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Investigating the Online Public Sphere for the Arabic World

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

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The role of social media in the revolutionary wave of protests in Arab countries, the so-called 'Arab Spring', remains a highly debated subject; some emphasized it while others minimised it. One of the claims about this role is that digitization of the public sphere has the power to enable political change in any non-democratic country by enabling new voices. The concept of public sphere identifies historical formation of democratic societies and it also posits a model of what an ideal society should be. However, no work has been carried out investigating the online Arab public sphere using data retrieved from social media. The characteristics of the emergent public sphere and their implications for estimating the significance of this medium as an enabler of Arab socio-political transformation, was purely anecdotal. This work contributes to this debate by addressing the potential role of the new media in shaping politics using the public spaces provided by Facebook as a new public sphere. Using the public sphere concept and its feminist critics as a theoretical framework, this research described the sphere formed from the acquired dataset of Facebook pages. A snowball sample approach was undertaken, which created a network of 1105 pages and 3331 edges (representing Facebook 'likes' between pages). The nodes of this network were classified according to actors' groups, the geographical boundaries they associate themselves with, and their ideology. Social network metrics and tools were used to analyse the resulting three views of the network.

The structure of the sample exposed two distinct sets of Arabic pages, linked by only 86 edges. These were activism, that is effectively the women's sections of Islamist movements, and Muslim women's struggle for their rights. With the exception of Yemen, the countries where 'Arab Spring' upheavals took place, constituted the biggest divisions of the nodes. Countries most represented in the network had pages which are the most active in the particular social movement studied, and these pages were created first.

The existence of women's contributions to the sphere formed by these pages is presented as empirical evidence of enabled voices. The results supported the assumption of an association between the new public sphere and the 'Arab Spring' by showing that feminist activism was more popular in countries where the 'Arab Spring took place.

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Nomenclature

$MENA$ Middle East and North Africa

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The revolutionary wave in the Arab states, the so-called 'Arab Spring', that began with the events of the Tunisian uprising in December 2010 and proliferated throughout the countries of the Arab League and its surroundings, has received international attention for the claimed role of social media as an enabler. A substantial literature has been dedicated to the study of this revolutionary wave. This has spanned many disciplines and has attempted to provide clarification of why or how this course of events happened. Although, according to the domain's methods and conventions, the explanations provided are fragmented, most of them suggest that the 'Arab Spring' should be understood as a socio-political event in the context of the advance of online media into the Arab world. The use of these new media in the 'Arab Spring' was one of the factors in the social revolution, among others such as social and political factors in the region. Nevertheless, it played a critical role, especially in light of the absence of open public media and a civil society (Khondker, 2011).

The claim is that digitization of the public sphere has the power to enable political change in any non-democratic country by enabling new voices. This builds on the fact that online social networks have changed individual competencies, the ability to organize collective action, and the transmission of information from the local to the international level (Lynch, 2011). Moreover, it allows Arab voices that have previously been marginalized, excluded and unheard. "These new voices are actively debating their own political identities and strategies, not only on Facebook but in an ever more diverse and contentious political press (online and offline)" (Lynch, 2012). Blogs, news websites, Twitter feeds, and political listservs offered spaces where women could debate on an equal footing with men (Howard and Hussain, 2011). Women's participation attracted the attention of many analysts for their engagement, both during the 'Arab Spring' e.g. (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011; Marzouki, 2011; Newsom and Lengel, 2012; Al-Ali, 2012) and after it e.g. (Sadiqi, 2016; Karman, 2017; Ennaji, 2016; Moghadam, 2014; Charrad and Zarrugh, 2014; Johansson-Nogués, 2013).

Many articles have been published since the last decade of the 20th century recognizing the potential of the Internet as a vehicle for disseminating democracy (Poster, 1995). Popular commentators even emphasized the role of social media to the point that the deeper historical roots of rebellion in the pre-Internet era became ignored (Morozov, 2011). More recent writers have identified the nuances as well as limits to the role of the new media in politics (Howard and Hussain, 2011).

However, the countries where the wave of protests has spread (Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen), experienced different scenarios and various outcomes of their uprisings. Although anticipated by many, replacing the old regimes with democratic ones was not guaranteed. The claims about the new forms of engagement in the emergent online public sphere should therefore be investigated, to expose its role in changing the power structure in Arab societies.

1.1   Motivations

Sociological discussion on the potential of the new media in shaping society began in earnest with Manuel Castells's work (Castells, 1996), 'The Rise of the Network Society' (Khondker, 2011).

However, the 'revolutionary' role of social media was emphasized by some researchers, and was minimised by others (Gerkin, 2011).

Discussions on this subject are divided between those who emphasize the controlling role of the new media, as a new tool of repression in the arsenal of dictators, and those who see it as a tool for democratic openness. Even in democratic societies, the new technology poses a grave threat to the freedom and privacy of citizens, as some writers point out. Other writers often get carried away with the potential role of the new media in shaping politics and opening up a new public sphere, especially in societies where a real public sphere is absent. There are, however, 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. Comunello and Anzera (2012) showed that the root of the dichotomous vision is what Wellman (2004) identifies as the first-age utopian and dystopian attitudes toward digital technology. Some researchers adopted technological determinism, a theoretical perspective that assumes a one-way effect of technology on society.

1.1.1   Two Dominating Perspectives

The literature produced during this period shows two dominating perspectives in the political discourse of 'Arab Spring'. One was based on pure political scholarship, while

the other tried to look at the changes brought about as a result of the use of digital technologies.

1.1.1.1 The Role of Social Media not included

Comparing 'Arab Spring' to similar political changes in the past is a main theme of the political view. This often features the speed and the scope of the wave of protests, but there is disagreement on which historical conditions are most similar to 'Arab Spring'. Anderson (2011) compared what happened in the region in the first decades of the 20th century with what is happening now in order to "demystify the Arab Spring". She notes that the spread of popular movements is not a new phenomenon and what is seen currently is a modern incarnation of Arab nationalist networks whose broadsheets disseminated strategies for civil disobedience throughout the region in the years after World War I. The critical issue, in her opinion, is not the globalization of civic engagement, nor it is the activists' use of technology. Instead she highlights the importance of the variation in the patterns and the demographics of the protests (e.g. the demonstrations in Tunisia spiralled from the rural areas to the capital; they did the opposite in Egypt).

Doran (2011) agreed with Anderson on reading 'Arab Spring' as a series of Arab nationalist movements; however, he saw a similarity with events that happened in the region half a century ago rather than the ones that Anderson referred to. In particular, the Suez crisis generated a revolutionary spark, and called the recent upheavals in the Arab states "the second Arab revolution" which the heirs of Nasser will benefit from. On the other hand, Weyland (2012) and Goldstone (2011) argued that the similarities are between the Arab protest wave of 2011 and the revolutionary riptide of 1848. They assumed that both diffusion processes displayed unusual speed and broad scope, yet generated disappointing results.

In attempting to provide an integrated framework for analysing democratic diffusion, Gunitsky (2014) laid out a typology of diffusion that focuses on recurring causal mechanisms, highlighting the contrasts and parallels across a range of historical cases and pointing toward integrated models of diffusion. He also presented mechanisms of counter-diffusion, focusing on negative feedback that led to partial or total collapses of democratic waves.

This trend in explaining the 'Arab Spring' ignores the role of technology in causing or enabling these social movements. From this perspective, the speed and the scope of the wave of protests do not appear unusual. Therefore, researchers following that trend did not see any need to modify their arguments to adapt to the peculiarity of these cases from the use of new technologies.

The political perspectives of the 'Arab Spring' are also presented in Middle Eastern Studies. Usually researchers of regional studies approach the cases of each country with

specific concerns. The overall concern in the case of the 'Arab Spring' is to identify the role of specific social groups in recent political developments, what motivates them to participate, and the expected shift of their role in the future (Matthiesen, 2013; Nepstad, 2013; El-Issawi, 2011; Al-Anani, 2012).

In the beginning of the movement, many works favoured single-country analysis (Taleb and Blyth, 2011; Shehata, 2011). Gradually, with the unfolding of events, the need for comparative analyses has emerged in order to highlight the differences between these countries that led to various outcomes and consequences (Willis, 2014; Noueihed and Warren, 2012).

In general, these political scientists have perceived political activity and political behaviour at cross-national and intra-national levels. They are engaged in revealing the relationships underlying political events and conditions, and from these revelations they attempt to construct general principles about the way the world of politics works.

1.1.1.2   The Role of Social Media included

There is also literature that recognizes the peculiarity of the era of the 'Arab Spring' and looks at that while considering the role of new technology.

Although there is obvious agreement among these political researchers that the new technology has played a role in transforming politics in general, and in enabling the political changes of the 'Arab Spring' in particular, this role has been understood and analysed through different contexts.

In order to analyse the evolving role of information technology in transforming global politics, Singh (2013) uses a concept called "meta-power" to refer to the ability of information technologies to foster interactions that change the identity of the actors and the meanings of issues in global politics. He claims that information technologies can broaden the "public sphere" by bringing in a diversity of actors and their perspectives, and facilitate interactions that change the identity of the actors and their interests in global politics.

Singh articulates the significance of studying three waves of international scholarship outlining the role of information technologies on global politics as conceptual context for understanding "meta-power. In this view, the first wave lasted until the early 1990s, in which the role of technologies in global politics was understood in an instrumental fashion, either enhancing the power of international actors or constraining the power of others. Meanwhile the second wave of scholarship on information technologies and global politics, roughly until the middle of the 2000s, began to theorize on the effects of these technologies carefully, albeit in an instrumental fashion, while also attending in-depth to particular issue.The third wave built upon second-wave perspectives. The paradigms

of the last wave were cross-fertilized to argue variously that technologies were not just mere instruments to constrain or expand the power capabilities of global actors, but that they also provided a way to understand major transformations in global politics.

Shirky (2011) reported the same history by reviewing the evolving debates over the Internet and politics during the same period. He highlighted that political science played a remarkably modest role in the early debates. Only a few political scientists (e.g. Bimber) were interested in the topic. Debate over the political consequences of the Internet began not among political scientists but among activists, politicians, and law professors.

Answering questions such as: "Does the Internet empower ordinary citizens *vis--vis* political elites?", "Can the Internet help activists to topple dictators?", has led the political scientists to uncover specific ways to explore how the Internet may affect politics, using both qualitative and quantitative data (Farrell, 2012).

Fung et al. (2013) developed six models to provide useful mental maps for scholars and practitioners that will help them locate just how some digital intervention or application fits into the larger institutional panoply of a political system with its own barriers and competing pressures. These models are: "the empowered public sphere", "displacement of traditional organizations by new digitally self-organized groups", "digitally direct democracy", "truth-based advocacy", "constituent mobilization", and "crowd-sourced social monitoring".

The authors use the case of Arab states in the description of the first model, where the digital intervention is claimed to transform the public sphere by enabling many-to-many communication, lowering the costs of acquiring vast amounts of information, and lowering the costs of creating and expressing all sorts of views, including political ones. The implications of this transformation on non-democratic countries such as the Arab states, where the governments deliberately diminish the size of the public sphere and control its contents, is much greater compared with democratic countries.

The authors also found the best implementation of the fifth model was the way activists of the 'Arab Spring' used online platforms to disseminate political messages and to mobilise protesters.

The suggested patterns of political activity have made the claims about transformations of the public sphere the heart of the impact of the Internet on politics. Digitization of the public sphere is claimed to have played a significant role in the political changes in non-democratic countries.

Although there is a rich literature dedicated to the study of recent social and political movements in the Arab states as a manifestation of the potential of online social networks, this literature has generated more questions to research.

1.1.2   Continuous Impact and Evolving Usage

The impact of social media on politics is continuous and requires ongoing observation and analysis. Lynch (2011) suggested that the long term evolution of a new kind of public sphere may matter more than immediate political outcomes. Rigorous testing of competing hypotheses about the impact of the new social media will require not only conceptual development but also the use of new kinds of data analysis not traditionally adopted in Middle East Studies. Moreover, the Internet's emancipatory promise has widely been advocated. However, it is important to recognize that social media platforms are used to serve the political goals of reformers, revolutionaries, and authoritarian regimes alike. States use these platforms to gather intelligence and spread pro-regime propaganda (Shirky, 2011).

The study of the evolving use of these platforms leads to further understanding about their potential impact on the politics and social change of Arab states.

For that reason, Youmans and York (2012) focused on evolving policies, functionalities, and user guidelines that social media activists employ. These architectural changes alter the communicative structure of social media sites, ultimately affecting who connects with whom. Using four case studies of social media sites, they demonstrated how prohibitions on anonymity and certain content types, and the use of community policing [1] of offensive material and greater infiltration by government agents can lessen social media's utility.

1.2   Objectives

Many researchers have been intrigued by the inclusion of the new voices as the result of the advance of the new technologies, and the discussions about the traditional exclusion of some social groups from the Arab public sphere (Shteiwi, 2015; Lynch, 2003; Skalli, 2006). This research follows that stream and explores the inclusiveness of the online publics as they manifest themselves in online social networking sites.

Adopting top-down narratives, which have dominated the literature on the 'Arab Spring, only captures parts of the picture. The whole scene, featuring the new voices, is better presented when middle-level views are taken into account.

This work is a contribution to the ongoing debate over the role of social media in changing the social and political status-quo of Arab countries. Its aims are to explore the ways in which the advance of social media has redefined the spheres of public communication and how these emerging spheres are reshaping or confirming the social patterns that dominate Arab society.

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[1] An Arabic-language group called "Together to close all atheist profiles on Facebook" began identifying Arab Facebook users known to be atheists and calling on group members to report those users for violating the site's identification policy (York, 2010).

Addressing the online Arab publics from this perspective potentially fills the gap in the existing literature on the new Arab public sphere, which either neglects or places very little emphasis on the characteristics of the online spaces, and how some of the challenges and constraints of offline origins have been ported to this medium.

1.2.1 Women's Public Participation is the Key

Women's public participation is a characteristic peculiar to the Arab publics due to historic exclusion and contemporary marginalization in the traditional political venues.

Yadav (2010) argued that the public/private dichotomy of the space does not reflect the similar division of activism as found in Western countries. Studying the Arab public with a gender lens can reveal patterns that may reproduce themselves online and influence the effectiveness of Arab online publics achieving democracy or any social and political change.

Although technology is expected to be gender-neutral, there is a debate on the role played by Arab women empowered by this technology in recent events, as well as in any socio-political reforms in the region.

The inclusiveness of the online Arab publics is examined here by drawing on the existing literature on public sphere theory and its feminist critics. By exploring female visits to these publics and their unprecedented ability to use these platforms to advocate their causes, empirical evidence is provided for the various claims made about the promised democratizing effect of the online Arabic public sphere.

1.2.2 Facebook Pages as Online Female Activism Spaces

Crossley (2015) argued that "Social networks and interpersonal ties are critical to social movements. They help recruit members, sustain organizations, nourish participants' movement identities, and disseminate information. She cited feminism as an example of the role of social media in sustaining social movement, claiming that "Facebook and feminist blogs enlarge and nourish feminist networks, create online feminist communities, expand recruitment bases for online and offline mobilization, and increase opportunities for online interaction with adversaries".

Arabic female activism is a clear example. There are signs that female activists used Facebook in the Arab world during the recent political movements (Radsch and Khamis, 2013). Facebook pages are used by Arabic women to group themselves and boost their social and political activism (Odine, 2015; Grami, 2013; Newsom and Lengel, 2012). They also associate their pages with other pages that strive for similar goals or that hold to the same ideology. Some of these associated pages represent activism in wider geographical areas, or work as international hubs.

1.2.3   Utilizing data extracted from Facebook

Lynch (2012) noted that scholars in the Arab world have been offered potentially revo-
lutionary opportunities, with an avalanche of usable data about the attitudes, relation-
ships, opinions and actions of millions of citizens increasingly living their lives online. He
compared this with how it was earlier, when a scholar could raise an entire dissertation
when they found a dozen diaries discussing the Urabi revolt of the 1890s, or the personal
correspondence of two early Muslim Brotherhood leaders in the 1940s in a dusty attic in
Cairo. "Today, on Facebook and Twitter, we have millions of such real time diaries and
correspondence, which are fundamentally transforming how we can and should study
the regions politics and societies. Information, images, documents and semi-public dis-
cussions, covering everything from disaffected Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood youth to
activists in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, which at one time would have been found
only through arduous fieldwork (if at all), is now easily available online. Most Middle
East experts are poorly equipped to exploit such information, however" (Lynch, 2012).

1.2.4   Using Social network analysis to study Pages of Activism

Visual representation of social networks is widely used to understand the network data
and convey the result of the analysis. Exploration of the data is done through displaying
Facebook pages of female activism as nodes, the like relationship between these pages as
edges in various layouts, and attributing colours, size and other advanced properties to
these nodes, according to the attributes that are meaningful to the investigation. The
focus is on describing the public sphere formed by these Facebook pages in terms of its
actors and the distribution of their activities by country and ideology.

1.2.5   Research Questions

Both the investigation of the historical manifestations of the Arab public sphere, and the
inspection of current events, have not shown enough evidence to confirm the existence
of the Arab public sphere in a Habermas sense. However, examining the existence and
the dynamics of the arenas online, which are autonomous from the political order and
accessible to different sectors of society, can provide a starting point to validate its
democratizing effects on the promising public spheres.

The main research questions in this study are:

- RQ1: *The shape of Arab Feminism* What do Facebook pages that hold Arab female
  activism reveal about their sphere?

- – *Actor groups that form this sphere.* Public spheres form when various groups of actors come together and exchange their views publicly. What are the groups of actors that form this sphere of activism?

- – *Arab countries represented in this sphere.* What do this online sphere tell about the geographical extent of this activism?

- – *Ideology.* How do Arab female activism pages posit themselves in relation to Western and global female activism, as well as to each other?

- RQ2: *The quantity of female participation* How are Facebook pages used by Arab feminists? How are their trends of activities changing over time, and from country to country? Since they were created, through the years that followed the uprisings, can any peculiarity of the countries where the 'Arab Spring' events took place be observed?

  - – Women's participation in the 'Arab Spring' attracted the attention of many analysts for their engagement, both during the 'Arab Spring' and after it. Do these participations apply to their activities on Facebook public pages that hold Arab women activism?

  - – The protest wave of the 'Arab Spring' started in Tunisia and spread to Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Does observing the activity rates on Facebook public pages that represent these countries in a transnational movement and comparing them with each other and with other Arab countries reveal any clues to explain the different scenarios and various outcomes these countries experienced?

  - – *The recent changes that occurred to the identities in the region.* It has been suggested that the spread of the upheavals of the 'Arab Spring' indicate Arabism's continued salience, while it was anticipated that this Identity was dead long ago and was replaced with national-state identity of Arab countries.

  - – Political Islam has played a role in the recent political upheavals Would the observation of Arab feminist online activity reveal a similar role of Islamism in socio-political activism? Can that role be described in accordance with the activism of sectarianism, the oppositionist stance?

    The Arab Uprisings have affected academic debates about the importance of Arab identity in regional and domestic politics. However, the rise of political Islam as a result of these social-political upheavals has received significant concern in most of the debates about the future of the region. Some argued that it is not liberalism, democracy, and pluralism that will win, but instead radical Islam.

- RQ3: *The quality of female attendance* To what extent are the social patterns that affect women's public self-presentation reproduced in the new online public spaces?

  Traditionally, women were not welcomed to public spaces, while cultural patterns affected their presence, such as gender segregation (a tradition of systematic prevention of interaction between men and women), and practices concerning how to avoid public exposure of identities. Now online Social media offered spaces where women could debate on an equal footing with men.

  - *To what extent are female users welcomed to participate in online public spaces?* What is the percentage of female attendance at Facebook public pages when these pages are not declared to be for one sex.

  - *Do Arab users of both sexes use the same strategies to anonymise their Facebook identity?* Are the strategies used for public naming more preferred by females over their counterparts?

1.3   Structure of the Report

In the previous sections, a review of the literature of the 'Arab Spring' was provided to justify the choice of the concept of the public sphere as a theoretical framework. This literature generated unanswered questions about the online spaces used by Arab users and their role in forming a new public sphere that empowers new voices, previously ignored and unheard. The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter 2 lays out the theoretical framework of the research by introducing the concept of the public sphere, as defined in sociology. The actor groups of the public sphere and the criticism it has received are addressed. Discussions on the online form of the public sphere are then presented. This chapter also explores the investigation of the existence of the Arab publics historically and online, and the issues related to its existence, and suggests an examination the publics online with a gender lens.

Chapter 3 introduces the historical use of women's sphere notion and its relation to the concept of a public/private split. It reviews the use of these terms to understand Women's sphere in the Middle East. This chapter explores the literature that addresses Women behaviour in public spaces and the development of a women's sphere. Social patterns that historically affected the public presence of Arab women are reviewed as well as some concerns that relate to the public presence of women online. Then the two counter-publics that formed in the women's sphere are introduced.

Chapter 4 provides empirical investigation on Facebook pages used by Arab women activists, by forming a network based on a snowball sample, the nodes of which networks

are coded according to the research concerns. Metrics that describes this network are used to analyse the sphere formed by women's activism and its implications discussed.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of female public participation by studying a transnational social movement and investigates the trends of its members' activities. The previous study sample is then widened to conduct analysis on the counter-publics that the members of this sample form.

Chapter 6 examines womens presence in online publics by observing the users of Facebook pages used by students in universities located in the Middle East. This chapter provides empirical clues on the persistence of culture patterns, reviewed in Chapter 3, on how the users of these pages present their identity.

Chapter 7 presents an overview of the research, summarising its key findings. An overview of the research contribution and limitations is then provided. Finally, future work is discussed.

Chapter 2

Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere was first introduced with a detailed description in the work of Habermas published in Germany Habermas (1962). Since its inception, the concept has proven to be extremely influential. Significant literature of wide range in humanities and social science disciplines has been generated, both explaining and critiquing Habermas' original conception of the public sphere. Other literature uses its concepts as a framework to foster comparative and trans-national historical understanding. Habermas et al. (1974) defined the public sphere as a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. He saw a portion of the public sphere coming into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. Habermas introduced *the structural transformation of the public sphere* as a historical-sociological account of the emergence, transformation, and disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere. He combined methods and materials from sociology and economics, political science, and history to grasp the preconditions, structures, and functions of this realm of modern society.

2.1 Various Conceptualisations of the Public Sphere

Political theorists have conceptualised public sphere in other ways. Based on her understanding of the politics of ancient Greece and Rome, Arendt (2013) sought to revive the meaning of the public space and action as enabling freedom, "an effort to become human in the fullest sense" (Dean, 2003).

In contrast, Calhoun (1992) defined the public sphere as a "contested participatory site in which actors with overlapping identities engage in negotiations and contestations over political and social life, ... actors routinely reach understandings about norms, identities and interests through the public exchange of discourse". On the other hand, Dean (2001)

notes legal distinctions between public and private spheres, where "public" refers to the state and "private" refers to the market and the family.

Ferry (1989)suggests an approach that considers the public sphere from the perspective of the publicity of ideas, opinions, and social events, and of their representational mechanisms. In that sense, the public sphere is a framework through which the process of media representation of social, political and cultural events is realized. Ferry believes that the public sphere has expanded horizontally when it become the domain where one community communicates with other communities. According to (Quéré, 1992), the public sphere becomes the system through which the group represents itself. This non-Habermasian approach is adopted in this research along side with an aesthetic approach to the public sphere based on the thought of Hannah Arendt. Hannah Arendt considered the public sphere the space in which the person becomes manifest to others. In this sense,the public sphere is the space of appearance because it is a scene where individuals and groups reveal themselves to one another, and where events become visible (Hammami, 2016).

2.2   The Concept between Idealization and Actuality

Among the critical arguments Habermas's account received is its failure to distinguish clearly enough between the ideal type and the actuality of the liberal bourgeois public sphere. Social theorists criticized Habermas's account of the public sphere for being read as a two-part tale, a rise and demise, the triumph of rationality and critical debate that brought the emergence of a 'liberal bourgeois public sphere' and its eventual dissolution with the development of 'welfare state mass democracy'. This development made society manipulated by the media that defines politics as a spectacle, with the public becoming consumers and publicity (critically reasoned debate) becoming public relations (McLaughlin, 1993). Fraser (1990) attributes Habermas's idealization of the liberal public sphere to his failure to examine other public spheres. The bourgeois public sphere is derived from the historical context specific to certain European societies, which is one model among many others.

2.3   Democratizing Effects

The study of the public sphere centers on the idea of participatory democracy, and how public opinion becomes political action. The basic ideal belief in public sphere theory is that the government's laws and policies should be steered by the public sphere, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere (Benhabib, 1992). "Democratic governance rests on the capacity of and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debate" (Hauser, 1998).

Much has recently been said about the promise that online discourse will increase political participation and pave the road to a democratic utopia. There are also many critiques of the claims that the Internet has democratizing effects at all. The idea that the Internet democratizes is hardly new. Many have written about it since the early 1990s. The relatively simple first-generation claims were a celebration of its potential to make everyone a pamphleteer; they came under a variety of criticisms and attacks over the course of the past half-decade or so. The second-generation critique was that the Internet is not as decentralized as we thought in the 1990s. The emerging patterns of Internet use show that very few sites capture an exceedingly large amount of attention, and millions of sites go unnoticed (Benkler, 2006).

The rhetoric on Internet democracy has divided the researchers into three camps, each drawing upon different models of democracy. First, a communitarian camp, which stresses the possibility of the Internet enhancing communal spirit and values. Second, a liberal individualist camp, which sees the Internet as assisting the expression of individual interests. Third, a deliberative camp, which promotes the Internet as the means for an expansion of the public sphere of rational-critical citizen discourse – discourse autonomous from state and corporate power through which public opinion may be formed that can hold official decisionmakers accountable (Dahlberg, 2011).

While providing six models to understand Internet and politics as described in section 1.2, Fung et al. (2013) showed that optimistic predictions of a more muscular public sphere have fallen short in developed democracies. However, they see non-democratic countries as large possible exceptions to this claim. On the contrary, Benkler (2006) argued that the transition from a mass media structured public sphere to a distributed discursive architecture represents bad news for totalitarian nations – a new threat that they find very difficult to handle, due to the decentralised, endtoend structure of the Internet. While in democratic countries, the lowered threshold for mediated conversation leads to a radical expansion of the public sphere.

2.4   Actors in the Public Sphere

The public sphere can be conceptualised as a communicative space where various groups of actors come together and exchange their views publicly (Walter, 2014). Calling themselves "a new agora", CommGAP, a global programme at the World Bank for "Exploring the interactions among public opinion, governance, and the public sphere", suggested actors in the public sphere fall into in five categories: "The public", "Civil society", "Public officials", "The media", and "Private actors" (CommGAP, 2010).

2.4.1 The Public

"We find an idea of *the public* as the general audience whose opinions matter, as those whose agreement or disagreement could change the course of elections or make or break a play, movie, or television show" (Dean, 2001).

In his attempt at defining exactly the meaning of *A Public*, Warner (2002) has combined historical analysis, theoretical reflection, and extensive case studies to show how the idea of *A Public* can reframe our understanding of contemporary literary works and politics, and of our social world in general. In particular, he applies the idea of *A Public* to the junction of two intellectual traditions: public-sphere theory and queer theory. He claims that the idea of *A Public* contains ambiguities, even contradictions, and its meaning, when extended to new contexts, politics, and media, changes in ways that can be difficult to uncover. However, it has become an essential fact of the social landscape. Warner was aware that several senses of the noun 'public' tend to be intermixed in usage. People do not always distinguish between *The Public* and *A Public*, although in some contexts this difference can matter a great deal. The public is a kind of social totality. Speaking of a national public, for example, implies that others exist, but whenever one is addressed as *The Public*, the others are assumed not to matter. He opines that the other two meanings of public both have the sense of totality but are bounded by an event or by a shared physical space, or come into being only in relation to texts and their circulation. In democratic theory, *The Public* is variously cast as "one or another of any number of sociological entities: a complex of groups pressing for political action (i.e. interest groups); people engaged in debate over some issue; people who have thought about an issue and know enough to form opinions (whether or not they have been engaged in conversation or debate); people who are following some issue in the media (i.e. audiences or attention aggregates); an electorate; an agglomeration of all citizens; the general population of some geopolitical entity; or even some imagined community in the minds of citizens" (Price, 2008).

2.4.2 Civil Society

As the distinction between the terms *civil* and *bourgeois* society in German or in some eastern European languages cannot be made, the relation between the two terms becomes ambiguous. Civil society, according to Cohen and Arato (1994), is the sphere of social interaction between economy and state. They stressed that it is necessary and meaningful to distinguish civil society from both a political society of parties, political organizations and political publics, and an economic society made up of organizations of production and distribution, usually firms, cooperatives, partnerships, and so on. Civil society is composed of organizations and activities that have no primary political or commercial character, and are not motivated by power or profit. In that sense, Splichal

(1999) presented it as conceptually close to the concepts of the publics and the public sphere.

Habermas noted that under certain circumstances, organizations of civil society can become part of the public sphere, "acquire influence in the public, have an effect on the parliamentary complex through its own public opinions, and compel the political system to switch over to the official circulation of power" (Welton, 2001).

Nanz and Steffek (2004) argued that actors from organized civil society play an important role in the creation of a public sphere. They have the potential to act as a discursive interface between international organizations and a global citizenry. Their role is to monitor policymaking in these institutions, to bring citizens' concerns into their deliberations and to empower marginalized groups so that they too may participate effectively in global politics.

2.4.3 Public Officials

These comprise the government, the parliament, the judiciary, and the political administration. The governmental system is responsible for aggregating and articulating common goals, the policy-making process, and the implementation of collectively binding decisions (Walter, 2014).

"Although state authority is, so to speak, the executor of the political public sphere, it is not a part of it" (Habermas et al., 1974). However, Odugbemi (2008) argued that a democratic public sphere is a critical part of the architecture of good governance. She stressed that good governance has the capacity, and even the obligation, to be an actor in the public sphere. In the democratic public sphere, public authorities listen to the public and determine the public will, while communicating their own issues and positions.

2.4.4 The Media

Habermas stressed the requirement of specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it in a large public body: "Today, newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere" (Habermas et al., 1974). Downey and Fenton (2003) argued that Internet has been "hailed as the saviour of alternative or radical media and indeed politics, perfectly matched for the widely-dispersed resistance of culture jammers and radical political protesters by both theorists and activists".

The significance of the advent of the Internet stems from the fact that it defies boundaries and challenges governmental media censorship, while providing an alternative voice For

traditional media outlets, which echo official, governmental policies and views (Salmon et al., 2010). Therefore, it provides invaluable opportunities for public mobilization across borders.

Klein (2000) argued that the internet facilitates international communication between NGOs, thus allowing protesters to respond at an international level to local and global events, while requiring minimal resources and bureaucracy. Klein goes so far as to claim an elective affinity between the 'anti-globalization' protests and the decentralized, non-hierarchical character of the internet.

"Instead of enabling a public sphere, as print had done in the late 18th century, some argue that the new mass media of the 20th threatened to subvert the public sphere and democracy. Movies, radio and television became large and concentrated industries or government agencies that reached millions of people. They had great propaganda potential to truncate the range ideas in the public sphere and restrict debate" (Butsch, 2007).

2.4.5   Private Actors

Private individuals become part of the public sphere when they come to it to promote public interests. This category contains individuals who are members of the respective political community and are, based on their legal status, entitled to certain rights and duties, to exercise these rights and duties, and to participate in the political community (Walter, 2014).

2.5   Critics of Public Sphere

2.5.1   Access is Guaranteed to All Citizens

The term public sphere denotes the existence of arenas that are autonomous from the political order and accessible to different sectors of society. However, many researchers have reported hegemonic dominance and exclusion in the public spheres studied. In response to Habermas' assertion that participants bracket or leave behind their particular identities when they enter into public debate, Fraser (1990) demonstrated that bracketing identity and status differences merely obscures the power operating in the public sphere and makes it harder for subordinates to overcome inequalities.

She argued that, in societies structured by inequalities, members of dominant groups have many advantages because they have set the spoken and unspoken rules for public speech. Even if access to public arenas is theoretically guaranteed to everyone, individuals are not equal within those spaces. She therefore proposed a model of multiple publics,

consisting of a dominant public sphere and many subaltern counterpublics. By forming subaltern counterpublics, marginal groups can critique the dominant society, without having their own interests and identity compromised or silenced by the exclusionary power exercised by members of the dominant public.

Benhabib (1992) argued that a theory of public sphere cannot simply "ignore" women and be subsequently "corrected by their reinsertion into the picture from which they were missing". Women's absence points to some categorical distortion within these theories. Fraser (1990) also identified the fact that marginalized groups are excluded from a universal public sphere, and thus it was impossible to claim that one group would in fact be inclusive.

2.5.1.1   Counter Public Sphere

In her discussion of the feminist public sphere, Felski (1989), whose term "counterpublic" inspired Fraser's work, described the feminist sphere as "coalitions of overlapping sub-communities, which share common interest in combating gender oppression but which are differentiated not only by class and race positions but often by institutional locations". Like Fraser, Felski described a feminist sphere in relation to a dominant, patriarchal public sphere.

Warner (2002) defined counterpublics to be formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment. "Like all publics, a counterpublic comes into being through an address to indefinite strangers". This is one significant difference between the notion of a counterpublic and the notion of a community or group. But counterpublic discourse also addresses those strangers as being not just anybody; they are socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse, ordinary people are presumed not to want to be mistaken for the kind of person that would participate in this kind of talk, or to be present in this kind of scene.

The historical records, McKee (2005) argued, indicate that there have been distinct public spheres organized around different political beliefs and geographical locations, as well as public spheres for other identity groups (such as Black, Spanish and Jewish people in Western countries). These public spheres have existed throughout modern times, yet something about their status, he noted, is changing in recent times. He suspects that the various public spheres, which always existed, are now more visible to each other than has been the case in the past. Many contemporary theorists have been inspired by Fraser's response to Habermas's articulation of a single public sphere. They simply tend to differentiate multiple publics by group characteristics or group identities, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, race, or nationality. However, some researchers suggest that public spheres should focus on "the ongoing dialogue on public issues" rather than the identity of the group engaged in the discourse.

To help create better descriptions of publics and allow for more comprehensive comparisons between public spheres, Squires (2002) presented an alternative vocabulary for multiple public spheres by exploring the history of the African American public sphere. She introduced a model with three responses *a marginalized public sphere* might produce given existing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. A public can *enclave* itself, hiding counter-hegemonic ideas and strategies in order to survive or avoid sanctions, while internally producing lively debate and planning. It is also possible to create a *counterpublic*, which can engage in debate with wider publics to test ideas and perhaps utilize traditional social movement tactics (boycotts, civil disobedience). She called the third response *satellite public sphere*, a public that seeks separation from other publics for reasons other than oppressive relations but is involved in wider public discourses from time to time.

2.5.2 Free and Rational Discussions

2.5.2.1 Partisan Economic Forces

Habermas (1962) conceived the public sphere in the 18th century in Europe as a bourgeois phenomenon, arising from the growing autonomy of professional classes (capitalist achievers) from both state and religious power. Starting with salon-type debate, the public sphere evolved gradually to become a political arena, in which public opinion was formed and contested. However, this idealized arena, in which debates were held placing the state under critical scrutiny, began to diminish in the 20th century under the weight of self-interested capitalist intrusion. News was itself 'commodified' and the state began to exploit the infrastructure of communication to influence the realm of public communication for its own benefit. The autonomy of the public sphere was compromised, as biased (mis)information was "aimed at the public by the capitalist state. However, some groups could remain autonomous from capitalist interests. Thus the quality of the information in the public sphere became of less value and the debate less rational and more "interested". Nonetheless the public sphere still held government accountable (Murphy, 2009).

Emerging since the 90s, the networked information economy with the World Wide Web, blogs, wikis, and other social media, has benefited the production of the public sphere. Internetbased media offer insights and commentary of a rather different character than does the mass media, which are often dominated by conventional views considered to be accepted by the public, and by the views of their owners. The new media are set up by individuals or NGOs that have another view of issues, and that often present their case in unconventional and nonjournalistic ways. "Many of the sites and blogs are neither dependent on advertising nor do they express mainstream tastes and opinions, since the motivation for publishing is anchored in personal engagement" (Benkler, 2006).

2.5.2.2 Religion and Public Sphere

The Reformation in Europe, which took place at the end of the 16th century, broke apart the feudal authorities (church, princes and nobility) into private elements on the one hand and into public on the other (Habermas,1989). The link to divine authority that the church represented, that is, religion, was then considered a private issue. Although "secularization theory has received severe criticism e.g. (Asad, 2003; Casanova, 2011; Martin, 1979), the decline of religion in the public sphere continues to be widely taken for granted as an intrinsic feature of modern times in public debate and in the media (Meyer and Moors, 2005).

Habermas's emphasis on the rational aspects of the public sphere overlooks the importance of religious identities in the creation and organization of the public sphere. The role of religious identities in the production of the public sphere became evident with the rise of "public religions", that is, of religious communities engaged in what Jos Casanova defined as the "repoliticization of the private religious and moral spheres and renormativization of the public economic and political spheres". This process of "deprivatization" happened within various religious traditions, including Islam, and in societies with different cultural, political, and economic realities, such as the United States, Brazil, and in Middle Eastern societies (Casanova, 2011). "Religion is neither merely private, for instance, nor purely irrational. And the public sphere is neither a realm of straightforward rational deliberation nor a smooth space of unforced assent. Yet these understandings of both religion and public life have long been pervasive, there has been an increasing interventions challenging researchers to reconsider their most basic categories of research, analysis, and critique" (Butler, 2011). However, the religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, unexpected, political importance.

The recent work of Habermas, and the public debate on the role of religion in the public sphere (Habermas, 2006), which featured the prominent philosophers and practitioners Judith Butler, Jrgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Cornel West, have steered the topic for many academic works (Butler, 2011; Mendieta and VanAntwerpen, 2011). As reported in Butler (2011), Habermas devotes a substantial part of his argument to outlining historical patterns of the religious and democratic legitimization of political affairs. According to Habermas, the resulting state of affairs does not discriminate against religious citizens. In recognition of the fact that religion has not withered under the pressures of modernization, Habermas has increasingly stressed the importance of cultivating a "post-secular" stance, an approach that both reckons with the continuing global vitality of religion and emphasizes the importance of "translating" the ethical insights of religious traditions with a view to their incorporation into a "post-metaphysical" philosophical perspective. Broadly agreeing with Habermas, Charles Taylor presented several significant elaborations of arguments already proposed by Habermas. Taylor

does not question the secular nature of the democratic state, yet he argues strongly for the reconceptualization of the term secularism. Butler elaborates this topic by arguing that practical battle lines do not need to be drawn between the religious and the secular or between public and private. The relationship between religion and the public sphere and the political arena can be understood differently according to its type. Therefore, one has to observe how the boundaries between public and private affairs are defined (constructed), what type of religion is helping to define these boundaries, what types of religion are limited to the private sphere, and what kinds of religious discourses exist comfortably and legitimately in the public sphere. While Judith Butler discussed the contestability of these boundaries by focusing on the relationship between religion and nationalism, Cornel West concentrated on the right- and left-wing political connections of religion. However, both Judith Butler and Cornel West paid critical attention to particular situations where religio-political discourse has been monopolized by religious and political elites.

2.6   Online Public Sphere

A number of researchers have been asking whether the Internet will have, or is already having, an impact on the public sphere and if so, what the attributes of this impact are. The query about the impact of the Internet on the public sphere has evolved from the question of whether the traditional mass media enhance or hinder democracy. This discourse adds the study of the Internet and the public sphere to the research agendas of mainstream political studies.

This work does not provide a complete review of the basic theoretical structure of the public sphere and its discourse from various disciplines. Instead, this work will provide an overview of some elements of the definitions that justify using it as a theoretical base to answer the open questions in the literature of online movements in the Arab world. The following sections outline the main themes of discussion around the validity of claiming the transformation of the public sphere to the new media and the characteristics of this new sphere, followed by an overview of the literature on the study of this concept, and criteria that draw from Habermas's original conception and his critics.

The cultural theorist Poster (1997) offered a sophisticated assessment of the potential of the new media to redefine culture and politics. He argued that the age of the public sphere as face-to-face talk is clearly over, and the question of democracy must henceforth take into account new forms of electronically mediated discourse.

The claims about the digital transformation of the public sphere stem from the fact that the new technologies enable many-to-many communication (whereas the old media are based on one-to-many broadcast technologies), cut down the costs of acquiring vast amounts of information, and decrease the costs of sharing all sorts of opinions, including

political ones (Benkler, 2006; Shirky, 2009). The pre-Internet public sphere offers too few speakers and too narrow a range of messages (Fung et al., 2013).

Papacharissi (2009) argued that the Internet, as a tool, does not contain the agency to affect social change. Individuals, on the other hand, possess differing levels of agency, based on which, they can employ the Internet to varying end effects, and gratification. She suggested avoiding the deterministic viewpoint that online technologies are able to, on their own, "make or break" a public sphere. She also recommended understanding that technologies frequently embed assumptions about their potential uses, which can be traced back to the political, cultural, social, and economic environment that brings them to life. Therefore, it is not the nature of technologies themselves, but rather, the discourse that surrounds them, that guides how these technologies are appropriated by society.

Poor (2005) stated that public spheres do exist on the Internet, and drew from Habermas's original conception four criteria to identify an online public sphere:

1. Public spheres are spaces of discourse, often mediated.

2. Public spheres often allow for new, previously excluded, discussants.

3. Issues discussed are often political in nature.

4. Ideas are judged on their merit, not by the standing of the speaker.

He also claimed that there is no radically different form of public merely because the public is online. An online public sphere is still a form of public sphere, online or not, and so must meet basic public sphere criteria. Using a case study of the Slashdot website, he showed how it functions as a public sphere.

Another conceptualization of an online public sphere "Web sphere" was offered by Foot and Schneider (2002). Unlike the online public sphere, which is thought to be situated in a single site, "Web sphere" spans multiple sites and its boundaries are dynamic, in the sense that the sites that form it are continuously changing. They defined their sphere as: "A hyperlinked set of dynamically defined digital resources spanning multiple websites relevant to a central theme or 'object'. A shared object-orientation and a temporal framework delimit the boundaries of a Web sphere".

2.6.1 Comparison with Old Media

It was widely anticipated that, with the advent of the Internet, the public debates in general would experience a shift towards the idealized participatory model of the public sphere and would lead to more inclusive public debates with diverse arguments.

Gerhards and Schäfer (2010) evaluated these expectations empirically by comparing "old" media in Germany and the USA with Internet-based communication structured by search engines. Focusing on the debate surrounding human genome research, they analysed whether Internet communication is "better" than print media communication in the sense that it better corresponds to the demands of the participatory model. They found only minimal evidence to support the idea that the Internet is a better communication space compared to print media. In both media, communication is dominated by (bio- and natural-) scientific actors; popular inclusion does not occur. Evaluations are largely one-sided and affirmative towards human genome research in both the print media and the Internet. Multiple studies on various political and scientific issues have come to the same conclusion, ranging from genetically modified food (Rucht et al., 2008) to various political topics in an international comparison.

2.6.2   Global Online Public Sphere

From utopian perspectives, the online public sphere would be able to bring people across the world together, bypassing geographic and identity boundaries. However, some are sceptical about the prospect of disparate groups getting along. They presume that the Internet carries the promise of bringing people together, but also bears the risk of scattering them in different directions. Benkler (2006) used the term 'Babel objection' to refer to the idea of the 'Tower of Babel' biblical story, where people dispersed because they could not speak each other's language. He employed this analogy to refute the thought that if everyone was free to read whatever they want, there would be no shared set of stories that people care about, so the possibility of civic discourse on a common set of understood core stories, core problems and core potential solutions, would be lost. He argued that this idea is proven false for a variety of reasons. Bennett and Entman (2000) also confirmed what had been previously predicted. The development of a global economy, and of political institutions that operate at supranational level, calls for the creation of a global public sphere. They explored how the Internet has modified our understanding of the issues involved in that challenge.

2.6.3   Online Discussions

Many observers have praised online political discussion for its rationality and diversity, claiming that anonymity online assists one to overcome identity boundaries and communicate more freely and openly, and this enables a more enlightened exchange of ideas. However, Poster (1995) addressed the issue of an Internet community through chat identities: "True, the Net allows people to talk as equals. But rational argument rarely prevails, and achieving consensus is seen as impossible ... It creates the profusion of different views ... The conditions that encourage compromise, the hallmark of

the democratic political process, are lacking online. On the Internet, since identities are mobile, dissent is encouraged, and 'normal' status markers are absent; it is a very different social 'space' from that of the public sphere ... But that does not necessarily make it incompatible with political thought". Papacharissi (2002b) suggested that online communication is about venting emotion and expressing what Abramson et al. (1990) referred to as 'hasty opinions', rather than rational and focused discourse. Gerhards and Schäfer (2010) noted that they expect that the Internet is a better communication space compared with print media when topics analysed deviate from societally established moral consensus. They anticipate taboo topics, such as homosexuality in some countries, certain sexual preferences, but also blasphemy, racism, etc., may be communicated more freely in the Internet, as this medium allows for anonymity and is less controllable.

2.6.4 The Virtual Sphere

Scholarly examinations of the internet as a public sphere conclude that online digital technologies create a public space, but do not inevitably enable a public sphere. A new public space is not synonymous with a new public sphere, in that a virtual space simply enhances discussion; a virtual sphere should enhance democracy (Papacharissi, 2008). Papacharissi (2008) argues that it is not online technologies that fail the public sphere test; rather it could be the other around. This does not necessarily suggest a failure of the online political apparatus; it could merely suggest that the language we use to describe online technologies routinely underestimates their potential. She introduces three primary conditions that prohibit the transition from public space to public sphere:

1. Access to Information

   Enhancing access to information, enabled by online media, does not directly lead to increases in political participation, or greater civic engagement, or trust in political process(Bimber, 2001). The online public space can be enjoyed only by the select few who have access to it, thus concealing an illusion of an open public sphere (Williams and Pavlik, 2013). The variation of global digital diffusion might make it more appropriate to discuss local, regional or national public spheres over a global public sphere. Moreover, while digitally enabling citizens(Everts, 1989), online media simultaneously reproduce class, gender and race inequalities of the offline public sphere (Hill and Hughes, 1998). Finally, the information access the internet provides also typically results in entertainment uses of the medium (V. Shah, 2001), the public sphere relevance of which is arguable (Dahlgren, 2005).

2. Reciprocity of communication

   The technological potential for global communication does not ensure that people from different cultural backgrounds will also be more understanding of each other

e.g.,(Hill and Hughes, 1998). The deliberative model may either be globalized or tribalized, according to the motivations of the political actors that put it to use. Online discussion of public affairs can connect citizens sharing similar motivations but may also reproduce and magnify cultural disparities e.g. (Mitra, 1997). Moreover, the collective use of the internet can lead to greater political participation, but only when it is characterized by trust and reciprocity e.g. (Kobayashi et al., 2006).

3. Commercialization

   In a study aiming at measuring up to the public sphere ideal, Dahlgren (2005) demonstrated how online democracy projects, while partially successful, ultimately are unable to attract a sizable portion of the population and are frequently "marginalized by commercial sites, virtual communities of common interest, and liberal individualist political practices" .

   The internet is unable to single-handedly "produce political culture when it does not exist in society at large" (McChesney, 1996). The content featured online has yet to become distinct from that provided by traditional mass media or to draw in the average citizen in the manner traditional media do (Bimber and Davis, 2003). Finally, through collaboration and mergers with media conglomerates, creative factions of the internet are colonized by the commercial concerns that standardize the content of traditional media (Davis, 1999).

2.7 Features of the Online Spaces of Facebook

2.7.1 The structural features of Facebook

When we address the structure of a social network, we mean the in-built criteria governing connections between accounts in a social media platform.

The structural features of online spaces influence self-presentation and expression (Dominick, 1999; Walker, 2000; Papacharissi, 2002a) and are employed to foster connection-sharing, social capital generation and effective communication (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Ellison et al., 2007).

In an attempt to keep Facebook relevant, many new features and updates have been developed since its launch in 2004. For example, in 2009 a Like button was introduced for users to positively interact with posts, and in 2011 a video call feature was added to allow face-to-face calls with other users (Facebook, 2016). Later, "reactions" as an adaptation of the "Like" button was introduced where users are able to efficiently express how they feel about certain posts through one simple touch (Facebook, 2016).

The platforms digital architecture enable, constrain, and shape user behavior in the virtual space where the political communication is mediated (Bossetta, 2018). Therefore, the ways media industries are organised and financed and the implications this has for communication activities are no longer avoidable concerns (Hardy, 2014).

2.7.2   The Political Economy of Facebook

In order to outline a political economy of Facebook, Cohen (2008) provided an attempt to draw attention to the underlying economic relations that structure the website, and the way in which the site fits into larger patterns of contemporary capitalist development. He argues that although there is a shift away, web 2.0 has presented from "old top-down media models", there remains "continuity through change: Facebook continues familiar models of extensive commodification". There is a move away from a more passive conception of the audience commodity, However, it demonstrates the continuous march of capitalism into cyberspace. While on commercial broadcasting, audiences conduct labour that creates an audience commodity (Smythe, 1977), on corporate social media we can speak of a big data commodity produced by Internet prosumers digital labour (Fuchs, 2017).

Looking backward at divisions of labor and the process of user labor, Gehl (2014) reveals the histories and contexts of social media sites, such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter. Using case studies, he illustrates how binary "Like" consumer choices hide surveillance systems that rely on users to build content for site owners who make money selling user data, and that promote a culture of anxiety and immediacy over depth.

Despite the increasing interest in political campaigning on social media, few studies have questioned how a platforms design features influence political actors communication strategies (Bossetta, 2018). Bossetta (2018) attributes this oversight to scholars penchant for treating social media as a single media genre when, in fact, these platforms exhibit significant differences in their network structures, functionalities, algorithms, and datafication models.

Most social media allow users to establish connections with organizations, communities and public figures. Such high-resource actors typically maintain accounts with different interface and tools compared to the average user (e.g., Public Pages on Facebook or Business Profiles on Instagram)(Bossetta, 2018). In that context, Facebook became prominent as the architectural equivalent of a glasshouse, with a publicly open structure, looser behavioral norms and an abundance of tools that members use to leave cues for each other (Papacharissi, 2009).

By using emergent technologies in order to help to produce new social relations and forms of political possibility, a wide diversity of individuals and groups have materialized their culture as a vital new space of politics (Kahn and Kellner, 2004).

Evidence of the existence of echo chambers within this new space has been offered in many works that address specific casestudies i.e (Quattrociocchi et al., 2016; Del Vicario et al., 2016; Zollo et al., 2017). Discussion within like-minded people seems to negatively influence users emotions and to enforce group polarization (Sunstein, 2002; Zollo et al., 2015).

2.8 The Arab Public Sphere

Although the concept of the public sphere has spawned a wide range of critical analyses across a wide range of disciplines, it has been widely viewed as one of the most useful conceptual tools for understanding cultural and political practices, not only from outside the European spheres, but also over long periods of time in which the internal dynamics of other civilizations become visible. The next section explores the literature that attempts to use Habermas's vision as a reference for comparison with the European experience, and to investigate whether the recent changes in Arab publics should be labelled as emergence or transformation of the Arab public sphere.

2.8.1 Comparison with Habermas's Public Sphere

Lynch (2015) insists that the idea of Arab public sphere appears in the rhetoric that invoked Arab unity during the peak era of Pan-Arabism in the 1950s. Arab nationalists dreamed of a unified Arab nation and shared space for political communication cultivated in public identities. However, it would be difficult to consider it an actual Habermas public sphere. Participation was limited to state mouthpieces such as Cairo's Voice of the Arabs radio broadcasts, with virtually no opportunity for critical engagement or debate in which the public could discuss political matters that affected itthe factors stressed by Habermas. Murphy (2009) agreed that the Arab countries had no obvious parallel experience to that of democratic Europe, which allowed a public sphere to exist. Under authoritarian regimes of the relatively new nation-states during the second half of the 20th century, civil society became severely limited, captive, if it even existed. Moreover, the Arab countries became notorious for censorship and curtailment of free debate, and public scrutiny of government. The tribal, familial, sectarian, religious, or patrimonial affiliations have not been superseded in determining the relationship of the individual to the state in the modern Arab region.

The notion of distinct public and private arenas, therefore, has not been firmly embedded in the region. Not only was it difficult to identify a public, so too was the possible boundary between the public and the private, which might have defined it. However, Murphy reported examples of public political debates that took place in the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century. The introduction of print news inspired public

discussions "about civilization, political legitimacy, social reform, broadening of (previously traditional) elites to include the professional classes". However, unlike Habermas's public sphere, the discussions, although fundamentally about the nature of the political community itself, revolved around the inability to stand up to the weakening or predatory influences of external communities (either the Ottoman Porte, or the European colonial powers). On the other hand, some researchers have predicted a new Arab public sphere and striven to grasp its properties and real dynamics.

Salvatore (2007) has revealed concerns that the Western Habermasian notion of public sphere could not easily apply to the Arab Muslim world, mainly because Habermas significantly underplayed the role of religious traditions in its formation. Khamis and Sisler (2010) denotes the oscillating new "Arab cyberscape" between the bipolar opposites of regionalization and globalization, traditionalism and modernity, as well as conformity and resistance."

In "The new Arab public sphere", Ayish (2008) emphasized the need to rethink the concept of public sphere for contemporary national and transnational politics when applied to non-Western settings. He harnesses the notion of "Islamocracy" or Islamic democracy to put forward a new public sphere perspective that draws on both Islamic moral values and contemporary political practices. The author, suggested that this synthesis approach holds great promise both for inter-Arab world communications, as well as for dialogue with other cultures, based on mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence. Mazrui (2003) discerned the proposed public sphere as intellectually grounded in Arab-Islamic morality and modern political practices, in the same way that Scandinavians combine liberal democracy with socialist principles, and the English combined a formal Protestant theocracy with a practical liberal democracy. There is no consensus among researchers on whether the recent changes in Arab publics should be labelled as emergence or transformation of the Arab public sphere. However, they all agree that the advance of the new technologies is promising in terms of potential transformations in Arab societies.

2.8.2 Promising Public Spheres

Thorsen and Sreedharan (2019) argues that the idea of public sphere, as posited by Habermas (1989), exists but only in a restricted form in Arab countries. The introduction of satellite television and Web-based communications in traditional society are often considered manifestations of promising public spheres (Zayani, 2008). Therefore, the study of the social and political transformations that took place in the Arab world as an effect of the advance of these technologies predated the 'Arab Spring'.

The Arab world has decades of experience with political argumentation at the transnational level (Lynch, 2003) and has succeeded in creating a less constrained public sphere

transnationally. However, the authoritarian nature of the governments and their rigid controls over the media have constrained the domestic space for debate within these countries considerably.

The traditional public sphere are gender-restricted to males and there are restrictive policies on the mass media, which are mainly owned by the state or members of the ruling elite (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019).

Lynch (2015) noted that the Arab uprising proved conclusively that the generational transformation associated with information and communications technology mattered. But how it mattered remains very much in question. Emancipatory narratives of the inevitable democratizing effects of empowered, wired, publics are difficult to sustain. The Arab states no longer have a monopoly on media communication, either in their production, in content, or in determining viewer reception. Murphy (2009) argued that this is clear evidence of an evolving public and its ability to formulate opinion.

Pointing to the role social media has played in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring, Howard et al. (2011) argues that a spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground. He stresses that social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders.

In the wider Islamic context, Anderson (2003) agreed that by some measures a new public space facilitated by the Web enables a new class of interpreters to address, and thereby to reframe, Islam's authority and expression for those like themselves and others who come there.

The study of the public sphere revolves around the idea of participatory democracy, and how public opinion becomes political action. A new public sphere will fundamentally change the conditions of political possibility, but the direction of that change remains uncertain (Lynch, 2011). Lynch (2011) asserts that technology is only one of many drivers of this change, and states are able to mobilize those technologies to their own end.

Both the investigation of the historical manifestations of the Arab public sphere, and the inspection of the current events, have not shown enough evidence to confirm the existence of the Arab public sphere in such a sense. However, examining the existence and the dynamics of the arenas online, that are autonomous from the political order and accessible to different sectors of society, can provide a starting point to validate its democratizing effects on the promising public spheres.

2.8.3   Arab Publics

The 'Arab Spring' political event has brought Arab publics to a point of focus. Yet they are studied as a manifestation of the potential the new technology can exert on a public.

The new Arab publics, Lynch (2012) argued, have brought forward a deluge of new voices who must be heeded, engaged, and incorporated into everything which scholars of the region do. By addressing the participants in the Arab public sphere who generated the recent political events as fully equal partners in the production of knowledge about the region, Lynch bypassed the question of whether these publics are forming a public sphere in Habermas's sense.

One the other hand, Sreberny (2000) criticized the analysis that builds on Habermas's notion of the public sphere because it manifests an inauthentic nostalgia for the heyday of the public sphere as a freely operating and protected zone of public debate. She claimed that this nostalgia is now challenged by a feminist critique of the patriarchal limitations of the public sphere, as well as by class and race critiques, of who controls access to participate in the public sphere. She pointed out cases in the Middle East where the public sphere is "weakly developed because of overweening state power" and where it is also a "male-dominated social space". She stressed the gender perspective to understand the public in Middle East, since she perceives that gender is a key marker of potential cultural instability and democratization. "In contexts where women's lives are still heavily bounded by religious culture, patriarchal values, and sheer habit, the force of mediated culture, especially images, which travels through public space into private living-rooms may be far greater than elsewhere. It is precisely the family orientation of Arab-Middle Eastern life, with parents and children viewing and discussing together, that makes the family a potential cauldron of conflict between generations and between genders, with pressures for greater individuation, autonomy and self-determination".

2.8.4   Social Networks and the Public Sphere in the Arab World

Social networks do not work in isolation from the transformations of the public sphere within which they operate, rather they constitute one of its spaces (Hammami, 2016). Therefore, reviewing the structural conditions in different countries matters. According to the "Arab Social Media Report" by the Dubai School of Government, Facebook had a penetration rate of 22.49% in Tunisia, and 7.66% in Egypt. Twitter had a penetration rate of 0.34% in Tunisia, and 0.15 % in Egypt (Sabadello, 2011), in spring 2011, when the uprisings happened in these countries. That means a majority of their population was not actually connected to these online social networks.

In his attempt to contextualize the use of Facebook in Tunisia,Hammami (2016) suggests considering three distinct phases of the continuous interaction between the net and its social context. In the first phase, Facebook was a public space for the representation of social life, and interacted in a unique way with the spaces of the Tunisian public sphere. In this phase, he denotes, the political uses of Facebook were limited. In the second phase, Facebook embraced a variety of unique forms of dissident expression that made it a revolutionary scene. Hammami argues that this phase heralded the politicization of

the entire Facebook network. Facebook became a plural multi-dimensional public space in the third phase, a space for the representation of social life on the one hand, and for engagement in political life on the other, a space that interacted in new modes with the public sphere and thus transformed it.

2.8.5   Identities

As the Ottoman Empire began to lose its hold on the Middle East to European powers, the concept of Arab unity was resurrected by two competing ideologies: Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism (Aljazeera, 2008).

Arab nationalism is a thematic subject in Middle Eastern studies. The tensions between the universalism of Islam and the particularities of Arab nationalism\Pan-Arabism has been a major focus of interest (Tibi, 1997). Vatikiotis (1986) reported a consensus among both Middle Eastern and Western students of the Middle East that Arab nationalism, as an ideological premise of politics and policy in Arab countries, was devalued after 1967 and its supreme goal of Arab unity has been abandoned.

Ajami (1978) claimed that Arabism has dominated the political consciousness of modern Arabs. However, in 1978 the anticipated that it is "nearing its end, if it is not already a thing of the past". Only a small fraction of active Islamist or pan-Arab movements operate on a purely transnational level (Frisch, 2010).

PanArabism and PanIslamism continue to exert real influence as cultural forces, while the independent state as part of a framework of interstate relations constituted according to the norms of international law, dominates the politics of the region (Mellon, 2002).

The Arab Uprisings have affected academic debates about the importance of Arab identity in regional and domestic politics. Phillips (2014) explored the recent changes that occurred to identities in the region: "Does the spreading of protest from one Arab state to another in 2011 indicate Arabism's continued salience, or does the subsequent rise of regional sectarianism represent its death-knell?"; "Are older debates between 'New Arabists' and 'post-Arabists' still relevant or is a new framework needed that better reflects the post-2011 Arab world?"

However, the rise of political Islam as a result of these social-political upheavals has received significant concern in most of the debates about the future of the region. Bradley (2012) argued that it is not liberalism, democracy, and pluralism that will win, but instead radical Islam. He predicts the future of the region in his book, *After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked the Middle East Revolts*. This met the expectation of

Ismail (2007) and made her explore the political implications of Muslim public self-presentation and forms of self-fashioning associated with the ongoing processes of re-Islamisation in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority societies. Her work sketched how projections of the Muslim public self contribute to a refiguring of the public sphere.

Phillips (2014) noted that the transnational Arab public sphere continues to exist, as does the Arab League; however, it is weak. He saw that there is a challenge for scholars to identify how and whether new structures may serve to make Arabism relevant again or whether its current weakness is permanent.

2.9   Islamic Public Sphere

There is an overlap between the notions of Arab and Muslim public spheres (Zayani, 2008). The research on the role of new media in the Arab world often entangles with broader research concerning the Middle East and/or the Muslim world in general (Khamis and Sisler, 2010). Many prominent Islamic websites belong to Arab countries, so they are not only part of the emerging "Muslim public sphere", they also form an inseparable part of the Arab media landscape (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003a). The term "ummah" usually used to refer to multinational Islamic public or "faith community". It refers to "past and present generations of Muslims, who are dispersed over various spatial locations and temporal periods, but who are united by embracing the same faith " (El-Nawawy, 2009). This term has evolved to the new concept of the "cyber ummah" or the "virtual ummah" in cyberspace ,which could be best defined as the Islamic community in cyberspace (Schmidt, 2005; Mandaville, 2001). The introduction of the Internet has made instructional changes in such community in some parts of the Muslim world. The proliferation of actors able to assert a public role leads to a fragmentation of authority, and it increases the numbers of persons involved in creating and sustaining a religious-civil public sphere (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003b). The introduction of the Internet has helped in redefining the "private" and "public" spheres and crossing the divide between them, it also provides important tools to traditionally marginalized social groups and minorities to be seen and heard in the public sphere. Mernissi (2006) argued that the introduction of the Internet in some parts of the Muslim world has "destroyed the frontier that divided the universe into a sheltered private arena, where women and children were supposed to be protected, and a public one where adult males exercised their presumed problem-solving authority." Likewise, in her research on the websites issuing fatwa, Sisler (2007) found that the anonymity of the Internet blurs the clear division between public and private spheres and effectively creates a space where women can freely address and publicly discuss even the most intimate issues related to Islam and Islamic law, on the one hand, as well as the most intimate details of their marital lives, and even their sexuality, on the other hand. Furthermore, Samin (2008)

found that Internet bulletin boards in Saudi Arabia can act as a "voice box for empowering the marginalized Saudi Shiite minority", as well as allowing the expression and vocalization of long silenced female voices. Thus, his study revealed that these Internet bulletin boards can largely act as vehicles for resisting "tribal exclusion and gender segregation", although, as he confirms, they can serve as a mechanism for reinforcing pre-existing norms within "newly networked traditional communities" simultaneously (Samin, 2008).

2.10   Conclusion

Habermas's conception of the public sphere has been subject to criticism from those of various backgrounds and different academic fields. This ideal of the public sphere has never been fully achieved by most accounts. However, these critics have pushed the boundaries of the original theoretical model that describe the bourgeois society of 18th century Europe to make it more applicable to cases that span time and geography.

The whole corpus of related studies that has been spawned around the intricate concept of public sphere provides a framework to describe the publics online and examine the visibility of various factors that indicate the emergence of new public sphere. This questions the claim that new voices were enabled, by the advance of online social networks, to contribute to political changes in Arab countries by forming a new public sphere online.

Critics of the concept have paved the way for investigating Arab women's publics online during and after the 'Arab Spring', to develop and enrich the understanding of the criteria arising from Habermas's original concept and their relationship to democratization theory.

Chapter 3

Women Spheres

3.1 The Notion of Women's Sphere

The notion of Women's sphere was reportedly used in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, 'Democracy in America' (1840). de Tocqueville provided the physical image (the circle) and the interpretation (that it was a limiting boundary on choices) that would continue to characterize the metaphor. Rediscovered and widely reprinted in the years after World War II, de Tocqueville's work alluded to the separation of male and female spheres in the course of his contrasting portraits of young, middle-class, American women. He reported the impairment of patriarchal authority which left young women with a high degree of independence, and encouraged a high degree of self-confidence. Yet when one of those same young women married, de Tocqueville reported, "the inexorable opinion of the public carefully circumscribes her within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties and forbids her to step beyond it" (De Tocqueville, 2003).

Kerber (1988) notes that the metaphor of the 'sphere' was the figure of speech, the trope, on which historians came to rely when they described women's part in American culture, (reporting on play patterns of children, Erikson (1964) gave the trope of separate spheres a psychological foundation).

3.1.1 From Male/Female Spheres to Public/Private Sphere

The centrality of the 'sphere' metaphor was substantially reinforced by historians writing in the mid-1960s (Welter, 1966; Lerner, 1969). For Lerner, this metaphor related not only to de Tocqueville, but to Friedrich Engels's conceptualization of a dichotomy between public and private modes of life (Kerber, 1988). Engels and Morgan (1978) gave classic expression to the concept of a public/private split, a split in which the home, understood to be a woman's place, was ultimately controlled by a man. "With ... the single

monogamous family household management lost its public character It became a private
service". "General concern about gender inequality in everyday life has given rise to a
number of studies that document asymmetries in the treatment and experience of women
and men, particularly in public places" (Warner, 2002).

3.1.2   Using the Term to Understand Women's Sphere in the Middle East

There has been virtually no debate about the usefulness of the terms 'private' and 'public'
in explaining current women's issues that seem to occupy the media's sensationalist
fascination, such as the revival of veiling in the Middle East. However, Thompson
(2003) argued that dichotomous models of 'public' and 'private' have not served medieval
and early modern women's history well. She stressed the usefulness of these terms as
lenses for historical analysis of women in the region, and she called for more extensive
experimentation with the dichotomies of 'public' and 'private' in historical studies of
gender boundaries in the region. She asserted the importance of the direct interrogation
of the concepts in local historical contexts, and direct scholarly debate about their merits,
to redefine them in truly universal terms, or to identify new conceptual frameworks that
foster comparative and transnational historical understanding. Her investigations of the
tentative, and often unexamined, uses of the terms 'public' and 'private' in historical
studies of gender boundaries revealed that "current gender boundaries in the Middle
East are neither mere imitations of, nor deviations from, European practice. They
refocus our attention on the local historical contexts that have shaped the meanings of
gender boundaries".

By contrast, in her response to the question of "What is 'Private' in the Middle East",
El Guindi (2007) criticized the public-private polarity that became a heuristic paradigm
used to describe gendered social and cultural activities. "A valuation was attached to the
duality: the public domain was described as a highly valued sphere in which men were
active, and the private sphere of women was used interchangeably with the domestic
sphere, a private domain of women less valued universally".

The recent discourse shows a trend towards challenging this dichotomous model by
asking less about the straightforward exclusion of women from the public. than about the
significance of the private. However, reorienting the debate did not prevail, despite the
emerging consensus regarding the unsatisfactory character of the analytic gendering of
public/private space. Yadav (2010) asserted that one must take seriously the possibility
that women – with as many multiple and complicated identities as men – work in the
service of goals that may not be recognized as 'advancing' them as women, but that this
is not necessarily a marker of privateness, tradition, or false consciousness.

3.2   Women's Behaviour in Public Spaces

Goffman's empirical studies, on how behaviours and actions are expected and conform to conventions or behavioural rules that apply in particular spaces, provide a framework for many researchers to rely on when studying women's behaviour in public, e.g. (Day, 2001; Franck and Paxson, 1989; Rosewarne, 2005; Foley et al., 2007) and online behaviour as well, e.g. (Sugiura, 2013; Garcia et al., 2009). Goffman's main interest was in understanding behaviour that occurred in public places and 'regulation', that is how people handle or manage themselves in face-to-face interactions with others. Gardner (1988) discussed critically some of Goffman's work on public places, with regard to how that work represents women's experience in public, and how women's experience changes the notions of public places that Goffman portrayed. Drawing on empirical work, Gardner (1988) concentrated on three areas: the normalized distaste for public places that is encouraged in women by their fear of crime in public, the measures they are informed they must take, and access information the woman discloses that can be used as a clue to her identity and home and, potentially at least, as ammunition for further harassment of her. Gardner (1988) used these areas to illustrate how gender-conscious appraisal is necessary in order to appreciate the character of public places. "Access – in Goffman's sense of openness to and availability for interaction – is an especially salient concept for gender relations. Access information is a related concept, defined as information given in public that can be used to locate an individual at some future time." Gardner's work reported that rules and practices for disclosing access information are not gender neutral among strangers. Women interviewed for her work reported conflicting pressures on them; they desire to remain accessible to others in the limited ways possible to them, and they sometimes want to spark acquaintance with men; but they will always want to remain crime-conscious and not divulge a name or address to a potential criminal. These women also reported that such pressures have given rise to the development of presentational strategies when interacting with strange men.

Women have their own folk practices concerning how to avoid giving one's name. One practice is to be evasive. A woman may give her first name only, give her approximate area of residence but not her address, give the type of work she does but not her place of employment, or indulge in verbal technicalities. Another practice is to give a public name, that is, a false name for use in public places. To do so is to create a different self – a 'situated self' as Goffman would call it – to whom reluctance to disclose information can be attributed (Gardner, 1988).

This might explain the behaviour, as by reported Marcus (1986), of people of 18th century Aleppo, a principal trading centre in Ottoman Syria, where they considered inquiries about female members of a man's household a taboo.

It might also explain the use by some feminist activists of a pen name for their work in the Arab world of that time, e.g. Malak Hifni Nasif (1886-1918), famous for her

pen name *Bahithat alBadiya* (the Inquiring Desert Woman), and Aisha Abd al-Rahman (1913-1998), Egyptian author and professor of literature who published under the pen name *Bint al-Shati* (Daughter of the Riverbank).

3.3   Development of Women's Sphere

Aristotle described Ancient Greek life as divided into two realms: the public realm or the city (polis) in which 'action' was performed, and the private realm, the home (oikos). The mark of the private was not intimacy, as it is in modern times, but biological necessity citeparendt2013human. Some have interpreted his views as confining women to the private realm while men were supposed to occupy the public sphere of the polis. Much work by historians on women was influenced by the Whiggish progressivism, a view which holds that history follows a path of inevitable progression and improvement, and which judges the past in light of the present (Merriam-Webster Online, 2009). This influence presents the past, in the context of women's history, as an inevitable progression towards the suffrage. The concepts of a public/private dichotomy offered ways of addressing women's history that employed social and cultural, as well as political, material (Kerber, 1988).

According to Cott (1997), the feminist political movement of the 19th century grew out of the separation of spheres and took its distinctive shape and interests from that separation.

In her revisionist work in rhetoric and women, Bizzell (1992) reported on the efforts of 19th century American women to gain the right to speak in public on religious and social reform issues, e.g. "Women's speaking in public, namely that women who did so tended to be branded as unchaste, no matter how obviously irreproachable their private lives were". Another aspect of the opposition was the extent to which American men felt personally threatened by women's emergence into the public sphere. "Men seemed to feel that they would be explicitly crowded out by the newly eloquent women".

3.3.1   Arabic Women's Sphere

Thompson (2003) stated that, although legal texts prescribing woman's proper sphere of action seems durable in the Arab world, historians have shown that "the location and function of gender boundaries have shifted over time, especially in response to state-building and class formation". She reported the consensus among historians that the colonial encounter with Europe in the late 19th century caused a profound and explosive shift in the discourses and practices that set gender boundaries. She discerned that the precise nature of the colonial and postcolonial shifts in gender boundaries,

however, remains unclear partly because of historians' poor understanding of pre-colonial boundaries.

Based on her Saudi cases study, Le Renard (2008) also claimed that "the strict segregation of women in Saudi cities cannot be understood as a mere consequence of tradition or conservatism; it has been increasingly implemented as urbanization has progressed and as the modern state's authority has spread over the territory".

As an example, Mernissi (1987) assented to the fundamentalists' claim that education for women has destroyed the traditional boundaries and definitions of space and sex roles. From fundamentalists' conservative perspectives, schooling has dissolved traditional arrangements of space segregation, even in oil-rich countries where education is segregated by sex. Postponing the age of marriage has also forced women to turn pragmatically toward education as a means for self-enhancement.

3.3.1.1   Sexual Segregation and Women's Veiling

Sexual segregation is a tradition of systematic prevention of interaction between men and women not related to each other by either marriage of blood. This tradition divides all social spaces into male and female spaces.

Marcus (1986) found out that people in 18th century Aleppo, a principal trading centre in Ottoman Syria, emphasized physical modesty as a function of enduring sacred and communal values of honour. He noted that "the local Arabic speakers had no word for privacy, and it certainly was not defined as the opposite of public". Instead they insisted on gender segregation and the veiling of women outdoors. What might reveal more about the complexity of their perception on privacy is that they considered inquiries about female members of a man's household a taboo. However, he pointed out that this honourable seclusion of women was an elite ideal only.

Fernea and Fernea (1979) showed that veiling and seclusion can almost always be related to the maintenance of social status. "Historically, only the very rich could afford to seclude their women, and the extreme example of this practice was found among the sultans of pre-revolutionary Turkey. Stories of these secluded women, kept in harems and guarded by eunuchs, formed the basis for much of the Western folklore concerning the nature of male-female relationships in Middle Eastern society. Poor men could not always afford to seclude or veil their women, because the women were needed as productive members of the family economic unit, to work in the fields and in cottage industries. Delta village women in Egypt have never been veiled, nor have the Berber women of North Africa. But this lack of veiling placed poor women in ambiguous situations in relation to strange men. Veiling and purdah not only indicate status and wealth, they also have some religious sanction and protect women from the world outside the home. Purdah delineates private space, distinguishes between the public and private

sectors of society, as does the traditional architecture of the area. Older Middle Eastern houses do not have picture windows facing on the street, nor walks leading invitingly to front doors. Family life is hidden from strangers; behind blank walls may lie courtyards and gardens, refuges from the heat, the cold, the bustle of the outside world, the world of non-kin that is not to be trusted. Outsiders are pointedly excluded. The veil does more than protect its wearers from known and unknown intruders; it can also be used to conceal identity" (Fernea and Fernea, 1979).

The study of Harem, the separate part of a Muslim household, in former times, reserved as 'women's quarters', literally 'something forbidden or kept safe', had intrigued Fatema Mernissi before she switched to the study of the 'digital ummah', where she focuses on the new sexual and political game produced by the new communication technologies' demolition of frontiers. According to her early publications (1987,1991,1997), Harem is a world view where space is sexualized; the private is confused with femininity and the public with masculinity (Mernissi, 2004).

The overlap between male and female areas is regulated by a host of rituals. When a man invites a friend to share a meal at his house, he knocks on his own door and in a loud voice asks the women 'to make way'. The women then run to hide leaving the courtyard free to be crossed by the stranger. The guest will remain with his host in the men's room. Similar rituals surround the trespassing of women into male spaces, which until recently was limited to a very few occasions. The veil is an expression of the invisibility of women on the streets, a male space *par excellence* (Mernissi, 1987). Mernissi (1987) investigated the durable of this tradition by interviewing women. She reported that sexual segregation was seen as a natural part of life by women in their fifties, but merely as an option for women in their thirties. Mernissi interprets this as a period of anomie, of deep confusion and absence of norms that the relations between the sexes are going through.

Based on an examination of popular literature and the media, and the implications of these ideas for the role of women in Egyptian society, Hoffman-Ladd (1987) examined the arguments and concepts surrounding the modesty and segregation of women in contemporary Egypt. "While a woman's modesty is often associated with her segregation from the world of men and hence from the male-dominated public sphere, this is not the case for those who find a high practical value in that it broadcasts a woman's respectability, enabling her to venture into the public sphere without harassment or damage to her reputation, whereas the women who wear Western clothing are often suspected of susceptibility to sexual immorality and are frequently harassed in the street and on public transportation" (Hoffman-Ladd, 1987).

"For women, 'access' primarily means actual or threatened access to their persons. In some cultures, the mere presence of a woman in public can be seen as a clear invitation to access. Middle Eastern cultures especially restrain women's public accessibility because

it is seen as a clear signal of sexual availability" (Gardner, 1988). This has led to a virtual appropriation of the public sphere by men and of the private by women (Minai, 1981), but this split should not be understood to be negative from the point of women's self-development (Abu-Lughod, 1985).

Le Renard (2008) looked positively at preserving such tradition, and asserted that the gender separation implemented in Saudi Arabia led to the development of a female sphere of activities. Publicizing the debates about various problems that Saudi women confront, Le Renard argued, contributed to the strengthening of the categorization of 'Saudi women'. Women have appropriated this segregated organization and reproduce it daily, and on their own terms, by developing their own activities and discourses that are by women, and for women.

3.3.1.2 Literary Salons

An interesting aspect of the women's movement in the Arab world is the cautious role played by female authors, from the privileged upper and middle classes, equipped with private education. Not only did they try to avoid presenting their claims in reactionary terms, but they also tried to prepare the ground for the dissemination and acceptance of their ideas through writing that appealed to the masses, and through the creation of literary salons for winning the sympathy and opinions of male intellectuals (Aslam, 2014).

A more tangible strategy adopted by literary women activists was the revival of literary women's circles or salons, along with the publication of journals. These clubs or salons, as they came to be known, "showed a fairly sophisticated awareness of women's subordination and separation from public life in their respective social and economic backgrounds" (Golley, 2004).

One such salon founded by Princess Nazli Fadil (1853-1913), daughter of Mustafa Fadil, hosted prominent reformers for whom the female question formed the core of their struggle for rejuvenation of Muslims. This salon, according to Khamis (1978), specialized in dealing with the political issues and the debates surging around power issues in the Arab world. Another salon was founded in Egypt in 1912 by the Lebanese poet and writer May Zyadeh (1886-1941). Specializing in literary and social issues, her salon lasted for twenty successive years (1911-1931), and was visited by top intellectuals and political figures. Another salon, founded by Labibah Hashim (1880-1947), focused on women's issues (Belhachmi, 2005). In Iraq, one such club established in 1923, named the Women's Awakening Club (Nadi al-Nahda al- Nisa'iyya), clearly reflected the spirit of that time. In Egypt, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, editor of al-Jarida, published feminists' concerns (Aslam, 2014).

3.3.1.3   Recent Women's Activism in the Middle East

Much has been written to address the problematic environment of the countries in the Middle East that weakens women's legal position and marginalizes their political and economic participation. People in this region might stand for gender equality in education but not in employment. A recent, large-scale survey on Arab attitudes toward knowledge, good governance, and gender equality (UNDP 2003:2), showed that the Arab respondents praised the pursuit of knowledge and condemned authoritarian rule, but they expressed the limits of their democratic aspirations with regard to gender equality and empowerment (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003). So the women in the region have to face a society that supports them in building their capabilities through education but is not ready to accept the utilization of those capabilities. However, researchers on feminism give different perspectives by utilising global feminist theories to understand the challenges that Arab women face in this region, claiming that citizenship has been central to many women's struggles, from suffrage to political quotas to welfare rights (Lister, 1997). In this sense Moghadam (2003) draws attention to what she called "second-class citizenship of women in the Middle East" that lie in patriarchal gender relations, political economy, legal frameworks, and the nature of the state. However, this trend received criticism that the autonomous, rights-bearing citizen is a Western construct, and that citizenship and civil society are patriarchal and capitalistic constructs (Pateman, 2014).

Skalli (2006) argued that women's movements for emancipation in the region have not followed the same path in all countries or have been shaped by the same forces. She stressed that such movements have become more organized in pushing for reforms to legitimate women's full participation in public life and to revise the images and discourses defining women's realities. But these movements were determined by a confluence of forces, the most significant of which are socioeconomic and cultural conditions, state policies, and regional political developments. However, despite existing differences, she saw important commonalities in the continuous struggle to legitimate access to the public sphere and the relentless efforts at participating in defining the terms and conditions of women's own inclusion in this space (Al-Hamad, 2002; Karam, 1997; Moghadam, 2003).

There is no opposition to the rise of Arab women, or their political and social participation in the Arab scene, according to a UN report (United-Nations-Development-Program, 2005); all political forces accept the legal and political equality of women. The problem lies in these forces' implementation of their principles in party and political life. The report confirms that participation by women is weak in all cases, though perhaps greater among dominant ruling parties that rely on mass mobilisation, especially among regimes that do not embrace pluralism, such as Syria and Tunisia. The report cites the Salafite movement to be the only exception to this stance on the rise of women.

This stance is now in decline in many countries but clearly influential in the Arabian Peninsula in general, with differences among the countries.

Many recent works(Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006, 2013; Cooke, 2016) have been dedicated to clarifying women's role in public spaces before and after the contemporary social and political movements in the Arab world. Al-Ali (2012) pointed out that the images of the coverage of the protests in Tunisia and Egypt, were largely of men, later changed to show more women. She argued that it is not only individual women that were given particular media attention, but that women participated side-by-side with men in the protests across the region, and were involved at all levels. She also pointed out that they do not just appear on the scene in 2011, but had been active members for decades in trade unions, political opposition parties, and more informal networks and organizations, that were all instrumental in the recent political developments. Moreover, during the height of the actual protests to oust Ben Ali and Mubarak, women of all generations and social classes were on the streets in large numbers. Notably, in places like Tahrir Square in Cairo, where men and women mingled for weeks in extremely crowded and volatile situations. Many Egyptian women reported that they had never felt as safe and been treated as respectfully as during the time of these protests. This has been reported alongside other cases of female reporters raped in Tahrir Square from United Kingdom, French, and American media (Karatzogianni, 2015).

Otterman (2011) also reported that roughly one quarter of the million protesters who poured into the square each day at the height of the protests, were women. Veiled and unveiled women shouted, fought and slept on the streets alongside men, upending traditional expectations of their behaviour. She noted that the challenge comes afterward in maintaining women's involvement as the nation lurches forward, so that their contribution to the revolution is not forgotten. Egyptian women were mobilizing, even after the revolution, to ensure a gender-inclusive democracy that provides them with full social and political rights, including the right to run for presidential elections, and are insisting on constitutional reforms that safeguard these rights, amid concerns by women activists that the post-revolution committee revising the constitution is all male (Krajeski, 2011). Johansson-Nogués (2013) explored the presence of women in the political transition processes that followed the fall of the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and found that, unlike the expectations of an equitable role, established women's rights are increasingly under attack and violence against women is on the rise.

3.3.2   Online Places for Women

"When a space becomes more than the sum of its parts, it becomes a place". The goals of place-making are to invite greater interactions among people and to foster communities that are more socially, physically, and economically viable (Anderson, 2013).

In an environment that gives every user the same privileges, would Arab women use fewer privileges to present themselves or restrict their activities as if they were second-class users? This environment is geolocation-blind. It does not put any constraints on its users on the basis of their location or their national identity, so the variation in the forces confronted by Arab women's activism in different countries will be obscured online. Although women's movements were determined in reality by a confluence of forces, tracing these forces would add too much complexity to this study. Studying Arab women as if all they come from one country will permit the comparison of offline activism with the online one.

Online spaces provide new places for diverse and critical views of contemporary life in the region, and for putting forward diverse role models from across the political, social, economic, and religious spectrum, as well as for expressing diverse opinions on issues pertaining to everyday life. In these new communicative spaces, public discussion is substantially rising about – so far – taboo subjects concerning women, such as domestic violence, Islamic law, and honour killing (Matar, 2007). Elsadda (2010) observed in these online spaces an emerging literary public sphere, or 'competing counterpublics', that are breaking the monopoly of mainstream literary spaces and changing tastes. She claimed that cyberspace has been particularly conducive to the participation of women in the literary field, and poses questions about the implications of the emergence of cyber counterpublics on the Arab literary establishment and the canon of Arabic literature.

The community of female 'bloggers' was reported in Nouraie-Simone (2014) as a space where discussions range from personal likes/dislikes to gender politics and feminist aspirations. With the online identity "lady sun", a 24 year-old woman launched the first blog, in November 2001. The community of women bloggers includes Tehran-based journalists, NGO activists, and literary and social critics.

The struggle to have such 'internal public spaces' open up and extend to the larger public sphere of the nation state is central to the women's movement and activism in the region (Skalli, 2006).

3.3.2.1   Gendered Internet Use Across Generations

Among the many offline inequalities that are mirrored online is the difference between men and women. Research shows that, over the first decade of the 21st century, gender differences in access to the internet have decreased and became very small in countries such as Britain and the US (Dutton and Helsper, 2007; Fallows, 2005). As younger generations show smaller gender differences in ICT use (Ono and Zavodny, 2003), the assumption that these differences are generational and thus temporal became presented. Helsper (2010) showed that generation is neither the only, nor the most important, predictor of gender differences in internet use. Life stage (measured as employment and

marital status) influenced the differences between men and women or had an independent effect for most of the online activities studied. Time is therefore unlikely to 'heal' all gender divides. Offline gender roles influence online behaviour as they do other behaviour, and this is likely to continue even when the current technology-savvy generation grows older. In the case of Arabic women, this could justify considering the influence of the cultural gender roles over other factors.

3.3.2.2 Gender Differences in Using Social Networks

In order to draw conclusions about women in the Middle East, it is useful to keep in mind cross-cultural research on gender differences when using online social networks. "Youth are sharing more personal information on their profiles than in the past. They choose private settings for Facebook, but share with large networks of friends" (Lenhart et al., 2009). "Girls are also more likely than boys (37% vs. 23%) to be Facebook friends with coaches or teachers, the only category of Facebook friends where boys and girls differ. Boys and girls report similar levels of confidence in managing the privacy controls on their Facebook profile" (Lenhart et al., 2009).

Research shows that females do not disclose themselves to people they do not really know, because of social pressure and traditional social roles associated with women (Fallows, 2005). According to Mazman and Usluel (2011), males use social networks mostly for making new friends and relationships, while females use them mostly for finding their old friends and keeping in touch with existing ones.

"Analysing a survey of university students in Australia, the results indicate that female consumers are more likely than male consumers to use Facebook to seek information (to research and learn new things and to discuss products and brands) and for convenience (to obtain things with little effort). Both of these reasons in turn relate positively to their degree of engagement on Facebook, where engagement is operationalized as cognitive absorption which is a state of deep involvement with an activity."Noguti et al. (2019)

Facebook was criticised in many academic research i.e. (Koc and Gulyagci, 2013; Karaiskos et al., 2010; Tang et al., 2016; Turel et al., 2014; Alabi, 2013) for its addictive qualities. The concept of Facebook addiction is controversial; Griffiths (2012) argues that rather than being addicted to Facebook, it may be more likely that there are addictions on Facebook, because there are many activities that a person can engage in on the Facebook website (e.g., messaging friends, playing games like Farmville, and gambling). When Kimpton et al. (2019) examine the relationship between high level of Facebook addiction and gender, they found a gender difference. while gaming was related to high levels of Facebook addiction in males, long distance, passive, active photo, and organizing behaviors related to high levels of Facebook addiction in females.

In the MENA region, there is a clear difference in the percentage of Facebook users from each gender. Statista (2014) reported gender distribution of Facebook users (aged between 16 and 64 years) as of the first half of 2014, 71 percent of Facebook users were male. Appendix A shows details about Facebook penetration for young people. This is shown clearer in Appendix C ,Figure D.1 and Figure D.2.

3.4   Counter Publics

"As gender issues and studies in the late 20th century have moved from the fringes to centre stage of social discourse, they have become increasingly politicized. So central have they become that the postmodern state, its apparatuses, political parties, and interest groups (even those in seeming opposition to the state), have put gender on the agenda and currently attempt to shape gender identity and politics to serve whatever priorities head their programmes. Of course, women are social actors, not just passive receptors of state or party actions. So, located at the centre of gender discourse is how women respond, adapt, ignore, redirect, or even subvert, such state and party activities and projects intended to shape their behaviour, lives, and thoughts" (Hale, 2018). Hale (2018) argued that "The causes of this politicization can be traced to the relationship of the state and its apparatuses to religion, to the particular expression of gender in Islam, to the politicization of Islam itself, and to forces outside the Middle East, such as international capital and its accompanying culture".

3.4.1   Feminism

In 18th and 19th centuries, women were excluded not only from the public sphere but also from many social categories of the public domain in Europe (Thompson, 1993). However, this exclusion only lasted till the late 20th century. Benefitting from the wealth of institutional networks and an active communication environment, the feminist public sphere produced its own oppositional feminist discourse, through which women managed to recast their needs and identities and therefore reduced the extent of their exclusion and disadvantage in the official public sphere (Goodman, 1992).

Within a variety of national contexts in the developing world, feminists were responding to problems facing women and playing an integral part of the political debates and disputes within these nations (Narayan, 2013). However, these endeavours were forcing them in most cases to be seen as counterpublics.

3.4.1.1 Networks of Feminism

Feminism is a range of political and social movements. Each has its own ideology and strives for its own goals. However, these goals and ideology might intersect to various degrees. Hawkesworth (2006) argued that globalization is a feminist issue, and argues that women have forged international networks and alliances to address specific gender issues beyond the borders of the nation-state. McLaughlin (2004) asserted that thinking through transnational feminism goes beyond locating Anglo-American feminists' complicity in colonial and neo-colonial discursive formations, instead offering an opening into collective feminist praxis within global contexts and revealing new possibilities for collaboration. Cooke (2016) marked women's participation in the 'Arab Spring' as a transnational feminist revolution, "because it involved not just one people exceptionally up in arms against its colonizers or unjust rulers; several societies simultaneously rose up against cruel men. Even if not all those dictators are gone, the people now realize that they too have power. They are listening to each others' music, admiring each others' art, reading each other's stories, and building their own activism out of those resonances".

Egyptian women first used the term *feminism* in public in 1923 (Badran, 1988), but the rise of modern Arab feminism is widely attributed to the groundbreaking book by Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women* published in 1899. Amīn (2000) claimed that the education and liberation of women was essential to strengthen and emancipate the Egyptian nation from British colonial rule. He argued that men oppressed and silenced women, which caused society in general to suffer. However, attribution of the rise of Arab feminism to Amin's work has received criticism from recent feminist scholars. Susan Muaddi (Darraj, 2002) reported that recent feminist scholars have effectively and persuasively argued that Amin is not the movement's "founder" in any sense of the word.

Badran and Cooke (1994) also argued that Amin is not the movement's founder in any sense of the word, and called the feminism attributed to him men's feminism, associating its development with contact with Europe, whereas in comparison women's feminism arose out of women's reflections on their own lives and problems. Leila (Ahmed, 1992) built on this critique, arguing that Amin's ideas are built on a comparison with the West, in which the West is refined, cultured, and advanced, and the East is not.

3.4.1.2 Two Arab Feminism

Golley (2004) noted that in the Arab world, feminist consciousness has developed hand in hand with national consciousness since the early 19th century. Because feminist and national consciousness emerged at the same time, and as a reaction to Western imperialism, some argue feminism is an illegal immigrant and an alien import to the Arab world and as such, is not relevant to the people and their culture. This has been

argued by those who oppose the emancipation of women and who consider feminism irrelevant to Arab culture. Nevertheless, groundedness of feminists in their own culture has been overlooked in the discourse on feminism (El Guindi, 1999).

In a discussion linking Western colonialism and feminism, Ahmed (1992) distinguished two strands of feminism propounded by Egypt's 'First Feminists'. The first strand is the Westward-looking feminism advocated by Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947) while the other, espoused by Malak Hifni Nasif (1886-1918), did not affiliate itself with Westernization. Despite her prominence as a feminist leader, Huda Sha'rawi was distanced from her native language, and therefore not a complete insider in her own culture. Mastery of the Arabic language (formal not colloquial) and access to Islamic knowledge are two fundamental requirements for a socio-political activity to claim its roots in Arabic/Islamic culture. El Guindi (1999) argued that both had undergone a masculinization process that distanced many women from the core of their culture. She discerned how the valuation of "foreign" languages, that has developed among the urbanized so-called aristocracy and spread among urban achieved-status groups, has come at the expense of the Arabic language. El Gendi noted the tendency of these groups to consider speaking 'soft' Arabic with French loan words was viewed as feminine and chic.

El Guindi (1999) added a corollary practice of the informal adoption of a husband's family name, in lieu of one's maiden name, as an example of how the cultural roots of the two feminist movements were distinguishable. It should be noted in this regard that Arab women have financial autonomy. The legal system requires that a woman should keep her maiden name after marriage. In Arab society, the state does not officially recognize a husband's name, even when it is informally adopted by women. Nasif continued to use her natal family name after marriage, whereas Huda changed her last name upon marriage – a social (not an official or a legal) practice borrowed by urbanized women to validate their modern, feminine, and chic image.

Since then, a feminist movement that advocates the Western path to women's rights has emerged in many Arab countries, gaining attention and funding from Western governments and international feminist groups (Abdellatif and Ottaway, 2007). Mounting evidence suggests that women activists have also made important inroads in Islamist movements by creating strong women's branches and pushing for broader political participation and representation in the upper echelons of the entire movements (Abdellatif and Ottaway, 2007).

Women in organizations supported by Western governments and international feminist groups believe that "women in Islamist movements are at best confused and misled, that their representation is token, and that they are only passive actors, shackled by the movements' strict codes of conduct, and assigned few if any significant roles in shaping their politics" (Abdellatif and Ottaway, 2007).

3.4.1.3   The hegemony of Western Feminism

Scholars argue that the feminist movement in the West has been taken as 'the' feminist movement (Mohanty, 1984). Homogeneous perspectives and presuppositions in some of the Western feminist texts, that focus on women in the third world, were criticized in many works (Friedman, 1998; Yegenoglu, 1998; Bordo, 2004).

Using her account of Central and Eastern European Feminism, Cerwonka (2008) confirms the hegemony of Western feminist experience. "In the East-West divide discourse, people remark on the challenge of trying to identify and theorize gender issues important to post-state socialist societies, in the shadow of an already well-established feminist legacy from North America and Western Europe". Hobson (2000) explained: "the tensions in the dialogue between Western and East European women are rooted in the direct application of Western feminist theory to post-communist reality, which leads to the false assumption that East European women are second-class citizens and that they are conservative".

Women's and gender studies have become more international in scope in response to pressure from university administrations and governments, and the increased border crossing of faculty and students, and as a consequence of widespread use of the Internet (Cerwonka, 2008).

However, there is some dispute around the degree of influence that Western feminism has placed on other feminist movements in non-Western countries. This dispute is documented in the emerging literature of global and post-Colonial feminism (Jaggar, 1998; Ferree and Mueller, 2004; Narayan, 2000), global south feminism (Ferree and Tripp, 2006; English, 2005; Eisenstein, 2015) and transnational feminism (Brenner, 2003; Mendoza, 2002; Gupta, 2006; Tripp, 2006).

Traditionally, Arab feminism represents an example of a feminist movement accused as being part of a cultural invasion that accompanied colonialism (Moghadam, 1991; Yaghoobi and Badran, 2011). However, following the rise of second wave feminism in the developing world, responses to the inherent marginalization of women of colour and devout women from this movement have emerged. Through women's political organizations, Islamic feminism represents part of a global and diverse response that belongs to that trend (Jones-Gailani, 2012).

Arab feminism is also frequently overlooked in Western discourse. "The textured image of exoticism which has been woven in the West over the centuries still dominates the way in which the Arab world is perceived. Orientalist discourses have influenced the way that Arab feminism, in particular, has been received and understood in the West. According to such discourses, the movement for women's liberation is, again, not indigenous to Arab countries. When such movement is recognised, it is described as mere imitation of similar movements in Europe and the USA" (Golley, 2004).

To some the cultural gulf is significant. "It is even argued that Western feminists have described Arab women's lives as being so different from theirs that they cannot possibly develop any kind of feminism. Even when Arab women speak for themselves, Elly Bulkin argued, they are accused of being pawns of Arab men" (Golley, 2004).Religious women, and Muslim women in particular, are perceived as either oppressed or victim of false consciousness (Salem, 2013). In response, Islamic feminism means to emancipate from both conservative Islam and Western feminism that dictates to the women of the South the manners and framework of their emancipation, arguing that it is impossible to be both subject to God and freed from the power of men (Zimmerman, 2015)

"Furthermore, Westerners often see it as their duty, whether as mission or stratagem, to assist the Muslim woman to liberate herself from these traditional bonds, and especially to remove her veil and educate her. In colonial Algeria, French criticism of the veil and the condition of women in Algerian society was, according to Frantz Fanon, a direct attempt to undermine the foundations of traditional culture. This accusation has been levelled by many Muslims at Western imperialism in general, and has focused attention on the importance to the survival of Islam and Muslim society of the traditional roles of women in the family and society" (Hoffman-Ladd, 1987). Western feminists are split on the issue of the veil, in contrast to French feminists, some Western authors and activists such as American social philosopher Nussbaum (2010, 2012) advocates the right to veil for Muslim women.

3.4.2   Islamism

The term Islamism represents a form of social and political activism, grounded in an idea that public and political life should be guided by a set of Islamic principles. The ideological dimension of Islamism developed primarily during the second half of the 20th century (Poljarevic, 2015).

Women, in Islamism, are regarded as the embodiment of Islamic originality and as such they have great symbolic value in distinguishing Muslim societies from the West (Timmerman, 2000).

Since its rise in the 1970s, Islamist movements formed counter publics in many Muslim majority countries (International-Crisis-Group, 2005). Such movements needed women in their ranks to reach out to all segments of the population and, as more and more educated women joined the ranks of Islamist movements during the past two decades, they became increasingly aware of their importance to the movements and started petitioning for a more significant role as political actors. Moreover, Islamist parties in many countries are realizing that in election-based political systems where women are allowed to vote, female candidates may help Islamist parties win votes (Abdellatif and Ottaway, 2007).

Unlike other Islamist currents, the Salafite one chose their path by analogy with allegiance to the ruler. Their position on women's role was always clear, namely, that a woman's place is in the home and that her role is to care for the family. While they may have accepted women's right to vote, they adamantly rejected their right to seek and hold public office "to avoid pitfalls". They were opposed to women being active in civil society, adopting, as a principle, a division of social labour that limits women's role to that of reproduction, motherhood and child raising, and warning against the mixing of the sexes (United-Nations-Development-Program, 2005). The most that could be expected from the Salafites, according to the UN report, was an acceptance of independent feminist activity in private charities. However, the report considers the Muslim Brotherhood to be "on the other side of the arena". Karam (1997) described the Brotherhood's stance on women's political participation as "intellectually liberal".

Badran (2011) claimed that the perception of 'the religious' and 'the secular' as distinct was reinforced by political Islam as part of their polarising political project. She claimed that Islamists reinvigorate not only the secular/religious binary but also East/West, public/private and male/female oppositions. Their consistent promotion of the notion that 'the secular' is alien, foreign, non-native and hence inauthentic, and that 'the religious constitutes the indigenous, native and authentic, affected feminisms negatively and brought divisive implications. Although the nation-based feminist movements in the region during the colonial era, such as the pioneering Egyptian, were organised and directed by women as citizens of different religions, they were branded by its adversaries as Western and anti-Islamic and thus marked as pernicious cultural invasion. This notion, re-enforced by Islamists, persists to this day in an era of religious revival.

On the Western side, 'Muslim women' images were decontextualized and circulated in American mass media to depict the veil as an icon of Islamic fundamentalism and Islam as enemy of 'Muslim women' and Western democracy. Western commentators have generally projected a negative view of the relationship among: Islamism as a political ideology, Islam as a religion, and women (Zayzafoon, 2004).

Yadav (2010) criticised the tendency in addressing women's activism within Islamist organizations as objects of (male) Islamist activism, rather than as agents in the transformation of polity and society. She claimed that tendency stems from an approach that reproduces the public/private distinction, and positions women's activity firmly within the private sphere. She considers that confirms the emerging critiques in the field of anthropology, indicating that many Western and Western-trained academics have shown considerable difficulty understanding women and Islamism. Capturing the role of Islamist women activists in Yemen, she showed that women's public work is often conducted in private spaces, and overlaps and intersects with men's work in ways that are gradually transforming what scholars and activists alike have come to think of as the public.

When comparing the role of Islamist women's activities to the role of secular women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) led by educated women, the latter have only limited outreach outside the urban upper class they come from. Islamist movements, in contrast, have proven themselves adept at building a broad following across social classes (Abdellatif and Ottaway, 2007).

3.4.2.1   State Feminism

States and parties are serving their agendas by manipulating the social and cultural identities of women, positioning them within the culture, often to their detriment. Gender researchers find themselves, for that reason, having to take them into serious account (Hale, 2018).

Between the 1950s and 1970s, Arab states were granting women recognition in the name of modernization, they were being appointed as ministers, held up as "model" women in various practical and scientific fields, and they were being honoured as a way for the state to show its support for new roles for women in the public sphere. Despite these accomplishments, often termed 'State feminist', such policies were criticized by some as top-down gifts prepared without the participation of their supposed beneficiaries (United-Nations-Development-Program, 2005). Critics also contended that the state was working to destroy women's unions and independent associations, and either co-opt women within its executive framework or marginalize them (Kandiyoti et al., 1991). Some Arab studies show that there is no significant difference between authoritarian and liberal regimes in matters relating to the rise of women. Work outside of government institutions exposes women activists to repression, especially when these activists link women's social rights to a lack of rights and civil and political freedoms in general (Hatem, 1994).

Regarding the relationship of the state to issues of gender, ethnicity, class, and religion, Hale (2018) analyzed the mechanisms employed by the state and/or party to achieve political and cultural hegemony. She stated that identity politics are often strategies or by-products of, or reactions to, state/party hegemonic processes. She tried to dispel some myths proliferating about the perplexing phenomenon of Islamism and its impact on women. Islam, she argued, is but one area of 'traditional' culture used to re-create identity politics through the maintenance of gender alignments. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that gender is a major factor and people are actors, not just the 'receptacles' of Islamic doctrines and prescriptions (Hale, 2018). Al-Ali (2003) argued that the relationship of women's organizations to the state is key to the analysis of women's movements in the region. She noted that varying levels of dependence and autonomy can be detected, not only in the comparison of one country with another, but also within given country contexts.

3.4.2.2   Islamic Feminism

"Islamic Feminism", which is defined as "a cross-border movement that brings together all Muslim women seeking to redefine their identity in a more genuinely modern manner that befits their religion and culture" (Haddad and Esposito, 1997), should be distinguished from the Islamist project regarding imposing so-called 'sharia law' over everyone, including women.

Islamic feminists who advocate an egalitarian mode of Islam should not be confused with Islamist women who promote political Islam and its patriarchal version of the religion (Badran, 2001).

"Islamic feminism emerged in the global umma (Muslim community) in the East and West, in the late 20th century, during the late post-colonial moment. Islamic feminism appeared, as well, at the time of an accelerating Islamist movement, or following the installation of an Islamic regime, as well as during widespread Islamic religious cultural revival in many Muslim- majority secular states and minority societies. Islamic feminism burst onto the global scene as a new discourse or interpretation of Islam and gender grounded in ijtihad or independent intellectual investigation of the Qur'an and other religious texts" (Badran, 2013). Badran (2013) recommended that "Muslims' secular and Islamic feminisms should not seen as oppositional forces, as some are inclined to do, seemingly influenced by the hostility between Islamist and secular forces in societies at large, from the final decades of the 20th century with the spread of political Islam, and which Islamists indeed frequently take pains to promote".

3.4.2.3   The Debate on Hijab

Islamic attire remains a central component and prominent symbol of the larger debate regarding women's rights, role, and status in Muslim societies and politics (Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, 1999).

"Contemporary Islamists assume that Islamization begins with sexual morality, hence their insistence on the veiling of women (or purdah) as a matter of necessity. 'Hijab', understood as the 'covering of women's hair', has become a major preoccupation; there is hardly an Islamist magazine that publishes an article on women without emphasizing the importance of the 'Islamic dress code' and proudly displays pictures of women, even young children of pre-school age, adorned in it" (Sherif, 1987).

For the early reformers,Ahmed (1982) reported, the woman's veil was the symbol of her relegation to the private sphere and of the appropriateness of her invisibility and non-participation in public life.

The veil gradually disappeared in the 50s and 60s of the last century, such that an article by Herald-Tribune (1958), describing the case of Egypt, stated that "the veil is unknown

here". However, since the 1970s, the veil has been having a resurgence concomitant with the global revival of Muslim piety. According to *The New York Times*, by 2007 about 90% of Egyptian women currently wear a headscarf (Slackman, 2007). "The wearing of the hijab, invariably condemned in the West, is a particularly difficult custom to evaluate. It can be an imposition on women by male members of the family or more broadly by social customs, but it can also be an assertion of identity or an act of rebellion against families and milieu by women who freely choose to cover their heads. For some women, wearing the hijab is a political act of defiance against an oppressive regime or the West" (Abdellatif and Ottaway, 2007). Ahmed (1992) argued that the re-emergent veil, by virtue of its power as a symbol of resistance, attests to the uncontested hegemonic diffusion of the discourses of the West in our age. And it attests to the fact that, "at least as regards the Islamic world, the discourses of resistance and rejection are inextricably informed by the language and ideas developed and disseminated by the West to no less degree than is the language of those openly advocating emulation of the West. Those who, like Frantz Fanon or Nawal El-Saadawi, are critical of the West, nonetheless ground themselves in intellectual assumptions and political ideas, including a belief in the rights of the individual, formulated by Western bourgeois capitalism and spread over the globe as a result of Western hegemony".

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the historical and contemporary manifestation of the challenges that accompany the emergence of women's activism worldwide and in the Arabic region. Exploring the literature around women's presence in public spaces reveals the difficulty of women's formal access to the public sphere.

While these challenges were overcome by Western feminist movements in the last century, the Arab movements are expected to benefit from the opportunity the new media are bringing, to achieve their political and social goals. An investigation into the online presence of Arab women's activism is required before the assumption of the effectiveness of this new opportunity can be confirmed. The proportion of actors that construct the public sphere formed by their activism also needs to be examined, and to what extent this online sphere reflects the geographical extent of this activism.

The similarities among feminist movements brought them together to form the global public sphere, but at the same time, this linkage caused some groups of activists to distance themselves in order to maintain their autonomy and stress their ideological and cultural peculiarity.

Despite Arab feminism's close affiliation to nationalist struggles, as well as contemporary circumstances, it continued to face accusations that it is an illegal import to Arab culture and a blatant invasion of their values. The emphasis on the effect of the colonial

encounter with the West and the various degrees of adherence to their own autonomy, translates in the contexts of the online sphere to a focus on how Arab female activism pages posit themselves in relation to Western and global female activism, as well as to each other.

Also in need of investigation is how the amount of feminist activism has changed over the period of the 'Arab Spring' and after, before any confirmation of the efficiency of the online sphere as an empowering medium can be made.

Furthermore, what is the extent of the social patterns that affected women's public presence historically, that might be reproduced in the new online public spaces and affect the quality and quantity of Arab women's participation in online social networks?

Chapter 4

Female activism Pages on Facebook

4.1 Introduction

There are signs that female activists used Facebook in the Arab world during the recent political movements (Radsch and Khamis, 2013). Facebook pages are used by Arab women to group themselves and boost their social and political activism (Odine, 2015; Grami, 2013; Newsom and Lengel, 2012). They also associate these pages with other pages that strive for similar goals or that hold to the same ideology. Some of these associated pages represent activism in wider geographic areas or that work as international hubs. Facebook and feminist blogs enlarge and nourish feminist networks, create online feminist communities, expand recruitment bases for online and offline mobilization, and increase opportunities for online interaction with adversaries (Crossley, 2015).

Retrieving a list of these Facebook pages, and how they link to each other, provides a valuable source of data for understanding the different feminisms described in Chapter 3 and how they relate to each other. Therefore, in order to obtain some empirical evidence, and to explore these relationships in more detail, a network analysis of Arabic Facebook Pages relating to women with a topic that was predominantly political or related to activism was undertaken, with the aim of analyzing the network formed by these pages and studying how they are situated among similar Arab and global pages. The proportion of actors that construct the public sphere formed by these pages was examined, as well as the extent this online sphere reflects the geographical extent and mirrors the ideological inspiration of this activism.

This chapter presents this evidence from three viewpoints:

- *View I* shows the level of online visibility of different actor groups that form this public sphere according to the five categories presented in section 2.4,

Actor	Markers
Civil Society	Pages that have office addresses or declare working hours and telephone numbers
Media	Pages that contain in its titles the word news or that defines their job as journalists, or research centres
Public Officials	Pages with names that contain a political party or any words that reveal it is an official representation of the government, such as a ministry
Private Actors	Pages of Female Politicians, Writers; name of the page reveals it is a female blogger whether it is real name or pen name
Publics	Pages that do not have any of the markers above

TABLE 4.1: Coding for Public Sphere Actors

- *View II* shows the geographical boundaries drawn by these pages,

- *View III* draws the shape of Arab feminism formed by the relationships between these pages and the other feminist pages globally.

4.2   Methodology

The network for analysis was created using a snowball sample approach. A deductive approach to coding the pages in the sample was then applied according to three perspectives (*View I, View II, View III*). The next sections present details of these processes.

4.2.1   Sampling

4.2.1.1   Collecting Data from Facebook

In order to create the network for analysis, an initial start was made by running a search, using Facebook's own search engine, for pages with titles using the words in Arabic that usually refer to women.

While there are two main words (المرأة : woman, single; النساء : women, plural), the Arabic language gives more options by adding the suffix (ات : aat) to any adjective to make it the name of women with that adjective (e.g. ثائرات : female rebels, مناضلات , ناشطات : Female activists).

The initial search took these words (woman, women, female rebels, two words for female activists) to get lists of pages that will be used as a starting set for the snowball process.

The results were then manually filtered the search by two criteria. First, the pages were genuinely related to women (the Female suffix makes it relatively straightforward to do

Feminism Theme	Markers
Arabic	Location, national names or symbols, Arabic Language
Western	Location, Sexual rights, Abortion, national Western names or symbols
Sect	using Political-Islam names or symbols
Non-Western	Stating it is international, location, nationality, race or multi-racial, custom-dresses
Transnational Project	Stating it is national chapter of international project for empowering women

TABLE 4.2: Thematic Coding of Pages in the Sample

this), and secondly that they related to activism in some way (for example, they were centred on a female activist, politician or blogger).

With the remaining pages in the search set, a manual crawl of each page's list of *liked* pages took place. Liked pages that met the two criteria, and which were not already in the search set, were added to it and edges representing the like relationship were added to a table of directed edges. In this way the network was exhaustively expanded until all of the pages in the search set had been crawled.

We did not use a criterion that pages must be in Arabic to be included in the sample network. However, the crawl was halted whenever a non-Arabic page was found and went no deeper. This meant that the resulting network included a rich set of Arabic pages and their interconnections, as well as the relationships they have to non-Arabic pages. However, the relationships between these non-Arabic pages was not captured, and they therefore represent the border of the Arabic feminist network.

4.2.2 Coding the Sample Network

A deductive approach was applied to coding the pages in the sample according to three perspectives. The following sections introduce each of these coding processes, followed by a description of resulting graphs.

4.2.2.1 Coding For View I: Public Sphere Actors

This view aims to show the distribution of public sphere actors and the percentage of each in the sample. Public sphere actors were introduced in section 2.4 as: the public, civil society, public officials, the media, and Private actors. The sample contains pages that could be classified with these categories.

Public   (46.79%)
Other   (22.71%)
Civil Society   (13.57%)
Private Actor   (8.69%)
Public Official (5.16%)
Media   (3.08%)
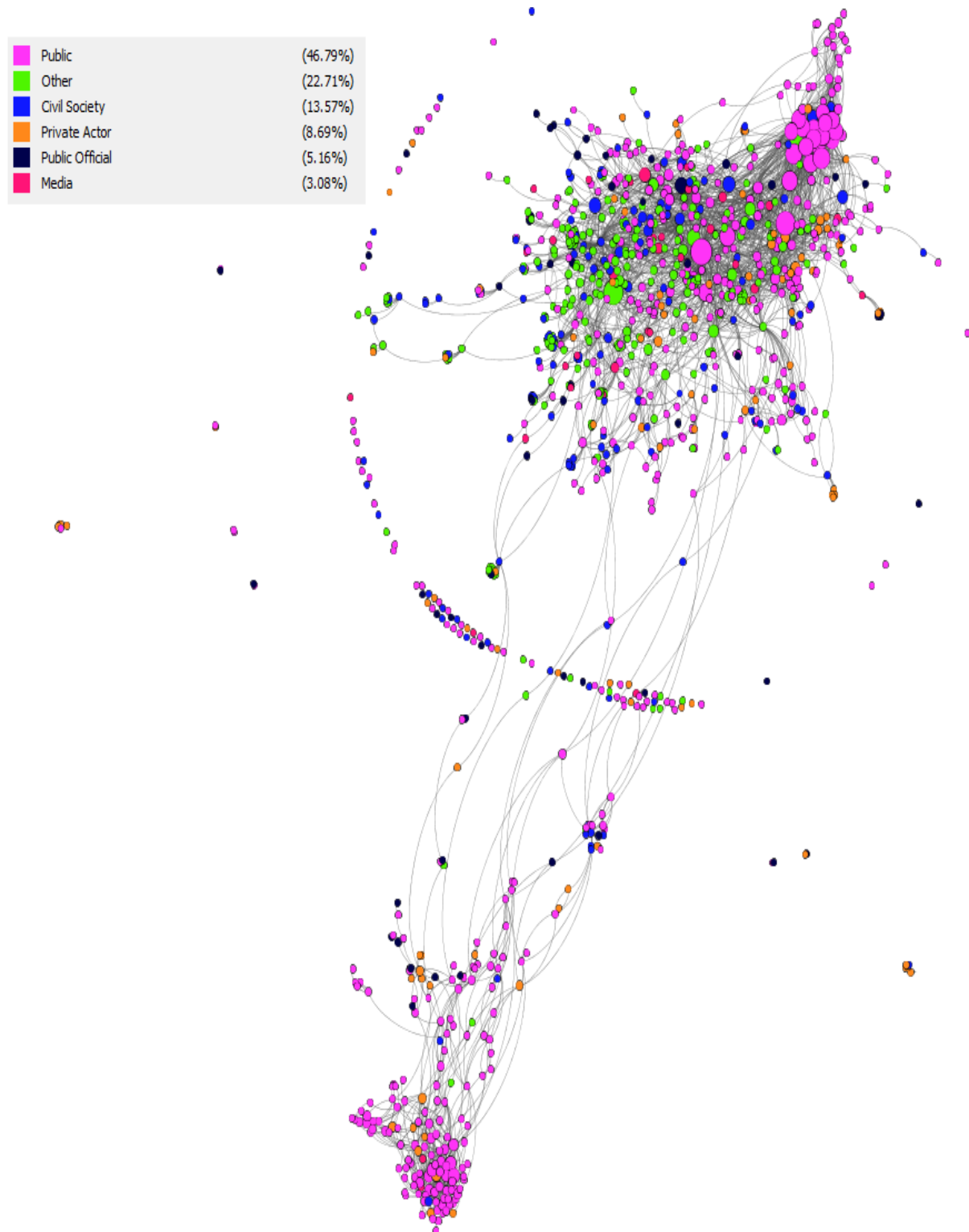
FIGURE 4.1: The Sample Network Colour Coded According to Actor Groups. The size
of the node represents In-degree of Each Page.

	Other	(23.26%)
	Pan Arabic	(21.81%)
	Egypt	(11.04%)
	Tunisia	(7.78%)
	Syria	(7.6%)
	Libya	(6.43%)
	Lebanon	(5.61%)
	Iraq	(2.44%)
	Algeria	(2.17%)
	Saudi	(2.08%)
	Morocco	(2.08%)
	Palestine	(1.99%)
	Jordan	(1.63%)
	Yemen	(1.63%)
	Kuwait	(0.72%)
	Sudan	(0.72%)
	United Arab Emirates	(0.45%)
	Bahrain	(0.36%)
	Qatar	(0.09%)
	Mauritania	(0.09%)

FIGURE 4.2: The Sample Network Colour Coded According to the Country Each Page is Associated with. The Size of the Node represents Each Node's Degree.

	Arabic Feminism	(61.72%)
	Sect Feminism	(15.11%)
	Non Westren Feminism	(11.67%)
	Westren Feminism	(6.52%)
	Transnational Project	(4.98%)

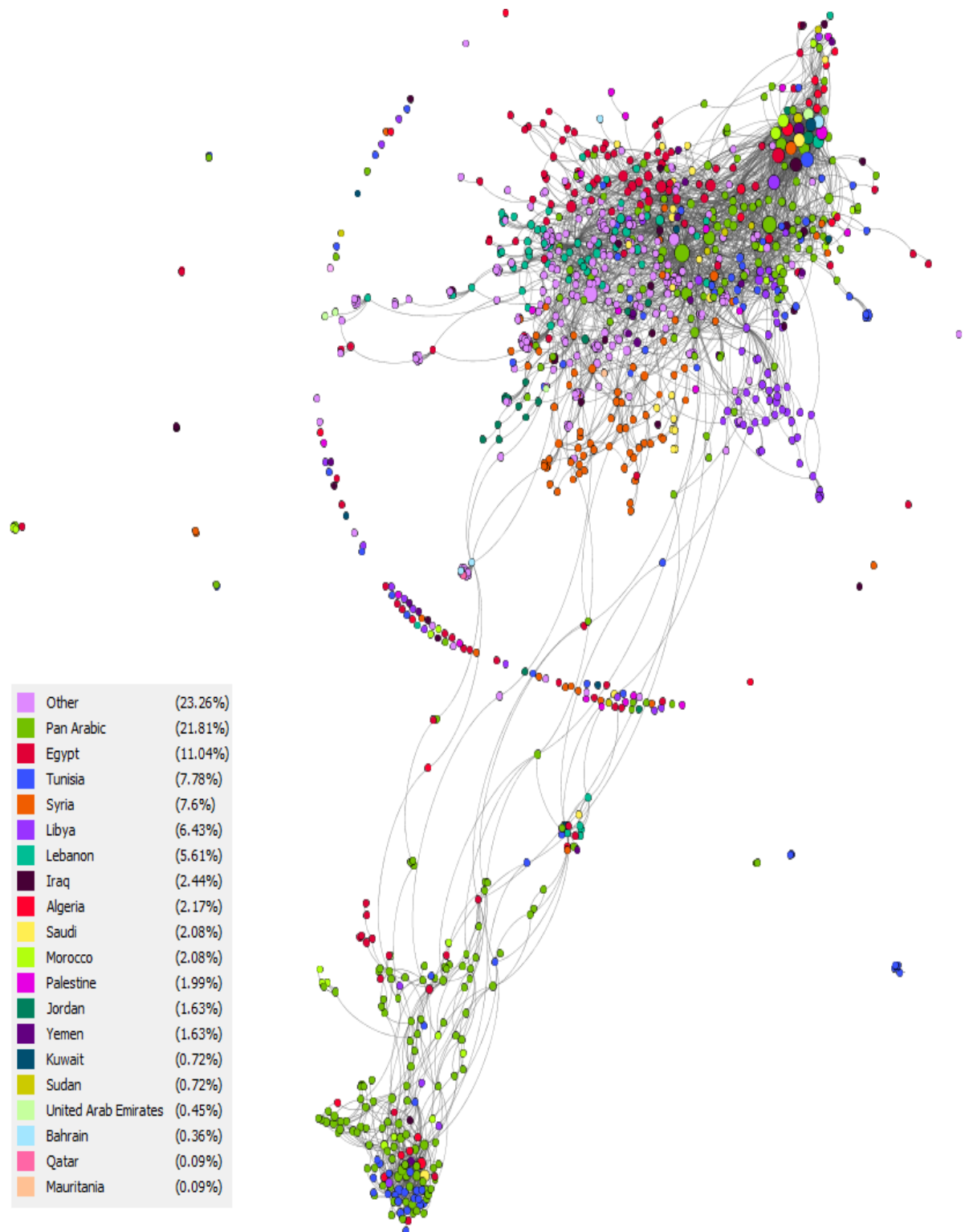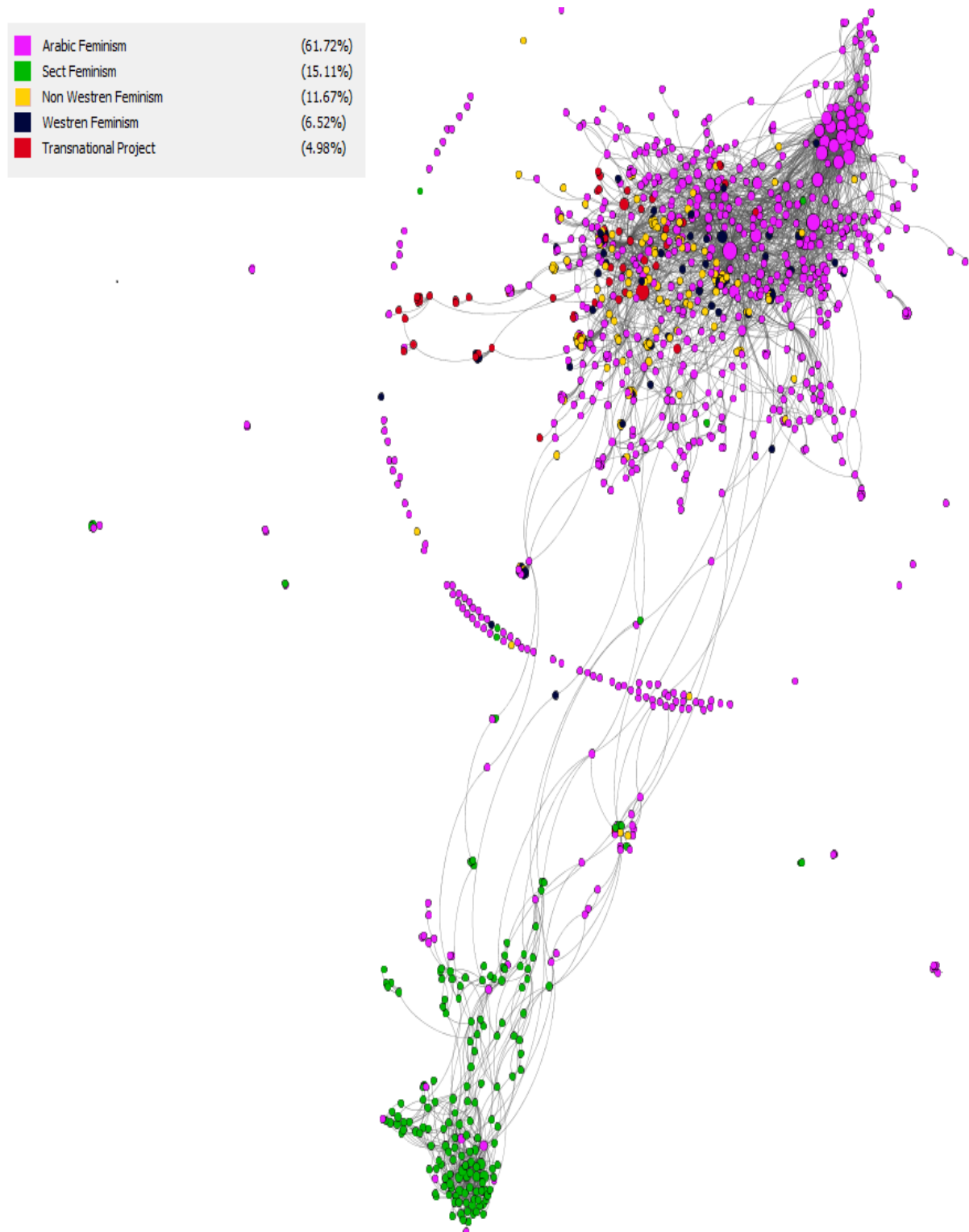FIGURE 4.3: The Sample Network Colour Coded According to Theme of Feminism. The Size of the Node represents Each Node's Degree.

Actor	Percentage
Publics	46.67%
Civil Society	12.49%
Media	2.30%
Public Officials	5.29%
Private Actors	8.66%

TABLE 4.3: The Visibility of Each Actor Group in the Sample

Figure 4.1 shows the network, where the nodes are coloured for each actor, while the size of the nodes represents the 'Followers' of the pages. The visibility of each actor in the sample is presented in Table 4.2.2.1.

4.2.2.2 Coding For View II: By country

For this view, any declared sign was observed that showed the country these activists are based in or targeting. These signs usually use the name of the country in the title, in the About section, or show the flag of the country. If there is no clue, or there are clues that declared it is targeting all Arab countries, it was coded as 'Pan Arabic'.

Figure 4.2 displays the network, where the nodes are coloured for each country, while the size of the nodes represents the 'degree' of each node. The visibility of each country in the sample is presented in Table 4.4.

4.2.2.3 Coding For View III: Feminism

For this view, the pages in the sample were coded according to how well they matched with the different types of feminism. Table 4.2.2 shows the five codes used, and an example of common markers that enabled classification of each page. As discussed in Section 3.4.1.2, the literature suggests there might be two strands of Arabic feminism with different attitudes to Western feminism. Therefore, two separate codes were used for Arab women's pages. Those pages that displayed political-Islam identities (for example, holding Islamists' flags or symbols) were marked with a special code, calling them 'Sect Feminism', while other pages that did not have these distinctive features were left with the original name 'Arabic Feminism'.

Two codes were chosen to distinguish the Western feminism from Global feminism (or feminisms of other nations), from the expected attitude of non-Western feminisms towards the Western and post-colonial influences.

These five codes allowed the distinguishing of the two Arabic feminisms (explicitly-Islamist or not) from those of non-Arabic ones (Western Feminism and non-western

feminism). The fifth code was used to show the pages of transnational projects imple-
mented in Arabic states, such as UN Women projects, or IEEE national chapters.

4.3   Results

The network constructed by the sampling process forms 1105 nodes and 3331 directed
edges. It is shown in Figure 4.1, Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 using a Force Atlas layout
algorithm.   A Force Atlas layout algorithm simulates a physical system in order to
spatialize a network.   This process depends only on the connections between nodes.
Attributes of nodes are never taken into account. Nodes repulse each other like charged
particles, while edges attract their nodes, like springs. These forces create a movement
that converges to a balanced state. The result varies depending on the initial state and
cannot be read as a Cartesian projection. The position of a node cannot be interpreted
on its own, it has to be compared to the others. The process is not deterministic, and
the coordinates of each point do not reflect any specific variable (Jacomy et al., 2014).

Each node represents a single page. Note that there are no edges in the 'Western' sub-
network as a result of the crawl halting when non-Arabic pages were reached. The colour
and the size of each node displays the property of interest at that stage of analysis.

4.3.1   Metrics of the Resulting Network

In order to quantify the influence of a particular node or group within the network,
common methods of measuring Network metrics are applied.

4.3.1.1   Density

Density is the proportion of direct ties in a network relative to the total number possible.
A complete graph has all possible edges and density of 1. The density of the sample
is 0.003. Table 4.4 shows how the density varies by subset. The low values of density
for the whole network and its subnets support the assumption that linking pages to
others with a like relationship reflect ideological purposes. This property has not been
employed for other non-ideological purposes such as Search Engine Optimisation(Ritz,
2019).

4.3.1.2   Degree Distribution

The degree of a node is the number of edges the node has to other nodes. Since the
network is directed, the nodes have two different degrees, the *in-degree*, which is the
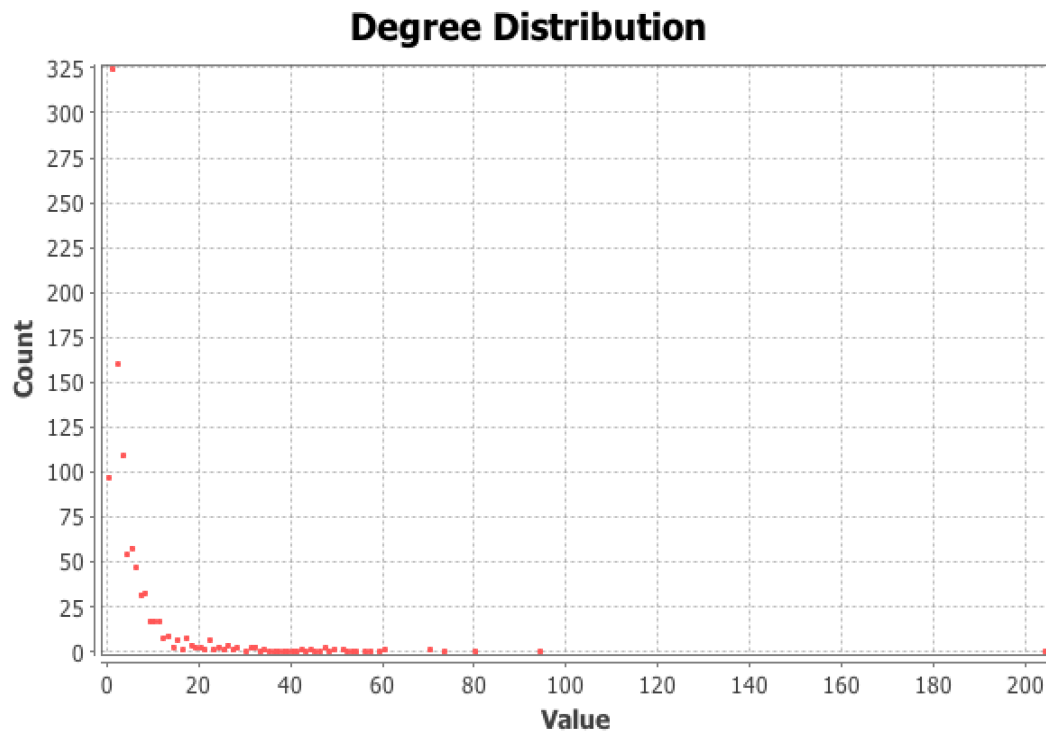
FIGURE 4.4: The Degree Distribution of the Overall Sample

number of incoming edges, and the *out-degree*, which is the number of outgoing edges. The Average Degree of the sample is 3.356. The degree distribution of the overall sample is presented in Figure 4.4. The In-degree and Out-degree distribution of the overall sample are presented from lowest to highest in Figure 4.5 and Figure 4.6 respectively. As might be expected, they follow a power law with very few high degree nodes. 98 nodes have a degree of 0 and represent 8.87% of all pages in the sample. These are pages that were in the initial search set, but which do not like any other pages that fulfill the criteria, and are not liked by any other pages in the sample.

4.3.1.3 Clustering Coefficient

This is a measure of the extent to which nodes in a graph tend to cluster together. The two versions of this measure are: the global and the local. The *global clustering coefficient* is designed to give an overall indication of the clustering in the network, whereas *the local clustering coefficient* of a node quantifies how close its neighbours are to being a clique.

The distribution of the local clustering coefficient is displayed in Figure 4.7. As expected, the number of isolated nodes, or those which are connected to only one other node, is for the clustering that is between 0 and 0.1, which makes the highest count in the distribution. Around 80 nodes have a clustering coefficient value of 0.2 and these are
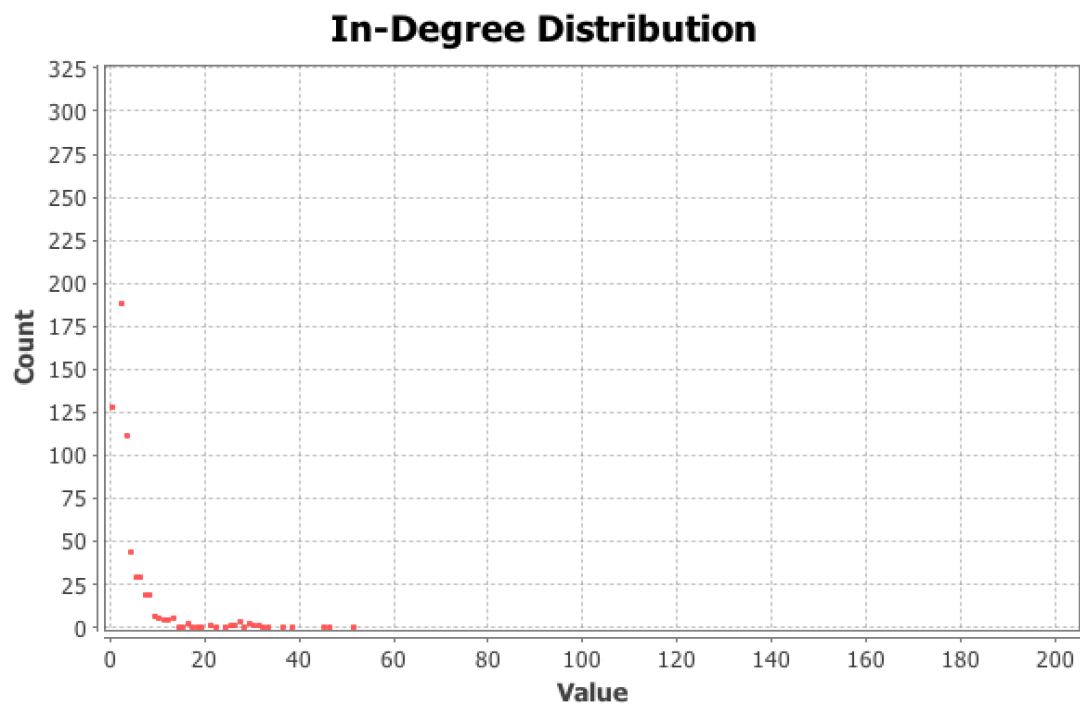
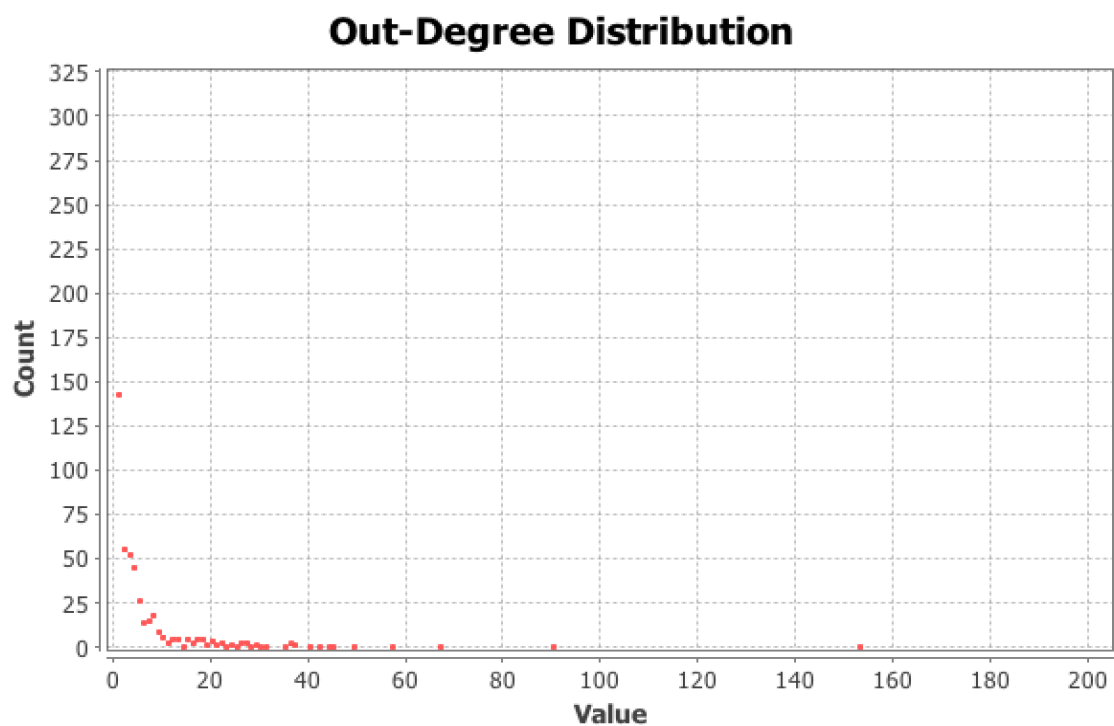FIGURE 4.5: The In-degree Distribution of the Overall Sample

FIGURE 4.6: The Out-degree Distribution of the Overall Sample

the cases when the node has only 2 neighbours and one of them is only connected to the other in the directed network.

The average clustering coefficient is the mean value of the individual coefficients. Calculating it for the sample using "Simple and slow brute force" algorithm (Kanungo et al., 2002) results in 0.135. Table 4.4 shows how the values of the global clustering coefficient varies by subset.

4.3.1.4 Modularity

Modularity measures how well a network decomposes into modular communities. The problem of dividing a network of interest into clusters for intelligent analysis has attracted significant attention in diverse fields of research. To discover the intrinsic community structure, a quantitative measure called *modularity* has been widely adopted as an optimization objective (Li and Schuurmans, 2011). The community detection algorithm provides a measure for modularity. Networks with high modularity have dense connections between the nodes within modules but sparse connections between nodes in different modules.

Modularity is the fraction of the edges that fall within the given groups minus the expected fraction if edges were distributed at random. The value of modularity lies in the range [-1,1] (Li and Schuurmans, 2011). The result of applying the modularity algorithm (Blondel et al., 2008) with the Resolution set to 5.0 (Lambiotte et al., 2008) results in modularity = 0.324, Number of Communities = 111. Although the large number of communities detected by the algorithm might indicate the ineffectiveness of the algorithm in this case, looking at the size distribution of these communities, Figure 4.8, changes the impression. Figure 4.9 displays the network with the nodes coloured by their modularity class. While three main communities contain 68.05%, 18.2%, and 1.9% of the nodes, the remaining communities (108 modules) each contain less than 1%, with nine nodes, five, three, and then a long tail of communities with one or two nodes only.

4.4 Analysis and Discussion

4.4.1 Actors' Visibility by Country

By analyzing the number of actors visible in the sample, it can be seen that the majority of the activism that takes place on Facebook is in form of publics.

Figure 4.10 compares the visibility percentages of actors in countries where the 'Arab Spring' took place with the ones in Saudi, Qatar and Pan-Arabic ones. Public Official actors, those who represent the state or political parties, are more visible in the countries
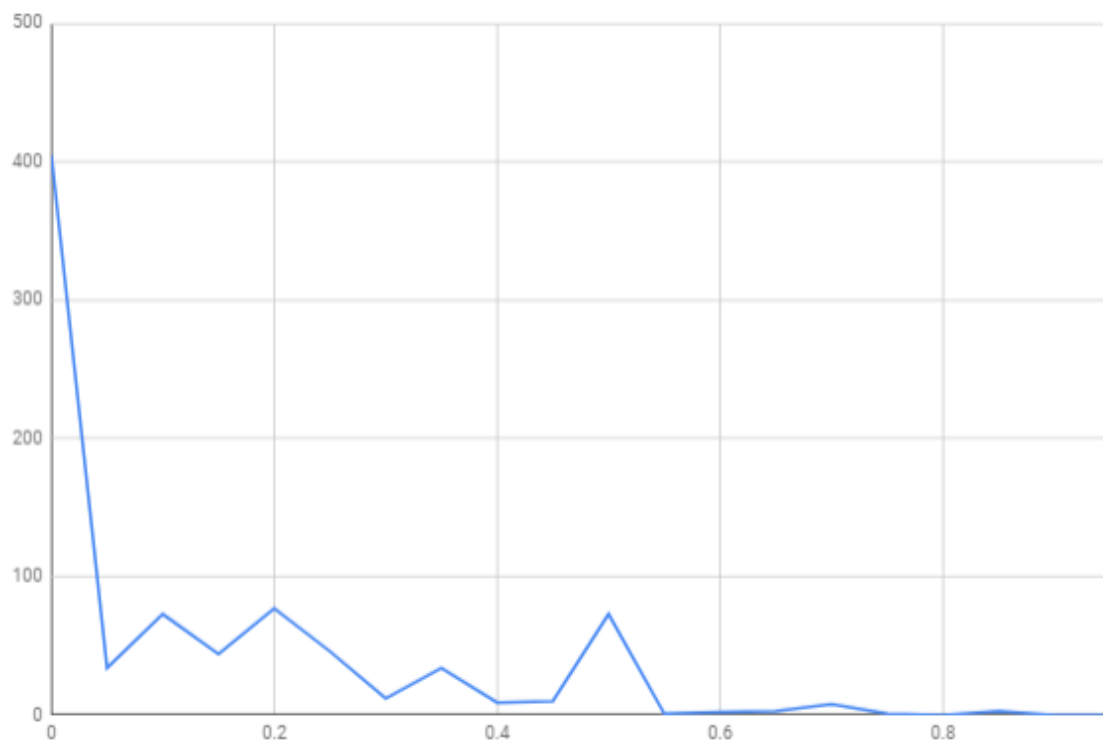
FIGURE 4.7: The Distribution of Local Clustering Coefficient for Each Node

Modularity: 0.324
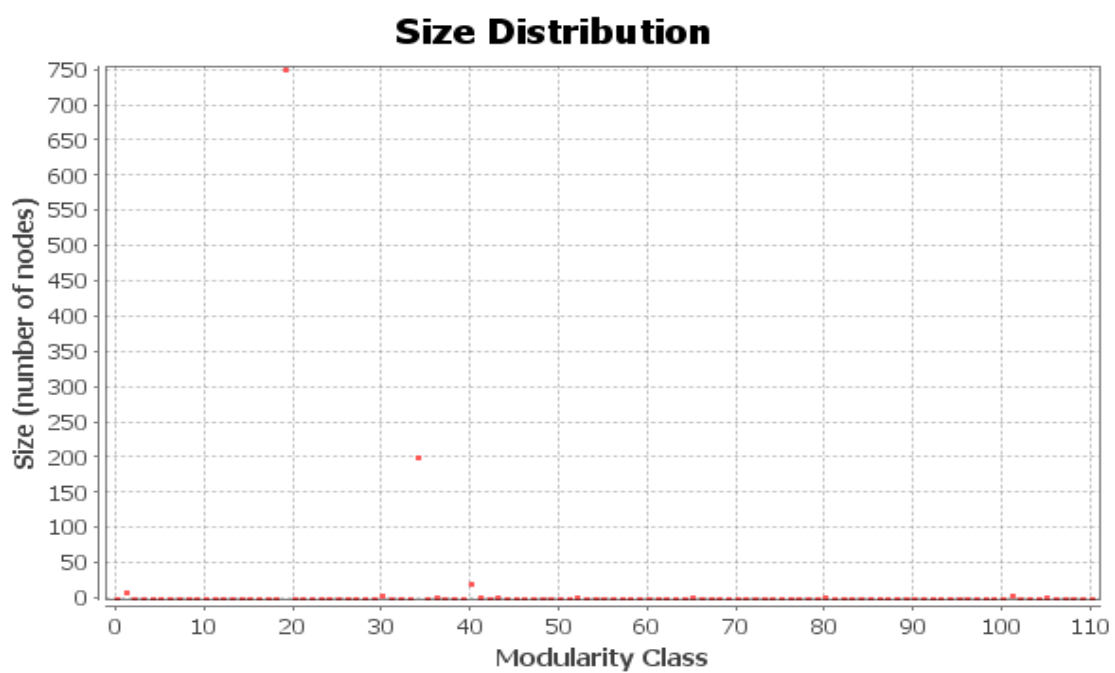Modularity with resolution: 4.301
Number of Communities: 111

FIGURE 4.8: The Distribution of Size of Modularity Classes for the Overall Sample
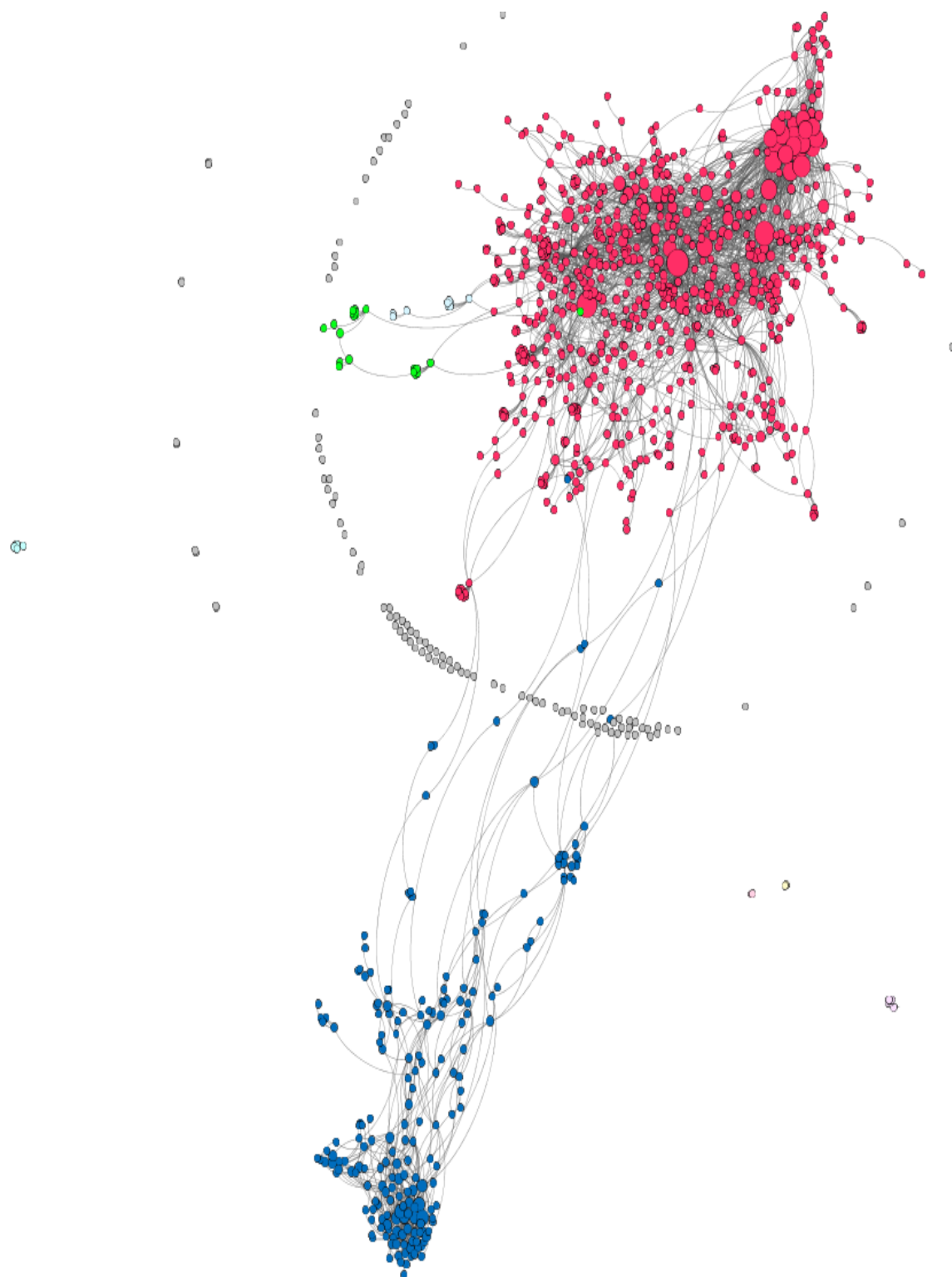
FIGURE 4.9: Nodes coloured by their Modularity Class

Network	Nodes	Edges	Percentage	Avg.Degree	Density	Clustering
All Pages	1105	3329	100%	3.013	0.003	0.135
Arabic	682	2101	61.72%	3.081	0.005	0.137
Sect	167	496	15.11%	2.970	0.018	0.171
Non-Western	129	8	11.67%	0.062	0.001	0.000
Western	72	0	6.52%	0.000	0.000	0.000
Transnational	55	48	4.98%	0.873	0.016	0.065
Publics	517	1329	46.79%	2.571	0.005	0.143
Civil Society	150	73	13.57%	0.487	0.003	0.046
Media	34	2	3.08%	0.059	0.002	0.000
Public Officials	57	18	5.16%	0.316	0.006	0.053
Private Actors	96	26	8.69%	0.271	0.003	0.003
Pan-Arabic	241	493	21.81%	2.046	0.009	0.120
Egypt	122	160	11.04%	1.311	0.011	0.109
Tunisia	86	65	7.78%	0.756	0.009	0.031
Syria	84	117	7.60%	1.393	0.017	0.092
Libya	71	96	6.43%	1.352	0.019	0.107
Lebanon	62	130	5.61%	2.097	0.034	0.192
Iraq	27	9	2.44%	0.333	0.013	0.074
Algeria	24	29	2.17%	1.208	0.053	0.244
Saudi	23	17	2.08%	0.739	0.034	0.128
Morocco	23	7	2.08%	0.304	0.014	0.000
Palestine	22	1	1.99%	0.045	0.002	0.000
Jordan	18	16	1.63%	0.889	0.052	0.000
Yemen	18	3	1.63%	0.167	0.010	0.000
Kuwait	8	0	0.72%	0.000	0.000	0.000
Sudan	8	2	0.72%	0.250	0.036	0.000
UAE	5	1	0.45%	0.200	0.050	0.000
Bahrain	4	1	0.36%	0.250	0.083	0.000
Qatar	1	0	0.09%	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mauritania	1	0	0.09%	0.000	0.000	0.000
Other	257	36	23.26%	0.140	0.001	0.004

TABLE 4.4: Metrics of the Sample Network

where the regimes have changed (Tunisia, Egypt). There is little visibility in Syria. This is might be explained as an example of state feminism, where the state is cleaning its image by showing care for women's rights in Syria. Qatar appeared in the network with only one page, which represents an organization for women that holds Qatar's ruler's name as a title for this organization.

4.4.1.1 Polarization

The network decomposes into two big communities, when the community detection algorithm applied, see Figure 4.9. This indicates dense connections between the nodes within each part but sparse connections with nodes between them. This reveals that the goals feminist activism is striving for, form two distinctive sets. Those who work for

FIGURE 4.10: Distribution of Actors in Each Country
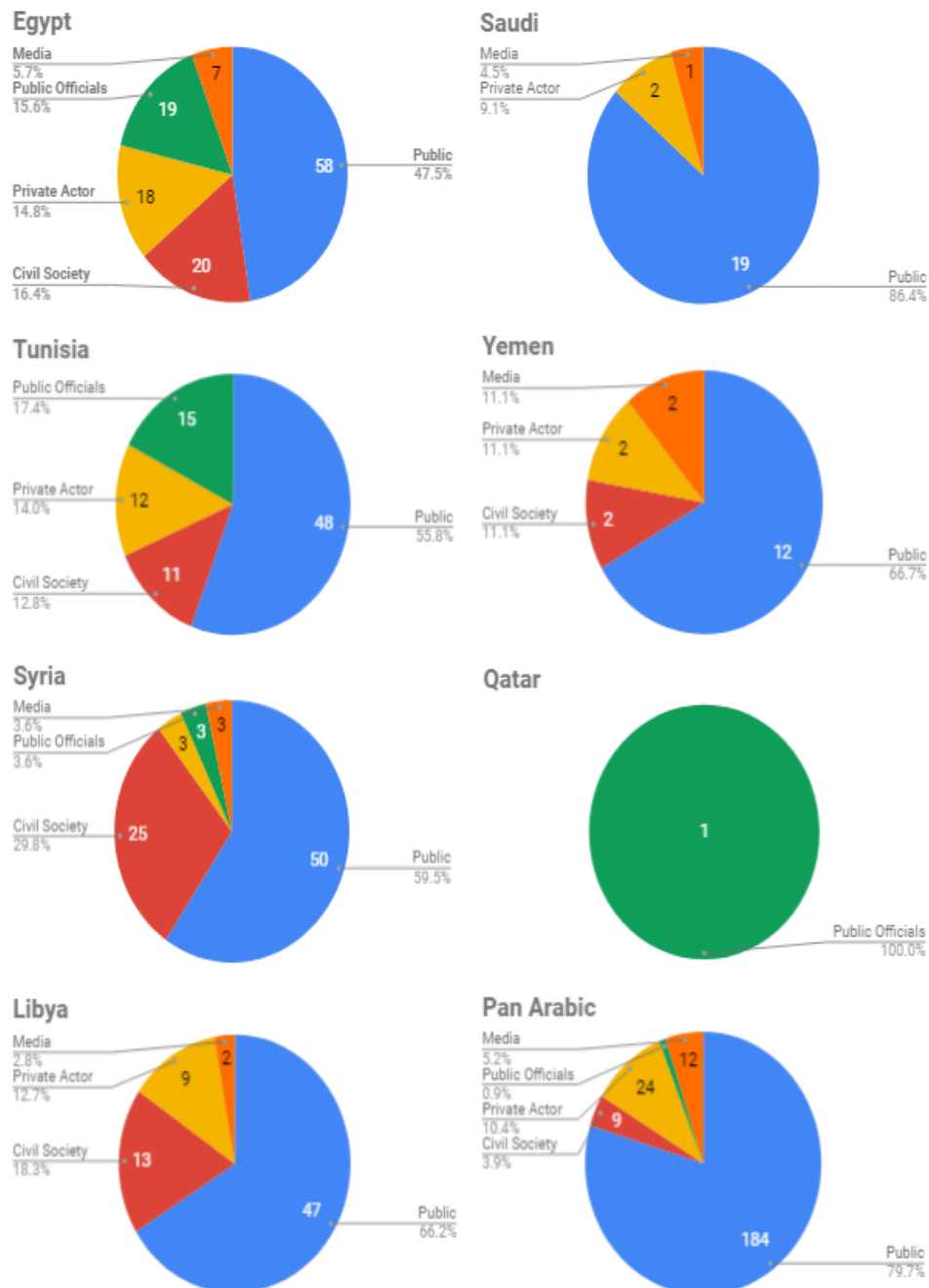
one of them cannot link themselves to those who work with the other set. Or it might indicate that this is identity politics and they are exposed to a pressure of polarization, where the circumstances and political forces are manipulating the identity of women.

4.4.2   Connectedness of Middle East feminisms with those of other nations

The network structure shows a significant difference in the way that pages identified as Arab feminism, and those identified as Sect feminism, connect to other types of pages in the sample.

Only 86 edges connect Arab feminism and Sect feminism, while Arab feminism is linked by 225 edges to non-Western feminism pages, and by 136 edges to Western feminism pages. Arab feminism pages have 161 edges linking them with Transnational pages.

This shows that Arabic feminism pages are more connected to the other nations' feminism pages than to pages of Arabic feminism that use religious ideologies to identify themselves.

Not only are Sect feminist pages less linked to Arab pages, they are linked by only 4 edges to Non-western pages, 1 edge with Western pages, and no edges at all with Transnational project pages.

This shows that, in terms of their network connections, Sect feminism pages are more isolated from the outside world than Arab feminism pages, and that it can be seen objectively that they have very few connections at all (5 edges across 166 pages).

4.4.3   Naming Paradigms

Also investigated were the terms used in the pages for each category of feminism/ Although a somewhat coarse measure, these do reveal the concerns of the different types of feminism, as expressed on Facebook.

The common words used were counted and a comparison made between 'Arab feminism' and 'Sect feminism' in Table 4.5. The table is in three sections, the first section showing the word used to indicate a feminist slant to the page, the second section showing the words which were used to describe goals, and the third section showing words associated with identity.

The word 'Feminism' (or its derivatives such as 'Feminist') is used very sparsely within the sample. It was used in English (10 times) and French (6 times) and even Arabic spelled in Latin letters (2 times), but only 4 times in Arabic (making a total of 22 occurrences in the sample, less than 2.6%). Pages coded with 'Sect feminism' was not used at all. This scarcity across the sample could be because it is assumed within these particular spaces, but it may also indicate that the word itself is explicitly avoided – perhaps because of its associations with colonialist interpretations of feminism (Yaghoobi and Badran, 2011).
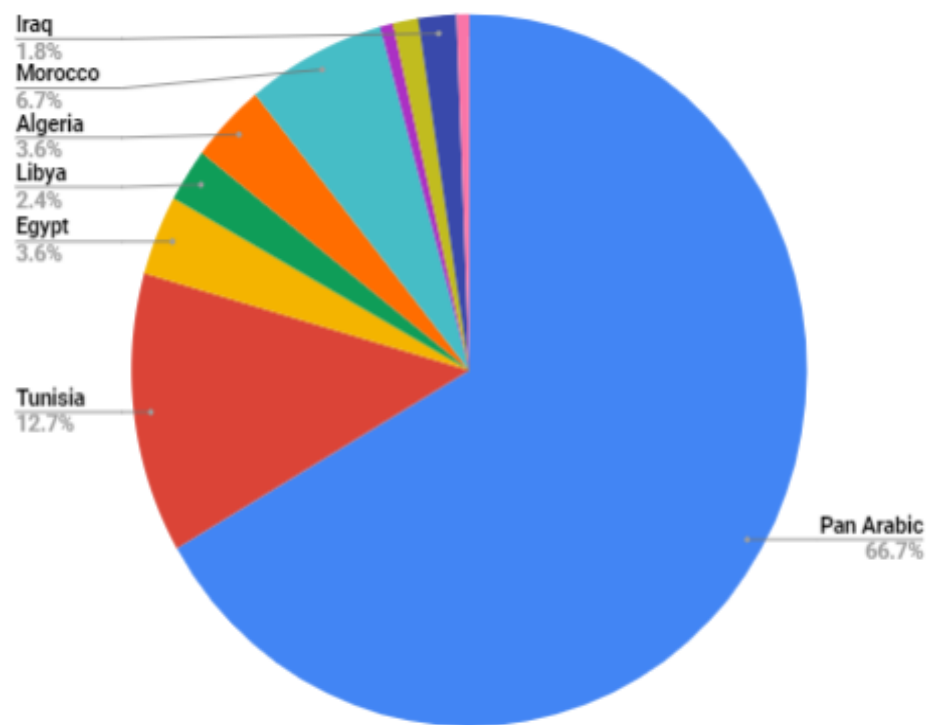
FIGURE 4.11: The Distribution of Sect Pages over Countries

Issues normally associated with Western feminism do appear in the the Arab feminism pages (words such as 'violence' and 'harassment'), appearing 83 times in the sample. But there is not a single use in the Sect pages.

In the third section there was a variety of identities in the Arab feminism pages, ranging from the debate around veiling, to aspirations of freedom and liberation, to stronger terms associated with direct action ('activist' and 'rebels'). In the Sect feminism section, the identities are much narrower. There is a shared concern with the issue of whether or not to wear a veil, although the Arab feminism pages identified with unveiling (18 times) and the Sect feminism with veiling (10 times). However the most significant group identified as Salafi, a religious-political ideology associated with a strict interpretation of Islam (Lauzière, 2010), whose 48 pages represent 28.9% of the total Sect sample.

4.4.4 Distribution of Ideologies by Country

The pages on Sectarian Ideology were not evenly spread over countries. Figure 4.11 shows that the majority of the pages classified as Sectarian feminism belonged to North African countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Morocco). With 12.7% of these pages, Tunisia appears to have the most significant role.

Word	count in AraFem	count in SectFem
نسوية (Nasawyia)	4	0
Feminist	10	0
Femes	6	0
Nasawyia	2	0
عنف (Violence)	15	0
تحرش (Harassment)	18	0
حجاب (Headscarf)	8	3
حرية (Freedom)	17	0
ثورة (Revolution)	25	0
منتقبة ات (Face-veiled)	0	10
سافرات (Not veiled)	18	0
سلفيات (Female Salafi)	0	48
مناضلات (Female Activists)	20	0
متحررات (liberated women)	12	0
حرائر (Free women)	12	1
متمردة ات (Female rebels)	13	0
لا قديسات ولا عاهرات (Not saints nor whores)	9	0

TABLE 4.5: Words Used in Page Titles

4.4.5 The Geographical Extent

Figure 4.2 shows that the top four countries, which have pages declaring activism based on them, are Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Libya. These are those countries who participated in the recent upheavals of the so-called 'Arab Spring', with the exception of Yemen whose representation is limited.

4.4.6 The Intended Scope

The intended scope of pages (in most of the cases) is declared in the title of the page or in the 'About' section of the page. Each of these was manually inspected in order to classify the page as either personal (relating to the activities of a specific individual), city (focused on a major metropolitan area), country (mainly focused on a particular nation state), or pan-Arabic (the widest focus, covering the Arab world), while transnational project pages are obviously defined by the nature of their projects.

The intended scope of Arabic and Sect pages varied considerably. Pages marked as Sect feminism in the thematic coding were most likely not to restrict their intended scope or its target publics by state or city names, while 77.8% of the sample were classified as Pan-Arabic. The details are shown in Figure 4.12. The Arab feminism pages were more likely to define their intended scope by stating the country or the city where their activity is based (58.6% were classified as focused on country), as shown in Figure 4.12.
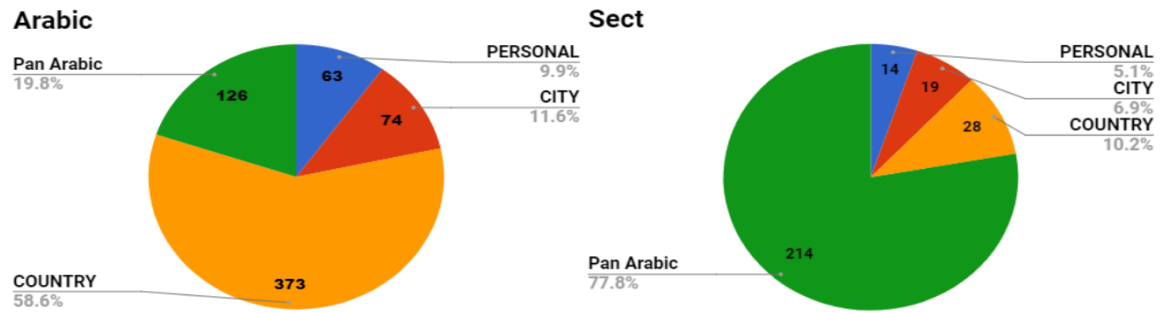
FIGURE 4.12: Comparison Between the Intended Scope of Pages in the Arab and Sect
Feminism Sample

4.4.7   Trans-national movements

Groups of pages were detected representing a trend that spread from country to country
in a form of a chain of pages that held the same pattern of naming themselves. The
title of these pages consisted of two parts: the chosen name for their cause, and the
name of the country they are representing. The names of these groups can be identified
among the words of high frequency in the third section of Table 4.5. لا قديسات ولا عاهرات
(Not saints nor whores), متحررات (liberated women), and Safirat سافرات (Not veiled). The
Safirat سافرات chain, biggest of all these, was highly clustered together and occupied the
top records in the in-degree distribution.

Rane and Salem (2012) stressed the significance of studying the social movements in-
volved in the Arab uprisings and their use of social media. He argued that what united
these movements was a collective identity manifested in a call for socio-political change
based on ideals of freedom and democracy.

"Cross-national diffusion can occur in the absence of high levels of direct contact, pro-
vided nonrelational channels of information are available to a group of potential adopters
who define themselves as similar to the transmitters and the idea or item in question as
relevant to their situation" (McAdam and Rucht, 1993). These characteristics of mo-
bilization for social and political change, identity-based network structure, and protest
action, are consistent with the cited definition of a social movement (Van de Donk et al.,
2004). Rucht (2004) affirmed the critical role mass media continue to play in terms of
how social movements are perceived and responded to. The Arab uprisings occurred at
a time when social media are more prevalent. However, mass media were still the most
dominant source of information about the uprisings even for those in the MENA region.

Chapter 5

The Quantity of Female Participation

Our research set out to investigate the claim that the online social networks provides a space that enabled digitalization of public sphere. As a part of online public sphere, women's online activism is inspected to know whether these online spaces provide spheres for women to participate in making socio-political changes in the Arab countries.

The previous chapter 4 showed how Facebook pages were used by Arab women to group themselves and boost their social and political activism. It provided an insight into the structure of the Facebook pages, their relationship with each other, how they link to other feminist Facebook pages worldwide, and the countries represented by such pages. It also addressed the groups of actors that form this sphere.

By producing alternative discourses and images about womanhood, women are shaping, impacting, and redefining the public sphere (Skalli, 2006). They participate in the production and dissemination of alternative knowledge and the creation of transgressive spaces. However, we have no idea how vibrant these spaces have become over the last decade. This chapter concentrates on detecting when these pages were created and how their levels of activity have changed over time, particularly before, during, and after the 'Arab Spring'.

The case of trans-national movements will be considered and the activity of pages that represent different countries within the same movement compared. This will enable the verification of whether there are any identifiable trends in activity in countries involved in the 'Arab Spring'.

The previous chapter showed that the pages are distributed to form two big segments, which represent two ideologies (Arab and Sect feminism). The word count showed that 'veiling' is a common concern and is reflected in the title of the pages on both segments, section 4.4.3.

Chapter 3 showed that the postmodern state, its apparatuses, political parties, and interest groups (even those in seeming opposition to the state), currently attempt to shape gender identity and politics to serve their own agendas. Politicization, traced to the relationship of the state and its apparatuses to religion Hale (2018) described in section 3.4, supports the assumption that there are counter-publics that take the 'veiling' as a vocal issue of dispute. In this case, if they are advocating for and against the same cause, will they exhibit a similar level of activity over time.

5.1   Case Study

In section 4.4.7, some pages of activism were detected representing a trend or a wave that spread from country to country, that form examples of transnational socio-political movements. The biggest is the 'Safirat' سافرات group. The pages forming this group are coloured green in Figure 5.1. The title of these pages contain two words: the chosen name for their cause which is the word 'Safirat' سافرات, and the name of the country they are representing.

The word 'Safirat' سافرات is the plural form for the word 'Safira' سافره, which simply means unveiled. The word is commonly used by those who believe veiling is mandatory, to label those who have discarded it. However, these women are using it as way of showing repel that mindset.

These pages use the same logos, mottoes, and similar descriptions in their 'About' sections. This means they form a transnational social movement, clearly indicative of their collective identities.

Not only do 'Safirat' سافرات pages exhibit the highest clustering values amongst the entire series of pages, their title holds a combination of two words, each expressing an identity. Section 2.8.5 explored how these identities have attracted many researchers who investigated the recent political changes in the Arab world. The common pattern of naming themselves uses the name of the country they represent as the second part of two-word title, with the exception of one page that held only 'Safirat' as a title. In the network sample presented in Chapter 4, a page for each Arab country was presented alongside two pages that hold a more general identity, 'Arabic' or 'Muslim'. There are also pages that hold in their titles identities that are parallel to these general identities, e.g. Kurdish, Somalian. This indicates that the spread of this wave went beyond Arabic activism.

Moreover, 'Safirat' سافرات pages are a clear example of a social movement forming a counter public, this being counter to the norm of these countries, which is adorning or 'veiling', i.e. head covering. These pages are a subgroup of a larger group which use the

word 'Hijab' حجاب(Head veiling) or 'Niqab' نقاب(Face veiling) to advocate against them. Pages that use these words to advocate against them are coloured purple in Figure 5.1.

Table 4.5 showed some words used frequently in the sample network. There are other pages that use these words. However, their titles show that they advocate the 'Hijab' حجاب(Head veiling) or 'Niqab' نقاب(Face veiling). These pages are creating another counter public. These pages are coloured fuchsia in Figure 5.1.

5.2   Answering RQ2

- When were these two publics created? How did the wave of 'Safirat' as an example of transnational social movement spread among the Arab countries? Where did it start?

- What has been the general trend of the activities (posting, reaction, commenting, and sharing) during the years before, during and after the Uprisings?

- Comparing the activity of pages that have countries in their name with more general names, what can we infer about the potential manifestation of Arab and Muslim identities?

- Are the activity levels of pages who advocate 'veiling' comparable to the activity levels of pages advocating against it?

5.3   Methodology

Using Netvizz[1], a tool that extracts data from Facebook for research purposes, the activity statistics was downloaded for the two sets of pages (Sample I and Sample II): posts, comments, reactions, and shares, between the dates 1 January 2008 and 15 August 2018 (the starting date is widely used in statistics of Facebook Pages). The downloaded files are tab-delimited and the records represent the counts of each of the four sorts of activity (posts, comments, reactions, and shares) per day. Pivot tables were created for each activity to show the quantity of the activities aggregated by year.

5.3.1   Sample I

The list of pages that include 'Safirat' in their page names was identified as the starting point of investigation. This list consisted of 18 pages, each one representing an Arabic country. This sample is used in order to compare the activities of the 'Safirat' social

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[1]Ethics approval for retrieving this data was obtained from the Ethics Committee at the University of Southampton (ID:19608)
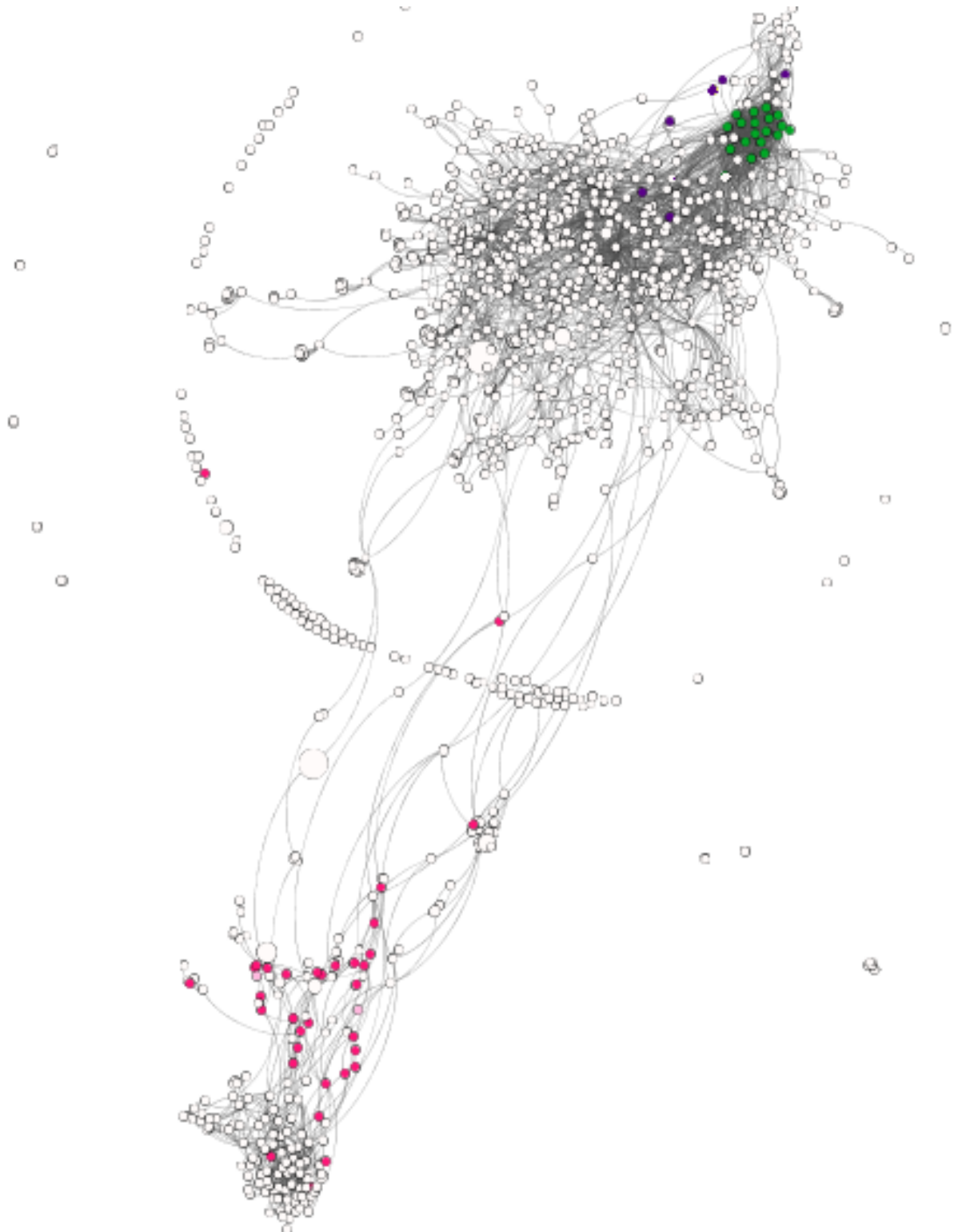
FIGURE 5.1: Positions of pages of Group1 (coloured green and purple), and pages of
Group2 (coloured fuchsia) in the sample network of Chapter 4

movement according to the countries they represent. The records of activity within these pages will then be retrieved.

5.3.2 Sample II

Sample II consists of two parts as they are required to run comparisons between two counter-publics (one advocating against 'veiling' and the other advocating for). The activities of each group will be the sum of the activities of each page in the group.

The 'Safirat' pages are a subgroup of pages which advocate against 'veiling'. In this larger sample, the 'Safirat' pages were collated with pages that generally advocate against 'veiling' and subsequently the activity data of all these pages combined was retrieved. This made up group 1 which consisted of 24 pages, 18 of 'Safirat' and 6 advocating against 'veiling'. These pages are coloured green and purple in Figure 5.1.

Similarly the group of pages that advocate for 'veiling' were identified, by collating the pages that have 'Hijab' حجاب(Head veiling) or 'Niqab' نقاب(Face veiling) in their name, with the purpose of advocating for it. 28 pages were identified by this criterion. However, four of these pages where excluded from this list: three had been deleted and one had a very short life, less than a month. That resulted in the group containing 24 pages. These pages are coloured fuschia in Figure 5.1.

5.4 Results and Analysis

5.4.1 Creation Dates

Figure 5.4.1 presents each page in Sample II. Group 1, coloured orange, represents the pages that advocate against veiling, while the blue ones represent pages that advocate for veiling. The position of each circle reveals the date of creation of that page, the horizontal axis showing the year and the vertical showing the month. The size of circles represents the total number of the followers of each page in August 2018.

This diagram reveals that the most pages were created in 2012. The pages created in 2013 generally did not gain the level of popularity the pages created before did.

The data reveals that the 'Safirat' group started with a page from Tunisia in February 2012, followed by Libya, Syria, Sudan, Saudi, and Algeria eight months later than the Tunisian one. In the last two months of 2012, Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq established their pages. The rest of the pages were created in the first half of 2013. Only the pages of Bahrain and the Emirates were left to September of that year. This suggests that the idea was first originated and tested in Tunisia, before it became
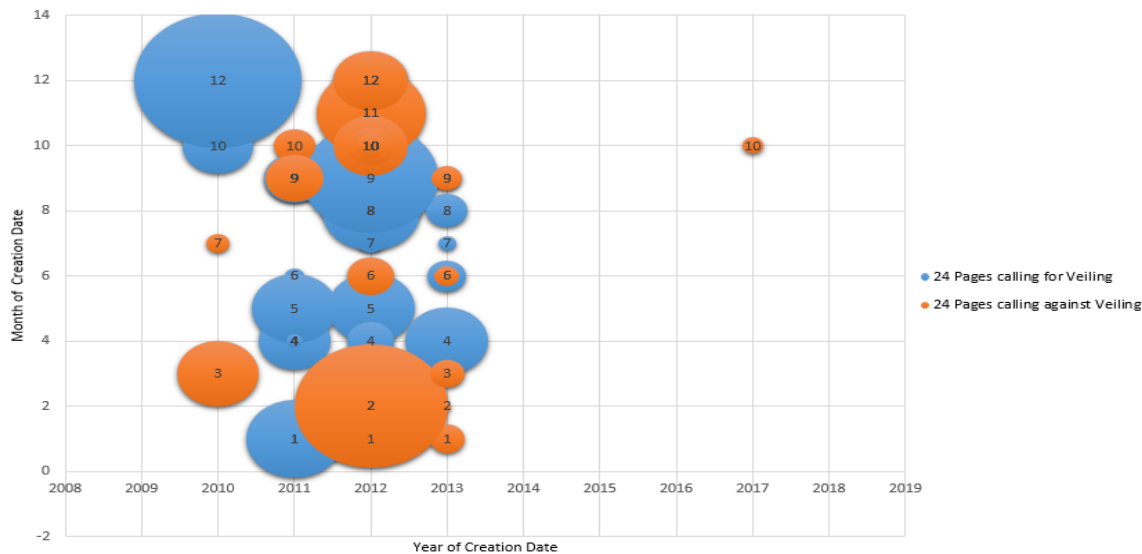
FIGURE 5.2: Creation Date of pages in Sample II. Circle size represents the total number of followers of each page at August 2018.

common currency in other Arab countries, who imitated it, most of whom witnessed the recent political uprisings that started in 2011.

5.4.2   Trends of Activities

This section presents the activities within each page of Sample I using four metrics (posting, commenting, like, share). Each has the horizontal axis showing the year and the vertical showing the quantity of activity. The countries where the 'Arab Spring' took place are marked with a thicker line, and the two general identities with dashed and dotted lines.

5.4.2.1   Posts

Figure 5.3 shows that there is a general trend showing an increase in posting during the period 2012-2015, and a subsequent decline thereafter. Interestingly, Tunisia and Egypt showed consistency in posting from 2012 (the birth of these pages) to 2016 and 2015 respectively. Libya, for example, had a peak in posting 2013 but then rapidly declined.

In terms of the pages holding the general identity 'Arab', after their beginning in 2012 the posting steady increased, peaking in 2013 and then declining dramatically and completely diminishing in 2015.

The 'Safirat' pages, which did not state a country or nationality, began in 2013 and have declined since then, eventually being phased out just one year after their beginning.

Table 5.1 shows the data on which Figure 5.3 is based.

Country	CreationDate	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Tunisia	10-02-12	587	589	594	594	564	322
Libya	15-10-12	400	595	666	163	26	3
Syria	16-10-12	113	214	56	17	6	4
Saudi	22-10-12	355	499	531	38	1	6
Sudan	22-10-12	57	235	529	23	2	0
Algeria	22-10-12	221	591	593	592	470	594
Egypt	14-11-12	594	591	599	595	264	231
Yemen	19-11-12	25	339	302	10	0	3
Palestine	18-12-12	20	570	471	105	8	1
Lebanon	27-12-12	3	599	549	19	0	0
Iraq	27-12-12	28	595	592	566	39	0
Kuwait	20-01-13	0	350	250	12	0	0
Morocco	25-02-13	0	117	2	2	4	0
Jordan	20-03-13	0	300	534	189	0	0
No Nationality	11-06-13	0	159	72	2	1	0
Pan-Arabic	26-06-13	440	572	90	1	0	0
Bahrain	14-09-13	0	80	187	10	0	0
UAE	14-09-13	0	98	178	11	0	0

TABLE 5.1: Activity(Posts) of the Wave of 'Safirat' Pages by Country

5.4.2.2   Comments

Figure 5.4 shows that Iraq stands out as having the most activity between 2014 and 2016, exceeding 30,000 comments at its peak in 2015. In order to understand this striking level of comments, all the posts published in 2015 were retrieved, resulting in 565 records, which were then ordered according the number of comments each post received. The content of the top 20 were reviewed, and it was found that six of these addressed the new draft Jaafari personal status law. Note the fluctuating low level activity within Libya, Tunisia and Egypt. The commenting by pages of general identity (Arab and no nationality) was very low in general and almost completely subsided during 2015. Table 5.2 shows the data on which Figure 5.3 is based.

5.4.2.3   Likes

Figure 5.5 shows a similar pattern to comments, with Iraq's commenting dramatically peaking in 2015, with Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt fluctuating, albeit at a higher rate that the remaining countries (except Iraq). It is worth mentioning the activity pattern of general identity groups (Arab and no nationality) is the same here as well.

Table 5.3 shows the data on which Figure 5.5 is based.

Country	CreationDate	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Tunisia	10-02-12	10656	7447	4403	2739	4767	2192
Libya	15-10-12	746	4870	5468	1019	159	30
Syria	16-10-12	383	417	146	48	0	0
Saudi	22-10-12	235	2234	1607	259	66	57
Sudan	22-10-12	181	1157	1140	102	24	0
Algeria	22-10-12	602	3688	2487	6143	2392	3942
Egypt	14-11-12	4331	5971	4023	6393	1705	3326
Yemen	19-11-12	17	1148	229	12	0	20
Palestine	18-12-12	22	1000	767	32	16	10
Lebanon	27-12-12	24	1702	714	49	0	0
Iraq	27-12-12	228	2186	8515	31306	687	0
Kuwait	20-01-13	0	870	129	88	0	0
Morocco	25-02-13	0	78	0	0	0	0
Jordan	20-03-13	0	884	1587	1066	0	0
No Nationality	11-06-13	0	103	149	0	0	0
Pan-Arabic	26-06-13	473	217	70	44	0	0
Bahrain	14-09-13	0	46	143	86	0	0
UAE	14-09-13	0	119	377	154	0	0

TABLE 5.2: Activity(Comments) of the Wave of 'Safirat' Pages by Country
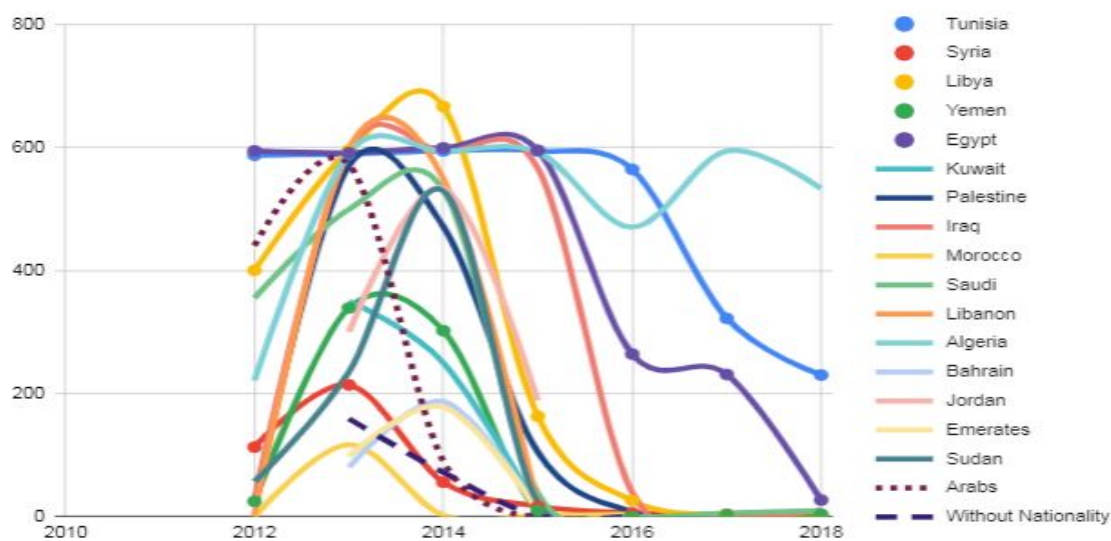

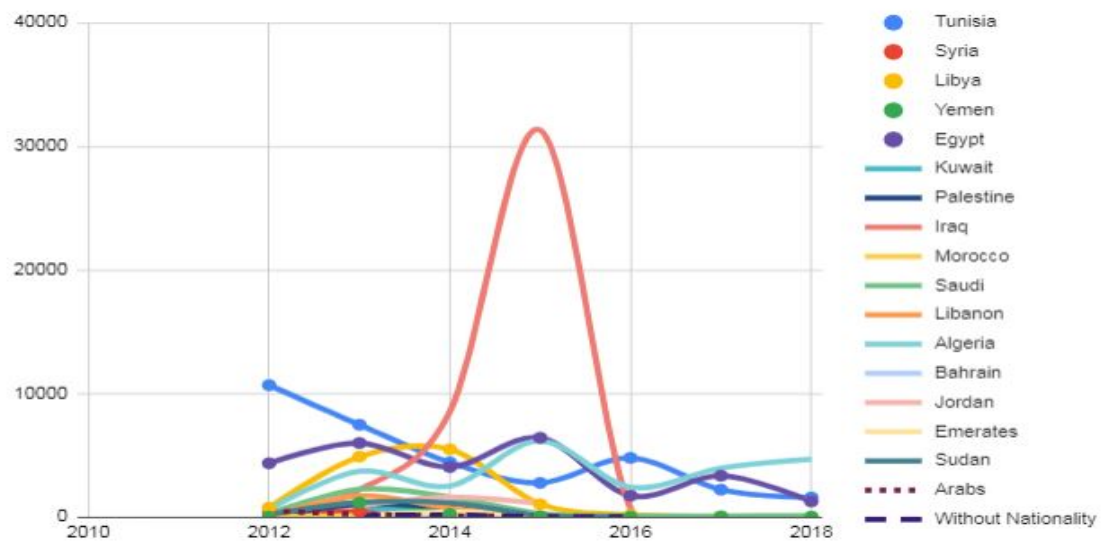FIGURE 5.3: Activity(Posts) of the Wave of 'Safirat' Pages by Country

FIGURE 5.4: Activity(Comments) of the Wave of 'Safirat' Pages by Country

Country	CreationDate	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Tunisia	10-02-12	43606	51788	43982	38949	62878	13693
Libya	15-10-12	2933	21637	20130	4353	827	123
Syria	16-10-12	1341	2063	1370	536	0	0
Saudi	22-10-12	1498	9596	9528	853	230	293
Sudan	22-10-12	1115	4971	7001	576	68	0
Algeria	22-10-12	2817	14326	10782	15975	15134	12040
Egypt	14-11-12	31972	39000	31121	37528	14657	12108
Yemen	19-11-12	220	4917	1473	98	0	15
Palestine	18-12-12	200	8047	5022	443	58	1
Lebanon	27-12-12	3	599	549	19	0	0
Iraq	27-12-12	1813	12754	39080	89305	3148	0
Kuwait	20-01-13	0	350	250	12	0	0
Morocco	25-02-13	0	113	1	0	0	0
Jordan	20-03-13	0	4982	9359	4933	0	0
No Nationality	11-06-13	0	764	771	0	0	0
Pan-Arabic	26-06-13	3952	1770	310	24	0	0
Bahrain	14-09-13	0	401	1101	310	0	0
UAE	14-09-13	0	827	2199	450	0	0

TABLE 5.3: Activity(Likes) of the Wave of 'Safirat' Pages by Country
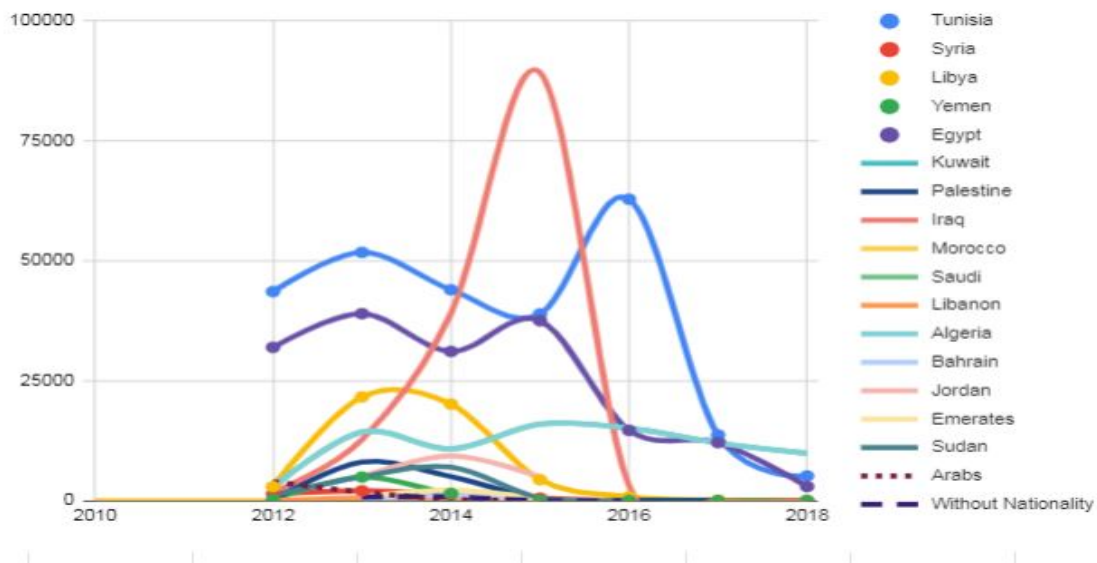
FIGURE 5.5: Activity(Likes) of the Wave of 'Safirat' Pages by Country
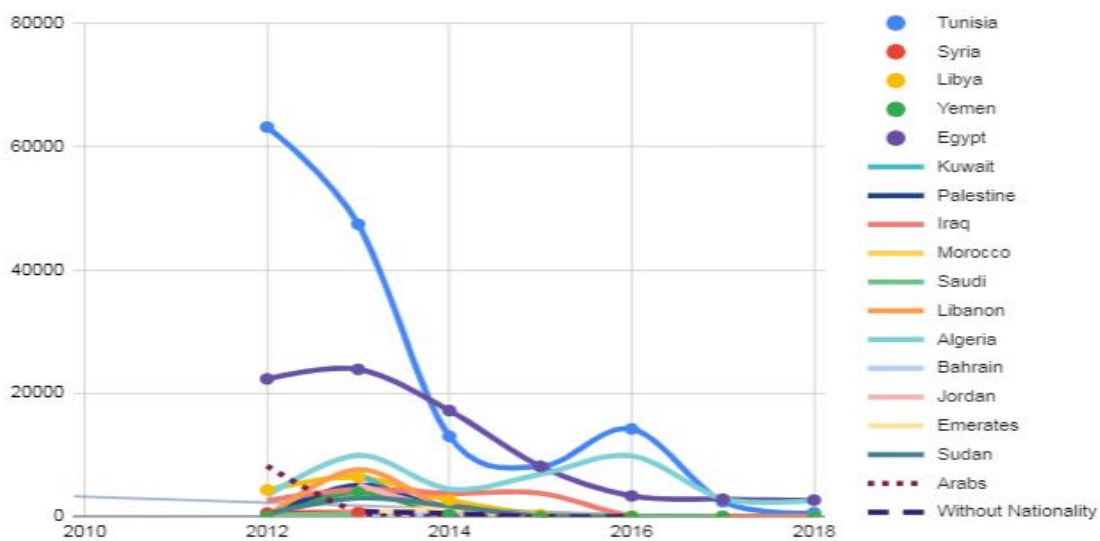
FIGURE 5.6: Activity(Shares) of the Wave of 'Safirat' Pages by Country

5.4.2.4   Shares

Figure 5.6 shows that Tunisia has predominantly the most shares compared to other countries, peaking in 2012 with over 60,000 shares and declining thereafter. Egypt comes second with just over 20,000 shares in 2012. Pages which identified generally as "Arab" in their name had a modest start in 2012 and within a year had virtually no shares. Pages without any nationality mentioned, began sharing in 2013 and had a low number of shares throughout until 2016.

Table 5.4 shows the data on which Figure 5.6 is based.

Country	CreationDate	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Tunisia	10-02-12	63134	47391	13017	8143	14214	2403
Libya	15-10-12	4323	6410	2687	352	67	39
Syria	16-10-12	576	673	135	24	0	0
Saudi	22-10-12	171	348	280	24	1	3
Sudan	22-10-12	449	3028	1754	101	2	0
Algeria	22-10-12	3355	9945	4461	6862	9859	2907
Egypt	14-11-12	22323	23870	17196	8148	3352	2836
Yemen	19-11-12	67	3955	357	10	0	0
Palestine	18-12-12	83	5136	1117	24	14	0
Lebanon	27-12-12	26	7638	1258	210	0	0
Iraq	27-12-12	2578	4443	3769	3808	131	0
Kuwait	20-01-13	0	6992	326	50	0	0
Morocco	25-02-13	0	458	0	0	0	0
Jordan	20-03-13	0	5181	1148	464	0	0
No Nationality	11-06-13	0	880	508	0	0	0
Pan-Arabic	26-06-13	8212	833	15	0	0	0
Bahrain	14-09-13	0	358	329	39	0	0
UAE	14-09-13	0	544	1290	62	0	0

TABLE 5.4: Activity(Shares) of the Wave of 'Safirat' Pages by Country

5.4.3 Veiling Debate

This section compares the activities of the two groups in Sample II, presented in four graphs. Each has the horizontal axis showing the year and the vertical showing the quantity of activity. The blue line shows the changes of the sum of the activities of the 24 pages of group 1 over time, and the red line shows the sum of the 24 pages in group 2 over the same period.

5.4.3.1 Posts

Figure 5.7 shows that the non-veiled group had a peak starting in 2011, the year 'Arab Spring' uprising started, whereas the veiled group had a steady increase in posts and a steady decline, although recently they are posting more. Since 2014 there has been a decline in posts to both groups.

5.4.3.2 Comments

Figure 5.8 shows that both lines exhibited a peak in comment levels. Veiled had their peak in 2012, non-veiled their peak in 2015.

FIGURE 5.7: Comparison of post rate. The blue line represents the sum of posts of all pages in group 1, and the red line represent the same in group 2
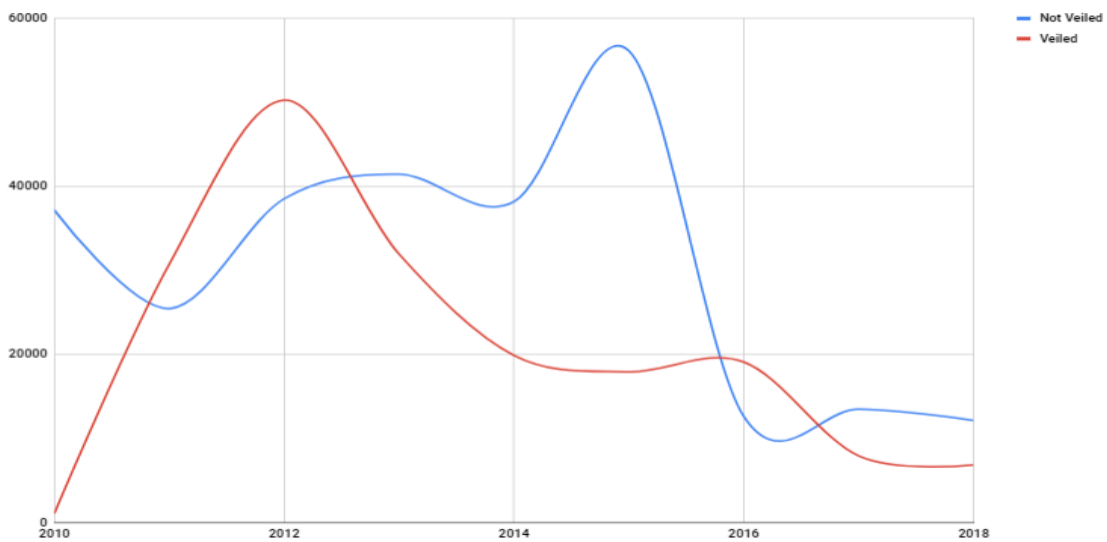
FIGURE 5.8: Comparison of comment rate. The blue line represents the sum of posts of all pages in group 1, and the red line represent the same in group 2

5.4.3.3   Likes

Figure 5.9 shows that from 2010 to 2012 there was momentum gained in the number of likes in both groups, but in 2014 there was a dramatic difference in the number of likes between veiled and non-veiled pages, with not veiled pages coming out on top. However, likes amongst both groups declined after 2014.

FIGURE 5.9: comparison of like rate: the blue line represent the sum of likes of all pages in group1 and the red line represent the sum of likes of all pages in group2
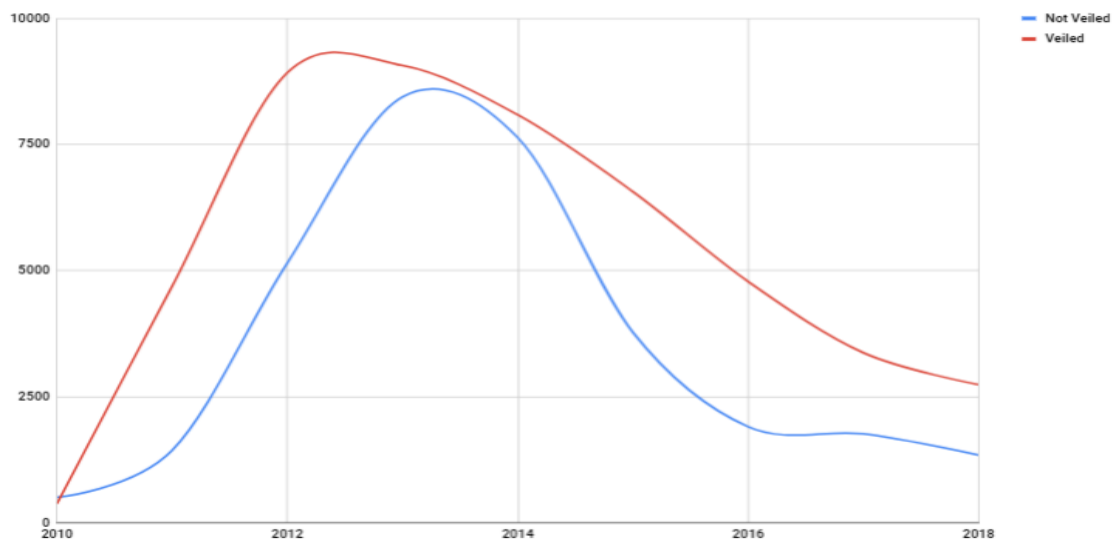

FIGURE 5.10: Comparison of share rate. The blue line represents the sum of posts of all pages in group 1, and the red line represent the same in group 2
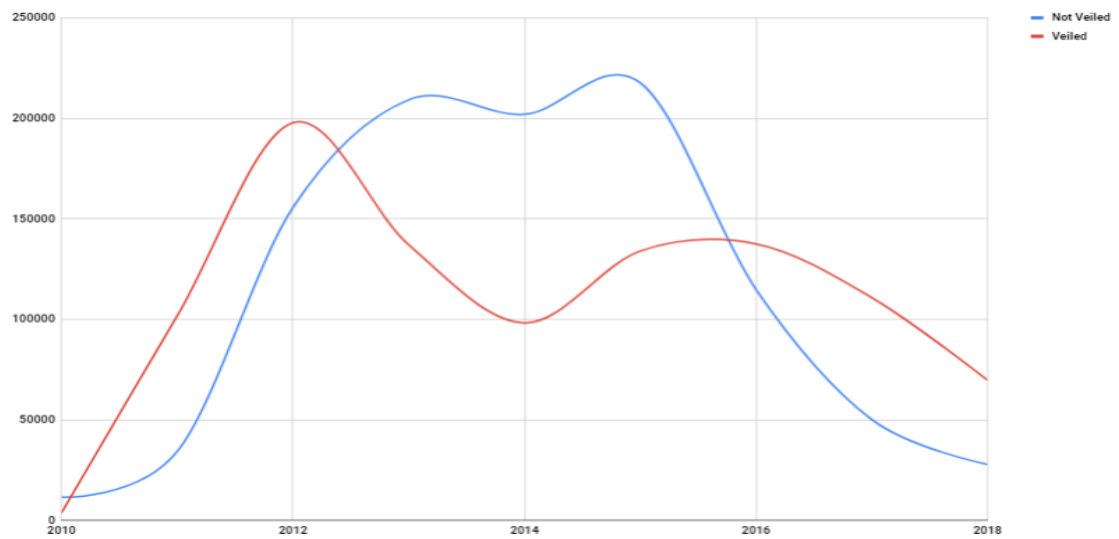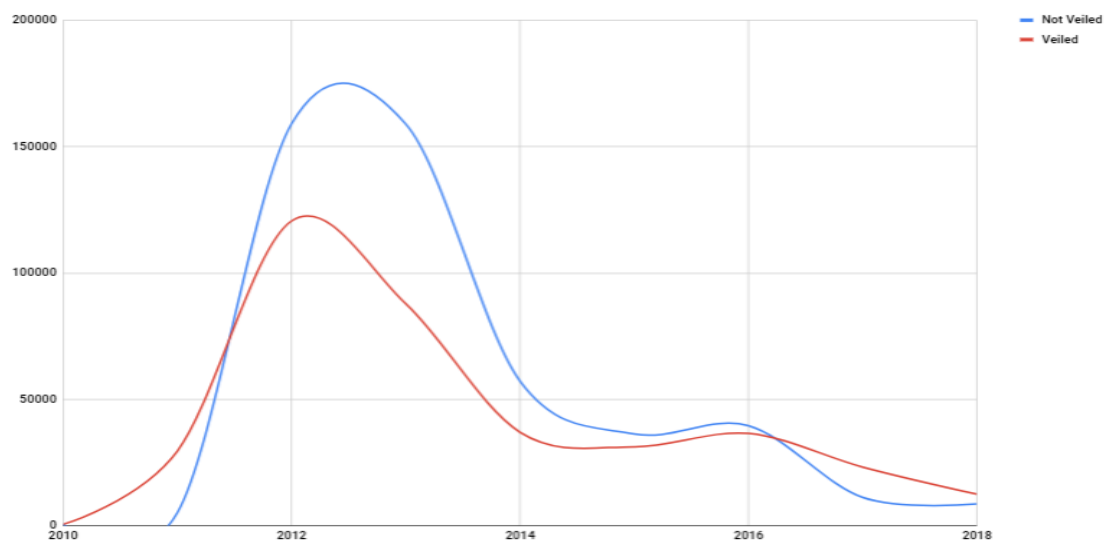
5.4.3.4 Share

Figure 5.10 shows similar trend, however unveiled had shared more posts in total.

5.5   Discussion

5.5.1   General trend of page activities during the time of observation

Most page activities peaked during 2012 to 2015, with a remarkable activity increase in the countries where the 'Arab Spring' uprisings took place. This is an evidence that women used Facebook pages, during the time of uprisings, to advocate for 'veiling'.

One of the exceptions is Iraq, which peaked in 2015. Iraq did not experience uprisings in the period 2012-2015, but they did witness an attempt at a constitutional amendment in personal status laws, presented by a group of Shia-Islamic parties addressing women's issues (Human-Rights-Watch, 2014). The content analysis of the 20 top commented-on posts showed that 6 out of these posts were addressing topics aroused by this attempt. These findings assert a theoretical principle that states: "A significant increase in the use of the new media is much more likely to follow a significant amount of protest activity than to precede it"(Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). When a significant political event takes place, people turn to media to find out what is happening.

5.5.2   The Structural Conditions in Different Countries

One cannot understand the role of social media in collective action without first taking into account the political environment in which they operate (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). In her work on comparison of the role of cyberactivism in the Egyptian revolution and in the Syrian uprising, Khamis et al. (2012) shows the importance of comparing and contrasting the underlying nuanced social, political and communication structures unique to each country, as well as the different roles of their various political actors and the types of online and offline communication strategies they deployed. This trend asserts the avoidance of technologically deterministic approach that privileges the tools of social change over the actors that employ them (Matar and Bessaiso, 2012; Jung, 2016). Citizens who live in poorer, more repressive regimes are less likely to have access to the Internet, and even when they do gain access, they are much more likely to be monitored, harassed, and censored (Herkenrath and Knoll 2011; van Dalen 2011). This might explain the relatively low level of activities in Yemen compared to the other Arab countries who had the Arab Spring uprisings. AppendixA shows that Facebook penetration for young people were at its max 0.4% for females and 1.5% for males in Yemen, while the max in Qatar is 6% for female and almost 15% for male. This is shown clearer in AppendixB ,FigureD.1 and FigureD.2. The Gulf countries presented at the right of the FigureB.1 shows the high penetration of Facebook accounts while the number of accounts are far beyond the average. This might explain the low activities in my findings. According to Wolfsfeld et al. (2013), citizens who live in wealthier environments and have relatively easy and uncensored access to the Internet and social

media are likely to have lower levels of political discontent or interest in politics. Citizens in such settings are more likely to use social media for entertainment and for keeping in touch with their friends. However, the figureC.1 opens our eyes not to neglect the gender issues in Gulf countries, where the gender breakdown of facebook users is at the highest values in these countries.

5.5.3   Social Movements

Social movements are defined as networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities (Diani, 1992).

As the role of new media publishers and social networking platforms has played in enabling social movements all over the world is compelling to theorise. Karatzogianni (2015) recommends taking into account the affective structures and politics of emotion produced, and not by merely applying the resource mobilization theories, identity paradigms in social movement theory, or network analysis. Al Otaibi and Thomas (2011) revealed the hope that placed in 2011 on how the political changes across the Arab world might produce radical social change of fortunes for women in politics and the role of social media as tools of liberation. From this perspective, the 'Safirat' group can be defined as a social movement as they form a network that enables informal interactions between users within the membership and, at the same time, their pages are networked together to engage in the cultural conflict of 'veiling'in order to make social change of fortunes for women in public life.

Scholars in the field assert that "one cannot understand social movements, how they evolve, how they expand, how they engage the political arena, without understanding the dynamics of diffusion" (Givan et al., 2010).

5.5.3.1   Diffusion of the 'Safirat' Movement

Tunisia is widely considered to be the country in which the current round of major upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East began (Daniele, 2014). It is quite clear that events in first Tunisia and then Egypt, did foster protests elsewhere. However, the question of diffusion depends on what is considered as the phenomena that spread (Saideman, 2012). The case study showed that Tunisia was the start of the social movement of the 'Safirat'. This finding features Tunisian feminists for using their country's constitution-making process as a vehicle for mobilizing local efforts, connecting with gender rights advocates in other MENA countries, and participating in a transnational dialogue (Daniele, 2014).

5.5.3.2   Collective Identities used by the 'Safirat' Movement

A collective identity is not something static; rather it is "the process through which a collective becomes a collective" (Melucci, 1995). The challenge for social movements is how to make the identification with the social movement more salient than other identifications (Nip, 2004). The 'Safirat' social movement was created from the decision to use not 'veiling' as an identity, not only advocating against it. Collective identity formation and maintenance require a network of active relationships between the actors (Pizzorno, 1985). Facebook pages definitely provide such networks to be built among women in the same country, then expanding them by linking with other pages that group their counterparts in other countries.

5.5.3.3   Other General Identities

Creating a 'Safirat' page with a general identity of Arabism can be understood as an attempt to give the Arabism ideology life, by grouping women of all the Arab countries together in a page called 'Arab Safirat'. This study shows that an 'Arab Safirat' page was created in 2012, which put it among the first pages created in the wave. The posting rate increased since its creation to a peak in 2013. However, the individuals who run it, as can be seen in the rate of posting in Figure 5.3, received poor interaction (comments, likes, and shares) as shown in Figure 5.4, Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.6 respectively.

Another attempt came in 2013, by creating a page with a title that use the word 'Safirat' only (without adding any nationality to it). This revealed that the authors are targeting all Arabic speakers. Again, this page received poor reaction and eventually diminished by 2015.

This observation provides insight into the complexity of the current status of pan-arabism, reviewed in section 2.8.5. Establishing these pages reveals activists' struggles to keep Pan-Arabism ideology salient. However, the decline of popular interactions reveals that this ideology has been taken over by nation-state identity.

5.5.4   Counter-publics

Both publics started with two pages each in 2010. It might look like a reaction, that attracted considerable number of followers,to the two attempt to advocate against veiling in the first half of 2010. This reaction appears to last for almost one year with creation of 6 pages.

Discussion here focused on the collective identities in social movements, namely a sense of 'we' in an oppositional culture. However, using the term counter-public might be more explanatory. The words منزل (home) and ملتقى (meeting place), used by the public

that advocate for 'veiling', reveal the shared sense of solidarity. Other titles show a defensive tone.

Although women participating in these pages might not be interested in most of what was posted on the page, they are probably glad that the page maintains its activity by attracting women who might perceive 'veiling' or 'not veiling' as their identity. This is what the term public means.

Chapter 6

Female Public Attendance

In order to examine the claim that the online social networks enabled Arab women to take part in the emergent online public sphere, the extent to which the social patterns, traditionally affected Arab women's public presence, have been ported to online public spaces needs to be investigated.

Unlike previous chapters, this chapter examines pages that do not hold socio- or political-activism. The focus here is on examining the persistence of the traditional social patterns of seclusion and gender segregation and public exposure of their identity, i.e. names.

Chapter 3 showed that Arab women were historically not welcome to participate in public spaces, while the modesty code constitutes a fundamental pattern in Middle Eastern culture. This chapter explores to what extent these social patterns are reproduced on Facebook pages as a new public spheres.

6.1   Case Study

This chapter investigates the extent social patterns, such as gender segregation and concerns regards using personal names in public, have affected the online public presence of Arab women. These cultural patterns were traditionally imposed on women living in Arab countries, not only activists. However, adherence to these cultural patterns varies across Arab societies, as well as by social status of these women (Fernea and Fernea, 1979), reviewed in section 3.3.1.1. Therefore, to compare Arab countries the homogeneity of social status of users of the pages being investigated should be considered.

By choosing student Facebook pages of MENA-located universities, confirms that users of these pages are homogeneous, and most likely affected by offline life as students attending their lectures and exams in the country where their university is located.

For this investigation, any participation by any activity, whether it be post, comment, like, or share, would count as attendance pages.

6.2   Answering RQ3

- *To what extent are female users welcome to participate in online public spaces.* What is the percentage of female attendance on Facebook public pages of universities when these pages are not declared to be for one sex.

  Section 3.3.1.1 showed how gender segregation, a tradition of systematic prevention of interaction between men and women not related to each other by either marriage of blood, divides all social spaces into male and female spaces.

- *Do Arab users of both sexes use the same strategies to anonymise their Facebook identity?* Are the strategies used for public naming preferred more by females or their counterparts?

  Section 3.2 reviewed practices concerning how to avoid giving one's name, e.g. a woman may give her first name only, or give a public name, i.e. a false name for use in public places.

6.3   Methodology

A quantitative approach is conducted here to investigate the quantity of female attendance at the sampled Facebook public pages. This method enables observation of the attendance at online public spaces as a distant outsider. Users of the sampled pages who participated in a given period of time will be the unit of observation.

Using NodeXL Pro[1], lists of the users[2] who participated by posting, commenting, reacting, or sharing the sampled pages, were downloaded.

6.3.1   Sampling

6.3.1.1   Choosing Pages of Students

The literature explored in Chapter 3 indicated that people in the Middle East have traditionally put great emphasis on gender segregation. However, online pages for university students do not state the genders of their followers. For each university, comparing the

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[1]NodeXL Pro is a fully-featured version of NodeXL, an open-source network analysis and visualization software package for Microsoft Excel that includes access to social media network data importers

[2]Ethics approval for retrieving this data was obtained from the Ethics Committee at the University of Southampton (ID:19608). Note that on 5 February 2018 Facebook removed API access for a number of elements on public pages. This includes all user information.

female attendance at the pages with the male attendance can give a clue as to how welcome female students are to the online public spaces that represent each country. University pages of Facebook were chosen as they gather similar social groups by age and occupation. Social network sites are, in general, considered to play an active role in the younger generation's daily lives (Boyd, 2007). Moreover, since Statista (2016) predicted that Facebook would get 265.4 million MENA users by 2018, it has become the social network site of choice by college students and an integral part of the 'behind the scenes' college experience (Selwyn, 2007). Despite the growth in older age group users, Facebook remains primarily a college-age and emerging adult phenomenon (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010).

"Teens' Facebook friendship networks largely mirror their off-line networks; 98% of Facebook-using teens are friends with people they know from school" (Lenhart et al., 2009). However, there are no clues whether this mirroring extends to university life, and to what extent the social patterns regarding female participation, that are socially prevailing in their lives offline, are affecting their online engagement.

The content of such pages might not be considered in the debates that form public opinion. However, this investigation is of the inclusiveness of the online publics. Publics, by definition, are groups of people who follow one or more particular issue very closely (Newman, 2014). Facebook public pages offer this grouping openly to every user who is interested in the issues published on these pages. Examining the inclusiveness of the online publics could be conducted partly by checking the female attendance at these pages. As seen in section 2.4.1, commenting or reacting to the published posts is considered attendance. The cognitive quality of that attendance is less important than the mere fact of active uptake. This consideration conforms to the argument Warner (2002) that a public exists only by virtue of address; it must predicate some degree of attention from its members, no matter how notional this attendance. Warner asserted that attendance is the principal sorting category by which members and non-members are discriminated. "If you are reading this, or hearing it or seeing it or present for it, you are part of this public".

6.3.1.2   Choosing Universities

The outcomes of the increase in the usage of social networking sites are likely to be uneven in different parts of the MENA region, while the popularity of Facebook pages is not the same across all universities. Neither is the distribution of universities even across the Arabic cities. Some universities are regional campuses of universities located out of Arab countries and attract non-Arabic students.

Country	Page Title	Fan-Count
Egypt	Cairo University	52485
Yemen	Sana'a University	33616
Syria	Damascus University	380193
Qatar	Qatar University	143837
Saudi	King Saud University	236017
Jordan	University of Petra	20022

TABLE 6.1: The Sampled University Facebook Pages

In order to study the online spaces of the Arabs, these universities are excluded if their official teaching language is not Arabic. These would exclude universities in north-African countries where French is their language of teaching. The investigation of the users of pages that belong to international universities in Dubai shows that these students are not using Arabic in their profiles at all, they show no evidence of conforming to the traditions of Dubai, and have no interest in discussing them.

In order to explore the pages of the MENA-located universities, Wikipedia was first used to get the lists of universities in each country. After excluding the universities whose language of teaching is not Arabic, many of the remaining universities do not have Facebook pages using their names.

The universities that have the name of the country or the name of the capital city were prioritized as they are usually the largest and oldest in that country. However, this does not always apply to their Facebook pages. For that reason, the Jordanian University was substituted with Petra University. Searching with the names of these universities in Facebook gave many pages of different popularity, which was given numerical measures such as the number of 'Likes' or 'Fan-Count'. The 10 most popular pages were shortlisted.

Any user is permitted to start new page in Facebook. However, Facebook provides a verification process to mark some pages as authentic. The idea of exploring the universities pages marked as authentic sounds good in the beginning, but exploring these authentic pages showed that these pages work, in most cases, as newsletters and official advertisements and any comment on these posts is considered as complaining to the authorities that manage the pages rather than debating about them with other students.

Taking all the above restrictions, the list was reduced to 6 pages. Table 6.3.1.2 lists these pages, the country the represent, and the number of Fans.
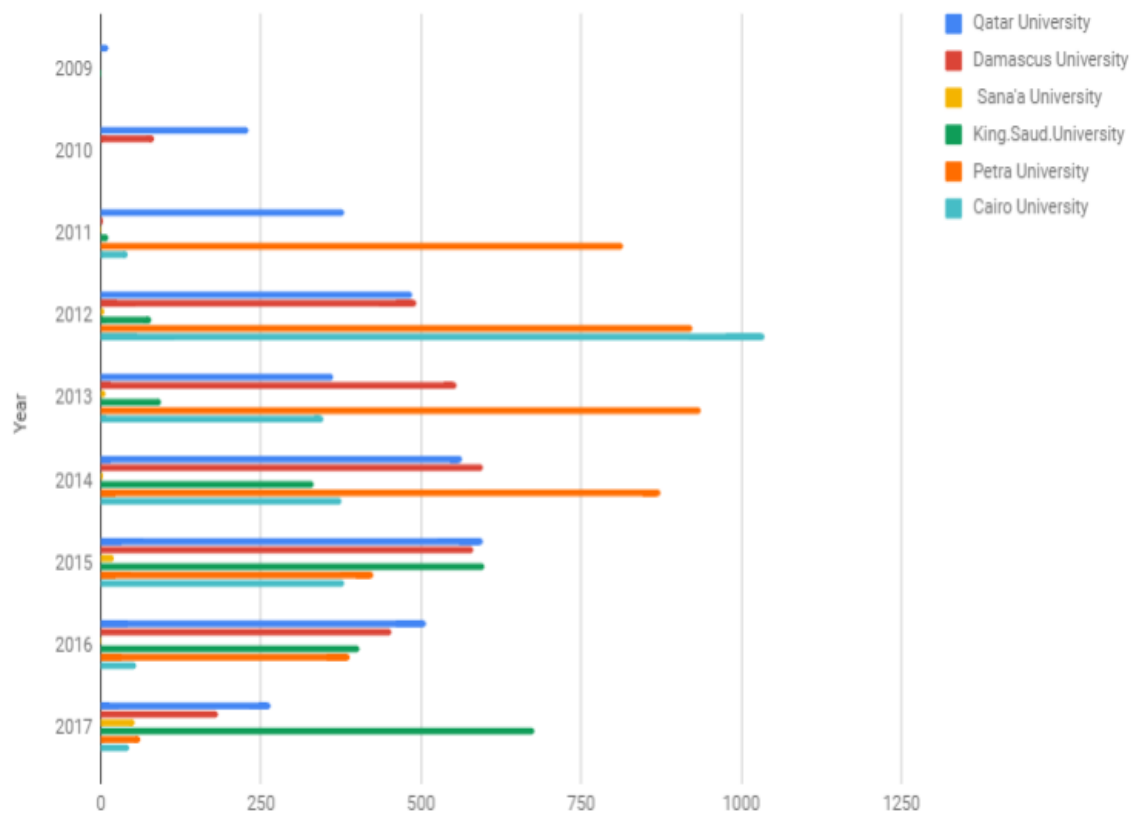
FIGURE 6.1: Period of Observation: Number of Posts per Year

6.3.1.3 Choosing Period of Observation

An examination was conducted on the concurrent participation of the two sexes on the same pages, because that meant they had some level of online interaction together. This is important as the aim was to investigate the persistence of the norms of gender segregation, as well as other features of public presence, e.g. names. A period of time should be chosen before retrieving lists of users who have participated in any sort of activity (posts, reactions, comments, or shares) on these pages. Exploring how many posts were published each year in the lifespan of each page resulted in Figure 6.1. 2016 was chosen to be the year of observation because the total number of posts for all participant pages is limited to 500. Monthly of records were analyzed due to the cost of coding and analysis. The number of posts per month for all participant pages in 2016 were retrieved, as shown in Figure 6.2. This fluctuates during the year, and some pages show really low participation in some months. Therefore, April was chosen as the post numbers are closer, except for Cairo and Sana'a.

It might be useful to look at Appendix B to get an idea of penetration of Facebook accounts and number of accounts in Arab states in 2017. (Note Yemen has low value according to the other countries sampled).
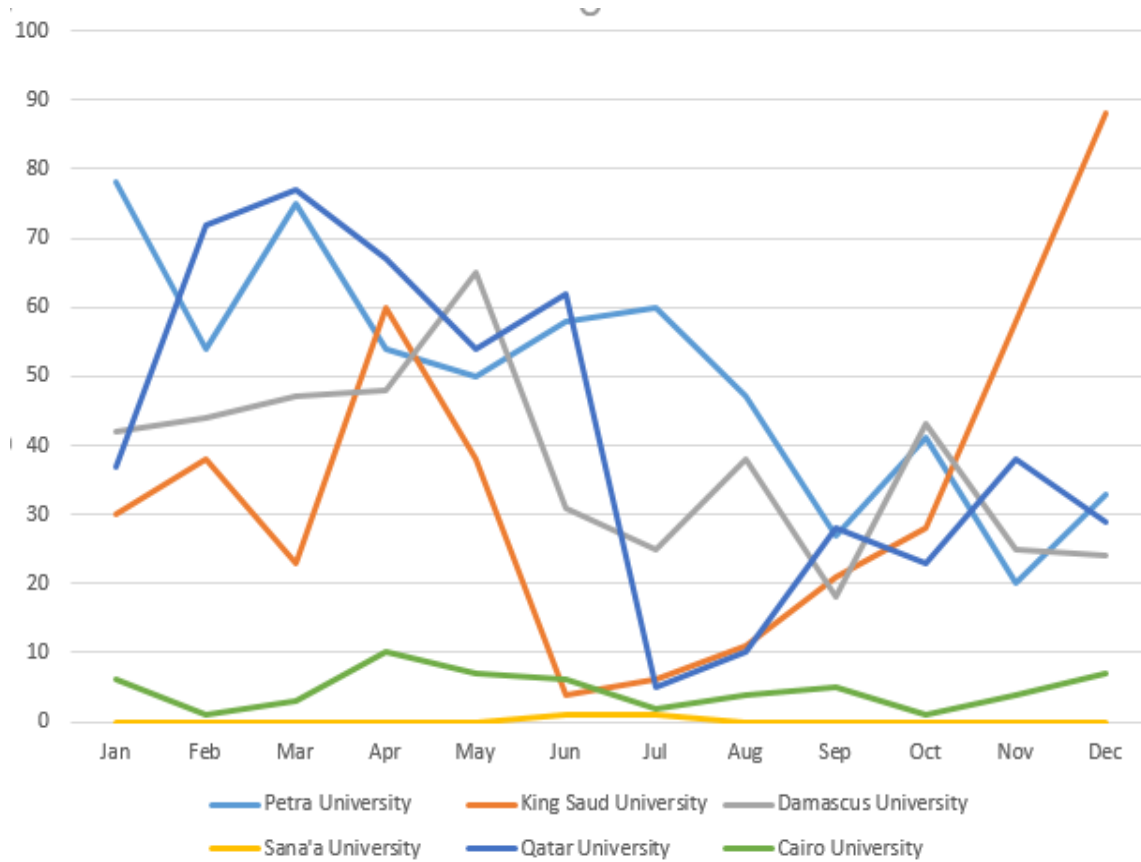
FIGURE 6.2: Period of Observation: Number of Posts per Month

6.3.2 Coding Using Usernames

The lists retrieved were of different sizes. While the University of Petra page (Jordan) has 608 users, Sana'a university page (Yemen) has only 21 users, the only one to fall below 50. The names used in the first 50 user records retrieved from Facebook, who participated in the pages of the sample (exception is Yemen with 21 records), were examined against common patterns of naming in the Arab world, to reveal their sex and level of anonymity used in the name of the profile.

6.3.2.1 Gender of the Attendance

The retrieved lists were coded for their declared gender using their usernames. Common female names, *bint* and *Umm* were used as indicators that the users want to be known as females, while using common male names, *bin*, and *Abo* were indicators for declaring masculinity. Some names do not show any indicator to reveal gender and were assigned NA value. The percentage of these categories was calculated and compared for the pages of the sample.

6.3.3 Practice for Anonymity used in naming

Patterns of naming used traditionally in the Arab world have been used to create the Facebook user account names. Some naming patterns have the ability to reveal user's identity to those who previously know them, while others serve to entirely anonymise them. Studying these patterns enabled the distinguishing between accounts with names, and those who are pseudo-anonymous, or anonymous. Users chose to fill the two-field name with different naming patterns and with various level of anonymity. When signing up, Facebook asks the user to fill the profile form information with two words for the name. Each field was classified separately, based on the pattern used in the naming.

6.3.3.1 Naming Patterns

Arabic names were historically based on a long naming system; most Arabs did not simply have given/middle/family names, but a full chain of names. This system was in use throughout Arabia and part of the Levant. Many Arabs adapted to Western conventions for practical purposes when travelling or when residing in Western countries, constructing a given name/family name model out of their full Arab name, to fit Western expectations and/or visa applications, or other official forms and documents.

6.3.3.2 Using Old Patterns of Naming

Some patterns of naming that have been used traditionally in the Arabic language. Using them can reveal the declared sex of the user and some more information that helps people who already know the user in person to recognize them. It can be used as an epithet of the person, such as "Rosie the Riveter". The article 'al-' ('the') precedes the title, which itself precedes the name that might indicate a surname, but it might be also used to add a chosen description to that user. Using the country or the city name is also common. This pattern was introduced in section 3.2 and the pen name "Bahithat alBadiya" was given as an example.

In Arabic culture, as in many parts of the world, a person's ancestry and family name are very important. The Arabic word for 'daughter of' is *bint*. A similar pattern exists for male name where 'Ibn' translates as 'son of'. A woman with the name Fatimah *bint* Tariq *bin* Khalid al-Goswami translates as 'Fatimah, daughter of Tariq, son of Khaled, of the family al-Goswami'.

Abu means 'father of', and is often used as a nickname. A man's friends might refer to him as *Abu*, followed by the name of his first-born son. Or they might pair *Abu* with something less concrete. The name of the terrorist 'Abu Nidal', for example, means 'father of struggle'. The term can also be used in a more colloquial sense. A man with

Country	Page	Male	Female	NR	Total	Females
Egypt	Cairo University	39	23	0	62	37%
Yemen	Sana'a University	14	5	2	21	24%
Syria	Damascus University	63	61	1	125	49%
Qatar	Qatar University	101	44	20	165	27%
Saudi	King Saud University	158	34	35	227	15%
Jordan	University of Petra	262	330	14	606	54%

TABLE 6.2: Table of Attendance at University Pages

a moustache might be called '*Abu* Shanab', or 'father of moustache' (Engber, 2006). Addressing one who has a child as *Umm* (child's name) for the mother and *Abu* (child's name) for the father is a sign of respect (*Umm* referring to mother and *Abu* referring to father) (Bedu, 2009).

6.4 Results and Analysis

Arab women were traditionally not welcome to participate in public spaces. The modesty code constitutes a fundamental pattern in Middle Eastern culture. This chapter has examined the extent to which the social patterns, traditionally affected Arab women's public presence, have been ported to online public spaces.

This chapter has explored the ratio of attendance as well as the ratio of anonymised account names used by Arab women in pages that do not hold socio- or political-activism to provide evidence of the level of persistence of the traditional social patterns of seclusion and public exposure of their identity.

6.4.1 Ratio of Attendance

Table 6.4.1 shows attendance at each university's pages. Female attendance is nearly equal in both Damascus university and Petra university. However, this is not the case in other countries. The Saudi university pages show clearly that women are not so welcome, with 15% attendance. Taking into account that the high number of 'not recognized sex' could be belong to accounts of female users, this might double the attendance and make it fall in the range around 30%, where the rest of universities were. Figure 6.3 shows these numbers in bar chart form. This view suggests that attendance of male could be higher without affecting female attendance. However, when female attendance increases above the 50 users threshold, it takes male attendance at this threshold with them.
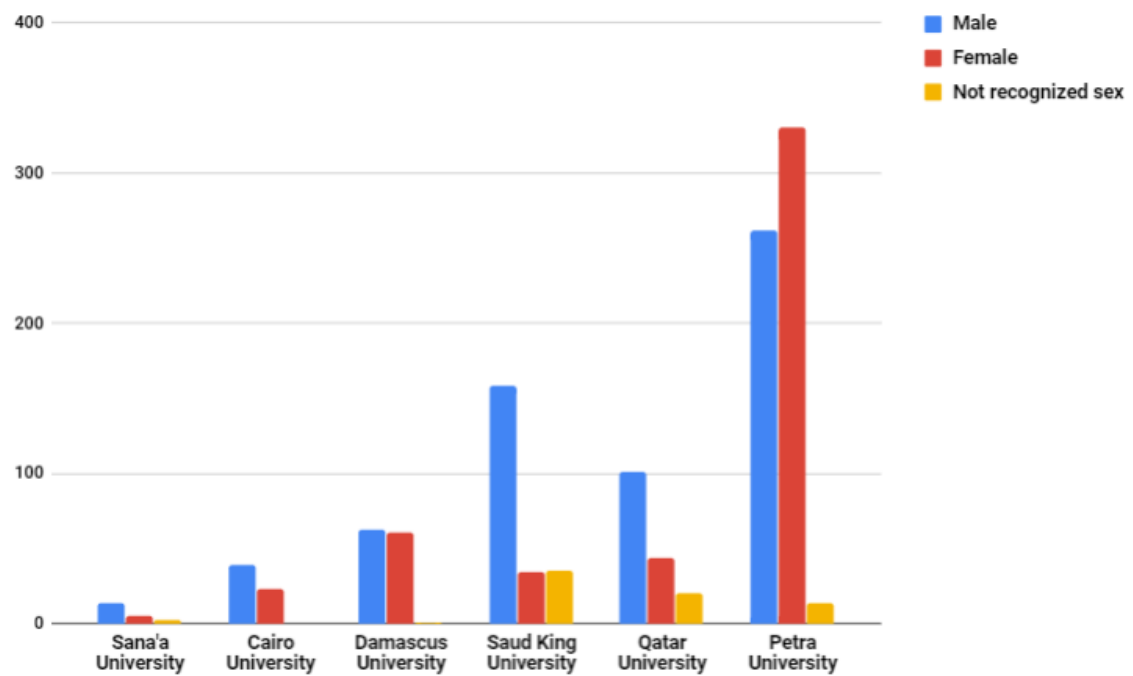
FIGURE 6.3: Attendance of Both Sexes to Pages of the Sample

6.4.2 Ratio of Anonymised Account Names

Figure 6.4 shows the choice for the first name and the second name of the users of the sampled pages. The column on the left of the female only column reveals they are males or were not recognized. No big differences could be detected that females were exposing their names. Users from the same university use almost the same practice regarding how they show their names. It is more common among users of Damascus university pages of both sexes to use their country name as a surname.
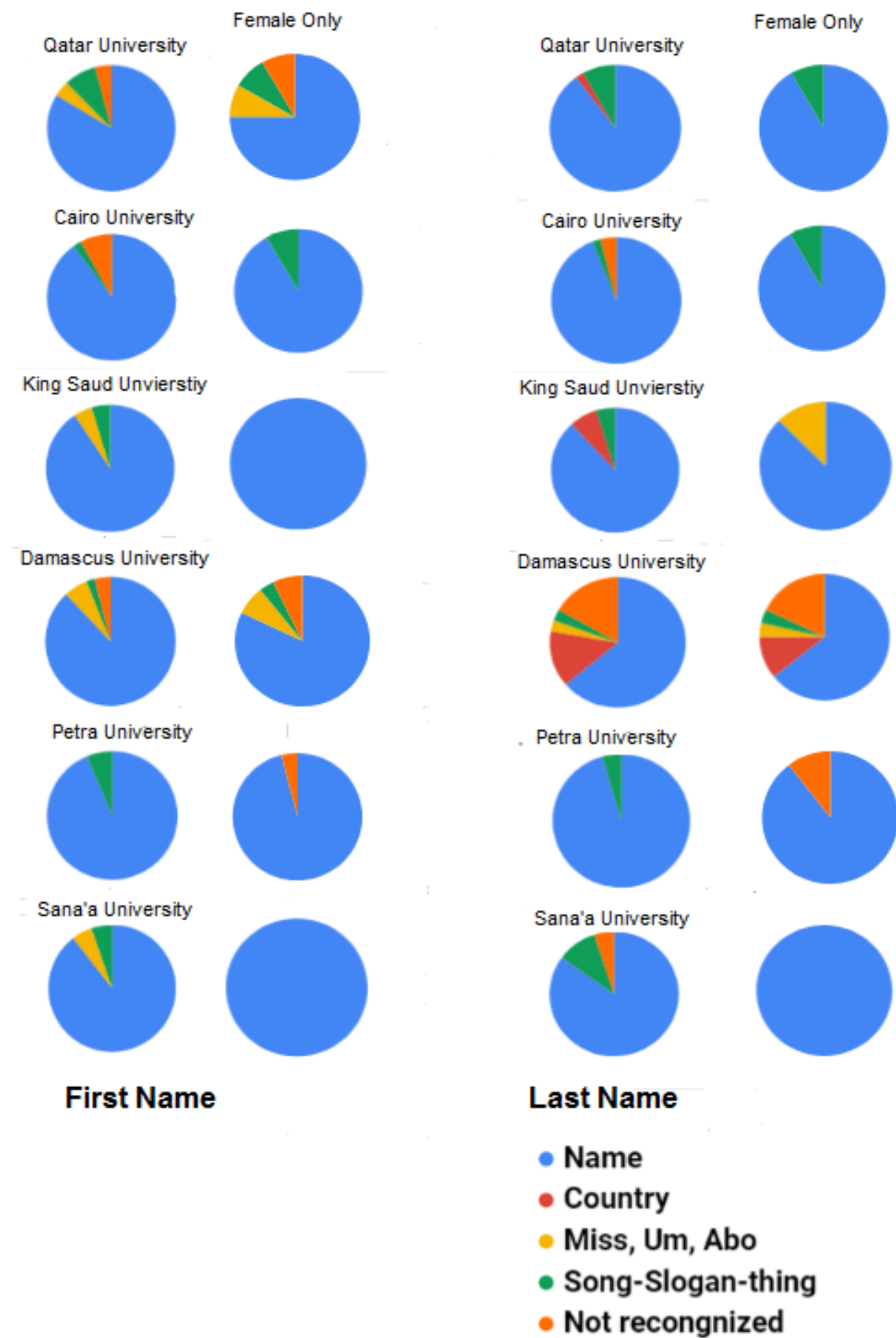
FIGURE 6.4: Attendance of Both Sexes to Pages of the Sample

Chapter 7

Conclusions

This thesis set out to explore the online public sphere of Arab women. The role of social media in the revolutionary wave of protests in Arab countries, the so-called 'Arab Spring', remains a highly debated subject in the work of scholars from various disciplines, some emphasized it while others minimised it. This work addresses the potential role of the new media in shaping politics and opening up a new public sphere, especially in societies where a real public sphere is absent.

As online social networks have allowed individuals the facility to organize collective action, and to transmit information from the local to the international level, it was anticipated that new voices, such as women's voices, would be able to debate their own political identities and strategies through online social networks such as Facebook. This work contributes to this debate by investigating that claim that digitization of the public sphere has the power to enable political change in any non-democratic country by enabling new voices.

7.1 Research Overview

Web Science methods have been applied in this work to investigate the claim that the digitalization of the public sphere has the power to enable political changes in any non-democratic country by enabling new voices.

Both the investigation of the historical manifestations of the Arab public sphere, and the inspection of current events, have not produced enough evidence to confirm the existence of the Arab public sphere in a Habermassan sense. However, examination of the existence and the dynamics of online arenas, which are autonomous from the political order and accessible to different sectors of society, can provide a starting point to validate its democratizing effects on the promising public spheres.

Drawing on a dataset of Facebook pages used by Arab female activists, the existence of women's contributions to the new online public sphere formed by these pages was presented as empirical evidence of enabled voices of Arab women.

The concept of public sphere identifies historical formation of democratic societies and it also posits a model of what an ideal society should be. By laying out this concept and its critics as a theoretical framework for this research, a classification of actors' groups was used to describe the sphere formed by Facebook pages of the acquired dataset.

The historical use of the notion of a Women's Sphere, and its use to understand Women's Sphere in the Middle East, was reviewed which supported this research in addressing the challenges Arab women face in public spaces. The development of Women's Sphere in the political contexts over the last century was reviewed, which enabled identification of the influence of Islamism and the Western feminist movements, and how such influence has divided the feminist publics online.

A snowball sample approach was undertaken, which created a network of pages of female activism and how they link to each other with a 'like' relationship. The nodes of this network (Facebook pages) were coded according to the research concerns. Metrics that described this network were used to analyse the sphere formed by women's activism and their implications discussed.

By studying 'Safirat', one of the transnational social movements identified in the network sample, longitudinal analysis was provided of pages that form this movement and the counterpublic formed by pages advocating against their goals. The trends of 'Safirat' group members' activities over the last 10 years were examined to gain insights into the dynamics of the sphere formed by these pages during the period of the 'Arab Spring'.

The last part of the empirical work presented an examination of women's self-presentation in online publics by observing the users of Facebook pages used by students in six universities located in the Middle East. This provided empirical clues to the persistence of cultural patterns on how the users of these pages present their identities, and to what extent women are welcomed into these public spaces.

7.2   Key Findings

The sample consisted of a network of 1105 pages and 3331 edges (representing Facebook 'likes' between pages). The analysis of the actor groups that formed this network revealed that pages representing civil society formed 22.7%. 5% of the pages are those which declared the state or political parties' participation in women's issues. Media and research centres concerned with women's issues were represented by 3% of the nodes. Female activists who ran their pages as individuals were represented by 8.7% of the nodes, while almost half of the nodes (46.8%) were online communities.

While 21.8% of the nodes did not associate themselves with specific Arabic countries, the nodes are not evenly distributed over 18 Arab countries. With the exception of Yemen, the countries where 'Arab Spring' upheavals took place (Egypt,Tunisia, Syria and Libya) constituted the biggest portions of the nodes. Egypt got 11% of the nodes, while Tunisia, Syria and Libya got 7.8%, 7.6%, and 6.4% respectively. Arabic Gulf countries (Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar) seem to have poor female activism online, since each of them received less than 1% of the nodes. The only exception among the Gulf countries was Saudi Arabia which got 2%. This showed that feminist activism was more popular in countries where recent political struggle had happened.

Similar results were observed in the percentage of female users of non-activism pages to whom these countries could be associated. The rate of female users that participated in pages associated with universities located in two Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) were compared with three that witnessed the 'Arab Spring' events (Egypt, Syria, and Yemen), as well with Jordan. This showed that women's attendance at these pages was also uneven. Female users of pages associated with Gulf countries appeared to be less welcomed, with a participant rate less than 30% of all participants during the period of observation. However, these female participants were most likely to use real (or real-looking) names. Using this middle-level analysis, specifically designed to reveal connections between micro- and macro-levels, the concerns about users with flexible identities could be minimised to some extent.

Comparing activities between Arab countries which participated in a transnational social movement showed similar findings. Countries most represented in the network had pages which are the most active in the particular social movement studied. Furthermore, these pages were created first.

Two attempts to boost generalized identity of Arabism were observed in the social movement studied. However, their popularity was very limited and they eventually diminished. This attests to the anticipated decline of the idea of Pan-Arabism, after dominating the political consciousness at the time of modern Arab state-building.

The network also exposed two distinct sets of Arabic pages, linked by only 86 edges. The first, labelled Arab feminism, was the larger (683 nodes), and had more significant links to Western, global, and transnational pages (522 edges). It was concerned more strongly with common global feminist issues (e.g. violence, or harassment), identified with freedom and activism, and tended to have a national (58.6%) or city (11.6%) scope. The second, labelled Sect feminism, was smaller (166 nodes), had almost no links to Western, global, and transnational pages (5 edges). It was not concerned with global feminist issues, identified with Salafi (a strict and political interpretation of Islam), and tends to have a Pan-Arabic scope (77.8%), perhaps because ideology has no borders.

These could be differentiated between activism that is effectively the women's sections of Islamist movements (Sect), and Muslim women's struggle for their rights (Arab).

The intricacy of the history and politics makes the naming of these two approaches a complex issue, since using Islam as a name might not only be mistaken for Islamist activism, but also by implication suggesting that other female activisms are secular, which is not (usually) the case.

This research supports the argument that Arabic feminism includes both Western-style values of women's equality and liberation, and a more Islamist interpretation of feminism focused on women's role in Islam. But it also shows that rather than being a continuum of values, there is rather more of a division between these two groups. In the first, the influence of other feminisms is limited, but in the second there is a more radical reinterpretation of those values in an Islamic and Pan-Arabic context.

7.3   Research Contribution

In this work, Web Science methods have been applied to investigate the emergent Arabic sphere online with new methods and sources of data. As far as I am aware, no work has been carried out investigating the online Arab public sphere using data retrieved from social media. Before this study, the characteristics of the emergent public sphere and their implications on estimating the significance of this medium as an enabler for Arab activism, was purely anecdotal.

Utilizing the power of social network analysis tools (Chapter 4) to infer the influence of regional and international feminist counterparts is novel as well. Parts of this Chapter were published in the Proceedings of the 10th ACM Conference on Web Science (Al Bunni et al., 2018).

Using a community detection algorithm, this work provides empirical evidence that supports reports of two major feminist paradigms evolved in historical contexts, in which new subjects and identities were re/fashioned out of shifting combinations of religious and national affiliation (Badran, 2005). My network clearly exposed this expected polarization around the identity of women's activism. The two Arab segments of the network (Arab and Sect feminism) showed multiple distinct characteristics, including openness to other nations' feminisms, and openness to transnational women empowering projects.

My work provides evidence of what Hèlie-Lucas (1999) called the game of fundamentalists and their identity politics. Varieties of fundamentalism exist with their politics as common characteristics. "In particular, one key element is the control of women". My research shows how identity politics have been used by those who hold Islamic ideology, in particular, the fundamental Islamists (Salafists). The titles of their pages hold names clearly show their identity Salafiat. The common goal of most of these pages targets posing more restriction on women public presence (calling for Hijab or Niqab)

with blatant ignoring any other goal women that join them with women not holding Islamic ideology.

The case study in chapter 5 provided an example of Badran's differentiation between Western feminisms and Muslim women's feminisms. The study of the 'Safirat' transnational feminist movement confirmed Badran's account at the start of her book, of how 'secular feminism' in the Muslim world has emerged as a social movement "in the context of a secular territorial nation-state composed of equal citizens, regardless of religious affiliation". The study of this case also provided insight into the complexity of the identities between Pan-Arabism and nation-state *status quo*, introduced earlier in section 2.8.5.

7.4 Research Limitations

One major limitation of this study is that it is restricted to investigating Facebook pages as a public sphere. Digitization of the public sphere could occur using online public spaces provided by other social media networks such as Twitter, as well as other collaborative platforms such as Wikipedia's discussion pages. In spite of its limitations, this study certainly adds to our understanding of the characteristics of the emergent feminist Arabic public sphere. Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample given to investigate the dynamics of these pages over time, this work offers valuable insights into the peculiarity of the countries that experience socio-political upheavals.

Studying the publics formed only by female activism is another major limitation. Although there is much evidence that Arab women participated in recent political events in the Middle East, this might not validate any generalization on all political activists in the region. Furthermore, it minimizes the significance of social media usage in Arab countries where women are not traditionally empowered.

Not to be ignored are the inherited limitations of the different penetration rates of the Internet in Arab countries, findings of this study are about the online public sphere, and should not be extrapolated to the more general offline population without further study.

7.5 Future Work

A fruitful area for further work would be to use the public sphere concept as a theoretical framework to understand the use of social media in shaping political changes in other regions.

More research is needed using social network analysis on the networks formed between the pages on Facebook, to enable comparisons based on their metrics to infer more

about how these pages cluster themselves, and what the possible implications are in the contexts of such clusterings.

Studying the other nations' feminists use of Facebook pages has the potential to reveal some clues that might inform our understanding about feminist activisms of those nations, and their relationships with other feminisms. The structure of the network formed by the pages they use and the actors groups that form it, provide a basis for comparisons that highlight the uniqueness of their experiences.

A study to be conducted after a few years could assess the long-term effects of the use of social media in the Arabic region.
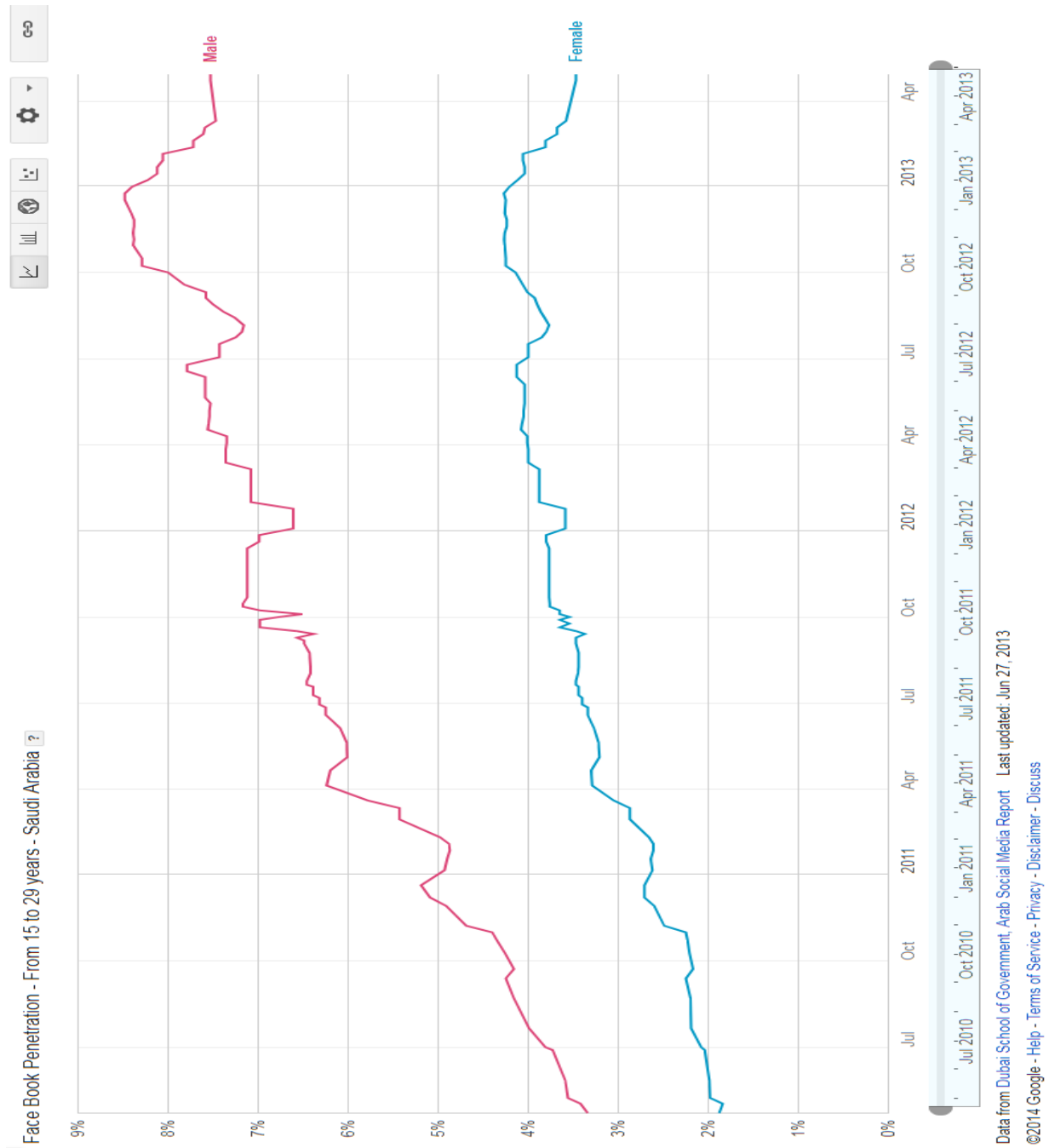
Appendix A

FIGURE A.1: Facebook Penetration of Users (15 to 29 years)- Saudi
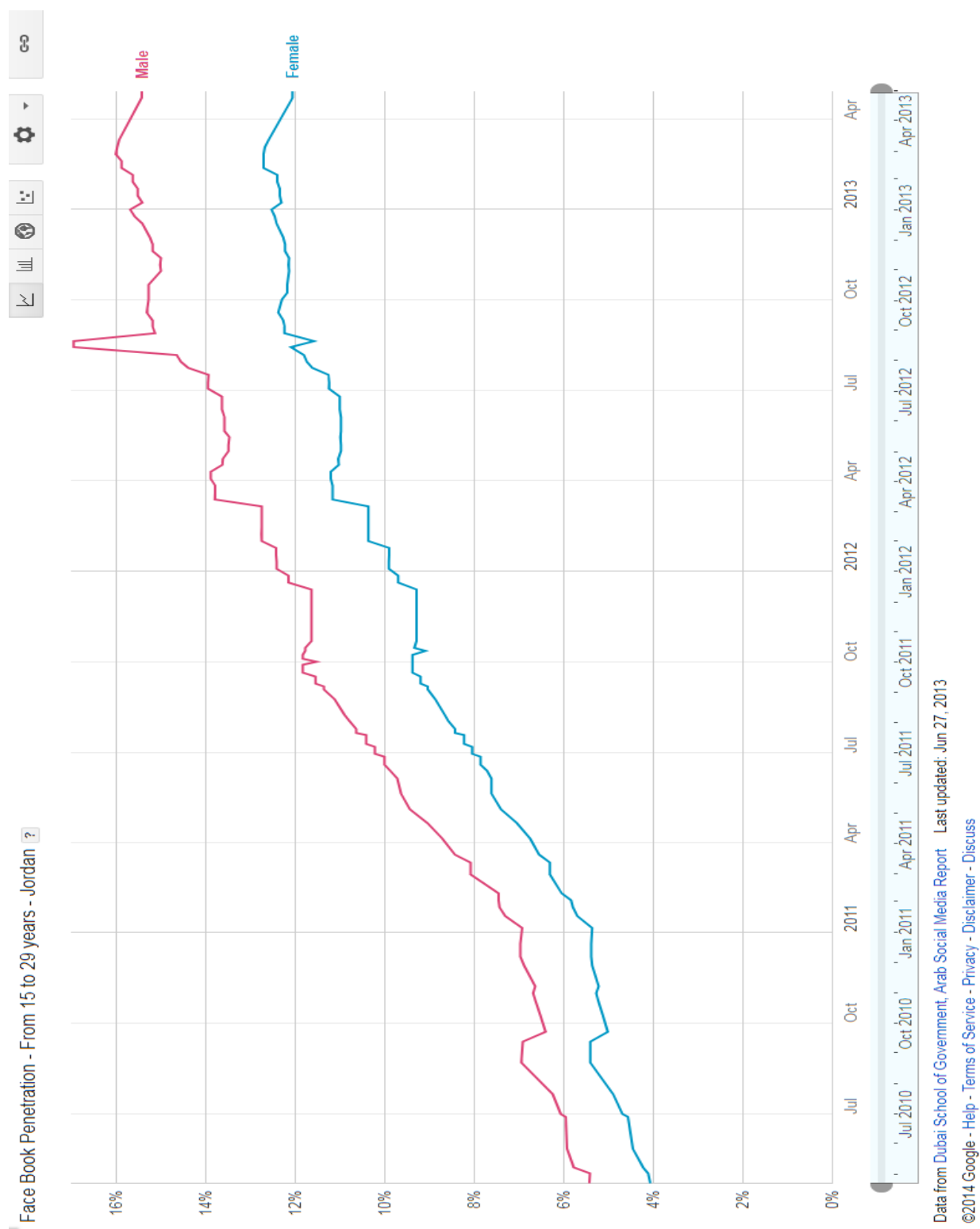
FIGURE A.2: Facebook Penetration of Users (15 to 29 years)-Jordan
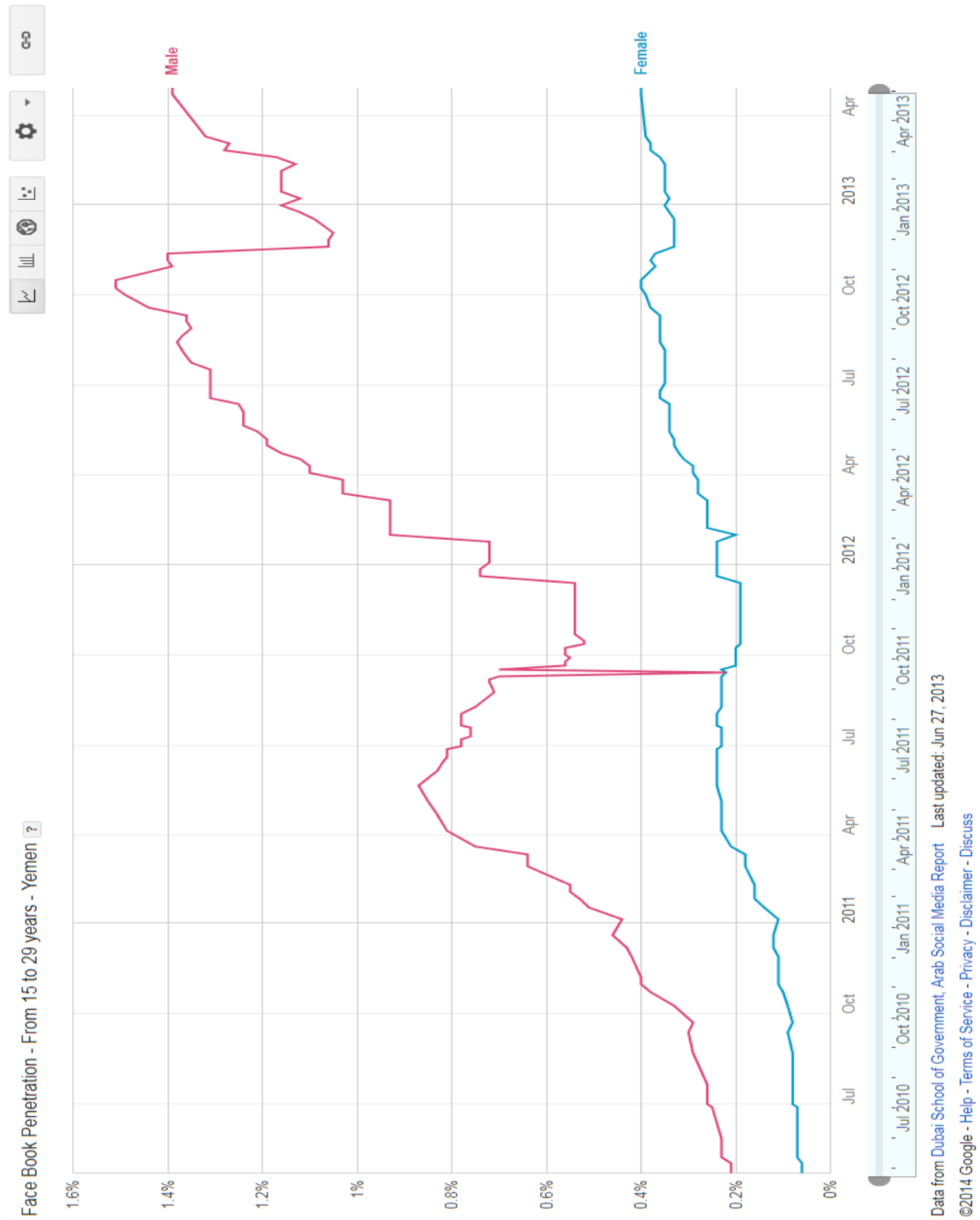
FIGURE A.3: Facebook Penetration of Users (15 to 29 years)- Yemen
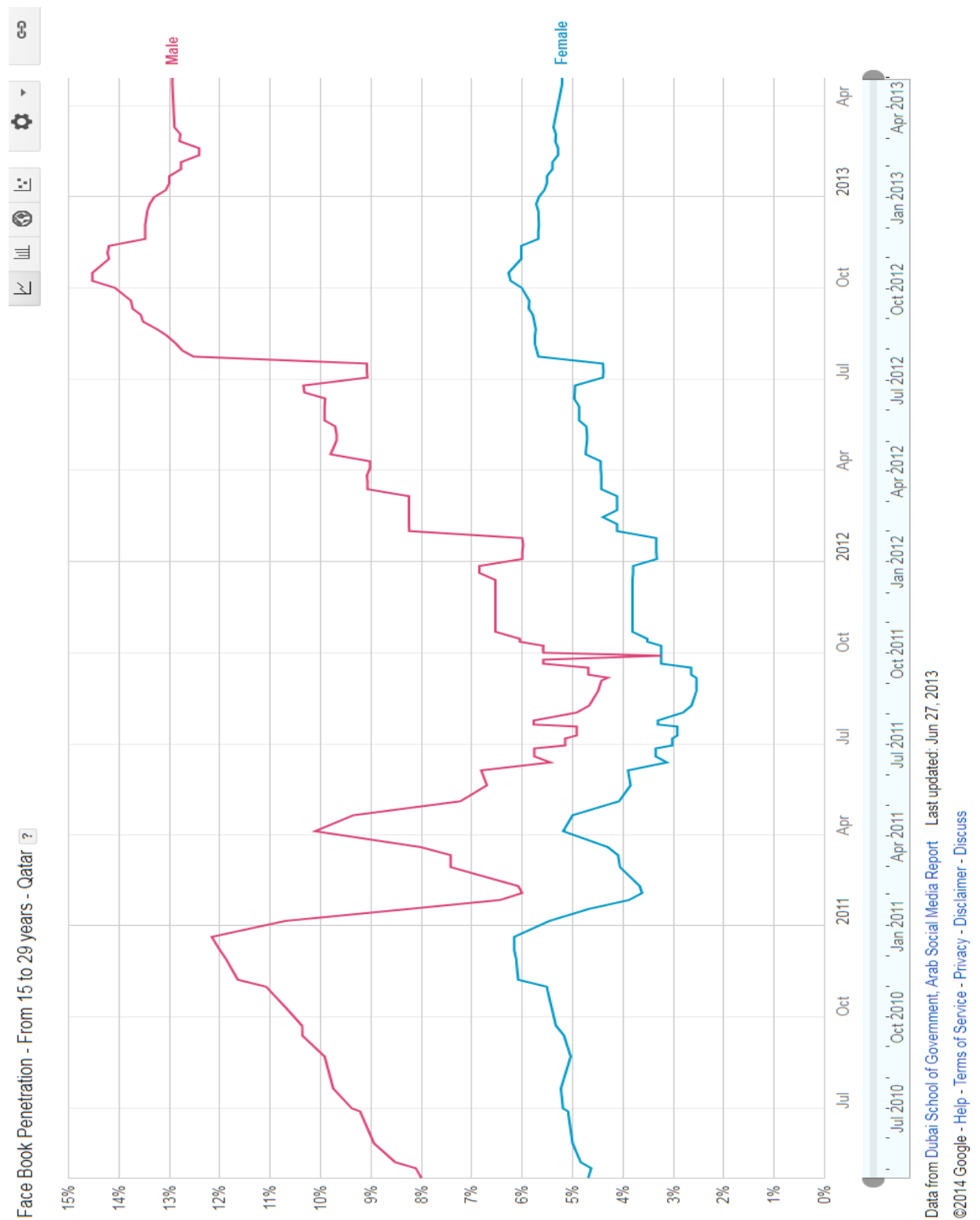
FIGURE A.4: Facebook Penetration of Users (15 to 29 years)- Qatar
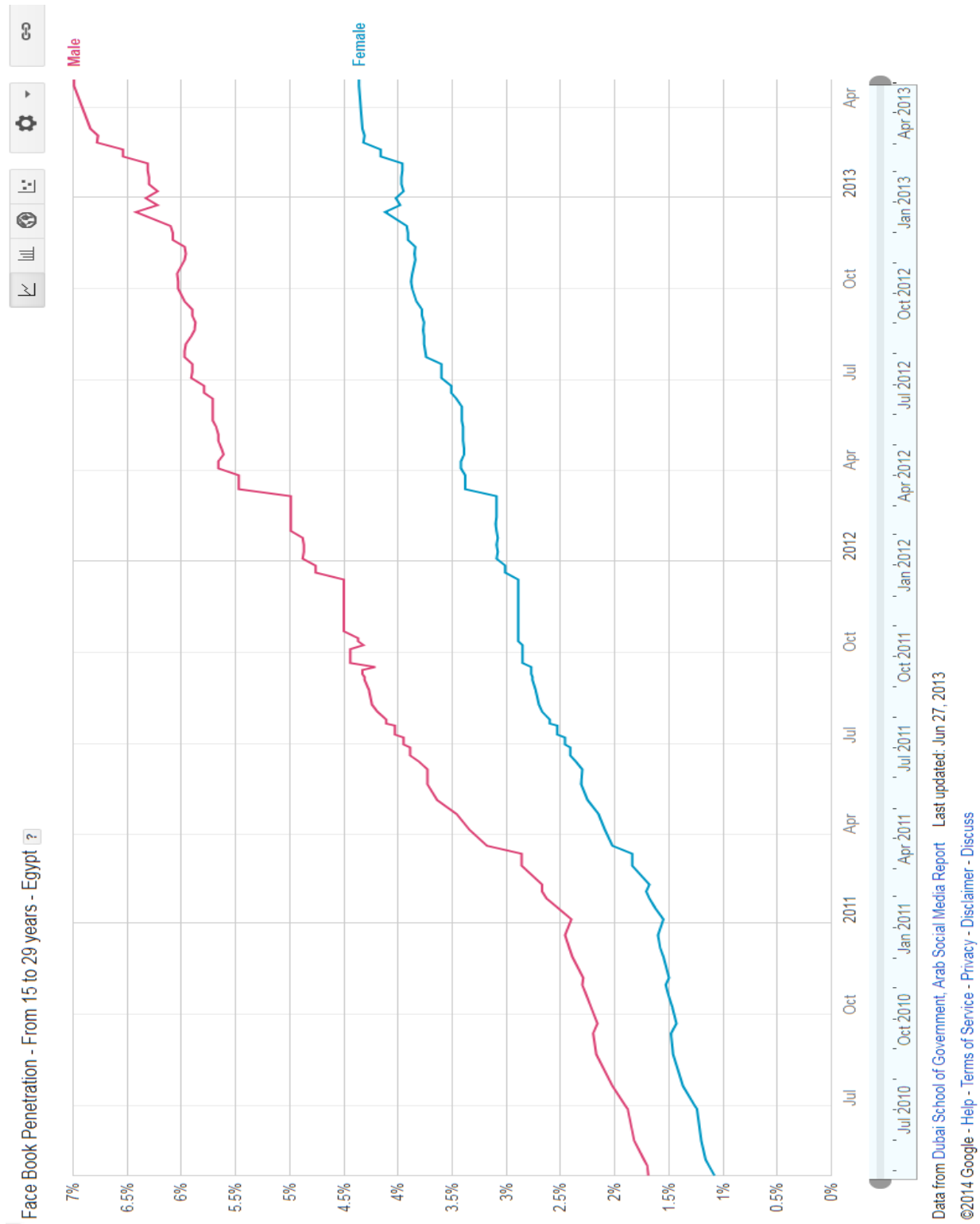
FIGURE A.5: Facebook Penetration of Users (15 to 29 years)- Egypt

Appendix B
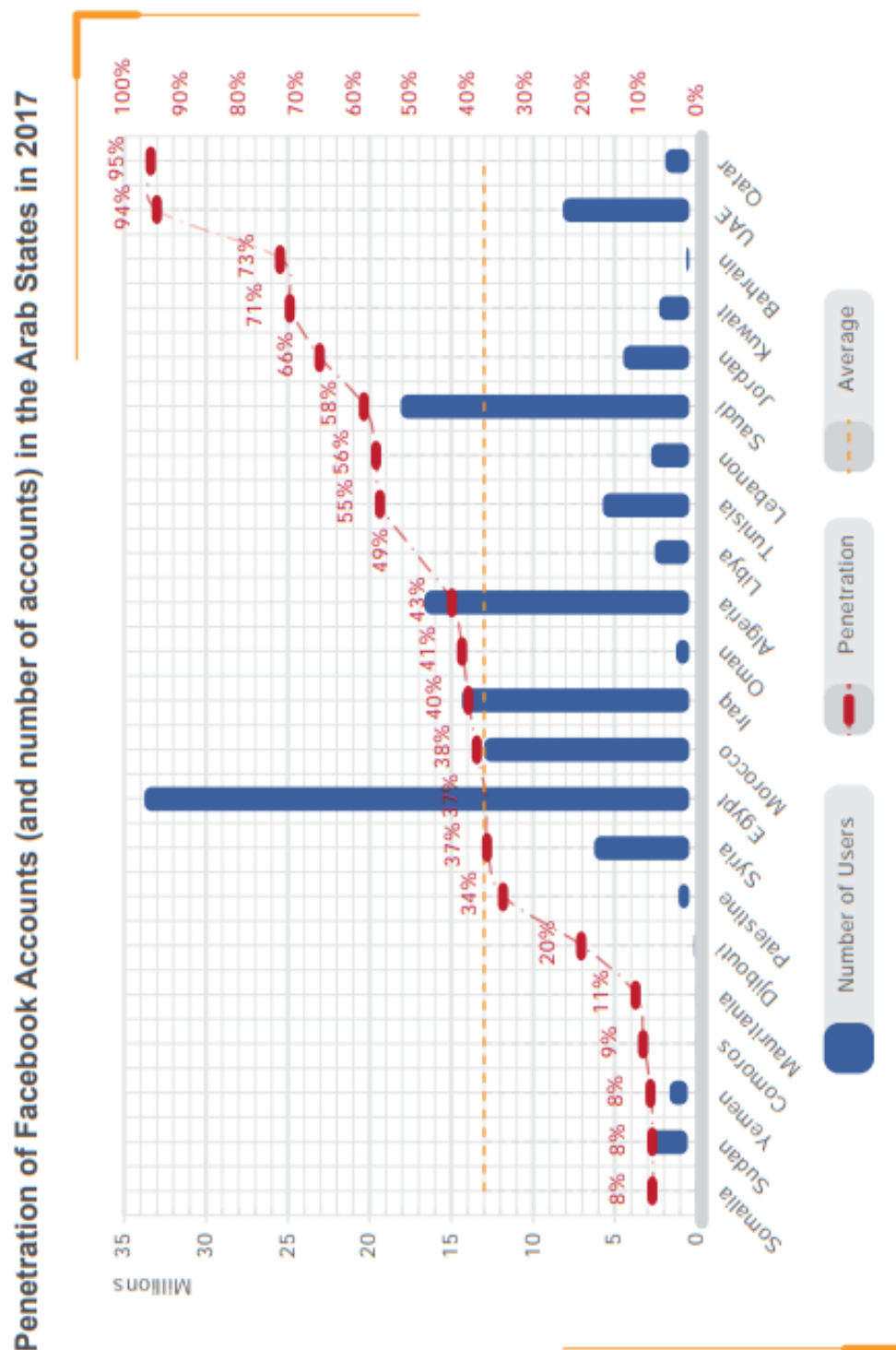
FIGURE B.1: Penetration of Facebook Accounts(and number of accounts) in Arab States in 2017

Distribution of Facebook Users in Arab Region (2017)

FIGURE B.2: Distribution of Facebook Users in Arab Region (2017)

Appendix C

FIGURE C.1: Gender Breakdown of Facebook Users in Arab States(2017)

Appendix D

FIGURE D.1: Facebook Penetration- Female Users (15 to 29 years) in Jordan, Qatar,
Saudi, Yemen, and Syria

FIGURE D.2: Facebook Penetration- Male Users (15 to 29 years) in Jordan, Qatar, Saudi, Yemen, and Syria

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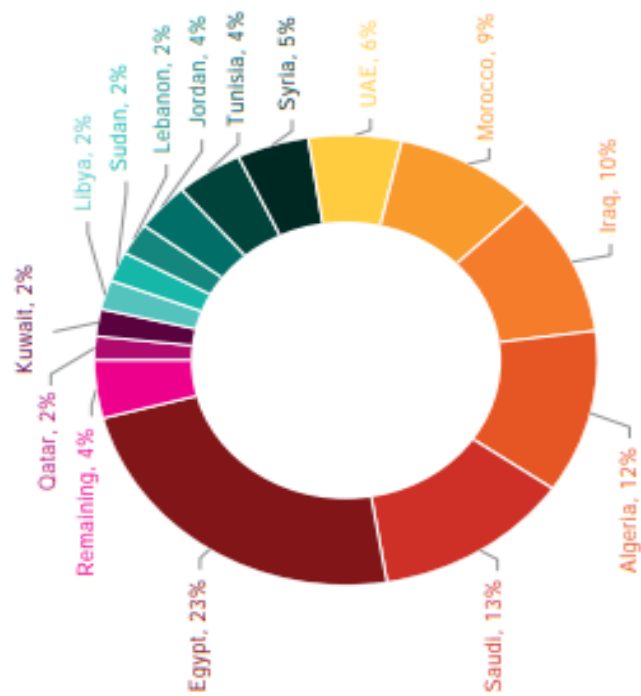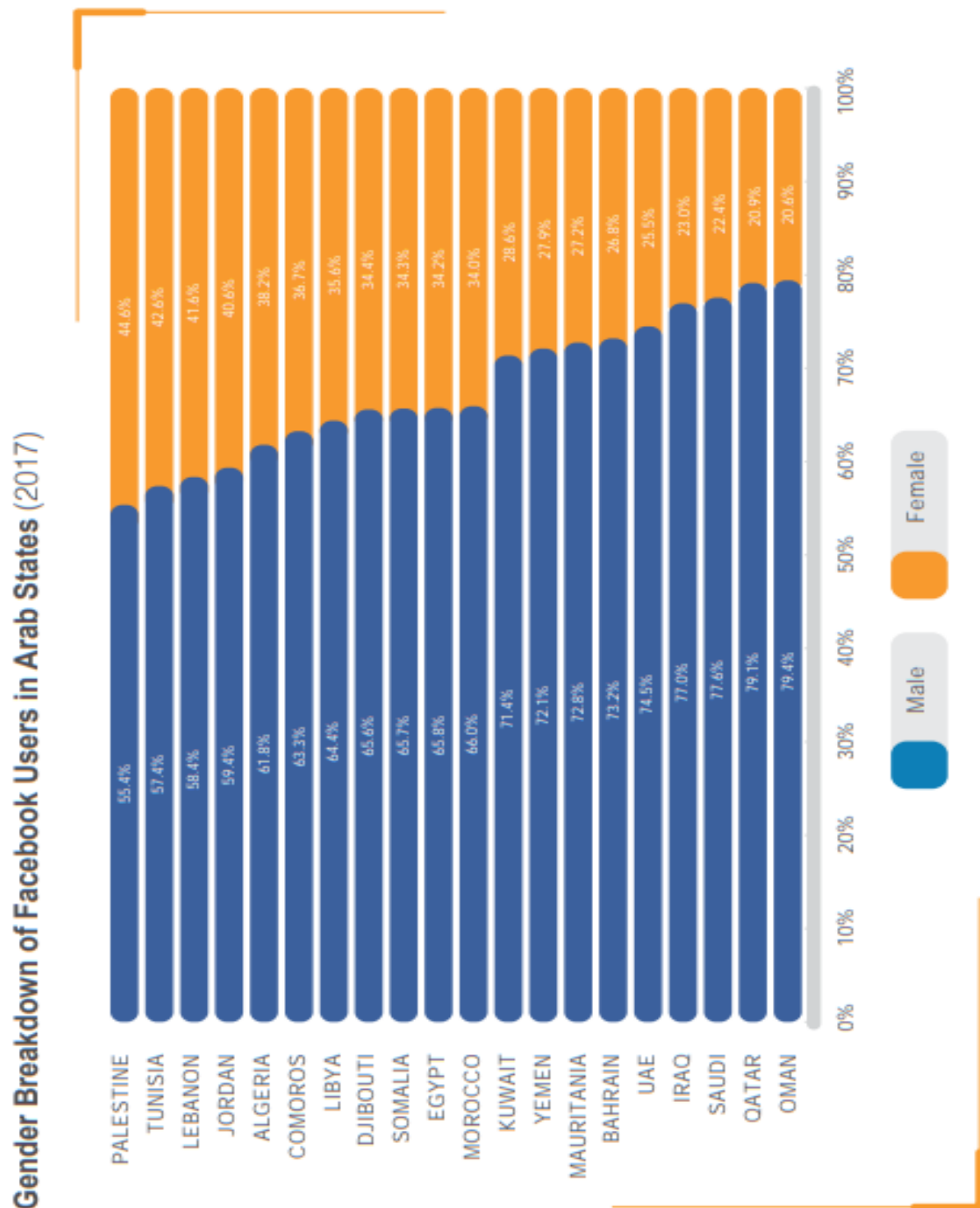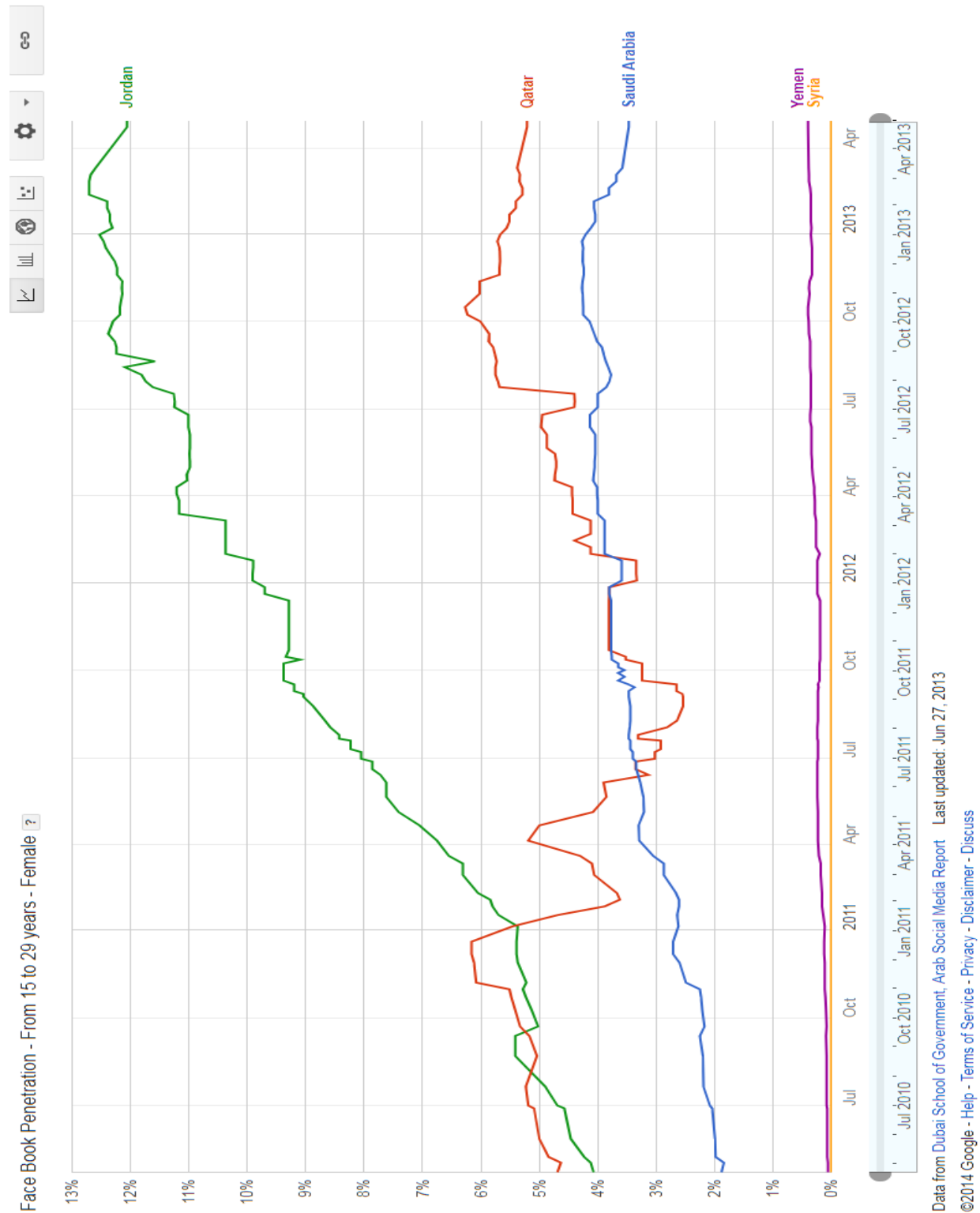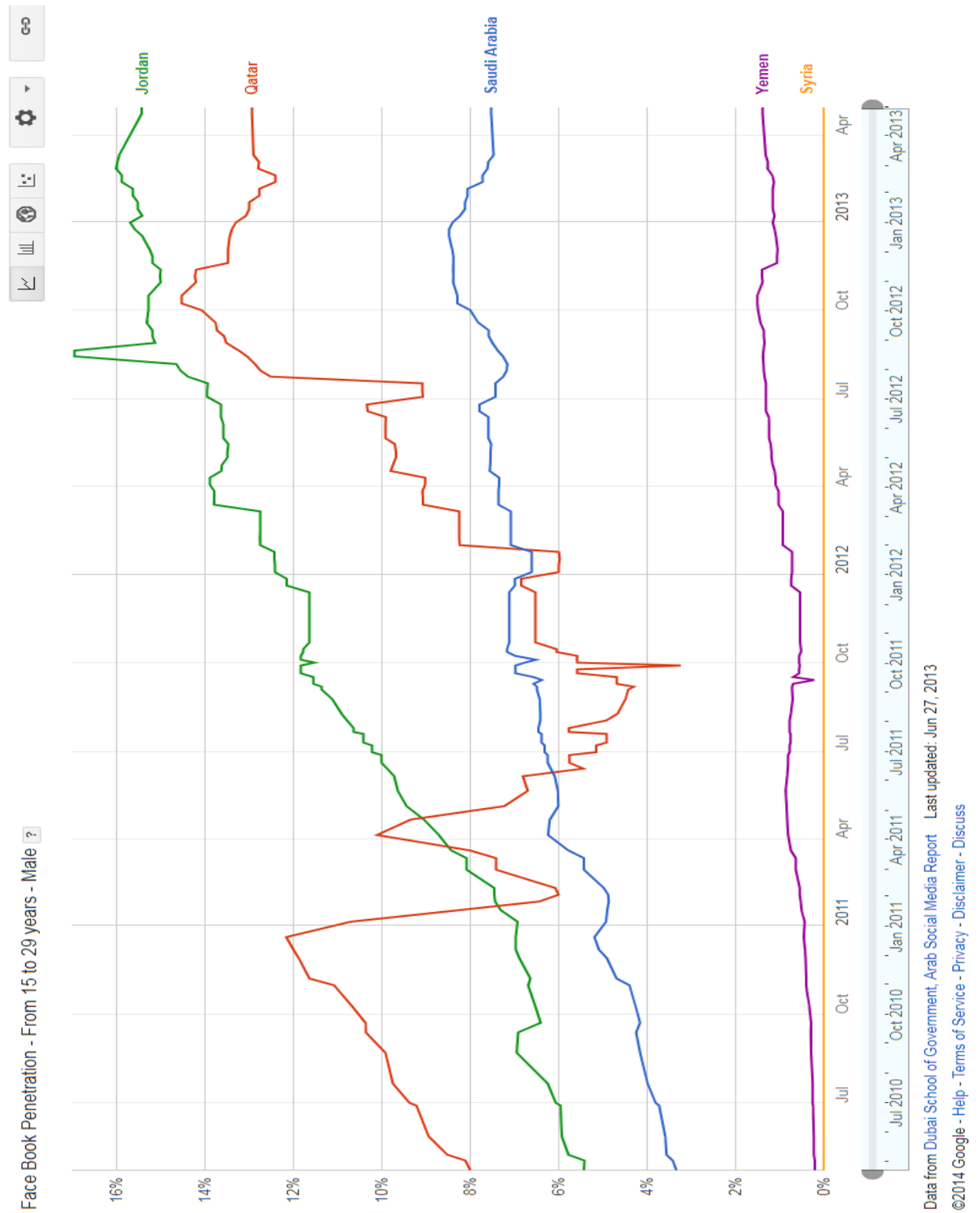Abramson, J. B., Orren, G. R., and Arterton, F. C. (1990). *Electronic Commonwealth: The Impact of New Media Technologies on Democratic Politics*. Basic Books, Inc.

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