work offline.

This achievement was supported with other examples presented by interviewee B, where he said that:

The response is mostly positive with some criticism, whether for the initiative as a whole or for some of our methods and style, or even our qualifications to publish certain information. Some examples on positive responses may be the awareness campaigns in schools and universities imitating Mizan. Some people have turned from recipients of information to publishers of it and to patrons of our goals. Having some other health awareness groups emerge after us such as Arab diet, fat fighter and other examples.

At the same time, interviewee B also mentioned some negative aspects, but it was mainly a personal one, where he was attacked from another user:

Negative responses are mostly a solo act as I stated, though some of them may be very hostile. For example, I never forgot a person's attack on me a long time ago because he was annoyed by using the title doctor despite the fact that I was an intern. I tried to explain to him and prove that the title is deserved after the end of the sixth year, but he attacked me personally and insulted me verbally, and even after blocking him I knew from some followers that he continued insulting me for a full day.

On the other hand, the interviewee was asked if their work had any effects on how his family and friends views him. He said:

*Of course! In our region they call people with high follower-ship celebrities. Also we are always asked about the interests we share on our networks when we meet people. One interesting effect is that we have actually coined with the Arabic word *میزان* If you search it on Google, the first two results are us. In other words, I am now that word, I am health, I am coaching, etc.*

As this was the first interacting health initiative that not only serves online users, they transformed their activity and they engaged with individuals from society in offline activities on the same approach. People became more interested in their work, and their social networks ties were engaged with them and promoting their activities.

While his partner described that effect by saying:

Immensely, I even think that my acquaintances view me differently after this initiative, as now I'm a leader, a person promoting change and not just a friend.

It is clear that the online initiative has changed how people viewed interviewee B: he became a leader for so many, even among his own circle of friends.

When he was asked to give examples of any recognitions that their initiative received from any agency in society, he replied:

We've been approached by several huge companies, and have visited and discussed strategies with the Ministry of Health on more than one occasion.

This once again, indicates that the nature of this initiative could be one of the reasons for the 'huge' recognition as the interviewee indicates.

On the other hand, interviewee B's response to this question was different. Even though he gave examples, he viewed the recognition they received in a different way:

No, and I don't mean that I did not get any acknowledgement, but that acknowledgement was mostly for other reasons and objectives, not as an appreciation for our work.

The examples that this initiator gave, unlike his initiative partner, indicates that interviewee B thought differently about this work. His main interest was focused on the work as an initiative that had not been acknowledged enough from their surrounding milieu, even if they have themselves been approached as 'celebrities' that were doing something different in the society and attracting different followers. He then gave some examples for the acknowledgment they received, such as:

- *the Minister's visit: we were accompanied by a company that presented us to the Minister and not by a request from him to meet us;*
- *most media interviews are for commercial aim as we are classified as effective people and we affect the ratio of viewing, or possess a good content that raises those ratios;*
- *we did not get any awards of acknowledgement, recognition or appreciation of the sort to our work: all the plaques and certificates we got were for lectures and activities we did;*
- *we did not receive any financial support or governmental logistics up to now. The only exception was the initiative of Prince Khalid Al-Faisal 'Governor of Makkah Region at that time', which involved holding our meetings in the Chamber of Commerce. We were asked to submit some documents as a bureaucratic procedure shortly after joining, to continue holding the meetings there, which led us to leave the Chamber of Commerce;*
- *we received support from some individuals by taking us into their homes or attending our meetings or spreading information about us because they believed in our message, but I do not classify that under "community support"*

He concluded with more illustrative words on his point of view on recognition and acknowledgment as follows:

What I said doesn't mean that society is fighting us or that we don't receive support. On the contrary, there are many supporters around us, but I don't see support as an appreciation from the community. Support could be interest in the objective, the aim, or even the interest in us as individuals from our fans, but appreciation is a more comprehensive word and it means acknowledging us as a socially effective body by socially effective bodies.

At this point of the analysis of the interview, it is important to note that both respondents' answers related to two of the theories used in this research, the capability and gratification theories.

Based on the capability theory, both initiators viewed the use of online social networks as an opportunity that helped them in their work, pursuing their goals and reaching people, they believed that the contribution of these online networks were a hugely positive outcome, with flexibility for both the sender and recipient, unlike traditional media. At the same time, even though both of them acknowledged the role of censorship and social norms, they believed that their work is a 'safe' initiative that does not cross any boundaries, even though they still practice self-censorship. Hence the use of online social networks were conceived as a real opportunity for them.

On the other hand, when they were asked about the achievements of their initiative, based on gratification theory, they both sought ways to fulfil their needs for achievements, through their online initiative, to share their knowledge and experience, reach the goal of spreading social awareness among others, and hence gratify their own needs. As they indicated in their answers, they became social celebrities and how others view them differently after their work.

8.4.1.3 *The issues of official and self-censorship, and social norms*

The final questions of the first part were concentrated on issues related to the notion of censorship, official and self, and social norms.

When the respondents were asked about the existence of official censorship and self-censorship due to the society social norms and religious principles, interviewee A acknowledged the existence of their effects on the interaction online in different social platforms,

The effects definitely exist with different degrees on each platform, creating a restraint on what you can offer or view.

And he continued, explaining this effect on their online initiative as:

But in our case, with such a neutral issue like health, we don't usually cross over into these believed to be sensitive areas. I can't say it has affected our case specifically.

He believed that the nature of the initiative played a major role in the reaction of the society, and because their initiative was concerned with health issues only, they did not face any situation that needed to be censored.

On the other hand, interviewee B's response to the same question was more explicit on this issue, where he said:

I strongly agree, the Saudi society is considered one of the most closed societies fighting change, and this influences, in some way or another, our work. We take into account its conventions, and traditions in all that we publish, starting from content, form, presentation and other issues. There is a difference between some communication networks which the users of those networks can detect.

Then interviewee B continued, indicating in his answer that they practice self-censorship, due to the conservative nature of Saudi society as conservative and the effects of social norms. He also indicated that the use of different social media affects the way they interact within it:

As the culture and general orientation of a network comes from the orientation of most of its users, and because Saudi Arabia is one of the closed societies, we always find that the advance and spread of one network could be for a one group more than the other. Some networks such as YouTube contains a huge amount of hostility from which no video nor channel may be excluded because it is considered a public network for all; Twitter is more private as you only watch

comments of those you follow and that appears clearly when you find what most discussions and disputes are on (Hashtags). This proves the theory that gathering all society classes in one area leads to higher enmity. For example when we want to publish information about women in sports on You Tube, we have to present it in a way that is accepted by all society classes, either in the information layout or the way it is explained. So we cannot publish pictures or videos with women in sports clothes as it is unacceptable socially and may lead to a negative reaction.

Although both respondents pointed out that they consider their initiative safe in that it ‘does not cross any sensitive issues, interviewee A observed the necessity of circumspection:

I think it depends on what your’ interest is, or what the objective of your online presence is. In our case we are creating a movement that is positive, and generating business with many stakeholders. So it is crucial to keep happy customers, and therefore respecting certain sensitivities. It might not change the whole opinion, but it definitely makes us think twice about our tone. Other bloggers or activists find it in their favour to stir up public opinion and cause a boom. So they might be less sensitive, or even deliberately insensitive.

His answer indicated that lead users’ attitudes depend on the cause they were supporting. As long as it was in safe areas that did not confront sensitive issues, religiously, politically, and socially, the practice of self-censorship is present but at a lower level than might be necessary in other contexts..

On the other hand, interviewee B provided a blunt answer on the same question, saying:

The Internet, like any other resource we use, contains accurate and wrong information and different opinions with which I may agree or disagree. All this can naturally influence your own point of view or broaden your horizon, but to change our personal opinions to please people is something that I don’t personally do. But we do it in Mizan as we deal with the information and the recipient as a product and a customer and the customer is always right.

The interviewee indicated that even though they sometime modify their attitude because they were dealing with different directions in their work, he revealed that he personally as a lead user did not change his point of view based on the view of others. In other words, his answer gives a clear idea on the mediation between the ‘authority’ of the doctors and their view that the users of their information are ‘customers’ that need to be ‘right’, i.e. that the customer should not be told that they are ‘wrong’, even if they might be.

On the other hand, when they were asked if they thought that their online initiative created the possibility for them to be socially isolated, interviewee A replied:

I don't think so

One possibility for that is because the nature of this initiative was important as it was concerned with health issues, and it was initiated from young doctors who shared their own experience and activities with others. This made them as lead users more socially acceptable.

However, interviewee B thought differently from his partner, where he said as a response to the same question:

Yes, we in Mizan believe that spreading the right message is by adopting it first. For example, I cannot advise people to exercise if I don't. This affected the way people look at me placing me as a "hero" who is not allowed to make a mistake; and so, affecting my social life, starting with the simplest of things, such as eating a favourite unhealthy meal in public to my own personal life, which I cannot practice freely in fear of an ill reaction to be with a girl in public for example.

Unlike his initiative partner, interviewee B felt like his life was affected by their work. He became more discreet in his way of living, because he 'did not want to be viewed or judged by the public for his behaviour in his offline life. The example he gave refers to a certain norm in the Saudi society: it is improper to be seen in public with an unrelated female, especially for him as well-known lead user.

To sum up, this is an online health initiative where the initiators aim to pursue their goal in seeking social change in their society through encouraging people to apply a healthier way of living by changing their eating habits. They provided them with the information they needed to apply that change in their lives.

Both respondents indicated that the nature of this initiative was considered to be safe as it 'did not cross any sensitive issues in the society. This gave the initiators more space in expressing themselves in online social networks, and in pursuing their goal through this means of communication. This is considered in this research as an alternative public space, where they can fulfil their goals and be engaged more with the public based on the definition of the capability theory.

At the same time, however, interviewee B explicitly revealed that he practiced self-censorship, while interviewee A was less forthcoming on this issue. Interviewee B pointed out the extent of the effect of the existing censorship and social norms on his online behaviour, while interviewee A did not seem to see this as an issue of importance in the context of their initiative. Whether this was because of the stated belief, or an even more circumspect approach representing self-censorship, is not clear from this respondent's answers.

Both initiators believed that using online social networks had a huge effect on their initiative, either on the initiative itself or personally; they indicated that they found an alternative place where they could express themselves and pursue their goals. This is consistent with 'capability theory' in which people actually join the offline activities promoted by the initiators, and viewed leaders promoting change not only because they are a friend.

The initiators were approached to participate in other activities, some of which satisfied their own need for being social, and maintaining their own social image, received support they look for from their own peers, behaviours consistent with 'the gratification theory'. The initiators differed in their views about how this initiative had affected their personal life. Where interviewee A 'did not feel socially isolated, interviewee B believed that being a lead user promoting health change affected his personal freedom as he pointed that 'people think I am hero that shouldn't make any error'.

8.4.2 RWA analysis: group 1 – second part – interviewee A:

The next part of the interview involved the social issues and behaviours online. Using the same categories from the survey analysis, the responses are categorized based on their RWA score to indicate whether the orientation of this lead user belongs to the conservative or cosmopolitan group. As with respondents in the previous case, some of the complexity of individual views may be revealed by answers that vary in their alignment with these two groups.

Table 8.2: Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for Second case-interviewee A

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | +2 | 7 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society | -4 | 1 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | +4 | 9 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | -1 | 4 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | -2 | 3 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | +2 | 7 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | -3 | 2 |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | +4 | 9 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | -1 | 4 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | -1 | 4 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | +1 | 6 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | +4 | 9 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | +4 | 9 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | +4 | 9 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing | +4 | 9 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| | awareness in the community on economic issues. | | |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | +4 | 9 |
| | Total RWA | | 122 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 65 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: The interviewee moderately agreed that the existence of Internet regulation is to protect society values, while at the same time he very strongly disagreed that these regulations were to regulate public opinion. In other words, he believed that the regulation of the Internet is to protect society values, which was important, but it did not mean that these regulations were to stop people from voicing what they think about or believe in. This could give an indication that even though young people are seeking social change, they still should conform to and value their society's norms, and Islamic values.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: The interviewee slightly disagreed that the people who supported the existence of Internet regulation believed that their authorities had good judgement on things; while he very strongly agreed that the people who stand against Internet regulation believe that their government are suppressing personal expression. This suggests that this individual is aware of the possibility that such individuals exist, but it does not reveal his own views concerning this issue.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: Slightly more revealing, the interviewee's responses in this category indicate that online expression is principally influenced by a 'few individuals' and does not necessarily reflect the view of a majority of people. This suggests that the respondent sees social norms regarding online expression as being influenced by more conservative elements in society.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: This set of responses fairly clearly indicates that the respondent controls his expression with the purpose of creating a specific image of himself in the minds of others, mildly rejecting expressions catering to the views of others or 'telling the truth' as perceived by the respondent. It is clear that,

in attempting to create this image in the minds of others, this respondent wishes to act independently, even from those that he holds in high esteem.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: In creating this self-image, however, the approval of the respondent's own community does matter. This may reflect the respondent's position in the professional health care community (those similar to the respondent).

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: His high scores here reflects a recognition that others are using online social networks to freely express their opinions. When compared with other answers, it does not suggest that this individual necessarily sees himself as one of these people.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: These high scores reflect the respondent's belief that social networks can be a powerful influence on social awareness in a range of areas. This is consistent with the respondent's effort to harness the awareness to behavioural change in the case of the activity he has initiated.

In conclusion, and based on the RWA score for the two scale ranges, this lead user falls into the conservative in-group, where the first RWA score 122 and for the alternative RWA score 65; his image in online social networks was very important to him. He believed that it could affect his credibility among his followers. The work he initiated online tended to fall more into the category of safe initiatives that seek to spread awareness in society without engaging with sensitive issues or transgressing social norms. Nonetheless, the individual does express a desire to form his views independently, rejecting the view that he should be influenced by others he holds in esteem, although weakly accepting that the opinion of friends, family member's, and peer's mattered to him. In short, the principal conclusion of this individual's position is that he believed that online social networks can play a crucial role in spreading awareness in his conservative society.

8.4.3 RWA analysis: group 1 – second part – interviewee B:

Turning to the second individual, it is useful to recall that this individual has already disclosed a somewhat more independent and assertive position regarding self-expression than the first respondent.

Table 8.3: Summary of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee B

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | +3 | 8 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society | +2 | 7 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | +2 | 7 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | +4 | 9 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +3 | 8 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | +1 | 4 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | +1 | 6 |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | +1 | 6 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | -4 | 1 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | +4 | 9 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | +3 | 8 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | +4 | 9 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | +2 | 7 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | +2 | 7 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +4 | 9 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on economic issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | +4 | 9 |
| | Total RWA | | 132 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 82 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: He strongly agreed that the regulation of the Internet is to protect societal values, while he moderately agreed that these regulations were to regulate individual's expression. This is an indication that this lead user has considerable sympathy for conservative societal norms.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: When asked about others, however, the individual clearly recognized that those opposing Internet regulation (i.e. those having less conservative views) believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate expression. On the other hand, those supporting regulation are seen as having some trust in authorities. The difference between these scores suggests that those supporting regulation may be less confident of authorities while those opposing regulation are clearly distrustful of authorities.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: He strongly agreed that online expression is influenced by the view of the majority of the people in the society; while he slightly agreed that online expression is influenced by a few individuals in society. This suggests that this respondent believes that social norms reflect the majority of people's views rather than only those of the more conservative members of society.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: His answers to this block of statements reflects a very strongly held belief in the value of telling the truth as the respondent perceives it, but the respondent also recognizes that expression is influenced by others. This also complied with his answer to the question in the first part of the interview where he said that, due to the nature of their work, they might modify their view on some issues. Moreover, he slightly agreed that his online opinion could be influenced to create a certain image of himself. This also complied with his answer to

one of the questions, where he indicated that his work made him more discreet in his life in order not to be judged by society.

His negative scores here also needs to be considered with his high score where what people think was less important than telling the truth as he perceives it. In this sense, there are some similarities between the two respondents A and B; they are both confident of their own authority as lead users, and circumspect with how they express themselves due to their strong interest in promoting a view of themselves. Ironically, although the second respondent voices stronger views concerning social norms and their effects than the first, the responses to the statements in the second part of the interview suggest that this individual is even more mindful of other's views, which he takes to be fairly consistent with the views of authority figures.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: His score here is also consistent with his answer in the first part of the interview where he said that his online work made him more discreet due to the conservative nature of Saudi society. His relatively higher score than interviewee A. shows the tendency of interviewee B to be more discreet about his personal life and practice self-censorship more while maintaining also his image. On the other hand, interviewee A. attempts to conform with the image he gained through this initiative.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: He strongly agreed that, with the existence of online social networks, young individuals have good opportunities to express themselves and question society traditions, norms and religion. This also complies with his answer on the role of online social networks as opposed to other means of communication, where both respondents agreed on the important role they play in their initiative. On the other hand, however, he moderately agreed that young individuals were having good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms, and also moderately agree taking advantage of this new technology to question the authorities. This statement about others reflects an awareness of this possibility even if the other answers suggest that this individual is unlikely to see himself as one who is questioning authority, at least in terms of online expression where he is clearly more circumspect despite a high value of telling the truth as he perceives it.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: The high score here can reflect the tendency among lead users to use online social networks to have an optimistic view of the role of online social networks in promoting awareness in a number of different areas. This is also consistent with the view that, in Saudi society, online social networks may be playing a role as an alternative public space.

In conclusion, both interviewees in the first group opined that online social networks were a preferable means of communication. This is consistent with the view that such networks constitute an alternative public space, and capability theory derived ideas regarding an individual's capacity to pursue their own goals in seeking social change in their society and by so doing earning the sorts of rewards suggested by gratification theory.

At the same time, these two individuals revealed some important differences in the extent and nature of their practice of self-censorship, where interviewee B. was more candid in his censoring practice, while interviewee A. maintained that such self-censorship was unnecessary since the nature of their initiative 'does not cross any sensitive issues in Saudi society.

Both respondents showed their concern about their online image, which they related to the success of their initiative and how people view them. For interviewee B, this success created a further set of social constraints as he was required to 'act the part', the role that he is associated with by virtue of the success of the initiatives, with the consequence that this success led to him feeling, to a certain extent, isolated.

8.4.4 Data analysis: group 2 – first part:

8.4.4.1 The starting point and the aim

The second group of interviewees contained three females aged between 21-24 years;

- Interviewee A is 21 years old, specialized in nutrition therapy, has joined the initiative as a content developer and infographic designer;
- Interviewee B is a 23 year old medical student, who also works with the initiative as a content developer;
- Interviewee C is a 24 year old doctor, who also works with them as a content developer.

They were all presented with the same questions as group 1, and the combined interviews with them are discussed below.

In the beginning the three interviewees were asked to explain the initiative in detail, their aim of making social change through addressing the case of promoting a healthier way of living by encouraging people to change their eating habits and take more exercise. Interviewee A started by saying in her detailed answer:

Currently, I'm working with Mizan as a content developer and infographic designer. I'm responsible for writing the tweets that are distributed on our Twitter account and for the designs on our Instagram and Twitter accounts. My goal is to provide simple yet standardized medical and scientific information related to health, fitness and nutrition that people can use and benefit from on a daily basis, together with providing inspiring and motivating materials rather than just pure facts and tips. My role is simply providing this information, viewing people's response to this on a regular basis to see what should be improved in the content. Also, I like to monitor people's reactions to tweets and designs and see what they usually relate to more so I can use that information to develop our material.

Interviewee B explained what they are working on:

Spreading awareness in society on health issues, and encouraging people to seek a more healthy way of living. Also I benefit from interacting with the followers, I learn more from their questions and discussions.

Interviewee C added:

Our initiative started as a support group for health issues across social networks three years ago. Now we are the first Saudi company that aims to provide psychological support and information through social media (Facebook - Twitter - Instagram)

8.4.4.2 The achievements and benefits of using online social networks

Then they were asked about the achievements they observed as an outcome of the initiative. Interviewee A said that:

It is the fastest and most effective way to communicate and reaches the widest range of people from all ages and societies. There's basically no limit to how wide your range can get, which maximizes our hopes in reaching more people and helping them. People also relate to consistency and they trust those who offer solid base information, and they trust us because they know what we offer is based on scientific research and this is how it's done worldwide. That is our focus; make people familiar with the way it is properly done.

She continued, adding some other negative aspects:

Also, perhaps a negative thing that I have noticed, people are very dependent sometimes: a lot of the information we provide can be found with simple research. In addition, people don't review and read all tweets, so they miss out on information related to the information that they asked about.

As she observed the importance and wide use of online social networks, and the benefit they gained from the widespread and reaching of a variety of people, she had formed the view that individuals who benefit from their initiative were also dependent. In other words, her view was that their targeted users were passive and did not work hard to search for the information. Subsequently, they became a reliable source for Arabic health information on online social networks.

Interviewee B thought that the most important achievements were:

Moral support, also viewing other people's opinions made me think about issues from a different perspective.

Interviewee C thought that the achievements were:

Mostly positive, they thank us for providing the basic information needed by each individual for health and support in terms of participation, and provided a positive environment to help those who are frustrated after a short period of time, and help them to continue the good work in changing their lifestyle.

As for their opinion on the contribution of online social networks on their initiative as opposed to other forms of communication, and if they thought of it as a negative or positive one, interviewee A said:

Our main platform is social media, so my answer is no. If there's a sort of distraction from anything, I think it can be contained. Misuse of this technology can result of course, but that is the way with pretty much anything in life.

The interviewee believed that because their main platform was online social networks, she did not feel that it could be compared with other means of communication. They started their initiative online, and they had been continuing to work online. Interviewee B said briefly that it helped in their initiative, while interviewee C responded briefly:

Certainly a positive factor

On the other hand, when they were asked if they thought that persuasive communication online can affect the view of others, interviewee A said:

Online communication can be very tricky because you might sound harsh or arrogant when in fact you're just talking regularly, so there's always the possibility of being misunderstood.

While interviewees B and C both agreed and replied:

Yes it can

However, when they were asked if they thought that their online initiative involved persuasive messages, interviewee A replied:

Simple ones yes, nothing very drastic. Most of them related to life changing habits and tips.

This is the same as interviewee B who also thought that:

Yes I believe it contains persuasive communication messages

Whereas interviewee C replied:

No, I don't think so

Among the other four partners in this initiative, she was the only one who thought that their work did not contain any persuasive messages.

Finally, they were asked if they received any recognition from society, media or any other official agencies regarding their online initiative. Interviewee A said:

No, I have not.

Interviewee B replied:

Yes, especially from those who got into the habit of drinking water after providing them with information on the importance of drinking water for their health.

And interviewee C added some other recognitions:

Yes, the partnership with ministry, and Joslin Diabetes Centre

8.4.4.3 The issues of official and self-censorship, and social norms

This section concentrates on the perception of each interviewee on the notion of official censorship, self-censorship and social norms.

When the respondents were asked about the existence of official censorship and self-censorship due to society social norms and religious principles and its effects on online interactions, and how they differ, if any, among different social platforms, interviewee A answered that:

In our field, since we don't write or distribute anything related to such matter, we found no conflict. With personal accounts, such problems may exist, yes. I think especially now that it is still new to people, this freedom to express and all, it's pretty obvious that some have misused this. About social norms, this is probably why a lot of Twitter users hide their identity on social networks or simple block their family members and relatives for fear of being judged or stalked.

Although she pointed out that the nature of their work was a safe one that did not conflict with sensitive matters, her answers were explicit on this matter: this was like her fellow partner in the initiative, interviewee B in the male group. This gives evidence concerning the relationship between social norms and self-censorship, where she indicated that facing such issues could accrue in personal accounts, thus hiding identities or blocking family members could be considered as a self-censorship act.

Interviewee B agreed on the existence of the effects, where she replied:

Yes I agree, but I do not think it is much different

Interviewee C also believed the same thing, saying:

Yes, but probably not among other different social networks.

After that, they were asked to provide examples of how others have responded to the initiative. Interviewee A stated:

I have received personal replies and success stories about simple information I provided, just a simple tweet that touched someone and led them to change and to lead a better life. This is exactly the type of response I was waiting for and it is the sole focus of our career here. For instance, I once wrote a tweet about

Body Mass Index and waist circumference measurements, and a lot of people responded to that or simply just measured themselves. A few months ago, I got a message from a girl saying that she lost 10 inches from her waist and that she's now much happier and that it was all due to that tweet and that to her, it was an eye opener. That was just one simple success story to share with you.

Her answer illustrates that she is seeking personal gratification through direct feedback from the users of the site. This can be regarded as significantly different from all other answers given in this case study, where different facets of the gratification motive were evident in the answers given by each interviewee.

Interviewee B added by saying:

Usually by getting thanks from the person who benefited from our information and advice, they usually describe to us how their lifestyle has been affected in a positive way.

While interviewee C, in a direct answer focusing on physical results, said:

Losing weight in many cases, an increase in the number of followers, improving the health lifestyle of many.

When they were asked to what extent their online attitude could be affected by the views of others, interviewee A said:

Personally, I try avoiding talking about conflicts and issues online to avoid any rudeness from others because I simply don't feel like tolerating it. I also believe that maintaining an online image is very important, and I don't advise people to share so much online because it can leave a negative impact on them later, whether it was in their careers or in their personal lives. And yes it is somewhat affected, I wouldn't, say, use bad words and so on because of the judgmental stereotypes.

Her answer clearly indicates her practice of self-censorship, as she cannot tolerate rudeness and the judgmental stereotypes. She also believed maintaining an online image was really important so it would not affect her life, either her career or personal one.

On the other hand, interviewee B replied by saying:

I do not think it is affected by the views of others

While interviewee C thought that her online attitude was affected:

To some extent

Then they were asked if they thought that their online work had any effect on how others viewed them, such as family and friends. Interviewee A replied

Yes and no. Not all of them know about my active online social life and those who do are good followers and are very supportive. The others that don't, well, they have no idea what I even do in life from the first place. As to what effect they might have, I have to maintain more restrictions to what I share to avoid conflicts with them, especially family members. Simply out of respect I guess.

Her answer here complies with her previous one that indicates her practice of self-censorship. Therefore she maintained her image online, out of respect to her family, which reflected the social system and patriarchal order in Saudi society.

Interviewee B agreed on the question, saying:

Yes, I do not know how to describe it; they vary from one person to another

While interviewee C replied:

Yes, we have become reliable when it comes to health

Finally when they were asked if they thought that their work created the possibility for them to be socially isolated, the three of them answered negatively. Interviewee A:

I have never felt this, no.

Both interviewee B and C replied:

No I don't think so

To sum up, the second group for this case study, which contained three females, responded by pointing out that the initiative they were involved in did not have any conflict issues, like their fellow male working partner, since it was a health campaign that did not cross any boundaries. However, at the same time, one of the male interviewees and the females were candid about their practice of self-censorship online, due to the existence of official censorship and society social norms, while the others were much more circumspect in revealing their attitude toward censorship.

On the other hand, all lead users in this case study agreed on the role that online social networks played in the success of their initiative. In other words they saw the use of online social networks as a means of communication in an alternative sphere, based on the capability theory. This helped them pursue their goals in spreading awareness on health issues in reaching to others on a wide scale and help others reach their own goals and change their way of living.

At the same time, although all lead users here showed a tendency to maintain their online images in order that their followers would trust them and to be more socialized, based on the notion of gratification theory and as an act of self-censorship, one of the female interviewees showed a significantly different perspective of gratification. She pointed out that she sought personal feedback from their followers on her work in the initiative, and this was illustrated in the kind of responses she received as an outcome of her tweets and information.

8.4.5 RWA analysis: group 2 – second part – interviewee A:

The next part of the interview was undertaken through analysing the responses of interviewee A on the statements; through this analysis the reader would be able to understand more about this lead user in certain social issues and behaviours online. Using the same categories from the survey analysis, the responses would be categorized into the interviewee indications based on their RWA score, which would then indicate the orientation of this lead user as conservative or cosmopolitan.

Table 8.4: Summary of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee A- Female

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | +1 | 6 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society | +3 | 8 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | +3 | 8 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation | +4 | 9 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| | believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | | |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +3 | 8 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | +2 | 7 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | -3 | 2 |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | -3 | 2 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | -4 | 1 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | +3 | 8 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | -1 | 4 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | +2 | 7 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | +2 | 7 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | +2 | 7 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on economic issues. | -2 | 3 |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | -2 | 3 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | +1 | 6 |
| | Total RWA | | 105 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 70 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: She slightly agreed that online regulation was to protect society values, but on the other hand she strongly agreed that this regulation was mainly to suppress and regulate an individual's online expression. This can indicate the existence of official censorship imposed by the government.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: The score in this category for both statements reflected the existence of both streams in Saudi society, those who believe that the authorities have good judgement on things, hence they are the ones to decide what is right or wrong for society. This also reflects the prevailing Saudi social norms.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: The scores also indicated the nature of Saudi society. She strongly agreed that online expression was influenced by the view of the majority in society, and moderately agreed that she was also influenced by the view of a few individuals in society. This is another reflection on the existence of both streams within Saudi society.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: While maintaining a certain image is important, as she indicated in the first part of the interview, the scores here also indicate that this lead user believed in the positive life changing possibilities in the message, and was therefore inclined to deliver this message regardless of whether this will cause some discomfort.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: Her score here complied with her previous answer and her answer to the questions in the first part of the interview, where she indicated that not all of her family and friends would know what she was doing with her social activity and online work. Hence, she maintained a discreet personality among the people she knew, which also complied with her low score in not being influenced by others in the previous question.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: The interviewee showed a moderate direction toward the use of existing online social networks, as she moderately agreed that young individuals were having good opportunities with online social networks. She also moderately agreed that they were taking advantage of these networks. In other words, as this reflected the characteristic of this lead user, it also reflected indications to the existence of self-censorship practiced in society.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: The interviewee very strongly agreed that online social networks were contributing to an increase in health awareness in society, mainly because she was part of this online health initiative. At the same time she moderately disagreed that it could contribute to spreading awareness on

economic and political issues. When compared with her male colleagues' strongly positive response to each of these statements, it seems apparent that this respondent is very cautious about economic and political issues that might be seen as more controversial. On the other hand, she was willing to acknowledge that online social networks played a role in increasing awareness of women's rights.

In conclusion, this lead user based on both RWA scores 105 and 70, falls into the conservative in-group, as she is discreet in her presence in online social networks, and her work on online initiatives falls into the category of safe initiatives than spreading awareness in society. It did not cross sensitive issues in Islamic conservative societies such as religion, or in authoritarian regimes such as politics. She indicated that she personally did not talk about conflict issues online as she could not tolerate rudeness from others. At the same time she advised others not to share too much information online as it might affect their personal life, families or even their career. One reason for this tendency could be the fact that she is a female in conservative society.

8.4.6 RWA analysis: group 2 – second part – interviewee B:

Table 8.5: Summary of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee B- Female

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | +4 | 9 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society | +2 | 7 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | -3 | 2 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | +1 | 6 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +2 | 7 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | +2 | 7 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by | +1 | 6 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| | others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | | |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | -2 | 3 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | -1 | 4 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | +3 | 8 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | +2 | 7 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | +3 | 6 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | +2 | 7 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | +2 | 7 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on economic issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | +2 | 7 |
| | Total RWA | | 120 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 72 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: She very strongly agreed that Internet regulations were to protect society values, while she moderately agreed that this regulation was to regulate individual's opinions in society. This reflected the prevailing social norms in Saudi society.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: In relation to other answers, the negative conclusion concerning the role of authorities is ironic. One might conclude from this that this individual thought that prevailing social norms were more influential and relevant than the views of authorities. She slightly agreed that

those who were against regulation believed that the authorities were suppressing personal expression, a minor acknowledgment of dissenting voices within society.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: The scores here can reflect the nature of the society, where this lead user moderately agreed that online expression was influenced by the view of the majority of society, and the view of a few individuals in society. Another reflection is on the existence of both streams within Saudi society. In this case, the lower agreement is consistent with the possibility that the majority of people have actually internalized values with regard to online expression, and therefore it is not so important what others think (as it will be very similar to the person's own inclinations).

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: Although she slightly agreed that her online opinion was influenced by those who she respected, she moderately disagreed that her online opinion was influenced by her need to create a certain image about herself. This indicates a conservative characteristic she showed in her answers in the first part of the interview, and her goal as delivering the right information to the public. This self-effacing position is conspicuous in its difference from the male respondents, and is consistent with the view that this initiative was about information content and user needs rather than the position or role of the lead user.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: She moderately agreed that her online participation was influenced by the approval of her own community, which can be traced also in her answers in the first part where she indicated that her online work was affected by how others view her. On the other hand, she was not as responsive as others in describing that effect.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: The interviewee strongly agreed that young individuals have good opportunities to express themselves with the existence of online social networks. However, on the other hand she moderately agreed that young individuals were have good opportunity to criticize society social norms and taking advantage of these networks, which indicates to the influence of society social norms and the existence of self-censorship practice in Saudi conservative society.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: The high scores on these statements reflect an optimistic view of this respondent regarding the increasing role of online social networks. Of interest, however, is that the extent of agreement is markedly lower with regard to the issue of ‘women’s rights’, which might reflect either some resistance to this category or, alternatively, the view that too little is being said about this issue in online social networks.

In conclusion, as with other lead users in this initiative, she believed that online social networks can be a major contributor in spreading awareness in her society. This implies the use of online social networks among Saudi lead users as an alternative public sphere in order to pursue their own goals and be engaged more with individuals in their society. At the same time, and based on both RWA scores 120 and 72, this initiator falls into the conservative in-group, which can be traced in her answers where she was reticent in revealing more about the practice of self-censorship.

8.4.7 Data analysis: group 2 – second part – interviewee C:

Table 8.6: Summary of the RWA Measurement for Second case- interviewee C- Female

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | +1 | 6 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual’s opinion in society | +2 | 7 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | +2 | 7 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | +4 | 9 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +4 | 9 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | -4 | 1 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | +1 | 6 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | -4 | 1 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | -4 | 1 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | +3 | 8 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | -2 | 3 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | +4 | 9 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | +4 | 9 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | +4 | 9 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +4 | 9 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on economic issues. | +1 | 6 |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | +2 | 7 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | +3 | 8 |
| | Total RWA | | 111 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 67 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: She slightly agreed that Internet regulations were to protect society values, and moderately agreed that these regulations were to regulate an individual's opinion, views that are consistent with the legitimacy of such regulation.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: She moderately agreed that those who supported Internet regulation believed that authorities had good judgement on things; but she very strongly agreed that those who were against the regulation believed that the authorities were suppressing their personal opinion. This can be seen as an acknowledgement of the existence of both streams in Saudi society – conservative and cosmopolitan.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: Her score on the influence of society on online opinion reflected the practice of self-censorship, not only because of official censorship, but also due to the Islamic belief and social order of the community. In other words, the fact that this lead user was reticent in her answers could be because her confidence in prevailing social norms far exceeds her belief that official regulation or regulation ‘exercised by the few’ is important.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: She slightly agreed that her online opinion could be influenced by the people she respected; but at the same time she very strongly disagreed that her online opinion was to create a certain image about herself. There is not enough evidence about the reasons for this, but one could say that, during the interview, this lead user was circumspect, thus, the only role she sought to provide the public with was the right information regardless of how they saw her. This is consistent with a self-effacing role for women in Saudi society in which attention to a woman as an individual is seen as socially inappropriate to a certain level and in some certain areas within the country.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: She moderately disagreed that she sought the approval of the people she knew to initiate her online work, which is consistent with her previous answer.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: She very strongly agreed that young individuals had good opportunities to express themselves online, and criticize society social norms and to question the authorities. This is consistent with the perception that online social networks are creating an alternative public space.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: She strongly agreed that online social networks contributed to increasing awareness on health issues as well as on women’s rights. At the same time she only moderately agreed that these social networks were increasing awareness on political and economic issues. Whether this difference reflects a lack of interest in these other areas, or the potential for greater controversy in these other areas, is not clear from these responses.

In conclusion, this lead user was circumspect in revealing information on the practice of self-censorship, but at the same time, like others in the initiative, she also believed that online social networks could play a major role in increasing awareness in Saudi society,

hence contributing to the social change this group is seeking. Based on her both RWA scores 111 and 67, she falls into the conservative in-group.

To sum up the characteristic of the lead users of the Mizan initiative, and based on their RWA scores, they all fall into the conservative in-groups, and their answers supported this analysis where the group partners tend to conform to the social norms and systems, even beyond the modest level of circumspection that would be needed in order to provide health information and improve people's lifestyle.

Their answers indicated that they were all practicing some degree of self-censorship, even though some of them appeared to be reticent about acknowledging this in their own behaviour while commonly acknowledging that other people were affected. The group of male interviewees were more explicit in providing examples about how they practiced self-censorship. By comparison the female group was not only more reticent but markedly less willing to acknowledge a personal stake or consequence to participation in this initiative. For example, interviewee A from the female group indicated that she tended to practice self-censorship by avoiding talking about conflict issues online because she could not tolerate rudeness from others, and out of respect to her family. On the other hand, where there had been any sensitive issues they needed to deal with, they modify their words and the ways in which they presented information. As well as their technical roles, it appears that the women might be involved with this project to deal with the female side of the public in case needed; a consequence of the social segregation system in Saudi society. This showed that, even though society was continuously applying the concept of gender segregation, online lead users managed to interact, meet, and facilitate online initiatives and civil work.

The group have great belief that online social networks could be a major contributor in spreading awareness in Saudi society. This would continue even if, in the long run, their belief could vary from one user to another, and from one issue to another.

This result is consistent with the survey result where the sample population falls into the authoritarian personality based on the two RWA scale scores in the previous chapter, which supports the research hypothesis that society social norms and censorship has an effect of online lead users behaviour and the formation of their online initiatives, although 17% of the survey sample population believe that online social networks are

new opportunities to old problems, which indicates the wide use and great effects of these new means that online lead users use to initiate social awareness in their societies. As the initiators of the Mizan case study indicated, online social networks can play a major role in increasing awareness in Saudi society, however, 35% of the survey population indicated that privacy and censorship are major limitations facing them while using online social networks, which supports the research hypothesis of the effect of society social norms and censorship.

8.5 The Third Case Study: Hit-Her initiative- حملة اضربها:

In 2013 a hashtag appeared on Twitter under the name # Edrebha اضربها, which means #Hit-her. The uniqueness of this hashtag is that it appeared at first with more than 400 pictures of online Saudi men and women celebrities and volunteers, holding signs Proverbs, and verses from the holy Quran written on them which condemn domestic violence. A media production company, Libra, took this initiative to spread awareness on domestic violence in general, and against women in particular. The Libra Company is a creative visual and audio production house that believed in the concept of giving back to the community (Farhan, 2013).

As a media production house they can only create a “buzz” (Farhan, 2013) on important issues that have the potential to be fixed in the short term. According to their team leader, “we don’t have the tools to initiate and commit to a long term plans therefore short terms ones and buzzes are our major strength point and it appeared clearly in our ‘Hit her, I dare you’ campaign that was addressed to the issue of the domestic violence in general and violence against women in specific” (Farhan, 2013).

They took the lead to draw attention to the downside of violence in a simple, yet shocking manner, by asking online Saudi celebrities and lead users to pose in front of the camera with signs having different Arabic words, idioms, and Quran verses related to the theme of the campaign (Farhan, 2013). Their main goal was not to change behaviour as the initiators do not believe that they can do this in a direct way. Instead, their aim is to spread awareness among individuals in society on the issue of domestic violence, especially hitting a women or a child, which, for some, is considered to be part of religious belief. They took the lead to tell the people who suffer in silence, and to

those who witness violent acts and ‘fail to act upon it, that this is not consistent with Islamic religion’.

According to the team leader of the campaign, “of course a campaign cannot change a behaviour that for the majority is considered part of the religion, even to some women who believed that it is part of her relation with their husbands. So we focused on clarifying the fact that this action isn’t normal and it isn’t part of our religion, and that was shown clearly in the signs that the participants carried” (Farhan, 2013).

On the other hand, it was part of this thesis through this case study to examine to what extent online Saudi lead users promote their work, also via videos uploaded on YouTube as another means of promoting their initiatives and collective actions. Unfortunately the team initiators decided that the outcome of the first phase of their campaign was satisfying enough that they stopped the YouTube production, even though they had already released the promo ad through every online social network. Hence, it was decided to eliminate this part from the research questions.

What is noticeable is that, in April 2013, the first campaign was launched through the King Khalid foundation, where they initiated the ‘*No More Abuse*’ campaign, which is “an anti-domestic abuse campaign in Saudi Arabia that aims at creating awareness and fighting this phenomenon”. “The campaign is a joint effort between the King Khalid Foundation (KKF)¹⁶ and Memac Ogilvy-Riyadh¹⁷. The campaign was released in Alwatan and Alriyadi newspapers, as well as in KKF social media channels, Twitter and Facebook” (King Khalid Foundation, 2013).

According to the site of the King Khalid foundation, they “submitted a draft law on ‘Women and Child Abuse Prevention Law’, which has been adopted and passed by Saudi Arabia’s Government” (King Khalid Foundation, 2013).

The differences between these two campaigns is the fact that the first one was done through a charitable foundation, while the second one was done by independent

¹⁶ “A Royal Foundation established by King Khalid’s family, in his memory, in the Islamic year of 16/12/1421 or 11/3/2001 and headquartered in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Foundation aims to be the leader and role model in the philanthropic and development work in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and to positively impact peoples’ lives by providing innovative solutions to critical socio-economic challenges in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” (King Khalid Foundation, n.y) .

¹⁷ This is a Middle East marketing and advertising company, part of Ogilvy and Mather Worldwide, the leading marketing communication company (Memac Ogilvy-Riyadh, n.y).

individuals in the society, with the participation of other independent individuals who sought to participate in such an initiative carried out by young adults online. At the same time both campaigns were done in conjunction, without any coordination between them, according to the team leader of the Hit-Her campaign (Farhan, 2013).

The initiative team consisted of eight members, comprised of men and women with different backgrounds of study and experiences that were involved in developing the idea. For this thesis, there was only the chance to interview four of them, three men and one woman. One of the interviewees was excluded¹⁸, others did not want to participate in this research, without giving any reasons, and one of them thought that the scope of the study was beyond her role in the initiative, hence she could not contribute to the research.

8.5.1 Data analysis: group 1-first part:

8.5.1.1 The starting point and the aim

The first group of interviewees had three males aged between 28-30 years:

- Interviewee A was a 30 year old project manager who works in his own time with Libra Company and their creative team to develop ideas that serve the community, and is the originator of the initiative. Contact with this individual led to access to the other members of the team that were also interviewed.
- Interviewee B was a 28 year old male lawyer who, as a member of the Hit-Her initiative, was responsible for the legal issues of the campaign.

At the beginning the interviewees were asked to talk about the intuitive, their goals and roles in it. Interviewee A gave the most elaborate answer:

In our company, Libra and Infra-Red for production, we have a verbal agreement on pursuing the concept of change in our society. We select our social initiative based on subjects that matter to our society and the ones that we know we can make a change and difference in.

Based on that we chose the subject of domestic violence, especially against women, because of the terrible stories we hear about, where some part of the individuals in our society believe that it is their right to discipline their children' or even wives by hitting them, ignoring the fact that this falls under physical abuse. It is an act punishable by law if the victims file a lawsuit, but, due to our culture, the fear of scandal, and the ignorance of the victims of their rights, lots of victims hide their stories out of shame, even though the government has

¹⁸ Another lawyer was interviewed but it was suspected that his answers were not independent of the one reported and were therefore excluded.

provided a special units for victims of violence. We found a good opportunity to raise awareness of the existence of such laws and protection provided from the government, stressing the fact that it is not right for anyone, even your father or husband, to assault women or children, providing the people with the contact numbers for such cases, either if you are a victim or just a witness of an assault.

His elaborated answer here gives clear indication on the contradiction between what some might consider as social norms of a society, and the connection between reporting any such violation with the shame or fear of scandal. Even though laws exist to protect the victims, he also acknowledged they are not known to everyone.

He then explained how they started the idea:

We were able to bring nearly 400 people to participate in this initiative, to take their pictures in different poses while holding different signs with idioms or verses from the holy Quran; they were asked to post the pictures on their Twitter accounts and other social networks they use. All of this caused a very strong buzz, which formed a wave of supporters and opponents to the campaign from different individuals in the society. Some of them went as far as to accuse me and all the participants of being “an agent of the West with a hidden agenda” because of the ribbon campaign¹⁹ celebration at that time in Saudi Arabia.

Then he went on to explain the next phase of the initiative, which they launched (by which the respondent meant that they created the content, but did not distribute it) but did not air as they had reached their targeted goals, as will be explained later:

After that, we launched a video to portray the attack and the hypocrisy of the aggressors outside their homes, and also contained lines from the law and the contact numbers for these cases. Following that another video filming two neighbours, one of them witnessed an assault in front of the children, and the man of the family felt obligated to report the incident as a message to the kids that it's not right to be silent on such a thing.

He then concluded the result of the campaign saying:

I can say now after three months of the campaign that we achieved a very important goal, which is drawing society's attention to the problem. The government has recently issued a law criminalizing domestic abuse. Our

¹⁹ On 2 December 1989, 14 women were massacred at L'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. Two years later a handful of Canadian men initiated White Ribbon Day (WRD) to mark the anniversary of the 1989 massacre. The group of men established the WRD Campaign to urge men to speak out against violence against women. In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly declared 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The white ribbon (WR) has become the recognised symbol of the WRD campaign.

campaign might not be the direct reason for such enforcement of the law, but we are sure it was a part of this achievement.

Although he pointed out that their campaign might not be the direct reason for such legislation, they were sure that they had something to do with it.

Interviewee B started by explaining the initiative:

In our social initiative campaign of “Edrebha” where we shed the light on violence against women, our objectives are to indicate society’s rejection of violence against women; in addition, to signify that there are official channels where women can claim their rights and stop such violence practiced against them.

He explained the role he played in this initiative:

My role in this initiative was in raising legal awareness by explaining the legal action applied in such cases of violence, starting with filing a complaint against the abuser and getting a thorough medical examination to prove it, as well as explaining whether different kinds of abuse required detention (temporary detention for abuser in jail) or not.

He concluded by pointing out the result of their campaign:

Now, and with help of Allah, we find that this campaign got through with forming a regulation protecting against abuse/violence, which was issued simultaneously with “Edrebha” campaign. As the campaign was one of the main reasons in issuing such a rule that I personally consider a big transition in the development of the quality of legal and law regulation in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

As the legal representative for the campaign he pointed out that the initiative was involved with the issuing of the recent legislation on domestic violence.

8.5.1.2 The achievements and benefits of using online social networks

The interviewees were asked about the achievements they observed on their online initiative. Interviewee A replied:

What I noticed is that the new generation in Saudi Arabia are very enthusiastic about change, they are looking for changing their reality and engage more in civil work and online initiatives. Hence, all the work done on previous campaigns were initiated by young Saudi individuals without any governmental support.

He observed that Saudi youth are the ones who desire change in their society, even if they lack government funding for this kind of initiative. Therefore, they work on participating in different initiatives conducted online, and he presented a comparison in the following paragraph:

Also, on a trip to the USA six months ago with a cultural exchange programme, our initiatives and efforts were acknowledged for being efficient even though we are not receiving any financial support and with all the limitations we face in the country.

On the other hand, the interviewee talked about the negative responses they received regarding their initiative:

Unfortunately, part of the negative response we got came from people of our generation who are brainwashed, or from religious militants, who advised us to stop the campaign or give the initiative a religious tincture to gain acceptance from the whole of society.

Interviewee B answered the same question by giving some examples on the achievements they observed, saying:

The main observation is in the followers' unique interaction with the campaign through different social media networks, most importantly, Twitter. Some of the main advantages are the followers' interaction by telling stories of violence practiced against them, and in the cooperation of people in the legal and law fields in providing legal consultations, and handling violence cases free of charge. The campaign also accomplished its main goal, which is raising awareness of violence against women.

Some of the main disadvantages are that many people refuse to admit that the problem exists (violence against woman in KSA) despite the supporting press reports, the real life stories told, and the intervention of specialized organizations like the Human Rights Organization.

As he presented some main examples of the advantages of this initiative, he indicated that some individuals got legal consultation and lawsuits free of charge.

When they were asked if they thought that online networks as opposed to other forms of communication were a contributor or negative factor, Interviewee A said:

Any publicity is good publicity, whether positive or negative.

While interviewee B gave an elaborated answer on the same question, explaining:

Nowadays, online networks are more efficient in dispatching messages. That is because the interaction or communication is instant and it doesn't require a lot of time to respond. The assessment is instant by pressing the button "Like" or "Dislike" for example, or through a study of comments in (Twitter) where the increasing tweets ensure the success of the idea or the extent of the followers' concerns.

All respondents agreed that the use of online social networks was an advantage in any campaign nowadays.

On the other hand, they were asked to give some examples about how people responded to their initiative. Interviewee A said:

The fact that we could gather 400 volunteers and finalize the pictures in three days is a big example on the success of the initiative.

Interviewee B answered this question saying:

The public's participation was through a photography session, where people held phrases protesting against violence and later posting them on their personal accounts. In addition, I personally received requests for legal consultation concerning an abuse case against a certain woman, and finally in the many reports on a number of television channels about the topic and having the rule issued.

They were asked if they thought that persuasive communication online could affect the view of others, interviewee A said:

Yes

Interviewee B said:

Yes, extremely, especially the older generation, as they are more susceptible than the current one who depend on logic and conviction.

However when they asked if they thought that their online initiative involved any persuasive messages, interviewee A said:

Somehow

While interviewee B said:

I don't think so: our campaign is simple and the objectives are clear and announced, as recipients can easily find the message behind it.

Finally they were asked if they received any recognition from any agencies in the society regarding their online initiative. Interviewee A said:

Yes, from the community by supporting or rejecting, but most appreciation was more from the West, where their media highlighted the topic as part of the idea of the oppression of women, although the main core of our initiative was to educate society, especially women, that there is a law that supports you and you should use it; the Western media misunderstood the message unfortunately.

According to the team leader, as their initiative was covered by different media agencies, he thought that the Western media misunderstood the message behind their initiative, where all they were seeking was to spread awareness on the issue of domestic violence.

Interviewee B answered to the recognition examples, saying:

Yes, we have obtained media support and the acknowledgement in the regulation formed for protection against abuse/violence.

8.5.1.3 The issues of official and self-censorship, and social norms

In the final part of the questions, the initiators were asked questions about censorship and social norms, and if they thought that the existence of official censorship and social norms had important effects of online interactions, and if it was different on different social networks such as Twitter and YouTube. Interviewee A replied:

There is always a smart way to get around censorship and deliver the message. The social network is not only Twitter or YouTube, and our biggest proof is the ability of our society to indulge in any new social network as an alternative to the other has been shut down change their privacy policy such as Hi5 previously, as they blocked the access to the site in Saudi. Now the interaction is stronger on Twitter, YouTube and even Facebook. For myself, I do not think I violate any of the religious principles, which is the most important thing, but I disagree with a lot of social norms in our society where most of the people mix between religion, culture and norms or even traditions.

His answer shows that, according to him, he is not violating any religious principles, although he disagreed with lot of social norms, a clear sign that the Saudi culture is mixed between religious principles and traditions. At the same time, his answer reflected the use of online social networks as an alternative public sphere among Saudi individuals to pursue their goals, even if that social network has been blocked.

Interviewee B agreed with him, saying:

I don't agree with this opinion because the virtual world was and still is a real platform for each individual of moderate or extreme thinking. Social media networks give you the chance to express your opinion in any scope of knowledge however you like. Experiments have shown that, despite monitoring attempts by the authorities to control the existing content on social media networks, they have all failed. The latest such attempt was by the Ministry of Justice over the lawyers' tweets on Twitter to intimidate them not to wade on the Ministry mistakes.

Both of them agreed that the use of online social networks as an alternative public sphere in their society could not be regulated, regardless of any official censorship attempted by authorities. In other words, they did not believe in the effectiveness of official censorship, hence they were not very concerned about how people saw them, as will be shown in the following answers.

They were asked if their online attitude was affected by the views of others, and, if so, to what extent. Interviewee A said:

I don't care how others see me as long as I am convinced of my actions and beliefs.

Interviewee B said:

My opinions can be adopted by others as others' opinions can be adopted by me, as long as they can meet at some point.

At the same, when they were asked if they thought that their online work had any effect on how they were viewed by their families and friends, interviewee A said:

It is normal that what you do will affect how people see you, in the end, they see you based on what you offer them, but I don't pay attention to their opinions.

While interviewee B answered, saying:

I don't care how people see me as long as I'm convinced/assured with the idea, and that the initiative and results of my work receive acceptance from a group of the public, as not all members are concerned with a topic unless it touches a part of his/her life

In this case study, it is clear that the interviewed initiators preferred to speak their minds regardless of others' opinions, as long as they believed in the cause, the 'spiral of silence theory'.

They were also asked if they thought that their online activities created possibilities for them to socially isolated, and, if so, to what extent it restrained their expression.

Interviewee A replied:

At some moments I feel that, but at the same time I found that I can express myself better by, for example, messages. But that doesn't affect my freedom of expression as much as I have learned how to express in more accurate way and less edgy and more confident.

Although this lead user did not care much about others' opinions, he clearly indicated that he learned how to express himself in way that would not affect his freedom of expression but at the same time in less challenging way. In other words, the answer indicates the practice of self-censorship.

Interviewee B answered by saying:

I don't think so

8.5.2 RWA analysis: second part – interviewee A:

The next part of the interview is dedicated to an analysis of the interviewee's character in order to understand his point of view on different issues more.

Table 8.7: Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for Third case-interviewee A

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | -2 | 3 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society | -3 | 2 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | +3 | 8 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | +2 | 7 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +1 | 6 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | +2 | 7 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | -2 | 3 |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | -4 | 1 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | -4 | 1 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | +4 | 9 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | -3 | 2 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | +4 | 9 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | +3 | 8 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | +1 | 6 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +3 | 8 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on economic issues. | 0 | 5 |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | -2 | 3 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | -2 | 3 |
| | Total RWA | | 91 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 58 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: The scores here reflect his answers in the previous sections, where he clearly stated that he disagreed with a lot of the social norms in society, where people mix between religion, culture, norms or even tradition. At the same time it reflects his tendency to freely

express himself without paying any attention to what others might think of him, even though he indicates that he learned how to express himself in a more accurate and less edgy way.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: He strongly agreed that individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe in the good judgement of their authorities, while at the same time he moderately agreed that those who are against Internet regulation believe that their authorities are suppressing their personal expression. This is an indication of the existence of both perspectives in Saudi society, the conservative and the cosmopolitan.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: The answers reflects this lead user's opinion in the first part of the survey, where he indicated that, even though the initiative faced lots of criticism, the number of people who supported them was much higher. He moderately agreed that online opinions are influenced by the view of a few people in society, which is the liberal part of the society.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: He moderately disagreed that his online opinions were influenced by others who he may respect, but at the same time he very strongly disagreed that his opinions were influenced by his need to create a certain image. This complies with his answer in the first part of the interview where he stated that he did not care about how others saw him as long as he believed in his work and did not violate any religious principles. His high score here complements his low score on the other statements in this cluster, where he stated that he did not care about others' opinion of him. He very strongly agreed with the importance of telling people the truth, regardless of what others think of him.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: He strongly disagreed that his online work needed to be approved by his own community, which also complies with his previous answers. This shows that this lead user tends to express himself and continue what he is doing, as long as it does not contradict his own beliefs, regardless of what others think.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: He very strongly agreed that online social networks are good opportunities for young individuals to express themselves, and strongly agreed that they are utilizing this means to question

their authorities. This score complies with his other answers to all the other questions, which indicated that he seeks to apply change in his conservative society through online social networks, regardless of others' opinion of him.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: Among all other lead users in these case studies, this lead user is the only one who moderately disagreed that online social networks had contributed to increase awareness on women's rights, even though he is the team leader for a social initiative that concerns with women's issues. However, he strongly agreed that online social networks had increased the awareness on health issues, where these initiatives were considered to be safe with no boundaries to break.

To sum up, and based on his both RWA scores, it is evident that this lead users according to the first RWA measure falls into the conservative in-group, while based on the second RWA measure he falls into the cosmopolitan out-group,. This marginal difference between the two scores could be regarded to the fact that this lead user indicated in his answers that he learned how to express himself online and his view on online social networks in spreading awareness in his society. On the other hand, his second RWA score 58 indicate to a cosmopolitan characteristic, where it is clear from his answers that h is more open in his online existence. He does not look for the approval of his own community to initiate any social issues, and this is clear in his choice in tackling very sensitive matters in Saudi society, domestic violence and women's rights. At the same time, he disagreed that online social networks contribute to increase awareness in Saudi society regarding women's rights. He also indicated that he learned how to express himself accurately and in a less challenging way.

8.5.3 RWA analysis: second part- interviewee B:

Table 8.8: Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for Third case-interviewee B

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | -2 | 3 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's | +3 | 8 |

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| | opinion in society | | |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | +4 | 9 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | +4 | 9 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +2 | 7 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | -2 | 3 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | -3 | 2 |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | +2 | 7 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | +3 | 8 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | +4 | 9 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | -4 | 1 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | +3 | 8 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | -3 | 2 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | -3 | 2 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +2 | 7 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on economic issues. | -3 | 2 |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | +3 | 8 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | +2 | 7 |
| | Total RWA | | 102 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 74 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: Although he moderately disagreed that Internet regulation is to protect society values, he strongly agreed that these regulations are aimed at regulating individuals' online expression. In other words, this means that he acknowledged the existence of official censorship despite the fact that he himself believed that every attempt to control online expression has failed, as his answer in the first part of the interview indicates with the example he gave referring to the Ministry of Justice.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: The interviewee scored high in this category. He very strongly agreed that individuals believe that their authorities have good judgement on how things should be done, and he also very strongly agreed that individuals who are against Internet regulation believe that their authorities are suppressing their online expression. In other words, he is acknowledging the existence of both parties in Saudi society, the conservative and the cosmopolitan.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: His balance between the two categories here indicates the existence of the two parties in Saudi society, the conservative and cosmopolitan one.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: He strongly disagreed that his online opinion was influenced by others he might know, which complies with his answer in the first part of the interview, where he stated that his opinion can cross other opinions as long as they agree at some point. At the same time, he moderately agreed that his online opinion was influenced by his need to create a certain image on himself. This contradicts his answer in the first part of the interview, where he stated that he did not care how people saw him as long as he is sure about his initiative, which might indicate that he wanted to apply the image he already had online and continue to do what he believed in, as long as his work was accepted from a group of the general public.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: His score here also reflected his previous answers. He very strongly disagreed that his online activities were influenced by the approval of others, as he stated previously, as long as he believed in his initiative.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: The interviewee strongly agreed that young individuals in Saudi society had good opportunities to express themselves and criticise society social norms, which complies with his following score, but at the same time he strongly disagreed that they were taking advantage of these opportunities. This can be related to the existence of official censorship, social norms, or the belief that these individuals are passive or inactive compared to the standard of expression he thought that they should have.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: Although this lead user is involved in a social initiative that concerns women, he only moderately agreed that online social networks contributed in increasing awareness on women's rights. With the same answer regarding health issues, and a negative answer concerning economic issues, one might conclude that the more controversial the issue the more cautious this individual is concerning impact. This makes the answer on political issues somewhat puzzling: although viewed against other respondents this issue might be seen as more controversial and hence less well covered in social networks, this individual believed that the awareness of political issues is the strongest effect, a paradoxical result.

To sum up, based on his answers shows characters of cosmopolitan mind-set in his presence in online social networks, but his both RWA scores 102 and 74 indicate that he is conservative. Based on his answers, he did not think that official censorship was effective in stopping individuals from expressing themselves, hence, he practiced what he believes online without being worried how others will see him which indicates to an open-mind set, but at the same time, he ultimately acknowledged that he does need to have a particular image in other's opinion where he moderately agreed that his online opinion was influenced by his need to create a certain image on himself, which indicate to the existence of society pressure. He thought that online social networks were good opportunities for young individuals in Saudi society to express themselves, but at the same time he said that they were not utilizing it enough. This might be the reason why he thought that, even though online social networks play a role in spreading awareness about women's rights, they are only moderately effective in doing so.

8.5.4 Data analysis: group 2 – first part:

8.5.4.1 The starting point and the aim

The last interviewee in this case study was a 30 year old female medical researcher technologist. She was part of the team that created the Hit-Her initiative. This group were supposed to have at least three females, but unfortunately two of them, as stated at the beginning of this case study, decided they did not want to participate.

At the beginning, she was asked to explain her role in the initiative:

I was part of the brain storming group ... the main idea was to send a clear message to society as awareness about how they should react in such a situation, and to make it clear what is right and what is wrong in these cases.

8.5.4.2 The achievements and benefits of using online social networks

The interviewee was asked about the achievements she observed of the initiative, she replied:

It is the real interaction with a human rights society and a women's rights society, and cooperating with them to spread awareness and provide real help from authorities (private and governmental).

This kind of initiative gave an opportunity for the group to not only interact with supporters and opponents, but also to cooperate with official civil entities in Saudi society, where they played a crucial part in spreading awareness through their official channels, and provide help when needed to vulnerable individuals.

At the same time, when the interviewee was asked if she thought that online social networks, as opposed to other forms of communication, were a contributor or a negative factor to their campaign, she replied that:

It will involve more effort more than contribution, because at this stage we will have to help each person or case who calls or emails as an individual case, and provide them not only with direction but also with help.

She indicated an important point, the effect of online social initiatives not only contributed to spreading awareness on violence, but people who need help actually find a voice that could offer help to them. This means that this kind of initiative can make a difference in conservative societies such as Saudi Arabia. However, it also raises ethical and other issues concerning the conduct of such a campaign. For example, since such a campaign may attract vulnerable people who are victims of domestic violence, is it not

necessary to plan for the response to these people, as failing to respond to them may make their situation seem even more hopeless and isolated?

The interviewee was asked to provide examples of how others have responded to their initiative. She said:

I have seen the supportive and the one who argued that the campaign should be clearer and show exactly the clear steps and meaning of our campaign so we are not misunderstood, and some have said it is a waste of time.

She presented two kinds of responses to the initiative, one who supported it and helped promote it, and those who simply comment ‘it is waste of time’. This also an indication of the existence of the two perspectives in Saudi Arabia: those who seek changes, and those who do not act upon it or they are against it to protect their own values. Most people think this stems from religion, not only from the tribal and social norms in the society. This answer illustrated some evidence that they respond to such people, although it is fairly casual evidence and certainly falls well short of claiming that adequate follow-up provision was anticipated and fulfilled.

The interviewee was then asked if she thought that persuasive communication could affect the view of others. She replied:

To some extent, yes

Hence, when asked if she thought that their online initiative involved persuasive communication messages, she simply said:

Yes

At the same time she simply replied when asked if they received any recognition from any agencies in the society:

Society and media

8.5.4.3 The issues of official and self-censorship, and social norms

The interviewee was asked if she thought that, with the existence of official censorship, online interaction could be affected, especially under the society social norms and religious principles. She replied:

True, I do agree with the effect of others' views on the online interaction. The main reason is that most people and new generation are moving and following the online media, and some of them consider it as main source of news. In my opinion all social networks contain the right and the wrong. You cannot rely on one of them but it is very easy to tell the difference between the right and the wrong.

This indicates the effect of new online social media as it became a source for news and information for both old and new generations.

Then she was asked if she thought that online attitudes were affected by the views of others. She answered:

To a high extent. Your behaviour and your attitude and how you respect others in your messages could send and represent who you really are

Her answer here complies with her point of view in the previous answer, on the proper online attitude due to the existence of religious principles and social norms in online interaction.

At the same time the interviewee was asked if her online work had any effect on how she is viewed by others, family and friends. She said:

To me, my family and friends are not active on online work

On the same subject, she was asked if she thought that her online activities created the possibility that she would be isolated. She replied:

I have a problem to be active online most of the time ... because I am social and really busy. So, yes, I do believe that there is inverse relationship between online activity and socializing.

For her, even if she is not that active online as she indicated, she still believed that being active online all the time might have an effect on real life.

8.5.5 RWA analysis: second part:

As this lead user is the only female interviewed in this initiative, the next part will give more insight on her character, especially that she is a female working on an initiative concerned with women's issues in a conservative society.

Table 8.9: Summary of Findings of the RWA Measurement for Third case- Female interviewee

| | Statements | Response Value | RWA Score |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| 1 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values. | +3 | 8 |
| 2 | The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society | +1 | 6 |
| 3 | Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgement on how things should be done. | -2 | 3 |
| 4 | Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression. | -2 | 3 |
| 5 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +3 | 8 |
| 6 | Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | -2 | 3 |
| 7 | How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | +2 | 7 |
| 8 | Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | +3 | 8 |
| 9 | In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | +2 | 8 |
| 10 | What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | +4 | 9 |
| 11 | Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others of your social class). | -2 | 3 |
| 12 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves, even when their view disagrees with those that are generally accepted. | -3 | 2 |
| 13 | Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize existing social norms. | +4 | 9 |
| 14 | Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions) | +2 | 7 |
| 15 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on health issues. | +3 | 8 |
| 16 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing | +3 | 8 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| | awareness in the community on economic issues. | | |
| 17 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on political issues. | +2 | 7 |
| 18 | Online social networks contributed to the increasing awareness in the community on women's rights. | +3 | 8 |
| | Total RWA | | 115 |
| | Alternative RWA Measure | | 68 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Statement numbers 1 and 2 discuss the existence of Internet regulation: She strongly agreed that the existence of the Internet regulation was to protect society values, while she slightly agreed that these regulations were to regulate public opinion. In other words, this lead user thought that the importance of the existence of Internet regulation was to protect society values, far more than regulating the expression of their opinion.

Statement numbers 3 and 4 discuss attitude towards Internet regulation: She moderately disagreed that those who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that their authorities have good judgement on how things should be done. She also moderately disagreed that those who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing their legitimate expression. This response complies with her previous answer, where she thought that society values were more important, and at the same time acknowledged the existence of both parties in Saudi society. Moreover, it indicates the practice of self-censorship among individuals in society.

Statement numbers 5 and 6 discuss society influence: Although this scores indicates to the existence of the two parties in Saudi society, cosmopolitan and conservative, the interviewee strongly agreed that online opinion is influenced by the view of the majority of most people in society. This indicates that her confidence in prevailing social norms far exceeds her belief that official regulation or regulation 'exercised by the few' is important, which also complies with her previous answers.

Statement numbers 7 to 10 discuss online attitude: As this score shows some contradictions, it is worth noticing that this lead user exhibits conservative character in several ways: she moderately agreed that her online opinion was influenced by all categories of 'others' about which she was asked, even though she noted earlier that her family and friends are not active online. She also acknowledged that her online activity

aimed to create a certain image of herself, again reflecting that other's regard is important to her. On the other hand, her high score, very strongly agreeing with the priority of telling the truth as she sees it, shows some determination to be independent of these external influences.

Statement number 11 discusses online activities: Her score here is somewhat paradoxical given the earlier remarks, but may be explained by the non-participation of members of her community in online activities. In other words, she has internalized the views of others and this is an influence; however, this does not then translate into direct approval because these others who she respects are not actually seeing what she is doing online.

Statements from 12 to 14 discuss youth and online public space: The interviewee strongly disagreed that young individuals have good opportunities with the new online social networks. This complies with her answer to the question in the first part, where she stated that all social networks are the same where they contain both correct and false information, and no one should rely on this information without considering its possible falseness. At the same time, she moderately agreed that young individuals take advantage of online freedom to question authorities, and very strongly agreed that they are criticizing society culture. This answer might reflect the nature of their initiative where they took a role in spreading awareness on one of the most sensitive issues in conservative societies, which is domestic violence.

Statements from 15 to 18 discuss promoting awareness online: As a Saudi female that is involved in a social initiative on women's rights that deals with domestic violence, the interviewee strongly agreed that online social networks contribute in increasing awareness on women's rights. This also complies with her answers in the first part of the interview and her conclusion on the initiative's achievements. She also strongly agreed that online social networks contributed to spreading awareness on health and economic issues, while she only moderately agreed on the awareness contribution on political issues. This is consistent with the views of many of the other participants, who appear to view political issues as being more controversial, perhaps due to the political system of Saudi Arabia where there is no direct political participation for citizens.

In conclusion, based on her both RWA scores 115 and 68 it can be side that this lead user falls into the conservative in-group. She believed that Internet regulation exists to protect society culture, in other words agreeing with the existence of official censorship; at the same time her answers imply that she expected that expression would be largely limited by the practice of self-censorship. Despite this view, and the importance she attached to other's regard, she rather strongly holds the view that telling the truth is of primary importance. Her belief in the role of online social networks in promoting awareness in society is reflected in her high scores on the promotion of women's issues through them, and the acknowledgment of their initiative online and through official media channels, even if she strongly disagreed that online social networks were different from other media where correct and false information co-exists.

8.6 Analysing the case studies results:

Table 8.10: comparing the RWA results of the case studies

| The case studies | Nature of the initiative | RWA scores | Results |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| The first case study | | | |
| Initiator 1 | Health/social initiative | 117 63 | Conservative |
| The second case study | | | |
| Initiator 1-male | Health/social initiative | 122 65 | Conservative |
| Initiator 2-male | Health/social initiative | 132 82 | Conservative |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|
| Initiator 3-female | Health/social initiative | 105 70 | Conservative |
| Initiator 4-female | Health/social initiative | 120 72 | Conservative |
| Initiator 5-female | Health/social initiative | 111 67 | Conservative |
| The third case study | | | |
| Initiator 1-male | Social initiative | 91 58 | Conservative Cosmopolitan |
| Initiator 2-male | Social initiative | 102 74 | Conservative |
| Initiator 3-female | Social initiative | 115 68 | Conservative |

Note: The alternative RWA measure results in the same classifications.

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

The discussion and analysis of the case studies was used to address the final research question:

- Regarding online expression, how do lead users pursuing social change through collective actions and campaigns in conservative societies conduct their activities online in terms of their perception of:
 - social norms;
 - official policies ‘official censorship’.

In the process of choosing the case studies for this research, the author had to identify different lead users in online social networks from Saudi Arabia based on their online initiative and collective actions, and follow them to determine whether their actions were adequate to sustain the research hypothesis, that these online activities are having an effect. Hence, the author started following different collective online actions on different social platforms for more than a year, especially on Twitter and YouTube, interacted with the initiators and discussed different issues regarding their online work; in this way the author created ties with some of them. They were later asked, either directly or through the author's other social strong ties, to participate in the research and present their initiative as a case study for the research.

Although there were many online initiatives that fell into the category of social movements in online Saudi public space, it was necessary to confine attention to a few of them in order to pursue the participants in some depth. The three case studies were chosen to cover a spectrum of such activities and to reflect the ideas from the theoretical framework used in this research. This framework provided insights about the extent to which lead users in conservative societies might utilize online social networks (uses and gratification theory), and the ways in which they might proceed (reflecting a capabilities theory underlying action) in order to achieve the social change they sought in their society.

Based on the definition of lead user presented at the beginning of the research, as those who are first in adapting to the new technology to achieve certain goals, the case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate that definition. The initiators are considered to be from the first few lead users in the fields in which they are working. They have become acclimatized with the use of online social networks to promote their initiatives to pursue social change in their society. In the use of online social networks, they found an alternative means for expression and, to varying degrees, expressed the view that the use of new online social networks is rightfully part of an individual's social rights and provides a basis for social norms that sometimes deviate from conventional social norms.

The first and second case studies are considered as health/social movements which worked on changing the view of others on certain issues such as; the habits of consuming junk food heavily, exercising every day, questioning the ingredients food

people consume etc. These may be considered a safe movement as they did not address any sensitive issues or contradict any moral values. The third case study focused on social movement that addressed a sensitive issue in the Saudi society, domestic violence against women and children, which might be considered as interfering with the family's privacy. By discussing it they crossed sensitive boundaries that have been stabilized in the collective mind of the community as part of the Islamic religion and therefore is forbidden to be discussed. Nonetheless, they took it on themselves to spread awareness on this matter regardless of the criticism they faced.

As conceptualized, utilized, and illustrated in the case studies, our theoretical approach highlights several main contributions to the fundamental research on lead users. According to the capability theory, we can say that individuals in conservative societies under authoritarian regimes lack the privilege of having and practicing their political and social rights that constitutions or other legal provisions usually secure for citizens in democratic regimes. Hence, in the use of online social networks, they found an alternative means to fulfil their needs, even with the existence of official censorship as well as social norms giving rise to self-censorship, which limits online expression. Despite these limits, they still pursued their goals to achieve the changes they sought for in their society. This is demonstrated in their almost unanimous assertion that online social networks are playing a major role in increasing awareness in Saudi society. The level of awareness differs from one subject to another, and from males to females. However, the only cosmopolitan lead user among the others stated that he moderately disagree that online social networks contributed to spreading awareness on women's right in the society. Nonetheless, it is still considered to be an important alternative means that lead users in Saudi society employ in pursuing their goals.

Based on the gratification theory, through their online initiatives and collective actions, online lead users in these case studies not only work to achieve social change in their society, they seek through their online initiative and civil work to fulfil their personal needs, such as socializing and creating a certain image for themselves in the eyes of the public or among their friends and family. However, even when their character is more consistent with a cosmopolitan perspective, they still prefer to preserve their image in front of the community.

Given the existence of social segregation between genders in Saudi society, online initiatives and collective action seem to be a way for mutual action. Both men and women are involved in the initiatives considered in two of the three case studies, and it is clear that, for women, volunteer work in order to help their society and fulfil their need as Saudi women, is a means of pursuing social change, which is consistent with their life in their conservative society. Nonetheless, the effects of social segregation is reflected by the differences in the answers between the female and male respondents, with the women generally more closely conforming to their society's conservatism, but perhaps in a less strict way than women not participating in these initiatives. A common position of the respondents is that they are part of a younger generation in Saudi society who is seeking to apply a different way of thinking, and interacting within their conservative society.

Table 8.11: Society influence and online attitude comparison

| Statements | Initiat or 1 | Initiat or 2 | Initiat or 3 | Initiat or 4 | Initiat or 5 | Initiat or 6 | Initiat or 7 | Initiat or 8 | Initiat or 9 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of people in the society. | +3 | -2 | +3 | +3 | +2 | +4 | +1 | +2 | +3 |
| Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society. | +4 | +2 | +1 | +2 | +2 | -4 | +2 | -2 | -2 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| How you express your online opinions is influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem. | -4 | -3 | +1 | -3 | +1 | +1 | -2 | -3 | +2 |
| Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create a certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are. | +3 | +4 | +1 | -3 | -2 | -4 | -4 | +2 | +3 |
| In order to create that certain image, it is better to tell people what they want to hear. | -4 | -1 | -4 | -4 | -1 | -4 | -4 | +3 | +2 |
| What people think about you is not the issue; what really matters is telling the truth as you perceive it. | +4 | -1 | +4 | +3 | +3 | +3 | +4 | +4 | +4 |
| Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others similar to you). | -4 | +1 | +3 | -1 | +2 | -2 | -3 | -4 | -2 |

Source: Created from data collected for thesis

Although the individual characters of the lead users in the same group may vary from one to another, the overall findings based on the RWA scores and analysis suggest that 8 out of the 9 lead users investigated for this research are conservative users that falls into the in-group. Based on the definition of the conservative lead user presented in chapter 3, where conservative lead user in this research is the one who conforms to the society social norms, religion, values, etc., the scores of the statements, where all of them agreed on the existence of the influence of others on online expression, while only lead users number '1-2-4-7-8' stated that their own online expressions are not influenced by their milieu view, this can be regarded to different reasons, such as that they already practicing self-censorship but not revealing that explicitly in their answers, but the evident showed that they all practice self-censorship in different levels as one of them stated that 'he is not caressing any boundaries' in the interview, At the same time, the nature of the initiatives undertaken online may be considered to be safe as they do not involve particularly sensitive issues. They all conforms to their social conservatism society norms by practicing self-censorship in order to preserve their online image only as long as it does not conflict directly with their own beliefs and the generally high value they assign to 'telling the truth', even when this involves being more open in criticizing the social norms of their society. At the same time, they confirm that, when questioning society social norms and traditions, they seek to avoid violating or transgressing Islamic principles, all in which is an evident of the effect of society social norms on online lead user's behaviours.

On the other hand, some of the lead users, number '4-5-6-7' stated that they are not looking to create certain image of themselves online, and based on their RWA scores combined with their interview answers, it is clear that the female lead users here '4-5-6' are conservative in their online presence hence they are not concerned with their online images. In addition, their own community is not well aware of their online activities. For the other male lead user here '7' it is clear that he wasn't worried about his online image or that he even need an approval from his own community to initiate any online activities based on his RWA score as a cosmopolitan lead user.

In other words, it can be said that the society social norms do not stop these lead users from addressing the issues they believe in to spread awareness and apply social change they seek. At the same time, however, they manage to learn how to address these issues

and practice self-censorship on their online presence as long as this practice will not contradict with their own beliefs. Hence, it can be said that even though the influence of society social norms are apparent in their online behaviour in the practicing self-censorship, it does not deter them from taking the online initiative in which they participate. This indicates to an open mind-set in applying different way of thinking in the society, which indicates also that some young individuals in Saudi society are seeking to apply a different way in living and integrating in civil work and social change, which might differ from the majority perspective of the conservative Saudi society. This result could be tested in further studies by applying a comparison between different kinds of online collective actions based on the level of its riskiness, such as political movements online, to measure to what extent the nature of the activities online could play role in forming online lead users expression and behaviour.

Moreover, the RWA analysis showed that the presence of online lead users in Saudi society differs between genders. When it comes to the female lead users, although they participate in initiatives that are considered to be safe, even the social initiative one Hit-Her, and that do not have any deep contradictions with social norms, religious, or even politics, they tend to be more conservative in their online participation. However, they manage to work in mixed environments and be part of volunteering work that serves their society.

The background case study on the collective action on women's right to drive presented in Chapter 6 showed that Saudi women are capable of being persistent and open in their utilization of online social networks in pursuing their social rights. A natural extension of the research presented here is to move towards more controversial issues that more directly challenge the existing order.

All online lead users investigated for this research were explicit in stating that telling the truth to others is very important to them regardless of the consequences, which could imply to the fact that they learned how to present themselves online and approach the society, which also on the other hand implies to the existence of the society social norms influence on their online behaviour and the practice of self-censorship, which support the research hypothesis of the effect of society social norms on online behaviours, but at the same time this effect does not stop them from initiating any activities online as long as they manage how to approach the society.

While the RWA scores for the 8 online lead users indicated their conservative characters, nonetheless their online collective actions and their answers they provide in the first part of the interview suggests that these online lead users have an open mind-set in applying different way of thinking, however when it comes to their exposure online they tend to be conservative in several ways.

In the end, we conclude that lead users in conservative societies, even under the existence of social norms and censorship, are utilizing online social networks to the extent that they became a preferable means for them to promote their online initiatives and collective actions. These groups of online lead users tend to believe that online social networks can be a major contributor in spreading awareness in Saudi society, especially when it comes to addressing sensitive issues that question their society norms.

8.6 Conclusion:

In this chapter, the author sought to understand the fundamentals and complexity that lead users face when utilizing online social networks in the country under study, Saudi Arabia, through their online initiatives and collective actions, in which they seek, through these networks, to apply social reforms in their societies. The case studies interviews gave an insight on how online lead users in Saudi conservative society may be creating an alternative public space in order to make a difference in their community.

As social norms are the main component used in this research to examine to what extent it affects online lead user's initiatives and collective actions in conservative societies, and if it has any influence on their online behaviour or even their choice to initiate certain causes rather than others, it was evident that society social norms influence online behaviour and expression.

Moreover, the RWA analysis suggests that the lead users of this study, even though they are applying different ways of thinking and questioning their society norms, still tend to practice self-censorship in their online interactions, even in 'safe' initiatives such as the Mizan health initiative.

Female lead users in the country under study tend to be more conservative in their online presence, which implies the nature of Saudi society. Their main involvement was

to deal with the female side of the public in case needed in a country that still applies a gender segregation system. However, the fact that these Saudi female lead users were involved in mixed initiatives and managed to meet, interact, and facilitate online initiatives and civil work with their Saudi male friends and acquaintances, implies that applying social change within the conservative Saudi society is not far from being realized with the utilization of online social networks and civil collective actions.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and further studies

9.1 Introduction:

With all its applications, the Internet may have the potential to become an alternative public space in conservative societies. It is therefore necessary to understand how these lead users are pursuing their goals and engaging more in online civil work in order to apply the social reform they seek for their society. Looking at the broader picture, the research conducted here concentrated on contributing some insights into the way that online lead users in conservative societies promote their initiatives and collective actions through online social networks under existing social norms and censorship, and how it may have an effect on their online presence and initiatives.

The study sought to examine a general hypothesis, through answering the research questions. The hypothesis is that,

- Social norms of conservative societies inhibit or channel the formulation of social reform issues to be addressed online;
- social norms of conservative societies influence the expression of those forms of social reform that are not inhibited or re-directed at the formulation stage
- Because of their effects on the formulation and expression of social reform, official censorship and social norms influence what social reform activities are attempted online.

Even though the challenge of a conservative society's social norms might have an effect on lead users of online communities, they have, and express, aspirations to utilize information and communication technology, and the Internet with its social networks, to attempt to address social reform issues through raising online social awareness or online collective actions.

This thesis has examined the concepts of lead users and public sphere. In applying these concepts to research on online social networks the thesis identifies particular online lead users that are utilizing the new technology and examines whether, for then, the Internet is a new public space to initiate discussion of certain issues in their conservative society and to spread awareness on them to facilitate level of social change. Because of the

general lack of information in this area, this thesis offers both a conceptual and an empirical contribution to the literature on the use of online social networks in the conservative Arab societies. Using Right-Wing Authoritarian measuring scale to characterize the lead users in the research sample and case studies in order to distinguish between the conservative and the cosmopolitan ones, constitutes an additional empirical contribution to the literature on the use of the use of online social networks in conservative Arab societies.

The study faced some limitations which made it more appropriate to apply the findings only to the research sample and not to generalize it to the whole Arab societies. First, the size of the sample was small, however given the scope of the study the sample size is expected and suitable. Second, the fact that *ex ante* it was not clear to the author the sample lead users were strongly religious (and might be influenced by the author interviewing in person) as well as the time limitation for doing the research led to interviews with the lead users of the case studies online instead of face to face.

9.2 Conclusion and major findings of the study:

The concepts that this research relies on are online communities and lead user theory, which is the main component for this research. As the concept of lead users has been extended in its application to different areas of research, the theory was also applied to the field of information and communication technology in order to specify a population in online social networks that is considered to have great involvement in shaping the social spectrum in their society. Hence, the targeted lead users in this research were the ones who are first and most active in adapting and using the new technology and its applications to achieve certain goals online, such as raising awareness in their society. A general view on Internet regulations and the history of censorship was also presented, as they are the main factors that can affect the use of the Internet.

As this research was designed as a mixed method research, the empirical study were divided into two stages, the first stage is the survey quantitative work which answers the research first two questions, and the second stage were the qualitative case studies which answers the research last question. For the survey, after filtering the received responses, out of 105 (78%) Saudi participants only 66 (50%) finished filling the survey. As for the case studies, 3 cases were chosen form the country under study,

Saudi Arabia, and 10 people were interviewed (one of them were excluded due to the suspicion that his answers were not independent of the one reported).

The survey sample population contained 35 (53%) males and 31 (47%) females; their ages ranged between 16 and 65, with 74% of them aged between 26-35, and 49% of the them holding a bachelor degree and (29%) holding post-graduate degrees in different specialties. In the case studies, Mizan ميزان three interviewees 2 male doctors 25 years old and 3 females between 21-24 years specialized in nutrition and medicine. Hit-Her اضربها contained of three interviewees (another interviewee was excluded as mentioned before) 30 years male project manager, 28 years old male lawyer and 30 years old female medical researcher technology. The Qumami قمامي contain of one individual 30 years old.

For the purpose of analysis, different theories were applied to examine the research hypothesis and answer the research questions within the framework presented in chapter 4. Based on the gratification theory which advocates that the Internet is used in order to satisfy certain needs for the users besides accessing information, such as being able to interact and socialize with others sharing the same interests, combined with the capability theory arguments of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum who advocate that in order for individuals to fulfil their social rights and achieve well-being they should be able to access their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value, to have freedom of choice and hence to achieve the social change they desire. In applying these theories to the use of the Internet, it can be said that the use of the Internet to access technology in the age of communication technology, and the use of computer-mediated communication, might becoming a social right rather than luxury, Hence, and according to the public sphere theory, the Internet may be becoming the new public sphere in societies that lacks other kinds of public spheres advocated by Habermas and other scholars.

When applying the notion of censorship to the Internet, it is clear that individual's freedom will be limited, and the suppression of people's expression will limit the capability available to them in society. It was evident from the survey findings that 35% believe that privacy and censorship (including freedom of expression, government and self-censorship) are a major limitation they face while using online social networks, and 21% of the respondents stated that community and religion are a limitation they face

online, consequently 18% voted strongly low on the scale when they were asked to which degree they find online social networks to be a new opportunity to solve an old problem. Based on the theories above it can be said that although the sample population are using the Internet with its all applications, they are not yet totally fulfilling their capabilities due to the limitations they face on their online expression, which supports the research hypothesis social norms of the society and censorship have an effect on online lead users behaviour.

On the other hand, as the Internet has been advocated by many scholars as an alternative public sphere in conservative societies which will undermine authoritarian regimes, it is evident from the research survey results, as in the case studies also, that the sample population believe that online social networks are contributing to spreading awareness in their society, 35% of the participants in this sample voted strongly high, and 29% ranked number 7 on the scale and also 17% voted strongly high on the scale when asked to which degree they find online social networks to be a new opportunity to solve an old problem, at the same time 34% voted strongly high where they were asked to what extent they believed that online social networks such as Twitter, blogs, Facebook and YouTube had an effect on changing people's view. This could be indication that online social networks could be considered as an alternative public space in societies that lacks other kinds of public spheres.

On the issue of society social norms and censorship influence on online lead users expression and behaviour and formulation of social reform issues to be addressed online, the survey results showed that while 43% would join online activities that served their community every once in a while, and 37% were actually taking part in these activities, 49% stated that sometimes the social norms of others affected their involvement in voluntary work, while 20% rarely got affected, and 18% stated that almost always their involvement decision get affected by others social norms.

The survey results also showed that 25% of the sample voted strongly disagree on the scale when they were asked if they supported laws governing the content of what is posted for common access in online social networks while only 11% voted strongly agree on the Likert scale, which indicates to the desire to have an uncensored public space. However, when the sample were asked if they thought that laws governing the Internet content should be enforced, the results showed that 37% felt that the laws of

regulating online content should be enforced sometimes, and 19% felt that it should be enforced almost always. At the same time, they indicated some areas where these laws should be enforced, 54% believed that these laws should be enforced in cases of cybercrimes, 22% believes that these laws should be enforced when it comes to violating moral and religion values, while 15% believes that laws should be enforced when it comes to national security.

On the other hand, it is evident from the survey results that 51% sometimes modify their words when replying or writing online, and 35% indicated that they modify their online expression. This response suggests that the majority of respondents exercise some circumspection in their online expressions. The respondents also specified the reasons for modifying their language online; out of 66 only 33 participants answered this question. 29 agreed that the main reason is: make the language understandable so the writer will not be misunderstood, especially when using slang phrases that they try to simplify so that every follower from different backgrounds, age, and countries will be able to understand their meaning, plus seeking the society acceptance for the idea presented online, few participants (four) stated that fear of government censorship, and legal prosecution was responsible for their modifying their language. This is a good indication on the level of influence that society social norms have on online lead user's expression and behaviour.

As this mixed methods research has been motivated by its distinct aspects of finding and establishing the characteristics and various traits of the lead users to make it a footprint within the domain of research interest, two RWA scales measurement with different ranges were used in this researcher in order to categorize the lead users into the two main groups used in the research: the in-groups – 'the conservative one where individuals conform to their society social norms and stick to their heritages without any changes', and the out-group – 'the cosmopolitan one where individuals seeks to apply different way of thinking, changing their social reality to comply with their needs and the way other thinks and perceive life'. The first RWA scale range form 18-162, and the score 90 is defined to be the mid-point of the scale, and the second RWA scale range from 12-108 with 60 as the midpoint of the scale. The reason for applying this method is to exclude any ambiguity in the sentences construction that might indicate any misunderstanding form the respondents ends.

Based on RWA score for the survey, the first RWA result showed that 96% and for the second RWA result 71% of the sample population are authoritarian who falls into the conservative in-group. This result complies with the fact that 37% of the sample stated that laws governing the Internet should be sometime enforced especially when it comes to fighting cybercrimes. Only 3% from the first RWA scale and 29.23% are non-authoritarian who falls into the cosmopolitan out-group.

The results of the case studies used also the RWA scale measurement to categorize the investigated online lead users into the two groups. Based on the analysis presented, it is evident that 8 out of 9 online lead users in the case studies are authoritarian who falls into the conservative in-groups, and only one of them is a cosmopolitan lead user based on his second RWA scale result.

The interview with the lead users offered major significant outcomes. They indicate that they rely strongly on online social networks to promote their initiatives and collective actions, as also they believe that online social networks are increasing awareness in their society. Hence, opportunities for applying social reform in their society, Saudi Arabia, appear to be emerging and may increase over the long run. This result relates to the capability theory, where individuals seek to use online social networks as a means of creating an alternative public space that is lacking in their offline life, and in which it is possible to practice social rights while at the same time seeking to gratify their social needs; this is implied by gratification theory.

At the time, the interviewees stated that they do not only seek to apply social change in their society, they also seek to fulfil their personal needs such as socializing and creating certain images of themselves in the eyes of the public. Nonetheless, there were many examples in the case studies of individuals feeling some tension in their relation with society, for example, one of the interviewees pointed out that being a 'hero' in the eyes of others affected his personal life, even the simplest things that he cannot practice in public freely for fear of a bad reaction from others.

It is worth noting that the lead users investigated were seeking social change in their society through tackling different topics online that are different from the prevailing way of thinking in the society. This indicates to a cosmopolitan character, however, at the same time they tend to be more conservative when it comes to their online presence:

they create a certain image for themselves and work on maintaining that image. This is regardless of how others see this image as long as it serves their purpose and their initiative, which relates to their use of self-censorship.

This result indicates an authoritarian personality, as reported previously. This also indicates that online lead users in this society tend to be conservative when it comes to sensitive issues, but at the same time they tend to be cosmopolitan in tackling social change in their society. The boundary between the two mind-sets can be attributed to their practice of self-censorship depending on the issues addressed.

Female lead users in the country under study tend to be more conservative, even though they are using online social networks to fulfil their personal needs and rights, participate in initiatives and campaigns where they meet, interact, and facilitate online initiative and civil work with their Saudi male friends and acquaintances. This is also another indication of how social change is applied in Saudi society.

The research results answered the research questions by showing that social norms and censorship are a major factors in online public space in conservative societies in the country under study, Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, lead users are initiating social change through their online initiative and collective actions that address the most sensitive issues in their society, and modifying their online presence and practicing self-censorship in a way that will not contradict their beliefs, which can be different from the point of view of the majority of the society, in order to apply the social change they seek.

In other words, social norms in conservative societies and censorship are major problems facing online lead user's expression, nonetheless it does not prevent them from addressing social change through their online initiative and collective actions. They have great belief in the role of online social networks plays in increasing awareness in their society, hence, applying the social change they seek for their community.

It was notable that self-publication and self-expression can happen in a conservative society where the lead users can use the online tools as an agent of social advancement. However, social norms, censorship and regulatory aspects even with their effects on online lead users behaviour and expression, however they are not blindly considered to

be potential barriers in preventing lead users from seeking more online initiatives and raising awareness in their society in order to apply social reform, as they learn and manage to practice self-censorship to modify their online expression in order to benefit from the use of the new public space available for them, online social networks, to pursue their goals and satisfy their social needs hence apply level of social change they desire in their society .

Therefore, it can be concluded that the study was successful in building new ground in filling the gap of understanding how online lead users in conservative Arab Islamic societies are utilizing modern communication technology and online social platforms as an alternative public space for them to practice their social rights in relation to existing social norms, official censorship, and self-censorship, and how these uses are related to social reform in their societies and the activities they address online.

9.3 Further Studies:

The research findings reveal possibilities for further studies to expand some of the examination carried out in this research.

In the process of designing the research questions, there was a formulated question for the purpose of the sequence of the ideas of the research. This question will make another breakthrough in expanding the understanding of online initiatives and social change in conservative societies through the response of lead user's followers. The question to be addressed as an extended version of this research is as follows:

- In these societies, how do individuals respond to lead user online initiatives?

It is suggested that this further examination uses some of the presented theories in this research, plus RWA analysis to categorize the follower's characters.

One of the ways in carrying out the above investigation would be by applying a qualitative research case study using the focus group method, in which the researcher can choose one online initiative group, interview the initiators to understand how they initiate their collective action and the responses they receive from their followers. The next step will be done through carrying a quantitative method, such as a survey, choosing a simple random sample from their followers to answer the above research question.

While preparing for this research, it was suggested at the beginning that it might be carried out as a comparative study between two Arabic countries, which would have been Saudi Arabia and Egypt. However, due to the unsettled political situation in Egypt at that time, the study shifted to focus on a single Arabic society, Saudi Arabia. Hence, a suggestion for further studies is to utilize the existing theories in this research to compare two Arab countries to gain deeper insights into the way online lead users in authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes utilize online social networks in order to apply different changes in their societies, whether that be a social or political one.

For the future research agenda, further research is proposed to expand the areas for acknowledging the difference between online female lead users and male users in conservative societies in pursuing social change in their society through online collective actions, focusing on women's rights in conservative patriarchal societies. One of the ways for applying such research is by applying a comparison study between online male and female lead users from one of the Arab countries to study: to what extent gender prevents 'or not' lead users from pursuing their goals in non-democratic regimes with conservative values?

Another investigation could be carried out to target online female lead users from one of the Arab countries using thematic analysis to investigate, for example:

- To what extent gender can prevent women in Arab society from revealing their identity?
- To what extent women in Arab society will be engaged in online initiatives, either 'social or political' in order to pursue their rights?
- To what extent women gain any of their rights in these societies through using online initiatives and collective actions?

In the same context of female online lead users, another study could be carried out by using a comparison method among different Arab countries to investigate to what extent social norms can inhibit or channel Arab women initiating social change in their societies through online collective actions and civil engagement.

Appendix

The survey questions: Part one: general information

- 1- Since when you started participating in online social networks?
- 2- Currently, what online social networks you are using?
- 3- What limitation or problems you experience in using social networks technology?
- 4- On the scale from 1 to 7, how high would you rate your expertise in interacting with online programs?

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| Strongly low | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly high |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|

- 5- On the scale from 1 to 7, to which degree do you find online social networks as a new opportunity to an old problem?

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|

- 6- On the scale from 1 to 7, to what extent do you believe that online social networks, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube have an effect on changing people's view?

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|

- 7- Do you take any part in online activities that serves your community?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Every once in while
- 8- Do you usually involved in online collective actions for voluntary works?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Every once in awhile.

- 9- To which degree do you think that the social norms of whom you interact with is affecting your involvement in voluntary work as collective action?

| | | | | |
|-------|--------|-----------|------------------|--------|
| never | Rarely | sometimes | Almost always | always |
|-------|--------|-----------|------------------|--------|

- 10- On the scale from 1 to 7, to what extent do you think that online social networks are a major contributor to social awareness?

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|

- 11- Name some of those old problems you used to face before using online social networks?

- 12- As an Internet user, are you familiar with the regulation list for electronic publishing within your country?

- Yes
- No

- 13- Do you know about the Internet laws regarding controlling expression within your country?

- Yes
- no

- 14- On the scale from 1 to 7, do you support laws governing the content of what is posted for common access in online social networks?

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|

- 15- To which degree do you think these laws should be enforced?

| | | | | |
|-------|--------|-----------|------------------|--------|
| never | Rarely | sometimes | Almost always | always |
|-------|--------|-----------|------------------|--------|

- 16- While expressing your opinion online, do you use any language technique to modify your words?

- Yes
- No

17- If your previous answer is yes, please specify the reasons for modifying your online opinion language?

Part two

Please indicate your opinion on each statement bellow by agreeing or disagreeing with it, and if you found that two or more statements in-between different levels please combine your opinion and write it down. The levels of agreeing or disagreeing are shown in this box:

| | |
|----|--------------------------------------------------|
| -4 | If you very strongly disagree with the statement |
| -3 | If you strongly disagree with the statement |
| -2 | If you moderately disagree with the statement |
| -1 | If you slightly disagree with the statement |
| +1 | If you slightly agree with the statement |
| +2 | If you moderately agree with the statement |
| +3 | If you strongly agree with the statement |
| +4 | If you very strongly agree with the statement |

- The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is important to protect society values.
- The existence of Internet regulation on the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society.
- Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgments on how things should be done.
- Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression.
- Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of most people in the society.
- Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society.

- Your online opinions are influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem.
- Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create certain image of yourself in the mind of others than to be who you really are.
- In order to create that certain image it is better to tell peoples what they want to hear.
- What people think about you is not the issue, what really matter is telling the truth as you perceive it.
- Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (Family, Friends, and social class).
- Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves even when their view disagree with those are generally accepted.
- Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize society social norms.
- Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (Government, religion, social traditions)
- Online social networks contributed in increasing awareness in the community on:
 - Health issues.
 - Economic issues.
 - Political issues.
 - Women rights.

Part three

18- High level of education completed:

- High school
- Some college
- Bachelor
- Post grade degree (Masters, Doctorate)

19- Subject of study

20- Please identify your current status from the categories below:

- Blogger

- E-Publisher (digital e-books, digital magazines, and digital libraries)
- Collective production groups
- Web developer
- Other (Please specify)

21- have you visited a non-Arabic country

- yes
- no

22- have you lived abroad

- yes
- no
- currently living abroad

23- Do you often interact with non-Arabic friends online nearly as often as your Arabic friends?

- Yes
- No
- Every once in awhile

24- Do you often read non-Arabic literature in its original language?

- yes
- no
- every once in awhile

25- Gender: -Male –Female

26- Age:

27- Country of citizenship

28- Country of residence

The case studies questions-Part one:

- 1- As a lead user (one of those to first use a technology for a specific purpose), could you please explain your online initiative, your goals, your role in this activity, and the current position of the work?
- 2- What observation could you offer on the achievements and new features of your online initiative?

- 3- Do you think that online networks (as opposed to other forms of communication such as e-mail and telephone) are a contributor or a negative factor (e.g. a distraction or involve more effort than contribution) to your campaign?
- 4- Some have said that with the existence of official censorship, concerns about appropriate observation of religious principles, and social norms (view of others) have important effects on online interaction. Do you agree? If, so are these effects different on different social networks such as Twitter and YouTube and in what ways?
- 5- Could you explain or provide examples of how others have responded to your initiative?
- 6- To what extent do you think that your attitude online is affected by the views of others about what is right and proper?
- 7- Do you think that your online work has any effect on how you are viewed by your family and friends? How would you describe that effect?
- 8- Do you think that your activities online create the possibility that you will be socially isolated? If yes, to what extent does this restrain your expression?
- 9- Do you think that persuasive communications online (as opposed to in person) can affect the views of others you know personally?
- 10- Do you consider your online collective action and campaign to involve persuasive communication messages?
- 11- Have you received any recognition either form society, media, or any other official agencies about your online activities?

The case studies questions-Part one:

Please indicate your opinion on each statement bellow by agreeing or disagreeing with it according to the following scale. If you are undecided or uncertain about a particular statement, please explain why.

- 4 If you very strongly disagree with the statement
- 3 If you strongly disagree with the statement
- 2 If you moderately disagree with the statement
- 1 If you slightly disagree with the statement
- +1 If you slightly agree with the statement
- +2 If you moderately agree with the statement

+3 If you strongly agree with the statement

+4 If you very strongly agree with the statement

1. The existence of regulation of the content of online social networks is important to protect society values.
2. The existence of regulation of the content of online social networks is to regulate individual's opinion in society.
3. Individuals who support the existence of Internet regulation believe that authorities (government, religious authorities, and elites) have good judgments on how things should be done.
4. Individuals who stand against Internet regulation believe that authorities are suppressing legitimate personal expression.
5. Online expression is influenced by the view of a majority of most people in the society.
6. Online expression is influenced by the view of a few individuals in the society.
7. Your online opinions are influenced by others who you may respect and hold in high esteem.
8. Your online opinions are influenced by your need to create certain image of yourself in the mind of others.
9. In order to create your desired image in the view of others it is better to tell peoples what they want to hear.
10. What people think about you is not the issue, what really matter is telling the truth as you perceive it.
11. Your participation in online activities is influenced by the approval of your own community (family, friends, or others similar to you).
12. Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves even when their views disagree with those that are generally accepted.
13. Young individuals have good opportunities online to express themselves and criticize society social norms.
14. Young individuals are taking advantage of online freedom to question authorities (government, religion, social traditions).
15. Online social networks contributed to an increased awareness in the community on health issues.

16. Online social networks contribute to an increased awareness in the community on economic issues.
17. Online social networks contribute to an increased awareness in the community on political issues.
18. Online social networks contribute to an increased awareness in the community on women rights.

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