

The Quality of Political Deliberation on Twitter

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Twitter users discuss political issues in Saudi Arabia and how social and religious values impact on the quality of deliberation. Its three case studies are: women's political participation; the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia; and unlawful use of public property. Based on the analyses of 12,093 tweets and 27 interviews with Twitter users in Saudi Arabia, this thesis argues that public debate is rational, respectful, focused and diverse. Both men and women participate in and exchange a range of attitudes towards government decisions. There is evidence to suggest that Twitter users criticise and challenge officials, clerics and established social values. Based on these findings, this thesis suggests that public deliberation about sensitive issues in Saudi society corresponds with key elements of public deliberation as it is envisioned in Western theories of citizen engagement in the public sphere. Some Twitter users perceive this kind of participation as an act of good citizenship. The analysis of tweets and interviews in this study demonstrate Twitter users' sense of connectedness towards their society and fellow citizens. On the other hand, the results also confirmed that the quality of political deliberation is impacted on by government censorship, Twitter users' self-censorship and social and religious values.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the quality of political deliberation on Twitter and the impact of social and religious values on that quality. This subject has been chosen for investigation because social media, and in particular Twitter, has the potential to empower Saudi citizens to engage in public discussion about different topics concerning their society. Many researchers have discussed the political changes in the Middle East and North Africa and the crucial role that social media platforms have played in that change. Singh and Thakur (2013); Ghannam (2011); and Salanova, (2012) say that social media have helped marginalized groups gain a voice and contributed to informing and mobilizing citizens as well as increasing government transparency; and they facilitate holding governments to account, as well as increasing freedom of expression and providing access to information resources. Other researchers such as Faris and Rahimi (2015) and Tufekci and Wilson (2012) have investigated how and why the citizens use social media in the Middle East. They discuss how the use of social media serves to increase civic engagement and to reconfigure the relationship between citizens and state. These studies investigated political change through analysing citizens' online participations to support revolutions and protests in Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia and Iran by organizing and mobilizing people, broadcasting news, connecting protesters with each other and the rest of the world. They concluded that social media platforms played an important role during the revolutions of 2010 and 2011.

Analyzing the relevant data on those platforms facilitated measuring and comparing citizens' activities before, during and after the revolutions, which enabled an evaluation of those platforms' role in changing dictatorial political systems, and changing the relationship between citizens and governments. Other studies investigated the role of the internet and social media in democratizing society in Egypt (Spinner, 2012), Iraqi Kurdistan (Mohammad, 2018) through an analysis of the political communication and participation between citizens and politicians, political parties' websites, and governments during protests, elections and media campaigns. However, Saudi Arabia,

where the government is an absolute monarchy and political activities online and offline are officially not allowed, has not seen similar protests and referendums. Moreover, media campaigns are not allowed during public municipal elections, therefore it is very hard to follow those studies` methods to measure political change in Saudi Arabia because of the shortage of crucial information that enables investigation. Even though many studies confirmed the role of Twitter in broadening freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia, they did not explain how and to what extent the relationship between citizens and Saudi government was changed as a result (Murphy, 2012a; Al-Rakaf, 2012; Alothman, 2013; Almahmoud, 2015 and Noman et al., 2015).

According to Althiabi (2018) social media function as cultural hubs that facilitate citizens to discuss the issues that influence their lives. Three government decisions that sparked discussions on Twitter in Saudi Arabia are used as case studies in this thesis to better understand the role of Twitter in political change in Saudi Arabia: Firstly, women`s political participation, as women`s rights are a very controversial issue in Saudi Arabia; secondly, the introduction of a tax on undeveloped property, where citizens were proactive in making suggestions as to how weaknesses in the law could be addressed and guarantee its successful implementation; and thirdly, government action against unlawful use of public property, where local government took action directly as a result of citizen action on Twitter. This thesis argues that debates on Twitter regarding these issues show a change in the relationship between Saudi citizens and power elites such as the government, the official religious institution and clerics.

When the PhD started in 2015, I noticed that Saudi citizens had become more vocal on Twitter; and that they had started to discuss sensitive issues, such as the driving ban. Moreover, the government seemed to be making efforts to introduce legislation that challenged established social values, in particular regarding women`s rights. Furthermore, citizens started creating specific hashtags to demand their rights and to criticize the Saudi government`s decisions and its performance regarding their rights, such as the housing shortage issue and unlawful use of public property. This is very pertinent because those criticisms give indications to what extent Saudi citizens have been empowered by Twitter and how they used Twitter to express their opinions about

social issues as well as exposing the government's shortcomings regarding these issues. How Twitter users discuss these issues gives insights into how they perceive the relationship between citizens, government and clerics, the community of citizens and the role of social and religious values in binding that community together.

1.2 Research Contribution

This study aims to make a significant contribution by exploring the role of social media in political deliberation in the Middle East through an analysis of the quality of political deliberation in three hashtags, regarding sensitive social issues in Saudi Arabia, on Twitter. There is no existing research that analyses the quality of deliberation on Twitter across a range of topics and no research that does this in the context of the Middle East. Previous studies generally have analysed the quality of deliberation on Usenet newsgroups (Wilhelm, 1999), political parties' websites (Hagemann, 2002), websites that were sponsored and managed by governments (Jensen, 2003), social networks websites such as Facebook and You-tube (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013), and social media platforms such as Facebook (Haas, 2012), and Oz et al. (2018) or compared between the quality of political deliberation on different platforms and websites. Although Oz et al, (2018) analysed incivility and impoliteness on Twitter versus Facebook, they did not analyse other elements of quality of deliberation on Twitter which is a platform that differs from other websites, social networks and media platforms. Twitter is a social media platform which has different characteristics from other social media platforms, such as the shortness of content in each tweet. Moreover, tweets on hashtags are generally accessible, and those tweets are able to receive comments and interactions, with the exception of certain users who are prohibited and not allowed to interact and read others' comments. It is important to study the quality of debate in detail because previous studies did not make a detailed analysis of the quality of deliberation on Twitter. Moreover, this study analyses the quality of deliberation through three different topics in one context which results in a more comprehensive view about the quality of deliberation on Twitter and to assess the results to measure differences or similarities depending on the subject

of the topic. This study is also important as it investigates debate in the Middle East, because no study to date has analysed the quality of deliberation on social media platforms, in particular Twitter, which show the extent to which the debates on social media included the elements of quality of deliberation in the Middle East.

Secondly, this study follows the recommendation by Janssen and Kies (2005) regarding taking into consideration 'the political culture and ideology' when analysing the quality of deliberations online, because cultural and political contexts impact on the quality of that deliberation. This study will also contribute towards a greater understanding of the impacts of social and religious values on the quality of deliberation on a social media platform in the Saudi context, which has been described as the most conservative society in the world socially and religiously, in particular regarding patriarchal discourse and social restrictions that give men control over women, because there is no other study investigating the impact of religious and social values on the quality of deliberation. Thirdly, this study develops a framework to analyse the quality of tweet contents which includes 10 factors that measure the six elements of the quality of deliberation (Diversity, openness, rationality, relevance, interaction, and respectfulness). This framework may help other researchers to analyse the quality of deliberation on Twitter in different countries, particularly Arab countries which have social and religious values which are similar to those prevalent in Saudi Arabia.

1.3 Research Rationale

Although Saudi Arabia, unlike other Arab countries, was not part of the Arab revolutions in 2011, Twitter has seen a massive increase in public discussion of sensitive issues among Saudis after those revolutions. This underlies the motivation to investigate four phenomena: Firstly, the extent to which Twitter users challenge the social and religious values that govern Saudi Arabia is addressed. Researchers such as Bukhari (2011) have pointed out that Saudis have started to discuss issues that used to be taboo, such as the suppression of women's rights. This thesis aims to investigate whether on

Twitter citizens and especially women challenge social restrictions and those conservatives in society who argue against women's political participation.

Secondly, many studies such as Noman et al (2015), Alswaeed (2015) and Al-Rakaf (2012) confirm that Saudi Arabia has started witnessing the emergence of a new culture of unprecedented criticism of the government's performance. Citizens are demanding transparency and action against corruption and the unlawful use of public property. Although traditional media restricted Saudi citizens from engaging in public discussion or presenting their voices for several decades, direct demands and criticisms of Saudi government organisations were posted on Twitter and there was some interaction with the government. This thesis offers an empirical investigation of this interaction and the role of Twitter for the changing relationship between government and citizens.

Thirdly, this thesis investigates whether Twitter enables citizens to criticize two great sources of power in Saudi society: clerics and the political elite. The participation of women in municipal elections was publicly criticised by some prominent clerics. A tax on undeveloped property and a law against unlawful use of property curtailed some of the political elite's privileges and corrupt behaviours.

Fourthly, Saudi citizens had not previously participated in public discussions on media platforms to discuss their society's interests. Therefore their discussions on Twitter are analysed to measure the quality of deliberation which will help to understand how Saudi citizens see their relationship with the sources of power in Saudi society- namely: the government, the official religious institution and clerics. Moreover, to discover the presence of elements of citizenship: connectedness and knowledge of the issue, the extent to which they appreciate informed debate, their connectedness to Saudi social and religious values.

1.4 Research Methodology:

The thesis is based on three case-studies: Women's participation in municipal elections in 2015, the introduction of a tax on unused property in 2015 and the introduction of a government decision against unlawful use of property in 2016. All three represent moments in Saudi Arabia's recent socio-political past when the government seemed to attempt to solve socio-political issues and respond to citizens' demands for change. They allow the thesis to explore whether and how citizens negotiate social values and their relationship with the government and wider political elite, but also clerics. The thesis combines a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of tweets with qualitative, semi-structured interviews with active Twitter users in Saudi Arabia. In total 12093 tweets were analysed; and 811, 2357, and 8925 tweets for each case study sequentially. This allowed for a comprehensive overview of recurring patterns across the sample of Twitter content. Interviews then enabled the researcher to explore in depth how Twitter users in Saudi Arabia had contributed to the three debates and how they perceived their relationship with fellow citizens and key sources of power in Saudi Arabia.

1.5 Research Questions:

This thesis is centred around the quality of political deliberation when Twitter users responded to the Saudi government's decisions about three different sensitive issues in Saudi society. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of tweets may facilitate answering the following questions:

Main questions:

- 1- To what extent do Twitter's debates about three sensitive issues in Saudi Arabia include the elements of quality of deliberation?
- 2- To what extent do social and religious values influence the quality of deliberation on Twitter?

Sub questions:

- 1- What primary topics were discussed by Saudis on Twitter in response to government decisions?
- 2- Did Saudi citizens support those Saudi government decisions?
- 3- What type of evidence did they draw on most often?
- 4- To what extent are the contents of Twitter diverse regarding the topics, the gender of users and their attitudes toward government decisions across the three case studies?
- 5- To what extent can deliberation on Twitter be considered respectful in the case studies?
- 6- How and to what extent do Twitter users interact with others in these deliberations?
- 7- To what extent can the contents of Twitter be considered rational in the case studies?
- 8- What are the differences between men and women regarding the elements of quality of deliberation in these case studies?
- 9- What are the differences between users who used their real names and those using **pseudonym** regarding the elements of quality of deliberation?

1.6 Research Organization:

The thesis contains eight chapters and begins by describing the cultural, political and legal contexts that are key to understanding the importance of the three case studies and why they represent important socio-political moments in Saudi Arabia. The thesis then moves on to discuss the importance of public, political deliberation for society and how its quality may be measured. It explains the importance of social media for political debate in Saudi Arabia. After outlining the methodology, the results of the three case studies (women's political participation, imposing tax on undeveloped property and unlawful use of public property) are described and discussed and final conclusions made. The chapters are outlined in more detail below.

1.7 The Structure of the Research:

Chapter 2:

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of political contexts in the kingdom in order to understand the extent to which Saudi citizens participate in making political decisions, and to understand the role of religious and social values that govern society. To achieve this aim, the role of the Saudi Council of Ministers and the way of appointing its members, the different stages of the Saudi parliament and the Basic Law of Governance (BLG) are explained to identify more precisely the role of Saudi citizens and their ability to take part in the political life of their society. Although Saudi public municipal elections were conducted three times (in 2005, 2011, and 2015) and were considered great steps forward towards democracy, Saudi women were excluded from the first and second elections for social and religious reasons, which confirmed the role of those values in governing Saudi society. Moreover, the chapter will provide a brief history of traditional and social media in Saudi Arabia and media regulation laws to explain how these laws may impact on freedom of expression when Saudi citizens engage in discussion about sensitive issues and why they conduct self-censorship to avoid conflict with their society or government.

Chapter 3:

This chapter explores the different definitions of deliberation, and its role in identifying social and political problems and finding solutions to them. Moreover, the notion of deliberation is placed within the context of Saudi culture. Finally, the framework for analysing the quality of deliberation is identified, with the following as its key criteria: relevance, openness, respectfulness, diversity, rationality and interaction.

Chapter 4:

This chapter explains the process of data collection and analysis. The benefits of combining quantitative and qualitative analyses of Twitter content with semi-structured interviews with active Twitter users are explained

Chapter 5:

This empirical chapter explores how Twitter users responded to the Saudi government's decision to allow Saudi women to participate in municipal elections as candidates and voters. This decision taken in a conservative society sparked discussion between conservative and progressive groups. The chapter highlights that supporters and opponents of the government's decision showed their connectedness to established social and religious values of Saudi society. Moreover, the chapter shows how Twitter users valued informed debate.

Chapter 6:

This empirical chapter analyses Twitter users' discussion about the Saudi government's decision to impose a tax on undeveloped property. This chapter argues that Twitter users were proactive when they participated in discussion about government decision. They attempted to protect the public interest and challenged weaknesses in the law. They proposed solutions that would result in the successful implementation of the law. This revealed a change in the relationship between the Saudi government and Twitter users, but also Twitter users' sense of connectedness with their fellow citizens.

Chapter 7:

This chapter covers the third case study, which investigates how Twitter users discuss the unlawful use of public property. The extent to which Twitter users employed Twitter to provide evidence of violations and to demand Saudi government action is explored. This chapter discusses the change in the relationship between government and citizens as Twitter users criticized the government's actions. This chapter also highlights how Twitter users expressed their sense of connectedness to society by exposing corruption and illegal use of public property.

Chapter 8: This chapter compares the findings of the three empirical chapters to reach a conclusion about the quality of political deliberation on Twitter about three Saudi government decisions.

Chapter 2

The Political Sphere of Saudi Arabia

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the political, religious and social factors that inform public debate in Saudi Arabia. It is the premise of this thesis that these factors influence the quality of public deliberation on Twitter, where sensitive social and political issues in Saudi Arabia are being discussed. The chapter focuses on the political system and the relation between the Saudi government and citizens; particularly regarding citizens' participation in decision-making and freedom to express views about key social and political issues. Key here are the Basic Law of Governance of Saudi Arabia and the role of the Executive and Legislative that control society. An explanation of the extent to which Saudi citizens participate in political decision making is provided; and the government's efforts to engage citizens in discussing social and political issues are explored. The chapter also addresses the extent to which the media enables Saudis to criticise the government and participate in discussions about government policy. Finally, the three case studies which are the focus of this thesis are presented. As this chapter will argue, all three case studies represent an issue of public affairs that prompted Saudi citizens to debate the collective values that govern their society, and to reflect on their relationship with the government, the official religious constitution, clerics, and other citizens.

2.1.1 Saudi Arabia: A Nation's Profile

Saudi Arabia is in the centre of the Middle East region and occupies the majority of the Arabian Peninsula. It sits at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is a member of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the region (2,149,690 km²), but 90% of the kingdom is desert, which includes *Alrub'Alkhali*, described as the largest sand desert in the world. Saudi Arabia shares its borders with multiple countries: its north borders Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait; its east borders Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Arabian Gulf; the south borders Oman

and Yemen; while the Red Sea lies to the west. The country consists of thirteen provinces: Al-Riyadh (including the capital city of Riyadh), Al-Qassim, Hail, Makkah (including the holy city of Makkah where the Holy Mosque is), AlMedina, Tabuk, Al-Baha, the Northern Borders, Al-Jawf, Jizan, Asir, Najran, and the Eastern Province. Economically, Saudi Arabia is a member of the G20 (the 20 countries with the largest economies in the world) as well as being one of the biggest oil exporters in the world. Regarding its religious importance, Saudi Arabia has religious value for a billion Muslims who pray five times a day towards Makkah; and 2 million go on pilgrimage there annually (Wagner, 2008). An understanding of this context serves to illuminate how social, political and religious elements influence the quality of deliberation among Saudis on Twitter and an understanding of why citizens from other predominantly Muslim nations may contribute to debates on Twitter, when the Saudi government decides to make changes that challenge some established social and religious values.

Figure 1: 2.1 Map of Saudi Arabia



Einstein (2006)

2.1.2 The Demographics

At the time of writing, new opportunities for public debate are opening up in Saudi society. The population of Saudi Arabia is young; and access to the Internet and use of mobile phones has increased rapidly. The use of social media is widespread. All this plays a crucial role in opening a new space for Saudi citizens to engage in discussion about social and political issues and to challenge some social and religious values.

According to the General Authority for Statistics (2018), the population of Saudi Arabia was recorded at 33,413,660 towards the middle of 2018. The percentage of yearly growth is 3.22%; and 20,768,627 citizens are Saudi nationals (51% male and 49% female). The number of citizens below 30 years of age constitutes 59% of the Saudi population (see Table 2.1). The high percentage of under 30s are what Prensky (2001) considers 'digital natives'. They have grown up only knowing the Internet and digital forms of communication. It is therefore easy to understand why the Saudi market has been described as the fastest growing, in terms of users of social networking sites such as Twitter and YouTube (Althiabi, 2018). Some digital natives, particularly in non-democratic countries, may use cell phones to exchange ideas and news and to avoid the more controlled traditional media which cannot broadcast all news for economic, political and religious reasons. According to Omran (2015), 72% of the Saudi population use cell phones, which globally placed it third, after the UAE and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). This information gives a first indication of the potential Twitter may have as a platform where Saudi citizens engage in discussions which are not possible in tightly controlled traditional media, such as television and the press.

Table 1: 2.1 Population by Age, Nationality (Saudi/Non-Saudi) and Gender

Age group	Saudi			Non-Saudi			Total		
	MALE	FEMALE	Total	MALE	FEMALE	Total	MALE	FEMALE	Total
4 - 0	1,123,261	1,084,529	2,207,790	298,126	283,015	581,141	1,421,387	1,367,544	2,788,931
09-مايو	1,097,810	1,060,664	2,158,474	377,142	360,021	737,163	1,474,952	1,420,685	2,895,637
14-أكتوبر	979,511	952,700	1,932,211	310,548	293,553	604,101	1,290,059	1,246,253	2,536,312
19 - 15	926,156	894,846	1,821,002	254,562	237,191	491,753	1,180,718	1,132,037	2,312,755
24 - 20	1,072,129	980,185	2,052,314	300,596	223,588	524,184	1,372,725	1,203,773	2,576,498
29 - 25	996,017	975,252	1,971,269	764,993	453,068	1,218,061	1,761,010	1,428,320	3,189,330
34 - 30	896,790	881,961	1,778,751	1,001,237	450,453	1,451,690	1,898,027	1,332,414	3,230,441
39 - 35	786,779	768,617	1,555,396	1,470,571	579,037	2,049,608	2,257,350	1,347,654	3,605,004
44 - 40	665,841	641,244	1,307,085	1,388,695	528,066	1,916,761	2,054,536	1,169,310	3,223,846
49 - 45	559,539	529,550	1,089,089	1,021,389	283,517	1,304,906	1,580,928	813,067	2,393,995
54 - 50	446,271	421,928	868,199	695,508	106,590	802,098	1,141,779	528,518	1,670,297
59 - 55	348,081	319,715	667,796	416,427	69,675	486,102	764,508	389,390	1,153,898
64 - 60	252,157	235,932	488,089	222,927	49,848	272,775	475,084	285,780	760,864
69 - 65	153,429	162,787	316,216	77,344	30,741	108,085	230,773	193,528	424,301
74 - 70	111,979	114,965	226,944	35,395	19,851	55,246	147,374	134,816	282,190
79 - 75	72,990	74,509	147,499	16,526	4,882	21,408	89,516	79,391	168,907
80	87,155	93,348	180,503	13,075	6,876	19,951	100,230	100,224	200,454
Total	10575895	10192732	20768627	8665061	3979972	12645033	19240956	14172704	33413660

(General Authority for Statistics, 2018)

2.1.3 The Political System of Saudi Arabia

Saudi citizens have not been given any real official opportunities to contribute to political decision making or request that officials are held to account in appropriate ways. If Twitter is a space where they can discuss their rights, demand that officials are held to account and expose corruption, it provides a new and much needed public space where citizens can engage in political debate and debate solutions to issues of public affairs. This transformative potential of Twitter is even greater if the government uses Twitter to engage with citizens' comments and demands.

The political structure of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy; where King Salman Bin Abdul-Aziz (whose reign began in 2015) is the head of state, Prime Minister and

Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. In June 2017, the King of Saudi Arabia issued a royal decree appointing his 32-year-old son, Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, as Crown Prince replacing Mohammed Bin Naïf. State power is held by a single family that inherits rule from one generation to the next, and one person from that family receives the top position of power until he abdicates or dies. Women are not allowed to govern Saudi Arabia, according the fifth article of the Basic Law of Governance (BLG) of Saudi Arabia. The majority of countries that have a monarchy have transitioned to constitutional monarchies where the monarch is the head of state, but their power is limited by the constitution. Other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Brunei, and Oman still have political systems where the monarch retains control (Hine, 2018). The political system of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy where the king holds absolute authority, even if there are functionaries who make decisions and run the political system. According to the Basic Law of Governance (BLG) in Saudi Arabia the king has the authority to appoint and dismiss the crown prince, members of the Council of Ministers, Saudi members of parliament, officers and commanders of the army and judges. The fifth article of the BLG confirms that “The system of governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia shall be monarchical” and “Governance shall be limited to the sons of the Founder King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abdar-Rahman al-Faysal Al Sa‘ud, and the sons of his sons. Allegiance shall be pledged to the most suitable amongst them to reign on the basis of the Book of God Most High and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger” and “The King shall select and dismiss the Crown Prince, by Royal order (Bureau of Experts at Council of Ministers, 1992).

Therefore, Saudi citizens do not participate in choosing members of the Council of Ministers and *Shura* Council in Saudi Arabia, unlike other citizens who live in similar countries ruled by the monarchs. Therefore, there is no culture of engaging citizens in discussion over policy changes; and there is no expectation that citizens should hold the government to account. One of the aims of this study is discovering whether Twitter is seen by Saudis as a space in which they can dare to criticise government officials and members of the royal family and discuss who should be held to account.

2.1.4 The Basic Law of Governance

Islamic regulations and traditional Arab social values are central to Saudi society where the articles of the BLG confirm the importance of Islam and traditional family values and recognise clerics as experts who have supreme authority in guiding society. The king of Saudi Arabia issued a royal decree (A/91) on 1st March 1992, which set out the functions of the state, the general framework for Saudi internal and external policies, and reflects a general approach to the way of life in Saudi society (Alsaud, 2006). The Saudi political system works to conduct its duties and responsibilities toward society in accordance with Saudi values, heritage and ethics. The dominant social values are patriarchal and Islamic; and this means that the protection of family is key, as is reverence towards religious authorities. This law includes 83 articles which are divided into eight parts; each part dealing with specific issues and aspects of social life. This law demonstrates how the government of Saudi Arabia recognises the importance of social values and religious rules, as the first article confirms that: “Its religion shall be Islam and its constitution shall be the Book of God and the *Sunnah* (Traditions) of His Messenger, may God’s blessings and peace be upon him (PBUH)”; and the seventh article confirms that the governance of Saudi Arabia derives its regulations from the *Qur’an* (holy book) and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammed and both are considered as the basis for this law (the BLG) and all the laws of state. These resources of law require trusted scholars to interpret their contents. Alhargan (2012) confirms the importance of *Ulama* (the official religious establishment as well as some non-governmentally affiliated clerics), who are immersed in Islamic teachings, because Muslims usually respect those people and listen to their opinions regarding social and religious controversial issues. He adds that the Saudi government usually resorts to religious scholars at the time of unrest, such as the Gulf Crisis (1991) and the Arab Revolutions (2011), to regulate and sustain reasonable relations between Saudi government and Saudi citizens.

Part three of the BLG includes five articles which emphasise that the cornerstone of Saudi society is the family, that family members should grow up with Islam, and that the state should strengthen family bonds and maintain families’ Arab and Islamic values and prevent whatever causes discord and divisions that might destroy the unity of society. But from another perspective, those articles arguably consolidate the authority of men

over women and confirm the culture of the patriarchy in Saudi society. These articles may encourage some men to try to exert more control over women and treat them as belonging to them; forgetting that, according to the same law, women have the same rights and obligations as citizens 'equal to men'; when this is the case, the BLG is being misused against women. Elshtain, (1996) notes:

"Male dominance is visible in societies in which complementarity of powers has given way an enhancement and expansion of institutionalised male authority accompanied by simultaneous diminution of women's domestic, sacral and informal authority"

Moreover, Article 42 of this law confirms that the Council of the King of Saudi Arabia and the Council of the Crown Prince are open to every citizen and every person who has a grievance; therefore, every individual has the right to address the public authorities about their affairs or in the public interest (Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, 2000). Article 42 exemplifies one of the common strategies used to connect citizens and government and shows that this 'open-door' policy facilitates top-down communication (Alsaud, 2010). Rather than promoting dialogue, the law secures the absolute rule of the government, and citizens are not encouraged to challenge the powers that be. If Twitter provides a space for political deliberation its transformative political potential is immense, especially if citizens use it to challenge established religious and patriarchal values. It is thus pertinent to investigate how Twitter users engage with these values and whether they choose to exercise their right to address public authorities, such as clerics.

2.1.5 The Council of Ministers

Laws and government policies are decided and implemented by the executive council in Saudi Arabia. The first Council of Ministers was established on 9th October 1950. According to the 56th Article of the BLG, the Council of Ministers is the executive authority of Saudi Arabia and the King of Saudi Arabia is the prime minister and leads the cabinet. The executive authority decides the internal, external, financial, economic, educational, defence and all public affairs policies of the state and oversees their implementation. It is the reference for financial and administrative affairs in all ministries and government agencies (Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, 2000). According to (Al-Hudaithi, 2013): "...the Council as the direct executive authority shall be fully involved in the affairs of implementation and administration, and shall include in its executive powers the following:

1. Monitor the implementation of laws, regulations and decisions.
- 2 - The creation and implementation of public works.
3. Follow up the implementation of the General Plan.
- 4 - Establish committees to investigate the functioning of ministries and government agencies.

All members of the council are appointed by royal decree". King Fahad issued the Law of the Council of Ministers in 1993, which outlined the form and function of Saudi Council. Article 3 of this law emphasised that every member of the Council must be "a Saudi national by birth and descent; well-known for righteousness and capability;" and "not previously convicted for a crime of immorality or dishonour" (*Shura*, 2018). Ordinary Saudi citizens however, do not participate in electing the members of the Council of Ministers. If they use Twitter to engage with these unelected ministers then it is possible to say that Twitter has introduced a degree of openness to the citizens/government relationship which traditional media have never facilitated. The transformative potential of Twitter in Saudi Arabia may be similar to that which was observed during the Arab Spring: According to Chaudhry (2014, p. 943): "Since the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, Twitter

has proven to be a useful mobilization tool for citizens. The power of Twitter to mobilize citizens (as seen in the Arab Spring) worries some governments.”

2.1.6 The Saudi Parliament

The Saudi parliament (*Shura*) has passed through various stages since King Abdul-Aziz came to Mecca, in 1924. Therefore, explaining those stages and how parliament has changed serves to highlight changes in the relationship between the Saudi royal family and citizens, and throws light on the role of Twitter in creating a new space where citizens can make their voices heard, potentially even communicating directly with members of government. There are three prominent stages to the development of the Saudi parliament. The first was when King Abdul-Aziz created the first elected National Council which included 12 representatives for all the districts of Mecca. That council created the first draft of basic law for administrating the country and employed six articles that regulated the running of the council and seven articles that formulated the jurisdictions of the council. This jurisdiction included all affairs in courts, municipalities, endowments, education, security and commerce; as well as creating permanent committees to deal with problems connected to traditions that did not involve religious regulations. King Abdul-Aziz issued his approval to enact a new Basic Law of Governance in 1926 and changed its title to *Majlis Ash-Shura* (Shura, 2018).

The second stage started in 1928 when the King appointed all members of the *Majlis Ash-Shura* and when the new revised system for the council included 15 articles. Moreover, the council issued an appendix that included seven articles, and this evolved to become the internal law for the *Majlis Ash-Shura* eventually comprising 24 articles. The council continued working under that law until the establishment of the Council of Ministers in 1953 where many of the jurisdictions of the *Majlis Ash-Shura* were divided between the Council of Ministers and other government organisations. However, the *Majlis Ash-Shura* continues to hold meetings and discuss issues that are transferred to it, although its level of power is reduced (Shura, 2018). Noteworthy, previous two stages included changes in relationship between citizens and government where elected citizens with full authority started creating constitution, but the government dismissed them and

appointed new members. That change might be linked to the surrounding political circumstances, but it indicated the change in the relationship between Saudi citizens and Saudi political system. So, Saudi citizens do not have authority to participate directly in making political decisions from that period.

The third stage started on 24th November 1990, when the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques issued a royal order that introduced three major laws: the Basic Law of Governance, the Provincial Councils' Law, and the *Majlis Ash-Shura* Law. This was considered a new page in the long history of the *Shura* in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as the duties of the Saudi parliament were accurately defined. Therefore citizens recognize that the Saudi parliament's role is purely consultant, which means that the Saudi parliament has no powers to enact new laws or hold anyone accountable. Its role does not exceed preparing regulations and proposals and then submitting them to the Council of Ministers for approval or rejection. However, this stage has seen some crucial changes, such as women joining as full members of the Saudi parliament for the first time, and the creation of new communication channels with citizens.

The *Majlis Ash-Shura* Law replaced the law issued in 1928 as well as the internal law; and supported that replacement by approving the laws of the council and their supplements in 1994 (Shura, 2018). However, crucially, members of parliament are still appointed by the king. According to Article 3 of the *Majlis Ash-Shura* Law, members of the *Shura* are appointed by the king from among 'knowledgeable and experienced citizens'. According to Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers (2000) the first term launched in 1994 and went on to 1997 with a president and 60 members; moreover, the number of members in the three following terms, increased by 30 each term until membership reached 150. The fifth term did not see any increase in members of Saudi parliament. But the sixth term saw very important development, because for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia women become members of the Saudi parliament. The *Shura* Council is keen to receive petitions from citizens, thus it has created a link in its home website to receive citizens' petitions which carry constructive suggestions that serve public rather than personal interests. This link requires communication information

and allows citizens to write the issue and their suggestions and gives them a serial number with which to follow the petitions.

In short, the Saudi parliament was not a democratic institution for a long time, even if the government developed regulations which aim to improve society and maintain the interests of citizens. Furthermore, its members were not real representatives of the Saudi people, because they were appointed by the King and women were excluded for a very long time, because women only recently became members of the Saudi parliament and for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia The *Shura* Council is keen to receive petitions from citizens, thus it has created a link in its home website to receive citizens' petitions which carry constructive suggestions that serve public rather than personal interests. Therefore, there have been (very minor) opportunities for citizens to contribute to policy-making and signs that the government has started to consider social media a tool by which they can signal to citizens 'look, you can be involved' but without allowing real dialogue.

2.1.7 Municipal Elections

Allowing public municipal elections in Saudi Arabia is considered a step forward in establishing a culture of democracy (Ghattas, 2005). Although some considered the Saudi government's decision to activate these councils as attempts to relieve internal and international pressures, what is perhaps more important is that this was a step, albeit tiny, in the right direction towards making Saudi Arabia more democratic through the participation of citizens in decision-making. An analysis of public debate on Twitter can reveal how citizens perceive this move and whether they see a change in their relationship with government.

Although the Law of Municipalities and Rural Affairs was adopted on 21st February 1979, these councils were not inaugurated until 2005. In 2004, the decision of the Council of Ministers No. 224 (dated 10th October 2003) to engage citizens in the process of decision-making in the management of local affairs through municipal councils was finally activated. 50% of the municipal councillors were elected by citizens to raise the level of services to meet citizens' needs and their desires and aspirations (Alghamdy, 2011).

Saudi citizens have participated in three municipal elections up to the time this study was conducted: in 2005, 2011, and 2015. While these were important moments of citizens' engagement in the political process, they were also controversial. According to Alghamdy (2011) the first election was held in 2005, but women were excluded from nomination or voting in the municipal elections, which was the crucial issue which generated significant discussions among writers, officials and citizens in the country. Al Watan Newspaper conducted polls which suggested that the majority of citizens supported women's participation (Al Maliki, 2005). Prince Mansour Bin Mutaib, the chairman of the General Committee of Municipal Elections explained that the reasons for the exclusion of women was the lack of trained women and the shortage of infrastructure needed for segregating the women and men because of religious and social values (Mishkhas, 2004, and Al Thagel, 2004).

The second elections were originally planned to be held in 2009 but were delayed to 2011 because an official government announcement indicated that the government intended to expand the electorate and discuss the possibility of participation by women as voters. But women did not participate in this election, which the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs attributed to the social customs of Saudi Arabia. However, King Abdullah issued a royal decree confirming that women could participate as voters and stand as candidates in a third election in 2015 (Pearson, 2015). According to Al-Saggaf and Simmons (2015) the king allowed to women to participate because of public pressure. On 31st July 2014, a royal decree was issued establishing the Law of Municipal Elections which confirmed the government's efforts to enable citizens to participate in decision-making as it increased the percentage of elected members from 50% to 70% of council members (Article 12), article 17th stated that female citizens had equal status to male citizens (Saudi National portal, 2014). The third municipal election in 2015 saw nominated 20 women from 2,106 citizens nominated to occupy 70% of municipal council seats in the municipal elections.

There were mixed responses in the media, which suggests that the government's decision was not universally welcomed at both popular and elite levels. Although the municipal elections were presented as a democratising move on the part of the Saudi

government and was welcomed by the majority of citizens according [Alhayat \(2005\)](#) newspaper`s poll, which suggested that the majority of citizens supported women`s participation, some journalists had different opinions about Saudi municipal elections, such as Al Khushiban (2003) who warned that the municipal elections could have a negative impact on Saudi society. He saw the elections as a double-edged sword which might revive tribal conflict and regionalism, because the voting and competition will be depended on tribal norms, such as giving their votes to the candidate of their tribe, which may lead to fragmentation of society. Conversely, Alhilwa (2003) did not fear partisanship, seeing it as a normal result of democracy; however, he felt that in practice the local elections would strengthen the social unity by merging citizens` demands into one national interest irrespective of their different religious or social backgrounds.

In short, these elections illustrated the crucial role of social and religious values in Saudi society and their impact on the relationship between the government and citizens, because the Saudi government delayed women`s participation in elections in 2005 and 2011, because of social and religious values. So, the influence of social and religious values will be evaluated in the analysis of Twitter users` discussions.

2.2 The Media System in Saudi Arabia

In democratic countries, the media plays a complementary role to the legislative, executive, and judicial authorities. The media is a fourth estate which is traditionally considered as one of the classic settings for balancing the division of power in democratic society according to Burke (cited in Dutton, 2009). News media is expected to highlight policy failures and expose scandals in the corporate sector, corruption in the judicial sector and the failures of officials in public administration. Further, the media alert citizens to issues of public affairs and provide a platform for the exchange of different arguments, all of which is essential if citizens are to make an informed decision when casting their vote in elections. The media also detects and to some extent foils wrongdoing by public officials as well as fiscal scandals. Brunetti and Weder (2003) confirm that with a free press, corruption will decrease, because the journalists' role as watchdogs promotes the transparency of the government decision-making process. McQuail (2010) emphasises that the media ideally is free and therefore can include a range of views. Therefore, citizens should find an opportunity to express their opinions, criticisms, and exchange ideas and suggestions and thus participate in developing their society and protecting the public interest. However, media agencies cannot carry out this role when they are under the control of dictatorships such as certain Arabic governments. According to Althiabi (2018) the media has been used as a propaganda channel which has promoted the control of authoritarian Arab regimes. The following section discusses the circumstance of Saudi media agencies and their establishment and regulation. It explores to what extent these agencies promote a constructive dialogue between citizens and government and how social and religious values influence media organisations in Saudi Arabia.

2.2.1 Saudi Newspapers, Radio and TV

The media in Saudi Arabia are not free, because of censorship and patterns of ownership. The establishment of Saudi journalism is divided into two stages of development –individual press ownership and organisational ownership –and each of these stages has different characteristics. Individual press ownership took place between 1924 and 1964 and during this time any individual could print publications. In that period, more than 40 newspapers were founded, including *Um Al-Qura* in 1924. It became the official weekly newspaper and aimed to inform citizens about new decrees and royal decisions. This was considered the main channel of communication between government and citizens although it was a one-way channel from government to audiences (Alzahrani, 2016; Awad, 2010). According to Alshebaili (2000) this period had another transitional ‘press merging’ stage between 1959 and 1964, when various publications merged together; these mergers were promoted by the government because it believed that there were too many newspapers in circulation in relation to the population, but also because the general literacy level was low and some of these productions did not have high-quality contents due to financial constraints. One example of these mergers was the *Albild* newspaper in Jeddah, which was founded in 1959 as a result of merging *Arafat* with *Albilad Al Saudia* (previously known as *Saout Alhijzas*). Alshebaili (2000) adds that one feature of the period of individual press ownership was the focus on good literary production, because literary writers supervised the newspapers in the absence of professional journalists.

Of course, fictional stories are safe and less sensitive than a discussion of political issues, which may have engaged the newspaper owners or writers in unexpected conflicts with the government or other citizens in society. Therefore it was very clear that the journals’ owners and writers were restricted by the surrounding political circumstances. Through the previous two stages, newspapers were owned by ordinary citizens, and most of these newspapers suffered from financial crises and relied on government support logistically and financially. The second stage was organisational ownership, which started after the Saudi government encouraged newspapers to merge before withdrawing the right to individual ownership of newspapers, issuing the new Press Establishments Law in 1964 (Alshebaili, 2000). These efforts, aimed at government

regulation of the press sector, resulted in nine newspaper organisations which were given licenses and some foreign newspapers which were printed outside of Saudi Arabia and imported in. The dependence of newspapers on government financial and logistical supports was a notable feature of this stage and meant that these press organisations could not criticise the government or guarantee reasonable freedom of expression of citizens' demands and criticisms (*ibid*), and the editors are responsible regarding any contents printed in their newspapers, as presented in section 2.2.2.

The history of radio in Saudi Arabia goes back to 1949 when the airwaves were officially launched with a recitation of the Holy *Qur'an* to win the hearts of citizens in the Kingdom (Mohammed, 2013). Radio was quite popular before that date; and 7,000 radio devices were owned by citizens in 1948, increasing to 13,000 in 1950 (Alshebaili, 2000). In 1965 TV programmes started to be broadcast, although TV was already known in the Eastern province because Aramco (an Arab-American company) provided a special channel in their area (*ibid.*). Saudi government radio and TV channels were established and supported financially and logistically by Saudi government; therefore they worked in the interests of the Saudi political system. Governments in other Arab countries at the time similarly used TV and radio to broadcast their ideologies and policies.

The Arab media in general and Saudi media in particular have a conservative view that distinguishes between content considered suitable for publication or broadcast and content that is not, as stipulated by law and enforced by the Saudi government (see 2.2.2). Moreover, the content of these channels predominantly consisted of officials' political speeches, visits and the protocol activities of government. Opposing views held by citizens were notably absent, because these channels' communication activities were subjected to pressure by the political system and its undeclared guidance officially (Alsaud, 2010). 1990 was considered the time when Arab TV channels systems really took off. Many Arab TV channels were founded after the American channel CNN used its professional resources to cover the First Gulf War, when Saddam Hussein occupied Kuwait (*ibid*). The use of satellite TV, which aired media content across the world, increased the power of democracy and decreased the control of state. According to Al-Saud (2010, p.107), the diversity of communication channels and media agencies allowed

for a freer circulation of information, ideas and opinions in Saudi society. Exposure to opposing views helped to make ideas and issues more mature and bolder than before. He adds that after the emergence of satellite channels and their spread in Saudi society, Saudi citizens started turning to international channels, such as BBC and CNN, and were thus able to bypass the gatekeepers and censorship in the national channels.

According to Ayish (2002) after 1990, three types of TV were common in Arab countries, and Saudi Arabia in particular. The first type, government channels, are controlled by governments and broadcast for policies. The second type, Reform Government TV channels, were introduced to confront new developments locally and globally, when officials admitted that there should be specialist government channels to compete with other channels. The third type (commercial TV) sparked a professional revolution in making news, because specialisation and professionalism guided the new media industry (AlSaud, 2010). The first type includes the Saudi first official channel; the second type includes *Alikhbaria*, *Iqtisadiyah* and the sport channels; and the third type includes commercial channels such as Middle East Centre (MBC), the Arab Radio and Television Network (ART), and LBC. These channels are owned by Saudi business men who are close to the royal family, as well as channels such as LBC whose major shareholder is Prince Khalid bin Sultan, a member of the Saudi royal family (Althiabi, 2018).

The emergence of new satellite channels, which were created by Saudi investments, increased the pressure on Saudi TV because these channels met audiences' desires and demands for more open programmes, which government channels cannot offer (Alshebaili, 2000). AlSaud (2010) says that whoever follows the development of the Saudi media observes that it is governed by known Islamic values, social customs, and traditions; moreover, Ayish (2002) confirms that Saudi news bulletins are full of protocol and positive news of politicians and the absence of other opinions which cannot appear in the official and affiliated Saudi channels. According to AlSaud (2010) the Saudi political system gave the media more space to keep abreast of developments in the media sector in the Middle East. Programmes that were critical of some government organisations' performance began to be broadcast and the scope of

freedom of expression, transparency, and clarity was extended, even if these views did not agree with the trends of the political system and directly criticized the negative roles of some government institutions. However, Alshebili (1999) confirms that it is noticeable that glorification and exaggeration of the advantages of government performance has become commonplace in Saudi media. He attributes this to the institutions themselves and not to the closed nature of the political system itself. Saudi media remain financially and logistically dependent on the government.

The internet was made available to Saudi citizens by a Saudi Council of Ministers' decision on 1st February 1999 (Alshebili, 2000). This launched a new era of media in Saudi Arabia, because citizens started to communicate digitally with other people in and outside of Saudi Arabia. The formal restrictions that prohibit citizens from expressing their opinions may be relieved, because Saudi citizens do not need permission from an editor to broadcast; thus citizens become creators of content instead of being merely passive receivers despite the government's censorship, which may limit their freedom.

2.2.2 Saudi Media Laws and Regulations

The strength of social, religious and political values has appeared to limit the space for freedom of expression and influences the contents of media platforms. According to Alsaif (1997), Saudi laws and regulations which organise the process of production and dissemination of media materials were organised by experts who understood Saudi social and religious values as well as the economic and political context. According to Alotaibi (2017), Saudi media and the internet are regulated by the Media Policy Law, the Printed Materials and Publications Law, the Executive and Regulations of Printed Materials and Publication Law, the Press Establishment Law, the Executive and Regulations of Electronic Publishing, and the Copyright Law. As they regulate media ownership and censorship, they influence to what extent Saudis have the ability to express their opinions in traditional and social media platforms. Those laws and regulations are enforced by some government organisations responsible for what is circulated in the media platforms such as the Communications and Information Technology Commission, the Ministry of Media, and the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology.

The Media Policy Law¹ includes 30 articles which are considered part of Saudi government policy and emanate from Islamic regulations. Generally, this law emphasises the importance of respecting Islamic regulations, protects social traditions and consolidates Arabic values in society. Articles 8, 9, 10 and 11 of this law address taking care of the Saudi family and their different needs for knowledge, such as specific programmes for children. Moreover, Article 24 confirms the importance of informing citizens of their responsibilities towards their country; and Article 26 confirms that freedom of expression in the media is guaranteed, within the Islamic and national goals and values of the Saudi media. The Printed Materials and Publications² includes 49 articles which regulate the process of production and its contents (Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, 2000). Notably, Article 7 prohibits printing or circulating any material that insults Islam or threatens the unity of society; however, Article 24 stipulates that freedom of expression in the media is guaranteed, within the Islamic regulations and confirms that newspapers be not monitored by government except in unusual circumstance. However, I believe that not all these articles have been adhered to in reality, because the Saudi Government has jailed some Twitter users because their opinions are considered not to conform to the values of Saudi society, such as respecting the Prophet Muhammed (Aid et al, 2015). The Press Establishment Law was issued on 10th January 1964 by Royal Decree No. 62/M and modified by Royal Decree No 20/M on 29th July 2001 and comprises 30 articles regulating the press process and production. Article 18 stipulates that newspaper editors bear full responsibility for any content published which does not follow the policy of Saudi Arabia, Islamic regulations, threatens the social fabric and values or disseminates racism.

¹Issued by Royal Decree No.169 of the Saudi Council of Ministers on 9th September 1982.

² Issued by Royal Decree No.17 on 7th February 1982 and modified by Royal Decree No. 32/M on 30th November 2000.

On 27th March 2007, the Saudi Council of Ministers issued the Law of Electronic Crimes³ that included 16 articles where articles 2, 3 and 5 confirm the importance of protecting the public interest, morals and public decency of society (Albahlal, 2007). The Saudi Minister of Information adopted the Executive and Regulations of the Electronic Publishing Law on 26th April 2018 which comprised 17 articles (Alweeam, 2018). Article 1 defines the types of electronic publishing which include social media platforms such as Twitter and electronic contents which include mobile and multimedia text, audio and video materials, any of which are prepared, produced, pre-prepared, updated, circulated or transmitted by electronic media or any other type of electronic material transmitted electronically through the Internet or various telecommunication networks. Moreover, Article 4 of this law confirms that “The electronic publication activity in all its current or updated forms is subject to the provisions of the Printed Materials and Publications Law (Ministry of culture and information, 2018). Article 14 holds writers responsible for unacceptable content; and Article 15 confirms that it is not permissible to publish anything that contravenes the provisions of Islamic law or the applicable regulations or any contents that violate the security of the country. The Saudi government will strictly enforce media laws on Saudi citizens while they are domiciled in the Kingdom or upon their return; moreover, non-Saudis will be under the law while they live in Saudi Arabia.

As discussed previously Saudi citizens have little opportunity to participate in shaping their government’s policies. Furthermore, traditional media such as TV and newspapers, as opposed to social media, have been tightly controlled by the government directly through logistical and financial support and indirectly by pressuring editors who then protect themselves by prohibiting writers from criticising officials and demanding political reforms. On the other hand, even though the government tries to control what Saudi citizens post on social media, social media platforms such as Twitter provide unprecedented opportunities for citizens to engage in public debate, when compared with the even more tightly-regulated traditional media.

³Issued by the Royal Decree No 79/M On 27th March 2007

2.3 Political deliberation on Twitter in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia

Many studies discuss the role of Twitter and Facebook during the Arab revolutions in giving citizens access to information and empowering them to engage in discussion; and how this also may have influenced citizens' relationship with their governments. The Arab Spring or Arab Revolutions refer to the public protests that swept across some Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa; and began in Tunis in 2010 after a young citizen burned himself to protest against harsh living conditions. That revolution was followed by other protests in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain (Mesawa, 2016). Although these protests included similar demands, such as political reforms and solutions to human rights problems, the social movements, strength and results of those revolutions were different from one country to another. For example, the Egyptian and Tunisian protests succeeded in removing dictatorial regimes, but Yemen, Libya and Syria have suffered instability, insecurity and civil wars since those revolutions. Other countries such as Sudan, Jordan, Oman, Algeria and Bahrain witnessed protests that motivated their governments to implement some social, economic and political reforms to satisfy their angry citizens, and maintain security and stability (Howard and Hussain, 2013). Although Saudi Arabia did not witness protest on the streets, the Saudi political system initiated some social, economic and political reforms to satisfy citizens and promised to meet their desires to maintain security and stability and avoid calls for democratization, as happened in some Arab countries. AlJabre (2013) confirmed that Saudi government succeeded in evading an uprising during the Arab revolution by responding to the public and implementing some social change. In the following paragraphs I will discuss the role of social media for political deliberation in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia, with a particular focus on recurring patterns of that debate, then the contribution of this thesis will be outlined.

Some empirical studies, such as Mesawa (2016), Mohammad (2018) and Howard and Hussain (2013), suggest that social media platforms, in particular Twitter and Facebook play an important role in facilitating political deliberation in some Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Tunis and Iraq. The creation of new spaces for public debate is particularly important in those societies where there are no long-standing

traditions of free, public debate. Public debate in the majority of countries in the Middle East is heavily censored and traditional media, such as television and the press, are tightly regulated by government or/and dominant political parties (Howard and Hussain, 2013; Mohammad, 2018). Salanova (2012) and Mesawa (2016) confirm the effective role of social media in particular Twitter and Facebook as a public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings; although authors such as Morozov (2011, p.xiv) criticize the optimistic view that: “technology empowers the people who, oppressed by years of authoritarian rule, will inevitably rebel and mobilize themselves through text messages, Facebook, Twitter, and whatever tool comes along each year”. He confirms that the internet and social media platforms do not constitute a public sphere as described by Habermas, because they too are under the control of governments. Moreover, Gladwell (2010) refuses to consider social media as a public sphere because the relations between people who participate in social media platforms are weak, and therefore such users cannot support each other because they are not close.

Although there has been an increase in deliberations on social media platforms, no one can confirm that this is evidence of the emergence of a new public sphere. Noam (2005) asserts that an increase in political discussions on social media platforms does not reflect their ability to become a public sphere. Nevertheless, theoretical approaches to the public sphere offer a useful starting point for an analysis of Twitter users’ engagement with sensitive social and political issues in Saudi Arabia. Even if there can never be a social media platform where debate can be truly free, social media nevertheless can be said to be providing space for public discussion, debates and interaction, which are all elements of the ideal public sphere (Dahlgren 2005). In the next paragraph the types of user who participated in these discussions on these platforms will be discussed.

Other studies focus on users who engage in political discussion on social media platforms in the Middle East, where many dictatorial states have strict censorship, persecution, as well as social, religious, and political values which create obstacles that prohibit ordinary citizens from directly criticizing presidents, clerics and political actors in their societies. Mohammad (2018) and Mesawa (2016) confirm that social media have

enabled ordinary citizens to engage in political deliberation about social issues; and that social media enable women and youth to engage in discussion with other citizens about their societies' interests. This participation of youth and women confirms the political and social change in Middle East societies. According to Mesawa (2016) social media play a crucial role in helping women to take on more active roles within the opposition movement. This however received criticism from some of the research participants who regarded such female activism as not compatible with the traditional roles of women in Egyptian society. Moreover, Egyptian youth does not usually challenge the decisions of political leaders or elders, but in the era of social media they started to reject them. According to Howard and Hussain (2013), the new generation of Tunisian and Egyptian citizens has the courage to discuss wealth disparities and corruption as well as having the ability to say 'No' to presidents who do not meet their demands and do not try to solve poverty and unemployment problems. Mesawa (2016) interviewed 15 political activists and journalists and confirmed the emergence of a young generation of citizens who say 'No'. He adds that this new culture has helped the marginalized Egyptian and Tunisian citizens to make their voices heard. Tufekci and Wilson (2012) confirm the tremendous shift in the ability of citizens in dictatorial countries such as Egypt to document and express their desires for social transformation. Politicians, political party leaders and political activists participate in discussion with ordinary people, but their participations were different. Mohammad (2018) confirms that politicians such as new candidates and political party leaders participate in discussion, but they usually use social media in a unidirectional fashion to post political ideas and political perspectives in the online space which does not promote open political discussion. In the next paragraph the common topics which have been discussed on these platforms will be presented.

Citizens engage in political communication and deliberation to express their opinions about different topics. According to Mohammad (2018) and Mesawa (2016), citizens in Iraq Kurdistan, Tunis and Egypt using social media platforms to discuss real democracy, social, political, and economic reforms and human rights. They believe that citizens there could no longer tolerate the increase in unemployment and the penetration of corruption in the government system and made demands for these issues to be tackled and to get their political rights. Moreover, other citizens raised the ceiling of their demands on social

media platforms, to remove corrupt political systems in Egypt and Tunis and they succeeded in removing them. Citizens in those countries had not been allowed to engage in discussion about issues such as poverty, corruption and unemployment before the emergence of social media. According to Mohammad (2018) political parties use social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to discuss their agenda and political programs with audiences. Moreover some of these political parties and new candidates use social media in their interests through spreading information about competitors` corruption and scandalous behaviour.

Regarding the Saudi context, many empirical studies have attempted to investigate the role of social media in particular Twitter in political deliberation. Alsweed (2015), Faqih (2015), Alsaggaf and Simmons (2015) and Noman et al (2015) confirm that social media platforms in particular Twitter provide Saudi citizens with a public space to exchange perspectives and engage in political discussion about their interests and Saudi social issues. These platforms help them to overcome barriers presented by the traditional media which have not allowed them to express their opinions for several decades. These studies emphasise that citizens usually discuss social issues that concern them such as corruption, women` rights and employment as well as expressing their dissatisfaction with government services. Moreover, Alsaggaf and Simmons (2015) mention that citizens use these platforms to demand that the government takes action in fighting corruption which threatens their society`s interests and in conducting political reforms. Moreover, some of these studies such as Bahammam (2018) and Alsaggaf and Simmons (2015) argue that the political discussions on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are evidence of social and political change and that it drives that change in Saudi Arabia. They believe that Saudi citizens become more able to discuss sensitive Saudi social issues such as women`s rights and political reforms. Bahammam (2018) and Almahmood (2015) discuss sensitive Saudi women`s issues such as travel controls for Saudi women (guardianship), car driving, and statistics about the percentages of unmarried Saudi women. Bahammam (2018, iii) found that "Twitter data reflect as well as facilitate an ongoing gradual social change in the Saudi society, since the unheard can now be heard and the dominant social practices involving women are being presented for public deliberation."

Overall, these studies stress that Twitter provides an important public space for political deliberation which has the potential to drive social change in the Middle East, in particular in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, some of these studies used quantitative analysis (surveys) (e.g. Alsweed, 2015 and Faqih, 2015) or qualitative analysis (interviews) (e.g. Mesawa, 2016 and Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). Other studies such as Samdi and Shahin (2017) used mixed methods (semi-structured interview and questionnaire) but all previous studies focused on users and did not analyse the content of social media platforms. Although other studies such as Muhammad (2018), Bahammam (2018), Almahmood (2015), and Alsaggaf and Simmons (2015) used mixed methods to analyse the contents of social media platforms, they focused on contents and did not investigate users' perspectives regarding the contents and using these platforms. Some studies used mixed methods to investigate the main topics, sub-topics and the main words mentioned in tweets or measured the interaction through inflowing tweets through re-tweets and replies. However, this is a tiny part of discussion which will not be enough to measure the quality of deliberation.

Noticeably, previous studies did not investigate the quality of political deliberation on social media platforms; therefore the main contribution of this study is measuring the quality of political deliberation on Twitter (see Chapter 3 for more information about the elements of quality of deliberation). This study is going to use mixed methods which starts by a qualitative and quantitative analysis of 10 elements of tweet contents (see Chapter 4 for more detailed information) which facilitate acquiring a deeper and more comprehensive view of the contents of social media than previous studies. For example, this study will focus on tone (sarcastic comments) and the source and types of evidence used to support users' attitudes. Then 27 interviews (9 for each case study) with active Twitter users who participated in the hashtags have been analysed. These interviews give more details about the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses of tweets, because the aim of study is not only to analyse how or what Twitter users commented, but also why they agreed or disagreed with the government's decisions. Therefore, this study will use a more comprehensive framework than any framework used in previous studies in this context. This framework combines the qualitative and quantitative analyses of tweet contents with the perspectives of users. Moreover, many previous empirical

studies analysed one case study, but this thesis will analyse three case studies in one context (Saudi Arabia). Analysing the quality of political deliberation across three different cases allows the measurement of the influence of social and religious values on the elements of the quality of political deliberation and to understand the similarities and differences. Therefore, I will introduce the three case studies in the following paragraphs.

2.4 The three case studies

While Twitter may provide new opportunities for public debate, it is important to remember that debates on any social media platform are enmeshed in the fabric of society. Saudi Arabia is a conservative society, where social values, religion, patriarchy and the principles of a monarchical system of government have been dominant for decades. An analysis of how Twitter users discuss social and political issues of Saudi Arabia needs to take this context into consideration. In order to do so, this thesis focuses on three instances where Saudi Arabia's social and religious values and the long-standing relationship between citizens and government were questioned.

2.4.1 Women's Position in Saudi Arabia

The first case study is women's political participation. The question of whether women should be allowed to participate in elections as candidates and voters, challenges Saudi society to reflect on the role of social and religious values in society. It asks them to consider whether the community of citizens includes women and whether they want to help secure women's rights.

Saudi women have struggled for several decades to obtain basic rights such as education, employment, driving a car and political participation. According to Hamdan (2005) Saudi women's rights and their role in developing their society has been one of the most discussed aspects of Saudi society by citizens in the era of social media. Women's political participation is a key issue in this debate. When the Saudi government allowed women officially to participate in municipal elections as candidates and voters on a par with their male counterpart, this was discussed as evidence of a democratic

transformation. Although the official position of government since the founding of Saudi Arabia has been to promote women's rights, it was influenced by the views of conservatives such as clerics or men with traditional social values who wish to prohibit women from getting their rights and participating in public affairs, in line with Islamic regulations and Saudi social values as they see them. Catty and Rabo (1997) say that Saudi women have been largely absent from the public sphere of Saudi Arabia; and have had to have recourse to holding meetings in their homes and other unofficial gatherings. That absence relates to the nature of Saudi society that prefers men over women because of social values or misinterpretations of religious regulations. Azimova (2016, p. 14) defined this as patriarchy, which is ".....a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men - by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, education and division of labour determine what part women shall or shall not play....".

The following illustrate the extent to which Saudi women have had their rights denied by such a patriarchal system and how government efforts to change aspects of women's rights in education, work and political participation were met with opposition from supporters of conservative social values.

2.4.1.1 Education

In the past century, the education of Saudi women was rejected by some Saudi elites and conservatives citizens because they believed that it threatened social and religious values. The Saudi state introduced a public education system in the 1930s, but women did not have access to education until the middle of the 1950s, because of continuous opposition from conservatives and traditionalists (Rather, 2016). Some citizens even demonstrated against women's education, but these protests were dispersed by royal guards on the orders of King Faisal (Blandford, 1996). Social values were an obstacle that stood against women's education, which is why the state embarked on a series of initiatives to convince tribal leaders and other conservative citizens to enrol girls in schools.

In the 1960s, Saudi women and some men in the western part of Saudi Arabia demanded women's rights to education according to Hamdan (2005). In a royal speech it was explained that the king in consultation with religious scholars had decided to open female schools under the control of a committee to be responsible to the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia (Dabla, 1983). According to Huyette (1985) female informal schooling had started in the era of King Saud, and King Faisal convinced the tribes of the importance of formal education for girls. Murphy (2012b) confirms that King Faisal struck a skilful balance between modernisation and the conservatism of a deeply religious society. The aim of these schools was teaching girls *Shari'ah* science and the *Qur'an* as well as mathematics and housekeeping to prepare them to be good mothers who would raise their children well. In 1964 four public intermediate schools and one secondary school for girls were opened to prepare them for domestic roles and university studies (Al Rawaf, 1991). Although the Saudi government conducted rigorous reforms to empower women citizens through education, even these steps faced difficulties and delays in certain areas of the country; for example, female education remained, at that time, unknown in the central part of Saudi Arabia (Rasheed, 2002). In contrast, female education functioned in the urban parts of the country such as Makkah more than in others (Rather, 2016). According to Arebi (1994) many religious groups perceived increasing women's freedom through education and work as a dangerous 'Western idea'. Although the Saudi government took great steps to include women in Saudi society, those steps were still limited (Chaudhry, 2014).

Although those social and religious dilemmas and obstacles hindered women's education, figures show an improvement as the number of female educational institutions increased from 15 in the 1960s to 155 in the 1970s (Almohsen, 2001). The first college for women in Saudi Arabia was established in 1970 and the first campus for women was opened in 1979 at the King Saud University in Riyadh (Hamdan, 2005). Between 1983-4, the Saudi government increased the amount of money spent on the educational sector; this was accompanied by a rise in the number of students enrolled in universities and a change in parental attitudes towards women's education which lead to an increase in the number of female students (Alsweel, 2008). Thereafter there was a swift rise in the number of Saudi women enrolling in higher education such that by 1993 females

accounted for 42% of students in higher education (Salloom, 1995). Bahgat (1999) emphasises that the 1990s witnessed a change in the role of Saudi women because a few decades before their job was to be good wives and mothers; however, they started participating in public affairs with men which might be attributed to the role of modern education in empowering Saudi women. The King Abdallah scholarship programme started in 2005 and gave a chance for Saudi students of both genders to study abroad. According to Alshaikhi (2017) the number of Saudi students who study outside Saudi Arabia in the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, and other countries, until October 2017, was 114,518 and there were also 74,753 companies that sponsored them. Many Saudi men and women educated in Western countries returned and supported women's rights and brought different visions for future of Saudi society (Hamdan, 2005). The Saudi General Authority of Statistics confirms that, in 2018 the number of Saudi women enrolled in higher education rose to 49% of students (Shar, 2018).

Although, social and religious values played a crucial role in delaying women's education, as shown by the government's effort in dealing with clerics and tribes, Saudi society has witnessed social changes that relate to the public appearance of women, although that society has a unique and complicated culture which includes social and Islamic affiliations (Al alhareth et al, 2015). Therefore Saudi women have been empowered and qualified by education to participate in the market sector.

2.4.1.2 Women's Employment

The acceptance by Saudi society of women's education as well as their success in different fields of science and the increasing number of women enrolled in educational institutions encouraged the Saudi state to conduct its economic plan to replace foreign manpower partly with Saudi women. To do this the government needed to consider the importance of these different interests and values that needed to be balanced. King Fahad stated at a meeting of the Council of Ministers in 1997 that 79% of the 660,000 jobs held by non-Saudi workers and earmarked to be 'Saudized' should be earmarked for Saudi women (Doumato, 1999). That decision facilitated women's engagement in society because they participated and were seen in different sectors of public life in Saudi conservative society (*ibid*). El-sanabary(1994) confirms that education empowered

thousands of women daily to go to their schools and work and, after they engaged in discussions with their families, encouraged many to see entering the labour market as a possibility. However, the percentage of women in the labour market did not change, which might be attributed to religious and social values such as segregation between sexes (Doumato, 1999).

Saudi Arabian religious scholars emphasised the importance of segregation in the workplace between men and women who are not relatives, as well as confirming that the mixing of genders in the workforce may have 'evil consequences' (AlMunajjed, 1997). Thus, conservatives stand against the Saudi government decisions that aim to empower Saudi women, just as they did with women's education in the last century. The decision of King Abdulah, which promoted the government plan to employ 70,000 women in the labour force, faced *fatwas* issued by the Permanent Committee for Religious Edicts, chaired by Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh that prohibited the integration of sexes in workplaces where there was no gender segregation (Alhargan 2012). Moreover, other religious scholars stated that there should not be equality between men and women as this was incompatible with Islamic regulations (*ibid*).

Although conservatives warned against enrolling women in the labour force, the last few years have witnessed a noticeable increase in the number of female employees, which confirms the social and political changes in Saudi society. According to a report issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development, the number of women working in the private sector in the Kingdom increased by 130% from 215,000 to 496,000 between 2012 and 2016 (Salem, 2017). This increased again by 8.8% between 2017 and 2018 from 545,400 to 593,400 (Al-Madinah, 2018). However, the percentage of Saudi female employees in the private sector (56%) exceeded their counterparts in the government sector (44%), and the low percentage of Saudi females employed in the public sector (5.6% between 2014 and 2017) has also been offset by a 25% rise in their employment in the private sector, which demonstrates the efforts of the Saudi government to encourage women into the private sector (Maaal, 2018). On the other hand, this increase in the number of women employed in the private sector is attributed to the nature of the

private sector which is more open to social change; because the public sector is under more scrutiny and expected to conform to social and religious values.

It is worth mentioning that the Saudi government issued different progressive and advantageous labour laws to encourage women and convince families regarding guaranteed segregation between the sexes and respect for the social and religious values that concern conservatives. Redvers (2015); Al-Tikriti (2015); and Yousef (2018) confirm that social culture and the Saudi family system, outside the framework of religious constants, have influenced Saudi government decisions and efforts to expand the number of Saudi women working in the labour market. Therefore, the Saudi government took many decisions to increase the number of women working in government and private sectors and to organise the work environment to be compatible with Islamic and social values⁴.

All these government decisions show that the Saudi government has made efforts to empower women and to give them their rights, while at the same time maintaining tribal community customs and religious values to maintain these different interests and the need to be balanced between them. Those efforts were supported by the Saudi government's financial ability (through oil wealth) to enforce segregation between the genders by providing exclusive government institutions for women (Le Renard 2008). All these appointments have received different levels of acceptance in Saudi society, but the extent to which Saudi society started to accept women's employment could be indicated by the official public celebration held by the Hail Airport Administration to mark the first female Saudi Assistant Captain. According to Aram News (2019) Saudi Arabia celebrated the first Saudi woman being officially assigned as Assistant Captain in Saudi Arabia's Nesma Private Aviation Company, on an official and popular level.

⁴ Issued on 13/05/2003, (120) Issued on 01/06/2004, and (187) Issued on 22/08/2005.
No (1/1/2473/ع) dated 12/06/2011 ; No (1/1/2474/ع) dated 12/06/2011; No (1/1/2475/ع) dated 12/06/2011; No (1/1/3732/ع) dated 18/07/2012; No (1/1/3729/ع) dated 18/07/2012; (1/1/3730/ع) dated 18/07/2012; and No (1/1/3731/ع) dated 18/07/2012.

2.4.1.3 Saudi Women's Political Participation

Women's political participation is necessary for women to make their voices heard and to implement national policies that advance women's political rights. According to Azimova (2016) women's political participation is very important because women occupy 50% of the population globally and 49% of the Saudi population. The Saudi government has promoted women's participation for several decades despite difficulties occurring because of social and religious values. However, the government's efforts have been supported by the increase in the number of Saudi women enrolled in public education and work sectors, which effected some change in social and political values among citizens. Women's participation in the Saudi Parliament, public municipal elections and their appointments to leadership positions are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Although Saudi municipal elections were conducted in 2005 and 2011, Saudi women did not participate till the third election because of social and religious values (see 2.1.7). Moreover, in 2006 the president of the Saudi parliament appointed six women as part-time advisers, which was seen as a small step on the path of political reform and giving women their rights (Muthafer, 2006). A historic decision was made by King Abdullah in 2011 when Saudi women were given the right to run for office and to vote in the third public municipal elections (Ba-Ammeer, 2015). King Abdullah declared publicly: "We refuse to marginalize women in society in all roles that comply with *Shari'ah*, we have decided, after deliberation with our senior *ulema* (clerics) and others...to involve women in the *Shura* Council (Saudi Parliament) as members, starting from the next term. Women will be able to run as candidates in the Municipal Elections and will even have a right to vote" (Al Arabiya, 2011). Notably, the King sent a message to conservatives and to all citizens when he mentioned the consultation with clerics, which was designed to convince them; because this was the first time Saudi women participated officially with men in making decisions.

The Saudi government also started appointing educated women to leadership positions, such as Noura Al Faize who was the first Saudi woman appointed as Deputy Minister of Education, serving from 2009 to 2015 (Aljazeera, 2016). Moreover, Princess Reema bint Bandar was appointed in 2016 as the Vice President of the Sports Authority

for Women's Affairs (Sabq, 2016); and Fatima Baashen was appointed as an embassy spokeswoman in Washington in 2017 (Al-Arabiya, 2017). Moreover, the Minister of Education appointed a female Dean of the College of Medicine in Taif, the first woman to hold this position in a college that included both sexes (Sabq, 2017). In 2018, King Salman appointed another woman, Iman Al-Mutairias, as assistant to the Minister of Trade and Investment (mci.org, 2018). All these government decisions show that the Saudi government has made efforts to empower women and to give them their rights, while at the same time maintaining tribal community customs and religious values to maintain these different interests and the need to find a balance between them. Those efforts were supported by the Saudi government's financial ability (through oil wealth) to enforce segregation between the genders by providing exclusive government institutions for women (Le Renard 2008). According to Alharthi et al. (2011) forcing society to abandon its values or rapid change may contribute to threatening the identity of society because of internal and external forces trying to impose a certain doctrine because people feel the importance of the values of their community and cultural identity. So, we notice Saudi government gradually move to enable women their rights. In 2018 Saudi women started driving cars. Moreover, the Council of Ministers approving, in 1st of August 2019, the amendment of the system of travel documents and civil status which means the equality between men and women regarding received official documents and travel without the condition of men's permission. This official announcement confirmed continuity of Saudi government efforts to equality between genders.

The Twitter debate on women's political participation is a case study that allows an analysis of how Twitter users explore the values that govern their society (including social and religious ones) because Saudi society has been divided on this issue for a long time as well as this issue being one where tribal affiliation and support for the government, royal family and clerics are all negotiated. Moreover, women's political participation and empowerment understood as a Western phenomenon and therefore as a threat, thus Twitter users may also negotiate Saudi Arabia's place in the world and its relationship vis-à-vis 'the West'. In the following chapter, the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia will be discussed; although this issue is less sensitive than women's issues, it may facilitate

exploration of how Twitter users position themselves in relation to the government when they discuss their public concerns.

2.4.2 The Housing Shortage

The state of housing in Saudi Arabia has a direct influence on the country's development and an indirect effect on citizens' relationships with the government. The Saudi government has tried many times to solve the housing and available urban land shortage: 54% of Saudi families do not own houses (Alekhbariya, 2016). According to Althunian (2014) the housing crisis is one of the biggest and continuing crises facing the Saudi government because it affects most social categories: the poor, traders, ordinary citizens and officials. This challenge is no longer just an economic challenge, but rather a political, economic and security challenge. 50% of the population is under 34 years old, and this shortage predicts a crisis that may threaten the stability and security of the state. Although the Saudi government has financial power and there are large empty tracts of land inside Saudi cities, this problem may be attributed to unsuccessful directives and institutional arrangements.

On 26th March 2011, King Abdallah announced Royal Order No: A/81 which established the Ministry of Housing and appointed Dr Shweesh as the first Minister of Housing to solve the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia. Alwardi (2012) suggested that 18 months after the Ministry had been established, there was no sign of a solution to the housing problem. No measures had been taken to enable Saudi citizens to acquire houses, and the situation was catastrophic because of the increasing price of houses and land, by 150% and 300% respectively. The gap between the purchasing power and the price of housing units had reached unprecedented levels in the history of the Kingdom and limited the possibility for many Saudi families to own houses (*ibid*). Many economic experts and government organisations identified an increase in prices and land monopoly as the main reasons for this crisis. Therefore they demanded that the Ministry of Housing prohibited monopolists from artificially increasing land prices (Althunian, 2014; Alwardi, 2012). According to Alwardi (2011), the main reason for the Saudi housing crisis was

the high price of land, which amounted to 60% of the price of housing; the reason for the rise in land prices was the monopoly of a small number of traders over hundreds of millions of square metres within the urban range combined with a reluctance to sell. For example, a study of the Supreme Commission for the Development of Riyadh City, No. 62 of 2011, confirmed that 77.4% of the capital city of Riyadh, for example, located within the urban area was unused 'white' land. Therefore, imposing a tax on undeveloped lands was the solution to solving the problems of the housing sector. So this is a case study that provides insight into how citizens see themselves in relation to a capitalist elite and it reveals if there is perception of a growing gap between rich and poor in Saudi Arabia.

A tax on undeveloped ('white') land was considered a way to increase the supply of developed land, to achieve a balance between supply and demand, to provide affordable housing for ordinary citizens, to protect fair competition and to control monopoly of ownership (Zakaria et al. 2019). The decision to impose this tax passed through many stages, organizations and government bodies until it (and its executive regulations) were approved in 2016. On 6th June 2011, the Saudi Parliament agreed in principle to impose an annual tax on undeveloped land; in September 2014 the Ministry of Housing completed the file regarding the imposing of the tax and sent it to the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta (the official religious organisation) for their opinion (Arabian Business, 2015). On 11th September the committee of General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta met, but they did not make a decision and on 16th September they transferred the file to the Saudi Council of Economic and Development Affairs. In March 2015, the Council of Ministers agreed regarding the suggested law and it was transferred to the Saudi Parliament to study it. On 17th November 2015, the Saudi Parliament officially approved the project. The final decision was made by the Saudi Council of Ministers on 23rd November 2015 and it was turned over to the Ministry of Housing to prepare the executive regulations, which were approved by the Saudi Council of Ministers on 14th June 2016. This government effort to solve the biggest obstacles to the provision of habitable land and reduce the cost of construction and ownership of homes by Saudi families took 5 years has been widely discussed in the media because the housing shortage is a central problem in Saudi society. The housing shortage is a case-study that illustrates how citizens position themselves in relation to

government; and is very interesting because this is an issue that impacts on large sections of society as well as revealing the gap between rich and poor in Saudi Arabia.

2.4.3 Opposing Unlawful Use of Public Property in Saudi Arabia

Corruption has been widespread in Saudi Arabia for decades, and it was only in the early 2000s that the government took steps to control it. The unlawful use of public property is an issue where public anger prompted the government to take action. These efforts by citizens seem to be having an effect; and this case-study is an example (perhaps the first) where the government seems to have responded clearly to public opinion on social media. According to the annual report issued by Transparency International, the global civil society organisation leading the fight against corruption, Saudi Arabia has made remarkable progress in the fight against corruption in general, as it advanced in the global ranking from 80th place in 2008 to 59th in 2017 out of 175 countries (Transparency.org, 2017).

Over the last few decades, several regulations, conferences and government organisations to fight corruption were introduced, including the Ministry of the Interior, the National Anti-corruption Commission, the Control and Investigation Commission, the Public Prosecution and the General Auditing Bureau (Lwai and Alshamre, 2012). The royal decisions issued by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques represented a clear and unprecedented condemnation of all forms of corruption. Another example of government efforts to fight corruption is Royal Order No: 5597 (7th June 2005). It established a bank account with the Al Rajhi Banking Company for state employees to anonymously return money they had taken illegally; and the amount that was returned by Saudis from 20th February 2006 to 31st October 2017 was 340,251,849 riyals (\$90,733,826) (Alenezy, 2017).

Yet perhaps the first major incidence which prompted the government to take action, was the flooding disaster in Jeddah (25 November 2009). Administrative corruption in government organisations that had enabled the unlawful use of public property was seen at the cause of the disaster (Al-saggaf and Simmon, 2015). This was one of the largest natural disasters to hit the Kingdom; and the city of Jeddah, in the western part of Saudi Arabia, witnessed torrential floods that killed 116 people, a further

many others were considered missing, and the floods washed away thousands of homes and damaged 3,000 cars according to official estimates, in addition to losses in Saudi infrastructure which were estimated at millions of riyals (Osama, 2017). This disaster was very significant for Saudi society, because for the first time people made demands on the state via social media platforms, to investigate the phenomenon of spreading. In response to public interest, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques (the late) King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz ordered the transfer of all the defendants in the flooding disaster in Jeddah (25th November 2009) to the Commission of Control and Investigation.

Since the Jeddah disaster, there have been several other cases where citizens took to Twitter to demand the government take action against corruption. At the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, Twitter users challenged a businessman in Jeddah city regarding his illegal use of the pavement and part of the road as a private entrance to his palace. Citizens demanded that government organisations, i.e. the Municipality of Jeddah and the Emirate of Makkah Region as well as King Salman investigate this corruption as it had happened in the disaster area, which is under the administrative responsibilities of those same government organisations. Moreover, they supported their claims with official plans of Jeddah city to clarify and prove that the businessman's infringements included the public pavement and part of the street. Twitter users used that campaign to expose many unlawful uses of public property by businessmen and princes, and they demanded to know why officials in the emirates of the regions, municipalities and other government organizations did not fulfil their duties to protect public property in different Saudi cities. The municipality and the emirate of Mecca responded positively to the demands of the citizens; and the Kingdom of Mecca thanked the citizens for their disclosure of corruption and announced the complete removal of the infringement on the pavement and the expansion of the sidewalk and the street to be a public property benefiting all citizens (see Chapter 7).

Economists estimate that the area of land recovered by the Saudi state between 2010 and 2015 is around 2.5 billion square metres and worth 2.3 trillion riyals (\$666,666,667) and referred to recoveries made by the Ministry of Justice and infringements of public property removed by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs in 12 cities and provinces (Al-Hayat, 2017). The Saudi government proved its determination to fight corruption and enforced the law on everyone; no one was excluded when the Saudi Attorney General asserted that the estimated value of restored amounts exceeded 400 billion riyals, which were recovered from a large group including princes of the royal family and ministers who had taken assets illegally (Alarabyiah, 2018). This case study allows an exploration of how a public took to Twitter, a case where the government clearly responded to public anger, including anger against the royal family and other elites.

2.4.5 Conclusion

This chapter shows the increasing interest in the role of social media in particular Twitter for political deliberation in the Middle East because of the emergence of a new generation of users which is more critical, the large take up of social media and the use of social media in political struggles since 2010. These studies have gathered empirical evidence that confirm that in this context social media has increased freedom of expression and empowered citizens to demand that the government listens to their concerns and reacts to their claims. These empirical studies gathered evidence for the quality of deliberation through analysing the discussed main topics, sub-topics and interaction between groups of users through using re-tweet and replies, but they have not applied a nuanced framework or compared different case studies. Using several case studies allows researchers to analyse the influence of different contexts on political discussion and compare the similarities and differences. Therefore, I will put together a more nuanced framework of analysis with some dependence on certain Western studies that measure the quality of political deliberation on websites and other social media platforms such Facebook and present it in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Deliberative Democracy

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of deliberative democracy and reflects on the political role of social media in democratic and non-democratic countries. It argues that the following are key measures of the quality of political deliberation online: diversity, openness, relevance, respectfulness, reciprocity and rationality.

3.2 Deliberation

Many researchers such as Poisner (1996), Choi and Kim (2005), and McGregor (2004) define deliberation as a rational, continuous and purposeful process of exchanging ideas and viewpoints, where participants are minded to consider opposite opinions to obtain agreements and decisions that contribute to developing society and serving the public interest. Bohman (1998) says deliberation is a joint, cooperative activity which enables people to consider alternative viewpoints and reasoning; and Fishkin (2000) believes deliberation is an essential process that facilitates the filtering and revision of ideas, transforming unreflective and rushed citizens' opinions into sound and thoughtful public views. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) say that deliberation is a constant process where rational viewpoints are presented and received equally; and King (2003) describes deliberation as a process of accurate and aware reflection on real information and viewpoints that generally leads to consensus about the case discussed. These definitions of deliberation indicate the common characteristics and benefits of deliberation, such as affording an opportunity to exchange various opinions, and providing exposure to others' ideas, which can lead to controversy between participants, as well as motivating participants to review and modify their ideas. This process may facilitate collective understanding of the issues, and some consensus on the solutions that might be in the best interests of the citizens.

Traditionally, the concept of political deliberation is associated with theories of democracy. Post (1993) says that democracy originates in discussion, a view which has been confirmed by Hill and Hughes who note that: “discourse is at the heart of democracy” (1998, p.62). Aristotle believed that liberty and equality in democracy do not have any meaning without a deliberative process that enabled citizens to govern themselves. He argued that self-government is obtained through the deliberation of citizens in political society with the aim of making good decisions (Aristotle, cited in Higare, 2010). The concept helps us see how citizens may seek to make a contribution to society, by finding a common solution and how they position themselves in relationship to each other and sources of power in society. This is of particular interest for research in countries where we can see some attempts to democratise by governments and/or citizens. Saudi Arabia might not be a democratising country, but the government seems to have introduced some forms of dialogue with citizens and there have been cases where public opinion seems to have led the government to act.

An analysis of political deliberation needs to consider the cultural context in which this deliberation happens. Habermas (1996, p.58) questions Aristotle’s idea of ‘right reason’ or ‘right ends’ because he believes that this idea draws on cultural interpretations of the public good. Habermas thinks that making laws and cultural interpretations of what is the meaning of ‘good’ are created discursively and inter-subjectively; thus, the discourse becomes the key to understanding deliberation. I agree with Habermas that identifying what is a good decision is very difficult, because those terms have different and changeable meanings from one society to another. For example, identifying the public good in Arab countries, and in particular Saudi Arabia, needs to take into account that social values and Islamic regulations play crucial roles in organising people’s lives and affects their behaviour.

The key to public deliberation is that citizens not only react to government action, but explore and propose solutions themselves. According to McAfee (2004, p.53): “public deliberations usually spend a great deal of time developing a public picture of what a problem is”. Deliberative democracy may attempt to identify the dimensions of problems and understand them, which may encourage citizens to exchange opinions to find

solutions that avoid undesirable consequences. Cohen (1972) says that the concept of freedom is divided into two aspects: 1) the freedom to oppose policy; and 2) the freedom to propose policy, which means citizens are not only free to oppose policy, but also to suggest alternative solutions and ideas. Thus, this freedom should be used positively to improve society and solve problems that may restrain development. McAfee (2004) and Cohen (1972) note that the role of deliberation is not limited to identifying problems, but passes beyond that to finding solutions. In a country like Saudi Arabia, where there is no tradition of public debate and where anyone who criticises the government or Islamic values has to fear punishment, Twitter users may not be the proactive citizens which ideals of deliberative democracy envision. However, even a small number of proactive tweets would be an indicator of an important change in the relationship between citizens and the government.

3.3 Types of Deliberation

As demonstrated in the previous section, Twitter has changed the nature of public deliberation, which requires an in-depth explanation of the emergence of Twitter as a place of deliberation. There are two types of deliberation – vertical and horizontal – each with different characteristics. In vertical deliberation, many citizens interact with a small number of elites, which “allows citizens to convey their values, interests and concerns to elites who act on behalf of the collective, and permits elites to learn from, inform and persuade their mass constituencies” (Price, 2003, p.3). Horizontal deliberation consists of interactions within and among individual citizens, outside of elite political circles. Fishkin (2000) says that horizontal discussion among citizens is very important for transforming rushed collective public preferences into more coherent and elaborate public viewpoints. Price (2003) goes on to emphasise that modern democratic society is organised into interest groups, political parties and others, to reflect the vertical elite/citizen communication; and that democratic regimes and media work as real examples of downward communication, while elections, referenda and polls serve as examples of upward flows. Although some Twitter users engage in discussions with officials, this study focuses more on horizontal communication, because social media

platforms are useful to citizens in non-democratic countries and in particular in Saudi Arabia to exchange opinions, ideas, suggestions, and criticism, because social, religious, and political restrictions prohibited Saudis from using traditional media (TV, radio and newspapers) to discuss and criticise government decisions and address sensitive social and religious issues.

3.4 The Positives and Negatives of Deliberation

Analysing the quality of dialogue can help to identify the positive and negative aspects of deliberation in Saudi society. According to some studies, deliberation is a double-edged sword that has a positive and negative side, which may develop or destroy societal and personal relationships. The positives may obtain when the deliberation contains elements such as equality, respectfulness and rationality. Firstly, deliberations about public interests, which exceed purely personal interests, may affect the government, society and individuals positively; and some researchers such as Grogan and Gusmano (2001), Barabas (2002) and Manin (1987) confirm the importance of deliberation to strengthen the relationship between citizens and the political system. They believe that democracy is the source of legitimacy in a constitutional system where democratic decisions are considered more legitimate if there is agreement that all the relevant voices are equally heard. Moreover, they indicate that deliberation improves the quality of opinion, and since public opinion often foreshadows public policy, then deliberation ultimately benefits democracy itself as people make better policy choices. Fishkin (1995) believes that when citizens feel empowered through deliberation and feel that the government is really the voice of the people, then the democratic process will be enhanced. Generally, collective actions encourage the creation of cooperative participation that strengthens the legitimacy of the government.

Secondly, finding solutions for social problems that concern citizens, in the light of public preference, is another positive factor of deliberation. The idea of the truth emerging from deliberation is common, and the Western political tradition from Plato and Aristotle emphasises that no one has complete knowledge, therefore they need to engage in deliberation to make up for that short fall and to make meaningful decisions (Manin, 1987). Gambetta(1998) maintains that deliberation may facilitate finding new solutions to common problems; and Fearson (1998) confirms that deliberation enables individuals or groups to voice their views and priorities, which would otherwise be invisible to others or simply not have previously been taken into account. Along the same lines, Grogan and Gusmano (2001) say that through deliberation people can solve problems such as a shortage of knowledge about particular issues, as well as supplying new ideas. Graham (2002), states that audiences can collectively draw from the process of deliberation, which includes information, experience and knowledge, to identify the best decisions. Therefore, citizens have started thinking about their preferences in the light of public interests. Graham (2002) argues that the concept of the common good makes the deliberative model surpass other models in trying to obtain the ideal of democracy. He adds that it makes participants consider their interests in light of public interests, which may motivate most citizens to modify their ideas after presenting them to public scrutiny. Grogan and Gusmano (2001); Mansbridge (1991); Elster (1998) all maintain that through the process of deliberation, citizens may start to pay attention to the interests of their society, community or state, and not just think about their personal interests; so, open deliberation between citizens tends to transform individual preferences into the common good. This study aims to investigate to what extent Twitter' users attempt to suggest solutions to solve problems related to Saudi government decisions when they engage in deliberations.

Thirdly, some studies confirm that individuals' personal qualities have been developed and improved by deliberation. According to Barber (1984), individuals who participate in opportunities to reflect and consider social issues are more likely to become informed and practiced about those problems. Furthermore, Song et al. (2004) emphasise that deliberation creates more informed and enlightened individuals, therefore they become more qualified to be democratic citizens, a basic factor in deliberative democracy.

Young (1996) states that expressing opinions, asking questions and engaging in challenges provides all participants with greater social knowledge and social objectivity, which helps develop the wisdom to reach appropriate solutions to public problems. Accordingly, the influences of deliberations on Twitter on users' opinions and the development of their deliberative skills and their knowledge are investigated in this study.

Although deliberation is considered to improve the quality of opinions, it may lead to undesirable outcomes such as shifts of viewpoints to new and dangerous ideas, as well as polarising opinion (*ibid*, p.5). Likewise, Warren (1996) argues that deliberation can undermine a community by disrupting the daily routines of citizens, eroding solidarity and causing the emergence of suspicion. He adds that deliberation may exaggerate problems, such as exposing injustice instead of promoting citizenship (1992, p.21). Macoubrie (2003) says the differences in knowledge level and education may lead to deliberative processes favouring elites and generate the idea that citizens are therefore not qualified to engage in deliberation like experts and elites do. However, engaging in deliberation that is distinguished by rationality, equality and diversity could offset many negatives, especially polarization, and through extended deliberation people can become more experienced, so likely to deal with corruption to secure social stability.

Deliberation plays an important role in establishing democracy and encouraging citizens to participate in making decisions through equal, public and reasonable deliberation that depends on rational arguments as well as being for the public good. The value of deliberation lies in encouraging citizens to pay attention to what is in the public interest rather than just focusing on personal preferences; and to review their attitudes and viewpoints rationally. This type of deliberation is considered very important for non-democratic countries where digital media has meant that freedom of expression has extended in an unprecedented manner, because in the past citizens could not use traditional media to criticise their political regimes. Those societies, including Saudi Arabia, include political restrictions which the government claims protect society, and which reflect common social and religious values (see Chapter 2). The next section

considers how to evaluate the quality of deliberation in such a context and the elements that make up this quality are discussed.

3.5 Evaluating Deliberation

This section outlines the main measures used to analyse the quality of deliberation in previous studies. Many scholars such as Manin (1987), Choi and Kim (2005), Graham and Witschge (2003), and Price and Neijens (1997) confirm that there are two measures to analyse the quality of deliberation: The first measure is, the process that the people themselves go through to arrive at a balance between the arguments they perceive as for or against their interests. According to Dahl (1989), 'enlightened understanding' indicates the process of citizens' abilities to identify their preferences depending on their interests and benefits and their understanding and available alternative choices; while 'enlightened sympathy', which means understanding other individuals' desires, wants, needs and values. Other scholars go beyond that and attempt to identify how deliberators build their opinions. Park (2000) emphasises that individuality and civility are two related but independent dimensions of democratic deliberation. Individuality indicates how a person builds and develops their own view through cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural elements of individuality. This study concentrates on the dimension of individuality by understanding how citizens build their arguments. Moreover, those arguments and sources of information are compared to consider the similarities and differences in the different three case studies. The second factor for measuring the quality of the process of deliberation is interaction. According to Burkhalter et al. (2002) this second measure is when citizens engage in interested listening or speaking to build a bridge toward mutual ways of understanding. Listening to others' opinions and desires can lead to a mutual understanding and a collective sense. On social media, likes, re-tweets, and replies can be used as indicators of interaction. In the following section, the criteria for measuring quality of deliberation which are considered as appropriate for use in this study are discussed.

3.6 Criteria for Assessing the Quality of the Deliberation

3.6.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the following as measures of the quality of political deliberation: openness, diversity, relevance to the main topic, respectfulness, reciprocity and rationality. Together they allow this study to explore how Twitter users build their argument and interact with each other.

3.6.2 Rationality

A useful way to measure the extent to which debate is rational is to look at the extent to which the participants of that debate seek to justify their arguments and the evidence they use to support these arguments. Justification has been used as a measure of rationality and thus the quality of deliberation by many scholars, including Graham and Witschge (2003), Wilhelm (1999), Dahlberg (2001), Jensen (2003) and Choi and Kim (2005). Steenbergen et al. (2003) believe that justification refers to backing up an argument by providing evidence of the information and the reasoning that form the basis of the argument. Therefore, a rational-critical debate should use justifications to support claims and provide critical estimates of the soundness of claims with coherence and commitment in discussion (Graham and Witschge, 2003). Deliberation should aim to benefit the public through presenting clear opinions, evidence and ideas that support or oppose the arguments presented when discussing controversial issues; or at least the logic behind the argument needs to be explained. Dahlberg (2001, p.3) emphasises that exchanges and critiques should include “engaging in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are provided with reasons and thus are criticisable; that is, open to critique rather than dogmatically asserted”. According to these authors, it is this kind of informed and reasoned exchange that will lead to mutual understanding and an agreement on what is in the public interest. Jensen (2003) agrees with these authors and adds that it is the process of informed and reasoned deliberation which leads to citizens reaching a mutual understanding and consensus about what is in the public interest.

There is some evidence to suggest that this kind of rational and evidence-based discussion is common in online political discussion groups. For example, Jensen (2003)

recorded that 90% and 66% of posts on the political discussion groups, nordpol.dk and dk.politik respectively, provided justifications for their claims. Furthermore, Jankowski and van Os (2003) indicated that 57% of messages to platform sessions were in the form of arguments, as were 39% of messages to Digital Debate and 40% of messages to Digital Consultation Hour. Moreover, Schultz (2000) says that claims in online newsgroups are often supported with justifications that enhance the validity of participants' demands. Graham and Witschge (2003) found that around 75% of 25 posts included reasoned arguments; and concluded that deliberation online is qualified to meet the normative conditions of rational debate. According to Wilhelm (1999), 75% of participants in Usenet forums provided justifications for their arguments; and analysis of the content of messages showed that 67.8% of political Usenet and 75.6% of political AOLs in Washington were supported with reasonable justifications. Hill and Hughes (1998) deduced that internet forums included an exchange of claims with reasonable justifications.

Yoon (2002) on the other hand, from his analysis of online forums, concluded that online deliberation often does not have rationality; and 79.2% of total content provided no evidence to convince others about the validity of their claims. Similarly, Coleman et al. (2002) emphasis that 86% of messages on Citizenspace in the UK did not depend on real information gained from such resources as newspaper articles or other secondary resources. Lastly, Hagemann (2002) believes that online discussion is a space for unjustified discussions. Moreover, Coleman et al.'s (2002) study of different online discussion groups confirmed that the rate of posts that express opinions varied across different groups: 91% on the Hansard Society consultation; 82% on the Home Office site; 66% on the National Assembly for Wales forum; 57% on the DTI site; 48% on the Hansard Society's Flood Forum; 44% of messages on Citizenspace and 35% on the Scottish Parliament forum. Yoon (2002) found that participants in online deliberation were more inclined to express their personal opinion which did not seem to be informed by a careful assessment of evidence rather than just talking about facts; and 88.2% of posts on the online forum organised by 600 individual civic groups throughout the Korean general election campaign in 2000 involved 43.1% giving personal opinions and 45.1% giving replies.

Researchers' analysis of the contents of social media platforms also reveals low rationality. Oz (2016) studied the civility, politeness and discussion quality of commentary and discussion sections on the Washington Post and Facebook pages and found that these two discussion environments had low quality comments, as 83% of Facebook posts and 91% on the Washington Post were not framed as rational arguments. Camaj and Santana (2015) investigated the potential of Facebook to provide a tool of political deliberation. They found that 40% of users' comments, on American candidates' Facebook pages during the presidential election, provided some reasoning for claims, but an additional 79% of the total comments were not supported by concrete evidence. Rußmann (2012) examined the political parties and candidates' Facebook communications during Austrian elections in October 2010 and found that the half of all postings were not supported by argument. Moreover, Haas (2012) analysed postings by 500 individuals on Facebook deliberation about the transport policy for the city of Vancouver in Canada; and found that only 19.3% of posts were reasoned opinions. According to Haas (2012), 81% of posts analysed were not logical; although participants did use various ways to justify their ideas and opinions when they engaged with others; and 18.1% of the posts used background materials (links to videos, documents and slides) to support informed deliberation among participants; 4.5% included links and 4.5% referred to others' contributions. Halpern and Gibbs (2013) analysed discussions conducted by citizens on White House-Facebook and YouTube to see if deliberations met the necessary elements of deliberative democracy and found around two thirds of YouTube and Facebook posts were illogical. Thus, levels of rationality were presented as high in some contexts and low in others; and rationality was measured by the logic and justification of arguments as well as by evidence used. The rationality in discussions on hashtags explored in this study may be low because Twitter users have not been used to publicly exchanging ideas and opinions about Saudi government decisions; they may also be resistant to arguments supporting change because the Saudi Arabia is very conservative and these users are afraid of change.

Facebook and YouTube users may not always engage in rational debate, but both platforms at least allow them to write long paragraphs; and this allows them the space to present arguments and evidence in-depth. Twitter has a 280 character limit which means

that here rational debate may be limited. A single tweet, may not allow users to complete their ideas and arguments. The current study considers these limitations when measuring to what extent tweets included rational discussions. Any tweet including one or more of the following elements related to the discussion topics considered a rational tweet: clear argument, justification or reasoned opinion (suggestions or criticisms). In addition, interview data reveals how Twitter users attempt to engage in rational debate by supporting their arguments with evidence and by respectfully engaging with the arguments of others.

3.6.3 Reciprocity

Reciprocity is one of the elements used to analyse the quality of deliberation. Markers of reciprocity on Twitter debates are re-tweets, replies and likes. Schneider (1997) says that reciprocity is where participants engage in discussion to identify and exchange their concerns, interests and demands with others; rather than participating simply to bargain with or persuade others. Interactivity on public discussion forums has been measured by establishing the number of replies per message (Jensen 2003; Coleman et al. 2002; Yoon 2002; Wilhelm 1999; Santana and Camaj 2015). Analyses of Twitter established the number of replies to posts (Santana and Camaj 2015), but also re-tweets (Shephard, 2014). Interaction on Twitter may be assessed by the number of replies, likes and re-tweets, as these can be considered as types of forwarding and interaction (Zhao, 2016). Therefore, the current study identifies three elements of tweets (likes, replies, and re-tweets) to measure the interaction between Twitter users in the identified hashtags.

3.6.4 Respect

According to Steenbergen et al. (2003) respect is a prerequisite for meaningful discussion. Participants should respect opposite arguments, the discussion group and the arguments under discussion. Respectfulness is a crucial element of deliberation – studies use different terms to investigate the level of respectfulness in deliberation, such as civil/uncivil and polite/ impolite posts. According to Oz (2016) any post that does not threaten democracy or individual rights and where participants do not use gross stereotypes to describe groups can be described as ‘civil’. In contrast, impolite posts include pejorative speech, insults, name-calling and vulgarity. Existing research that has measured the quality of public debate in this way suggests that the majority of user comments are civil. However, there is a considerable percentage of impolite user content on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube (Papacharissi, 2004; Halpern and Gibbs 2013).

Other studies analyse the use of offensive language (Jensen 2003) and abusive comments (Coleman et al. 2002) directed at other users. These studies report different results with regards to the levels of offensiveness. For example, Jensen (2003) found that 59.6% and 40.8% of posts on nordpol.dk and dk.Politik respectively could be classified as respectful; and Yoon (2002) classified 77.8% of messages as respectful, but found 22.2% used offensive language against participants in online discussions. Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997) suggest that confrontations on online forums are less than expected by most of the audience; but, according to Streck (1998, p.45) “cyberspace... on a day-to-day basis is about as interactive as a shouting match”. Coleman et al. (2002, p.52) found that negative comments, including abusive comments, outweighed positive comments; in their analysis of UK Online, they found that 72% of messages were negative and 28% positive. They defined ‘flaming’ as attacks on participants as opposed to the content of their messages such as their ideas and opinions. Davis (1999, p.163) analysed messages on Usenet discussion forums and found that people posted aggressive or derogatory messages with a high level of flaming; and added that Usenet political deliberation “tends to favour the loudest and most aggressive individuals”. Hill and Hughes (1998) confirmed that 39% of Usenet debates and 32% of AOL chat could be classified as ‘a flame fest’ which was “in fact very noticeable but not entirely consuming within online discursive forums”.

This study benefits from explorations of these elements used in previous studies to measure the level of respectfulness. Participants' comments or opinions that use gross stereotypes to describe groups, such as using any expressions that negatively stereotype race or religion, as well as using offensive language and aggressive or derogatory messages are to be classified as 'uncivil or impolite' messages. On the other hand, any content that does not present any such negative language will be classified as 'polite'. The analysis will also discuss the type of disrespectful content such as abuse against women, racism or class hatred.

3.6.5 Diversity

Schneider (1997) says diversity means including participants who have a set of controversial issues without these being restricted by others. Moreover, Wilhelm (1999) believes that opinion heterogeneity is the opposite of creating a like-minded group of citizens; thus, discussion among like-minded individuals is not considered as real deliberation, because deliberation is supposed to provide a set of varied opinions. In practice, however, discussion groups rarely are as heterogeneous as this ideal suggests they should be. Because groups are controlled by like-minded individuals, the extent of diversity and freedom of deliberation inside those groups is very limited (Davis 1999). In a study of Usenet newsgroups Wilhelm (1999) found that 70% of content included strong or moderate support for the dominant ideas about a political issue or candidate. Individuals tended to gravitate towards groups that had viewpoints that agreed with their own. Hill and Hughes (1998) believe that even if people with various opinions are theoretically welcome to participate in political group discussions the smaller group simply integrates into ideologically homogeneous communities of interest.

The current study benefits from these previous studies by employing diversity of opinion as an indicator of the quality of deliberation. It considers the difference in topics, the type of users (male, female, organisations, others), and users' attitudes toward Saudi government's decisions as indicators of diversity. Gender is included as a measure of diversity because the influence of political restrictions, social values and some Islamic regulations may affect women's participation or the discussing of topics considered taboo

in Saudi society (see Chapter 2). Twitter debates about gender politics in Saudi Arabia tend to confirm the patriarchy of Saudi society. Based on her analysis of two hashtags, the newly-announced travel controls for Saudi women and statistics about the percentages of unmarried women, Bahammam (2018, p.ii) argues that the discussion shows "a discourse of dominance that privileges men and gives them control over women, and a discourse about the subordination of women". Moreover, Altoaimy (2017) revealed that supporters of the ban on Saudi women driving cars concentrated, in their discussion on Twitter, on the social and moral threats of lifting the ban, and confirms the importance of a commitment to the country's religious values about women. However, supporters also avowed their desire to give women their rights and release women who they saw as victims of the conflict between modernity and conservatism. This study therefore investigates how the genders were represented in the discussions on three different Saudi hashtags, one of them directly related to women.

3.6.6 Relevance of the Posts to the Discussion Topic

If citizens' discussions on social media platforms stay relevant to the main topics, this is considered to add value to the quality of deliberation (Schneider 1997; Wilhelm 1999). Analyses of online consultation forums (Coleman et al. 2002) and political discussion forums (Jensen 2003) explored whether participants contributed to the main topics of discussion. Following the lead of these researchers, this study analyses to what extent the tweets contributed to the main topics under discussion.

3.6.7 Openness

Revealing personal data may provide initial indicators about the openness of deliberation, especially in dictatorial states where many people hide their identities on social media. Investigating if there is a difference in tweet contents when users criticise the sources of power in Saudi society under real names or **pseudonyms** is therefore one means of assessing openness. Jensen (2003) notes that openness includes self-disclosure; namely, when participants choose to reveal personal data (real names rather than **pseudonyms**). The participants' identities may involve a name, email address or

other information. According to Yoon (2002) 91.6% of 1,764 messages on two websites which were created by an independent newspaper and supporters of one of the candidates, analysed did not reveal information about users' identities; conversely, Jensen (2003) confirms that online deliberation demonstrates a high degree of openness, as 97% of messages on nordpol.dk and 73% of messages on dk.politik revealed information that indicated the identity of users. The reason for the difference between the two former studies is attributed to the difference between the two websites in the two studies. Yoon analysed the content of two websites which were created by an independent newspaper and supporters of one of the candidates where contributors were allowed to use a **pseudonym** in their profile. In contrast Jensen analysed the contents of Nordpol.dk website which was initiated by a county government in Northern Denmark prior to regional elections in 2001 to create a democratic dialogue via the Internet. This website was under government management where the civil servants were responsible for the 'content' and had the authority to delete postings that violated the rules. So, all those discussion which included differences in openness some of which attributable to the type of websites or their regulations and owners. But the characteristics of Twitter and Saudi government's regulations may present different results to those of previous studies.

According to Noman et al (2015) Twitter opens up public space for Saudi citizens to participate in political and social deliberation in a nation that heavily restricts political speech, civic engagement, and media freedom. They add that Saudi Twitter users (of both genders) usually use pseudonyms to avoid problems associated with taking a controversial political stance. This supports evidence about the increase in numbers of men and women who exchange their opinions regardless of whether they are in a minority so long as their identities are unknown (Campbell and Howie, 2014). According to Ausserhofer and Maireder (2013) many hashtags on Twitter are male-dominated. Although Twitter has helped Arab women to overcome obstacles which prohibit them expressing their opinions in public, revealing their gender and using their real name is an issue for women who share controversial opinions due to prevailing social and religious values (Dashti et. al, 2015). Therefore, even though women do use Twitter as a platform to engage in political discussion about social issues, Twitter presents as a gendered platform.

The current study includes the name used by each user as the measure of the open quality of deliberation – using **pseudonyms** rather than real names may indicate Twitter users' desires to hide their identities when they discuss issues considered sensitive in Saudi society to avoid clashing with religious and social values, or because of their fear of government censorship, as explained in Chapter 2.

3.7 Media and Deliberative Democracy

We should remember that citizens need common forums, such as mass media, where their voices and demands can be heard and where they may engage in discussions about social and political issues. According to McGraw and Holbrook (2004) mass media play a crucial role in the heart of modern democracy, where unbiased information and trustworthy news are considered essential to the health of a democratic state. They add that mass-communications media is considered to be a useful mechanism to distribute information and educate people, as well as a crucial channel that connects politicians with citizens, because, in modern times, they rarely communicate directly with each other. The mass media is considered as a fourth authority that enables political systems to educate and spread awareness among citizens and protect society. Presumably, the media plays a supervisory role in monitoring how governments run their countries, and increases the level of transparency and accountability between government organisations and citizens, as well as protecting citizens' rights.

Media platforms' ownership and financial interests limit the possibility of freedom of expression to criticise and participate in solving social problems. Dahlgren (2009) notes that massive media empires dominate all the activities of the media, which include production, distribution, hardware and software. He adds that the social relations between corporate owners, government, technical innovators and citizens are shaped by the motive to increase financial benefits. As a result, the watchdog functions and protecting freedom of expression are not a part of the culture of those media corporations which force the journalists who work for them to avoid criticism or investigate topics that may harm their interests. It is expected that stakeholders, such as commercial companies and political parties, influence the media landscape and its agenda-setting. According to

Bennett (2004), media regulation and deregulation could be the policy result of the interests and power of various actors, such as political parties, advocacy organisations and public officials. To understand those circumstances in the Saudi context, this study presented a comprehensive view (in Chapter 2) about the organisational and political factors which may drive Saudi citizens to use social media platforms, notably Twitter, to express their opinions about government decisions. This study attempts to find out to what extent Twitter users considered the role of Twitter to connect ordinary citizens to the administrator and provide useful information to the citizen on the issue of discussion, which contributes to increasing the quality of the dialogue.

3.8 Influence of Social Media and Government Restrictions on the Nature of Deliberation

Many studies have discussed the influence of social media platforms on traditional mechanisms of communication in dictatorial countries, such as politicians' speeches delivered to their supporters in a one-way interaction. On social media, politicians are not just talking to audiences who are like-minded, but the discussions equally become circulated among citizens who have different opinions and ideas, provided there is no censorship or any kind of regulatory restrictions. A change in political communication in non-democratic countries from hierarchical to horizontal has the potential to make people more active in discussions and exchange different opinions because they feel themselves important and have the same opportunity to present their views. However, it may also motivate these dictatorial regimes to employ counter-measures to limit those discussions and their influence.

The internet has become the place where dictatorial regimes can find criticisms against them; thus, such regimes attempt to stifle this flow of political expression and target digital activists to prevent any sensitive information that may threaten their rule (Howard and Hussain, 2013). Morozov (2011) believes that the internet and social media enhance state control and their ability to track down activists. He adds that in weak societies and those new to democracy, social media may be used by governments to control citizens; where a single ruling party controls massive chat rooms in which

discussions about the concerns and interests of society are conducted. Dictatorial regimes have used different strategies to extend their control and dominance on social media platforms. Howard and Hussain (2013) note that the Tunisian and Egyptian governments monitored online discussion and arrested activists, during revolutions, and shut down social media platforms; which was interpreted by observers as a reaction that reflected these two governments' fear of the ability of social media to promote citizens' communication that they could not observe (ibid p.39). In addition, Tufekci (2014) suggests that dictatorial regimes use counter-insurgency that comprises a set of sophisticated technologies that help governments to monitor platforms and remove contents. According to Mohammad (2018) social media platforms were used as an alert by Iranian security forces that therefore succeeded in preventing mass demonstrations during the Iranian presidential elections, in 2009. Lastly, Mesawa, (2016) believes that despite these strategies, Egyptian and Tunisian citizens can use social media to exchange information within the regulations of those countries, but that effectiveness of social media was not continued in the long-run because of political system's repression, violence, and media censorship. Regarding Saudi Arabia, the government has passed some very strict laws and regulations that prohibit discussion and criticism for some sensitive issues such as the political system and the official religious establishment (see Chapter 2). Therefore this study also attempts to evaluate the influence of censorship on Twitter users' deliberation about Saudi government decisions.

3.9 Citizenship

In this thesis, citizenship is understood to include three elements: connectedness, rights, and duties. Generally, it is difficult to find agreement on a definition or specific elements for citizenship because many researchers, in different places, mentioned diverse things as elements of citizenship which come out as the result of differences between societies. For example, Stevenson (2003, p.4) argues that citizenship "is more often thought to be about membership, belonging, rights and obligations." According to Hermes and Stello (2000, p.219) being a citizen means having a "sense of connectedness to one place in society and the obligations and the rights that are due to oneself and others". On the other hand, other researchers have described citizenship in relation to public concerns and interests. Buckingham (1999, 2000) says being a citizen indicates having a sense of connectedness to groups in society and sharing in their concerns.

All these differences in definitions of citizenship and its elements remind us that defining citizenship is not easy and this is partly because it incorporates a number of different elements, reflecting competing political traditions, and partly because of both its contextualised and contested nature (Lister, 2003). This opinion was emphasised by Mouffe (1992a, p. 25) who says: "the way we define citizenship is intimately linked to the kind of society and political community we want". Therefore, although researchers have suggested many elements of citizenship, some of those elements are common such as connectedness, duties, and rights, but they are difficult to apply because of the different nature of Saudi society and the presence of clear and explicit factors governing the community and affecting the values of citizenship. Those factors include Islamic regulations and Saudi social values which restrict individual freedom and control public deliberation. This does not mean that citizenship in democratic societies is not influenced by different factors, but Saudi society in particular suffers from ambiguity and overlap between religious and social values, as explained in Chapter 2. Altorki (2000) rejects the modern concept of citizenship which is described as "a homogenous, undifferentiated, universal category" because this term is not applicable to Middle Eastern society, especially Saudi Arabia, where there is no equality between genders. Moreover, Saudi society is unique because it does not have a specific constitution that governs it, because the Saudi government claims that the *Qur'an* and the Prophet's *Hadith* are the main

sources which regulate people's lives. Islamic and Saudi values influence public life. According to Alqurashee (2011) citizenship in Saudi Arabia has certain common characteristics such as: equality, freedom, participation and social responsibility. However, those elements require a public with an awareness of the importance of society, a connectedness to its values and a desire to serve the interests of that society. She adds that there are two crucial and important elements which participate in building the concept of citizenship in Saudi society: 1- An inherited loyalty that comes from the citizen's historical identity and its basic components: religious, social, tribal and familial. 2- An acquired loyalty increases and decreases depending on what the government provides to the citizen. She confirms that citizen rights are offset by duties and she focuses on the importance of preferring public interests over personal interests. Alseef (1997), notes that Saudi identity is influenced by certain traditions and values which include beliefs in the inferiority of women and the denial of their equal rights.

This thesis aims to investigate how Twitter users deal with Saudi government decisions through analysing their reactions to those decisions. These analyses seek to discover whether Twitter users react to these decisions by critiquing them positively or negatively and making demands on the government or whether those discussions encourage Twitter users to be proactive with the government decisions by exploring the loopholes in laws and finding solutions to fill those gaps. According to Street et al. (2013) the active citizen does not just benefit from opportunities for equality and inclusiveness guaranteed by their government, but participates in maintaining them, even if this means challenging political authority. Saudi society is influenced by various power elites (see Chapter 2) which are the political system, official religious institution and clerics therefore this thesis analyses the extent to which and how Twitter users evaluate their relationship with those sources of power.

Knowledge is very important in facilitating citizens' engagement in discussion about their society's interests. So, this study aims to investigate to what extent Twitter users were informed in their discussions on Twitter about three government decisions in three case studies. According to Dalgren (2009) people cannot act as citizens when there is a shortage of knowledge because knowledge is crucial for civic engagement. Therefore

this thesis focused on how Twitter users informed others about their rights and spread the awareness regarding the topic of discussion. Moreover, it seeks to understand how Twitter users` evaluate and interpret related information and their efforts to share them with other citizens.

Saudi society is considered as one of the most conservative society in the world because of strict religious and social values (see Chapter 2). So, those values play an influential role in guiding Saudi citizens` actions in accordance with the Basic Law of Governance (BLG). According to Alharthi et al (2011) society's commitment to its values does not mean that it does not advance. On the contrary, society can maintain its values and habits as development continues, such as China and Japan. Moreover, some Muslim countries, such as Malaysia, have even evolved while preserving their values. On the other hand, Couldry et al. (2010, p.6) describe public connectedness as citizens addressing subjects that may influence their lives together and requesting common solutions. So, this thesis attempts to investigate through analyzing their connectedness to the public interest how Twitter users considered woman`s rights as citizens, to demand fairness and equality between citizens in imposing tax on undeveloped property and in fighting misuse of laws to avoid paying tax or facilitating unlawful use of public property as well as rejecting insults toward violators and officials because of their social values. So, this study will evaluate to what extent Twitter users demonstrate their sense of connectedness to Saudi society and adherence to its values and their obligation to protect society`s interests and their social responsibilities.

The literature on political engagement highlights citizenship, and this can be applied in the case of Saudi Arabia; and the crucial role of the elements of good citizenship knowledge, connectedness, and the relation between government and citizens can be analysed. It is also important to take into account the nature of the political system and the absence of the real role of the citizen in political decision-making and the impact of religious and social values on the interpretation and evaluation of freedom of expression when claiming rights and criticizing government decisions.

3.10 Conclusion

This literature review has given an overview of the definitions of deliberation, its importance and its positive and negative aspects. Moreover, the role of social media, particularly Twitter, in providing an informal space in which citizens can discuss public concerns in Arab countries has been explored. Saudi Arabia is identified as a different case because it did not have any street protests which were the result of media campaigns on social media which would have facilitated measuring the process of mobilizing, organisation, discussions, the results, and motivations. Moreover, Saudi Arabia does not have public election of Saudi parliament's members or political parties which may have enabled a discussion about the political deliberations before, during and after those elections, as happened with the Arab revolutions. So, the literature review reveals a shortage of studies that investigate the role of social media in political deliberation in Saudi Arabia and discover the elements of good citizenship through how people use Twitter. Therefore, in the absence of studies that analysed the quality of political deliberation with regards to socially sensitive issues in Saudi Arabia, this study draws on Western studies for its framework of analysis. The key markers by which the quality of deliberation will be assessed are: diversity, openness, relevance, respectfulness, interaction and rationality, but those elements were modified to be appropriate to the Saudi context. The elements of good citizenship: connectedness, the relation between government and citizens, and the knowledge of the issues have also been discussed to explain how they will be used in this thesis. The design, process and methodology which will be used to analyse data will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Study Design, Process and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the approach taken to analyse the quality of political deliberation when Saudi citizens respond on Twitter to the Saudi government's attempts to meet citizens' demands with regards to women's political participation, the housing shortage and unlawful use of public properties. This was achieved by analysing six elements of the quality of deliberation: diversity, openness, respectfulness, reciprocity, the relevance of the posts to the topics of discussions, and rationality. The following sections discuss the methodology, the rationale for the data collection procedures and the analysis.

4.2 Mixed Methods

Choosing the appropriate methods to conduct research depends on its aims and the type of research questions asked. This study uses mixed methods to investigate the quality of deliberation on Twitter. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods facilitates a comprehensive and in-depth analysis (Creswell, 2014 and Bajnaid, 2016).

The quantitative method is distinguished from other research methods by its ability to facilitate the analysis of massive data and provide a wide overview of a phenomenon (Watkins and Gioia, 2015). In this study I used a quantitative analysis to study a total of 12,093 tweets, across three different case studies. It allowed me to ascertain how often Twitter users agreed or disagreed with government action and how often tweets included elements of quality of deliberation; namely: diversity, openness, respectfulness, the relevance of the posts to the topics of discussions, interaction and rationality. Moreover, quantitative analysis enabled me to study the relationship between the use of these variables with gender and the use of **pseudonyms**/ real names. Having established the recurring patterns of deliberation, the next step was to conduct an in-depth qualitative

analysis of arguments, including the diversity of opinions across the sample of tweets. A central interest here was the way in which Saudi culture (social and religious values) informed arguments. Furthermore, in order to ascertain the extent to which deliberation was informed and rational, the types and sources of evidence used to justify arguments were analysed.

Following the analysis of Twitter content, I conducted 27 semi-structured interviews with Twitter users who had been active in debates on the three case studies (see section 4.5.2.4). Their perspectives were expected to yield more information and deeper explanations about the qualitative and quantitative results of Twitter analysis. According to Creswell (2009) qualitative research requires interpretation because nothing speaks for itself. Therefore, the semi-structured interview transcripts were analysed qualitatively by thematic analysis.

First stage:		
Quantitative Analysis of Tweets		
A quantitative analysis was used to analyse a total of 12,093 tweets ⁵		
Pilot study	A	Preparing coding sheet
	B	Consultation with 7 experts in media and Saudi contexts.
	C	Agreement Test
The elements of quantitative analysis		
	1-	User`s names
	2-	The type of user
	3-	Tweet`s attitude toward government`s decision
	4-	The main topic of tweet
	5-	The relevance of tweet`s content to the hashtag
	6-	Respectfulness of tweet content
	7-	Attached evidence
	8-	Re-tweet
	9-	Reply
	10-	Like
Second stage:		
Qualitative Analysis of Tweets.		
The first phase complemented the quantitative analysis by providing an in-depth analysis of arguments <u>and analysis of themes of good citizenship.</u>		
	1-	Analysing the study sample.
Third stage:		
Qualitative Analysis of Interviews.		

⁵ See also the following figure.

	1-	Interview 9 active Twitter users who participated in the first case study: Saudi women`s political participation.
	2-	Interview 9 active Twitter users who participated in the second case study: Imposing tax on undeveloped property in Saudi Arabia.
	3-	Interview 9 active Twitter users who participated in the third case study: Unlawful use of public property in Saudi Arabia.

Table 2: 4.1. The procedure for analysis of thesis data

Together, Twitter analysis and semi-structured interviews enabled me to answer the following research questions, across the three case-studies,

- 1- What primary topics are discussed by Saudis on Twitter in response to government decisions?
- 2- Do Saudi citizens support Saudi government decisions?
- 3- What types of evidence do they draw on most often?
- 4- To what extent are the contents of Twitter diverse regarding the use of real or nick names, the gender of users and their attitudes toward government decisions?
- 5- To what extent can deliberation on Twitter be considered respectful?
- 6- How and to what extent do Twitter users interact with others in deliberation?
- 7- To what extent can the contents of Twitter be considered rational?
- 8- What are the differences between men and women regarding the elements of quality of deliberation?
- 9- What are the differences between users who choose their real names and users who choose **pseudonyms** regarding the elements of quality of deliberation?

4.2.1 Selection of Case Studies

This thesis set three main conditions to choose case studies of Saudis' deliberation on Twitter. The first condition is related to government: the case study should capture Saudi citizens' responses to government decisions. This study is interested in moments when the government responded to citizens' demands for socio-political change. Moreover, those decisions should impact on the majority of citizens and not a specific ethnicity, professional position or class (for example, teachers or police officers) or religious identity (Sunni or Shiite). The second condition is that the case studies were unfolding between 2015 and 2016. This was a particularly interesting time because there were two historical government decisions in Saudi Arabia: for the first time Saudi women were allowed to stand as candidates and vote in municipal elections; and the Saudi government imposed a tax on undeveloped properties (see Chapter 2). The third condition is that those government decisions should be discussed by citizens during the process of issuing the decisions or afterwards. There had to be a specific and widely known hashtag which trended at that time⁶.

Initially in this thesis, two case studies were selected as central issues in 2015: Saudi women's political participation and the introduction of a tax on undeveloped property. Both were key moments in Saudi politics and coincided with the growing importance of Twitter in Saudi Arabia. But by the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016, as I gathered data for these case studies, the Saudi government seemed to adopt a slightly different strategy in its public efforts to engage with citizens. Some government organisations exchanged tweets about specific citizens' demands. This was the first time Saudi government organisations had interacted directly with Twitter users' tweets and exchanged tweets about a specific issue, even admitting that some mistakes had been made. This was an important shift in the government's communication strategy and an indication of how important it considers Twitter as a platform for public debate. Thus I made the decision to include as a third case study the government's actions over unlawful use of public property.

⁶ Comparable to the #MeToo hashtag.

4.2.2 Selection of Hashtags

To collate a sample for each of the three topics, I applied two criteria. Firstly, hashtags had to specifically relate to government decisions. Secondly, those hashtags should be widely discussed among Twitter users and had to be within the top ten trending hashtags. Twitter's official website (<https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/twitter-trending-faqs>) was used to identify the hashtags that 'trended' (this refers to a topic that is the subject of many posts on a social media website or application within a short period of time) after the decisions were issued. Consequently, the following three hashtags were chosen: #the-danger-of-women-political-participation-in-municipal-election⁷, #Undeveloped_Properties_Tax⁸, and #كفايةمدلع (# Enough_Manipulation)⁹ were selected.

4.2.3 Time-scale

The current study is identified as cross-sectional, in line with the recommendation of Saunders et al. (2007) who stress the importance of identifying whether the aim of research is to investigate an ongoing phenomenon (longitudinal study) or to look at it at a single, specific point in time (cross-sectional study). Analysing all tweets for each identified hashtag, for three case studies, is very difficult because each hashtag was active for several months and contained thousands of tweets. To make the work manageable, a sample was taken during spikes in Twitter activity after key events, such as official announcements, and clerics' or experts' comments. These spikes of activity tended to decrease after approximately four days. For each case study, I therefore collated a sample of tweets that were posted in the crucial four-day period¹⁰ during times of heightened activity. This sample was sufficient to allow the debate to be captured as it evolved, from initial quick reactions to more intense debate as Twitter users started to comment on each other's contributions.

Regarding Saudi women's political participation, 1,412 tweets and re-tweets were initially identified; however, re-tweets were then excluded from the sample because they

⁷ خطر مشاركة المرأة في الانتخابات البلدية#

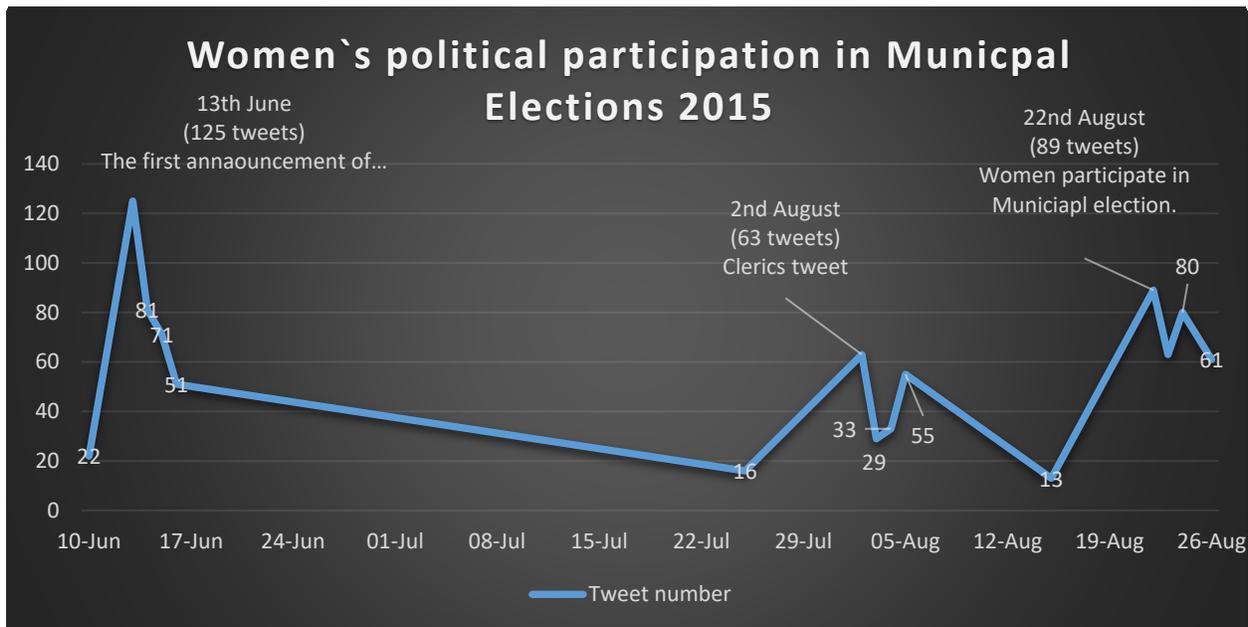
⁸ فرض رسوم على الأراضي البيضاء#

⁹ كفايةمدلع (# Enough_Manipulation) it demands business men to stop using public property illegally).

¹⁰ Such as the following Two study analysis four days. 1- Wasike, B.S., (2013), Ferguson et al., (2014).

did not add any comments for the discussions (Figure 4.1). For this case study, the final sample comprised a total of 811 tweets. The spikes of activity that were identified for this sample were: from 13th to 16th June, after some election centres announced that they had prepared everything to enable the participation of both male and female Saudi citizens on 13th June 2015. The second spike of activity was from 2nd to 5th August, after a well-known Saudi religious cleric, Al-Dawood, tweeted on 2nd August 2015; this posting included his warnings about the catastrophic consequences of women’s participation in municipal elections. He called on other clerics and citizens to demand that the government cancel women’s participation in the elections. The third spike was from 22nd to 25th August. August 22nd was a historic day for Saudi women because it was the first-time women had participated in municipal elections in Saudi Arabia (Ba-Ammeer, 2015).

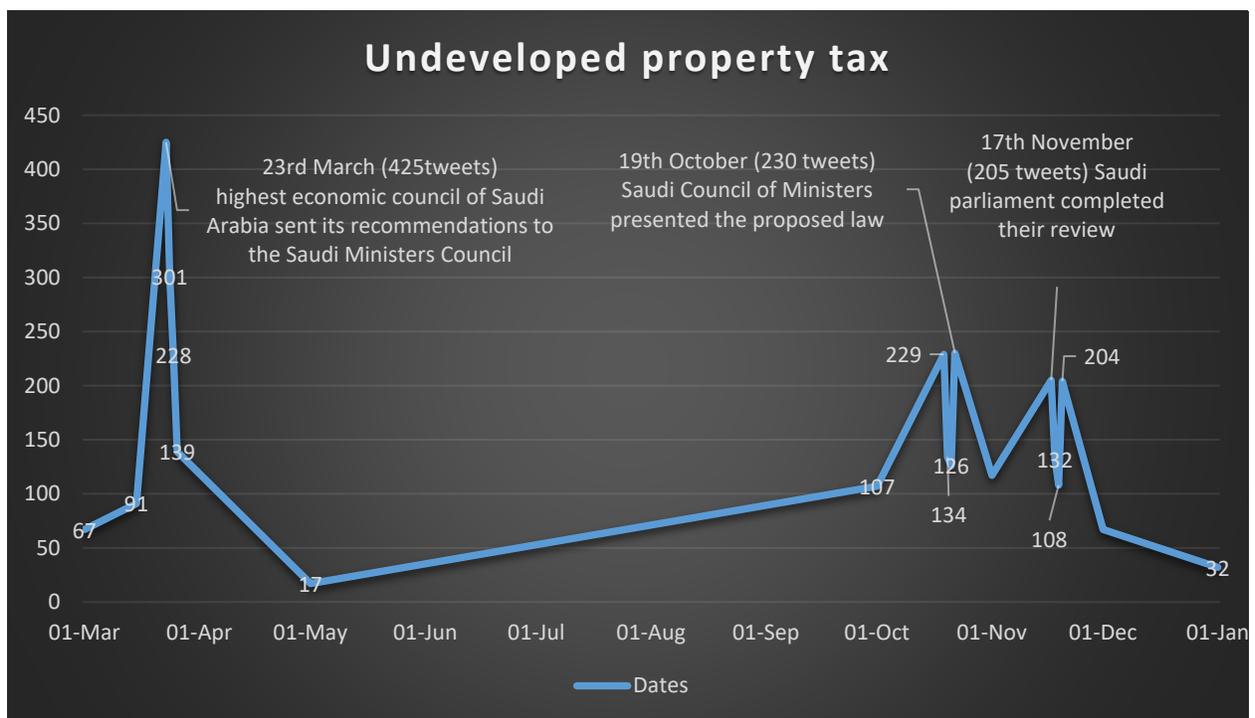
Figure 2: 4.1 Number of tweets using the hashtag #The_danger_of_women’s_political_participation_in_municipal_elections



Regarding the imposition of tax on undeveloped properties, 3,038 tweets were found, but re-tweets which did not add any comment to the discussions were removed (Figure 4.2). This left for analysis a total of 2,357 tweets across twelve days. The three 4-

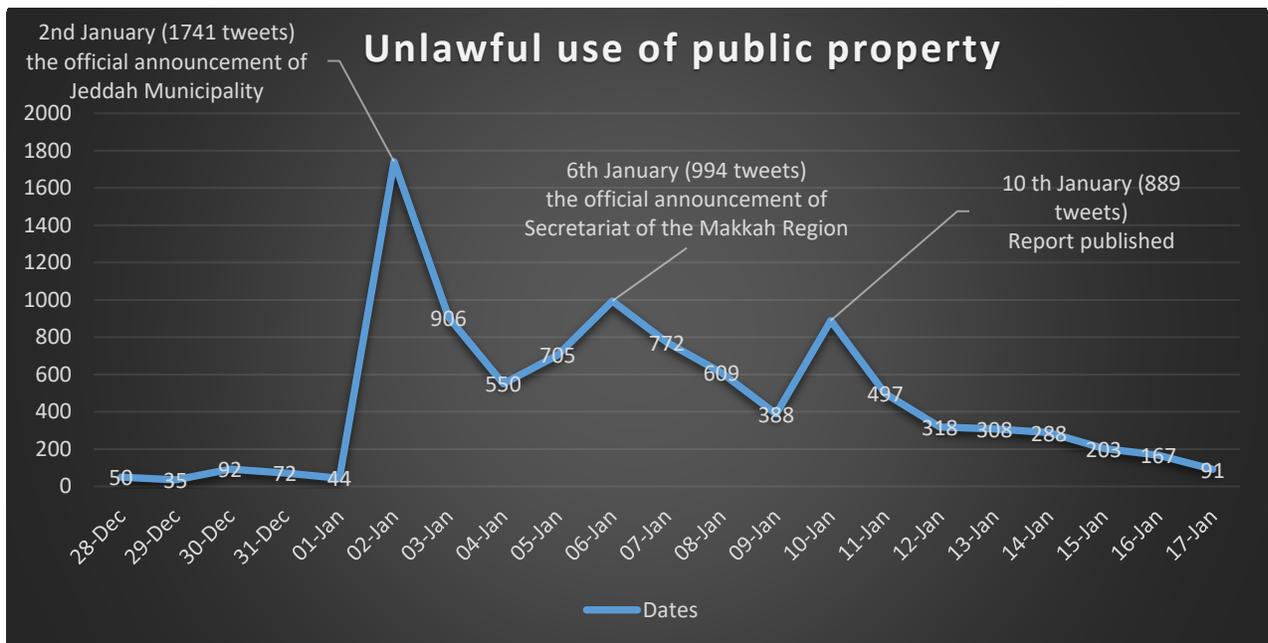
day periods chosen were: from 23rd to 26th March 2015, starting with the recommendation by the highest economic council of Saudi Arabia to the Saudi Ministers Council to impose a tax on unused properties (23rd March); from 19th to 22nd October 2015, after the Saudi Council of Ministers presented the proposed law to the Saudi parliament for a month's review (19th October); and from 17th to 20th November 2015 when the Saudi parliament completed their review and sent it back to the Saudi Council of Ministers (17th November).

Figure 3: 4.2 The number of tweets using the hashtag #imposing_the_tax_on_undeveloped_properties



Regarding unlawful use of public property, 13,518 tweets were found under the hashtag, but any re-tweet which did not add comments for the discussion was removed (Figure 4.3). The remaining total of 8925 tweets were analysed. Although the three different periods of time selected were consecutive, the selection followed the same criteria for choosing samples for the other two case studies: tweets posted after announcements of key government decisions. Therefore the samples for all three case studies allow an analysis of how Twitter users responded to government decisions. The period identified was from 2nd to 13th January. On 2nd January the Municipality of Jeddah Governorate announced that the pavement on Sari Road was being used lawfully. Then, on 6th January, the Secretariat of the Makkah Region announced that a committee, which included the Municipality of Jeddah, the Secretariat of the Makkah area, the Emirate of Makkah and the traffic department, had started investigations and would send their report to the Prince of the Makkah region. On 10th January 2016, the result of the investigation was announced by the Emirate of the Makkah Region.

Figure 4: 4.3 The number of tweets using the hashtag #Kiffaih_Dalla

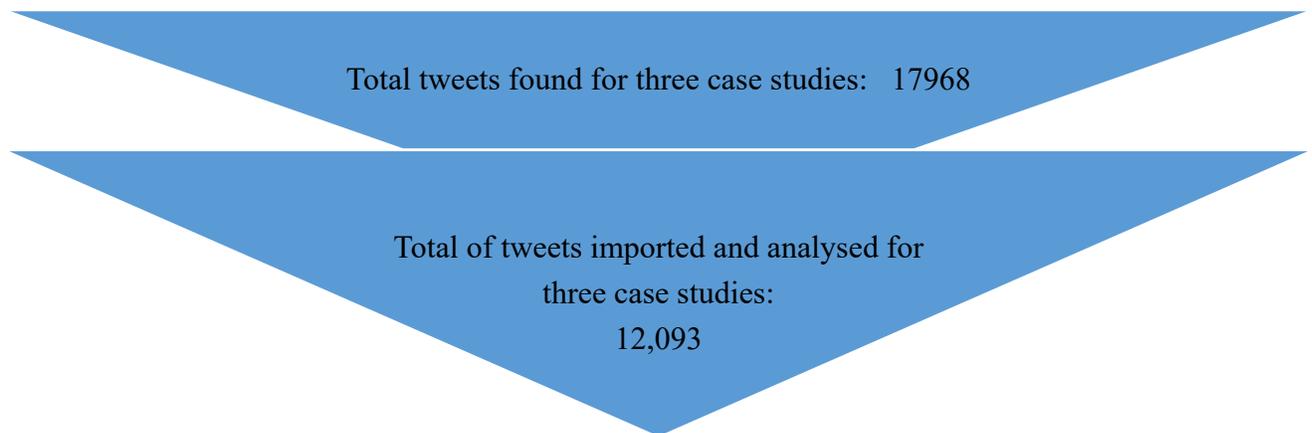


4.3 Tweets` Sample for Analysis

4.3.1 Importing Data

The Twitonomy software program (Twitonomy.com, 2018) was used to collect tweets as it allows a search for specific keywords in hashtags, URL, and@users. It also allows researchers to export analytical reports to Excel.

Figure 5: 4.4 Number of imported and original tweets



4.3.2 Analysis of Tweet Contents

Kulatunga et al. (2007 p.484) emphasise that “the research approach can be divided into two broad groups known as the deductive approach and the inductive approach”. Each approach is appropriate to specific types of research depending on their aims and questions. At the beginning of this study, a review of the relevant literature revealed that there were specific elements in the quality of deliberation, such as diversity, openness, relevance, respectfulness, reciprocity, and rationality; and thus a deductive approach was applied to the analysis of tweets by searching for these elements in the tweet contents. Similarly, common topics –Requesting Action, Human and Civil rights, Values and Norms, Technology and Programmes, Economic Crisis etc. which were mentioned in literature review (see chapter 3 and Table 4.4) – were used to investigate the quality of deliberation by identifying different arguments. I combined this deductive

approach with an inductive approach. While I felt that my literature review had provided a clear and detailed framework to capture the diversity of political deliberation on Twitter, I wanted to make sure I could take account of elements that feature prominently in my sample, but are not mentioned in existing literature on political deliberation. As much of this literature focuses on political deliberation by Western Twitter users, I had to be prepared for finding elements of political deliberation that are specific to my three case studies and the socio-political context of Saudi Arabia. Therefore certain sub-topics obtained from an initial inductive coding, such as patriarchal speech, class hatred and tribal values were later combined under the single main topic of 'Saudi social values'.

4.3.3 Coding Scheme

There are few studies that analyse the quality of deliberation on Twitter in depth and try to take account of a wide range of elements that constitute deliberation between ordinary citizens, in non-democratic countries. This study thus attempted to benefit from a set of coding schemes that already exist for the classification of political tweets in democratic countries (Tumasjan et al., 2010; Golbeck et al., 2010; Hemphill et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2013 and Small, 2011). However, Saudi Arabia has a unique political system, therefore it was necessary to make some modifications to previous schemes to create a framework relevant to the context of Saudi Arabia, which is described as one of the most conservative countries in the world regarding religious and social values (see Chapter 2). I therefore shared a draft of my coding scheme with the following 7 experts in the field of Saudi media (Table 4.2).

Table 3: 4.2. The Experts

N	Name ¹¹	University	Job
1	Naïf bin Thunian	King Saud University	Professor
2	AbdualateefAloofy	King Saud University	Professor
3	AbdualazizAlzahrani	King Saud University	Senior Lecturer
4	Haitham Mohammed	King Saud University	Senior Lecturer
5	Fareed Moazi	King Saud University	Senior Lecturer
6	Saber Tour	King Saud University	Assistant Lecturer
7	AlhabibBalqassim	King Saud University	Assistant Lecturer

After this first consultation process with experts (Table 4.2), the coding sheet was drawn up¹². I then conducted a pilot study whereby 100 tweets were randomly selected from each hashtag and analysed them to test whether the definitions of the study's variables were precise enough, and whether they were suitable for coding in the study sample. The pilot was also used to establish whether the study needed to add new variables and to test the validity of this tool. The pilot study confirmed that there was no need to make any modifications to the coding sheet. Therefore, the researcher decided to test the reliability of this tool. The same tweets were analysed again at a different time (after 10 days) to measure the percentage of agreement (compatibility) between the results of the two tests. The results indicated a high percentage of agreement (99.65%) as shown in Table (4.3).

¹¹All interviewees confirmed their names could be mentioned in the thesis.

¹² Appendix3

Table 4: 4.3. The ratio of agreement between the first and second analysis

(Number of tweets' stability = 100)

Variables	Average rate of agreement
User's gender	100%
Name used	99%
Primary topics/ Irrelevance ¹³ of the posts to the discussion topic	99%
Type of evidence used (tweet attachments)	100%
Agree-disagree- neutral towards government decision	100%
Respectfulness	100%
Replies	100%
Re-tweets	99%
Likes	100%
All variables	99.65%

Based on the insights I had gained from this pilot study, I then finalised the coding scheme and analysed the sample for each of the three case studies. The final coding scheme is discussed below.

¹³The primary topics were classified to cover the majority of topics mentioned in tweets that related to the main topic of hashtag; therefore any tweet not related to the main topic has been classified as 'irrelevant'.

4.3.3.1 Diversity and Relevant Contents

Diversity is one of the elements of the quality of deliberation. It was measured by focusing on users' attitudes to government decisions, type of user and the main topics of the tweets. As discussed in Chapter 2, the government's decision to grant women the right to participate in municipal elections marked an important milestone towards greater gender equality in Saudi Arabia. The analysis of Twitter users' gender allows this study to ascertain the extent to which women have started to take their place in public deliberation, but also whether there are differences in the ways in which men and women respond to government attempts to strengthen some of women's civic rights. This study used the data users wrote about themselves on their Twitter page, such as their user name, gender or by considering how they presented themselves in their tweets over three months. For example, if they wrote 'we are women', 'As a woman' or gave other indications such as 'men did not allow me/us to do...' and 'we (means himself and other Saudi men) should respect women rights', this was taken as evidence of the gender with which they identify. However, if their gender could not be identified by the previous means, then they were classified under 'others'.

Although all three hashtags explored in this thesis discussed Saudi internal affairs, this did not mean that non-Saudis and Saudis those living outside Saudi Arabia could not participate in the discussion, and indeed this was the case for 436 tweets in all three case studies of this thesis (149 tweets in the first case study, 180 tweets in the second case study, and 107 tweets in the third case study), which constituted less than 1% of the total tweets. 30 tweets were sent by Arab citizens from Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt and Oman. All the profiles of senders were investigated with the aim of finding clear evidence of citizenship. This confirmed that some tweets were posted by non-Saudis as well as by Saudis who lived outside Saudi Arabia. Moreover, 406 tweets were sent by known Saudi opponents (political activists) or Saudi students¹⁴ or companions or family members who were studying or living in the USA, UK, Australia, Canada and other countries when they discussed government decisions on those hashtags. I decided to include these tweets in my sample as they could potentially reveal the influence of censorship and social values

¹⁴King Abdallah scholarship sent more than 140,000 Saudi students to study abroad.

on Twitter users in different countries. However, those tweets did not include contents that were different from other tweet contents posted by Twitter users in Saudi Arabia. 99.5% of tweets used Arabic, which was expected.

The third element used to measure the diversity of deliberation in this study was the primary topic of the tweets. Previous studies have identified the following as important primary topics: Requesting action; norms and values; the political power of technology; civil and human rights' economic issues; and sarcastic criticism (Graham et al., 2013; Zamora-Medina and Zurutuza-Muñoz, 2014; Lee et al., 2013; and Hemphill et al., 2013). I adapted these to make them suitable to the context of Saudi Arabia. 'Requesting action' was modified to requesting action from sources of power in Saudi society, which include the government, the official religious institution, and clerics. 'Norms and values' was modified to include Saudi social and religious values. Moreover, Twitter users explore the place of Saudi Arabia in the world, and their position it in relation to 'the West'. 'The political power of technology' became 'the role of Twitter and cell-phone apps'. 'Civil and human rights' was used with more focus on gender equality and women's successes. 'Economic issues' became 'different economic benefits'; and 'sarcasm' was extended to include proverbs, poems and cartoons.

Some tweets contained more than one topic. In order to identify the main topic, I took the following steps: Firstly, noting tweets where the main topic was clearly indicated¹⁵. Secondly, when two topics had the same importance and connected to each other, I categorised the tweet by the topic which was most supported by evidence or justifications, because the evidence was considered to add more value to the topic¹⁶. Thirdly, if the tweet did not include evidence and justifications I removed the topics separately, then I identified if the meaning was changed completely after removing a topic and the rest of contents did not have any meaning; if so, I considered it as the main topic¹⁷. Fourthly, if the previous steps could identify the main topic, the first topic mentioned in the tweet was considered to be the main topic¹⁸. Furthermore, some scholars such as Wilhelm (1999)

¹⁵ Appendix 4.1

¹⁶ Appendix 4.3

¹⁷ Appendix 4.2

¹⁸ Appendix 4.4

believe that the relevance of the deliberation to the topic under discussion is one of the elements of the quality of deliberation. Therefore, this study measured the extent to which the content of the tweets related to the hashtag's topic.

Table 5: 4.4 Primary topics

	Primary topics	Definition¹⁹
1	Requesting action	Explicitly demanding government organisations and official religious institutions to take responsibility for giving citizens their rights, solving previous mistakes by government organisations and protecting the social fabric of Saudi society. Demanding that citizens demand action from officials to perform their duties, in serving and developing their society.
2	Norms and Values	Any tweet discussing Islamic, Arabic or Saudi tribal values or demands to protect those values against the influence of Western countries, liberals and any international convention.
3	The political power of technology and cell-phone Apps	Users discuss how electronic devices and mobile Apps are useful for demanding their rights from the government, accessing sources of information and helping the government by identifying unlawful actions.
4	Civilian Rights and gender equality	Freedom of expression, political participation and housing rights of Saudi citizens especially women; as well as gender equality.
5	Economic benefits	Evaluating the expected economic benefits and losses from government efforts to develop Saudi society.
6	Criticism by sarcastic proverbs, poems and cartoons	Using sarcastic proverbs, poems and cartoons to criticise and expose the corruption and mistakes made by the government, officials and citizens.
7	Others	Any topics that do not relate to the previous categories.

¹⁹The modifications of the definitions were made after consultation seven experts in the research field of media in the KSA (see Table 4.20).

4.3.3.2 Openness

The second element was openness, which addresses the extent to which participants are willing to reveal their identities. This category was very important for a number of reasons. Before the emergence of Twitter, Saudis had not used a free public platform to make demands and criticize the Saudi government's efforts and decisions. Thus, on Twitter Saudis may avoid using their real names when they criticise the Saudi government or discuss sensitive political, religious and social issues. Classifying tweets in this way allowed the study to measure the extent to which Saudis feel free and safe to criticise and present their opinions.

4.3.3.3 Reciprocity

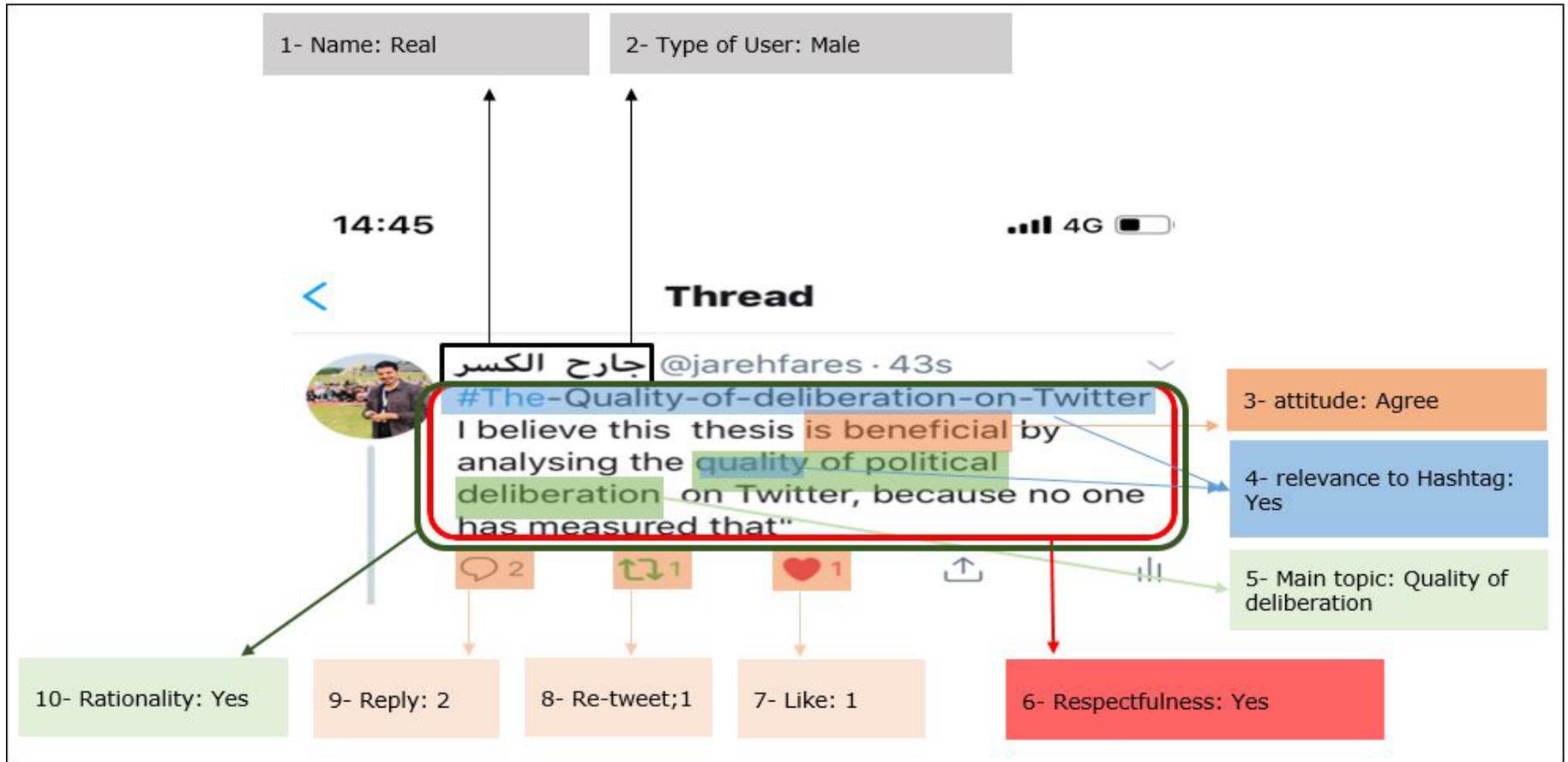
Wilhelm (1999) and Graham and Witschge (2003) confirm that reciprocity is where participants interact with other participants' posts. Therefore, this study measures the interaction between Twitter users by asking whether a post had received none, one or more than one like, reply or retweet.

4.3.3.4 Rationality and Respectfulness

This study classifies any tweet that included clear, respectful and relevant content (to main topic of hashtag) as 'rational', whether it was supported by clear evidence and justification or not. To measure the extent to which Twitter users felt they had to justify their views, I ascertained whether they referred to evidence. Given the conservatism of Saudi society, I coded for references to official statistics and studies, and citizens' previous experiences of Saudi government decisions, but also for use of religious sources (the *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah* [sayings of the Prophet] and clerics' opinions). Moreover, the attachments were classified into two types: links (which transfer users to other websites); and images (which include copies of newspaper articles, book extracts, government documents and cartoons). Respectfulness was another element of the quality of deliberation. This study benefits from previous studies in classifying any content that

includes offensive language and aggressive or derogatory messages as impolite tweets. Moreover, any tweet that does not contain offensive language and aggressive or derogatory messages was considered as respectful.

Figure 6: 4.5. Tweet Analysis



4.4 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is the process of identifying themes or patterns within data. Qualitative analysis allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of quantitative results; therefore, the role of researcher in this case is that of 'interpreter', which should be done in a way that allows readers to understand the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2009). The thematic analysis of my sample provided a more in-depth understanding of the quality of deliberation. I identified recurring arguments and their linguistic nuances.

I followed the process of thematic coding, as recommended by Creswell (2009) and Braun and Clarke (2012). According to these researchers, there are six steps to examine qualitative data: 1) read through all the data to obtain a general sense of the information; 2) start coding; 3) search for themes when reviewing the initial codes as well as attempting to find overlap and similar areas; 4) define the themes and convey findings through checking the adequacy and quality of information that support initial themes; 5) interpret the meaning of the data; and 6) write the analysis.

Firstly, following the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2012), which emphasise that researchers should immerse themselves in their data through re-reading the contents several times, I attempted to get a comprehensive view of the most frequent themes, the diversity of sources of information (political, religious, and social) and to what extent the arguments received counter-arguments. I then added notes and started to identify sub-themes, by constantly returning to original texts (tweets). I prepared a specific Word document in which I recoded comments to identify important words, topics and arguments in tweets. I then gave each a serial number provided automatically on an Excel spreadsheet with each tweet, so that I could quickly use it for reference.

Once I had read through the sample three times and had taken notes I finalised the sub-themes, making sure I merged themes that overlapped and taking account of important distinctions. For example, many tweets in the first case study 'Saudi women's political participation in municipal elections' discussed values, but from different angles. Some tweets included phrases that directly indicated the role of tribal traditions as influencing citizens' attitudes. These tweets were coded under 'tribal values'. However,

other tweets included phrases that indicated Islamic values. These were coded as 'religious values'.

The fourth step of the analysis was a review of themes. At this stage, it is important to check the quality of the themes that have been identified in relation to the coded data. Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest an evaluation to determine if there is enough relevant data to support each theme and whether the data is useful in answering the research questions. This step included some revisions or discarding of elements. In the final fifth and sixth phases, I defined and named each theme, ready for discussion. This thematic analysis revealed that as they discuss sensitive socio-political issues in Saudi Arabia, Twitter users negotiate a concept of good citizenship such as connectedness to society's values. It showed their appreciation of informed debate and how they see their relationship with the government. The key elements of this concept, such as political knowledge and a sense of connectedness to society, were useful guides for my analysis of interview data.

4.5 Interviews

The aim of interviews was to gain interviewees' perspective about the quality of deliberation on Twitter, and to what extent they consider Twitter a useful public space for Saudis to discuss their social and political issues. Moreover, as the thematic analysis of tweets had revealed key themes of good citizenship, I wanted to investigate how Twitter users see their role as citizens. I attempted to obtain suitable data by asking participants about four factors: what motivations were there to engage in discussions on Twitter; to what extent they believe Twitter is an appropriate platform to discuss sensitive Saudi political and social issues; what factors influence Saudis' discussion of political and social issues; and to what extent they believe the discussions on Twitter, around the identified issues, were rational, respectful and beneficial to wider society.

According to Hagan (2000, p.174), an interview is "a face-to-face situation in which the researcher orally solicits responses from a subject". Saunders et al., (2012, p.372), observe that: "Essentially it is about asking purposeful questions and carefully listening to the answers to be able to explore these further".

Interviewing has many advantages, such as facilitating personal contact between the interviewer and participants to obtain rich data, which may not be available if using indirect data collection. Also, misunderstandings that may happen in interpreting questions may be avoided through the face-to-face relationship, and the researcher can encourage participants to provide more detailed information and to clarify their views, through a technique called 'probing' (Seidman, 2006). Accordingly, I attempted to create a rapport with participants by making them feel that their answers were very important. A few times I asked them to be more precise regarding some ambiguous words and phrases which may have different meanings from one individual to another, including terms like 'the values of Saudi society', because this could indicate Islamic, Arab or Saudi tribal values.

There are disadvantages to interviewing, such as bias, which can happen in the interaction between participants and interviewer, not only because questions may be misunderstood, but due to the preconceptions of the individuals involved (Gubrium et al., 2012). I tried to always be balanced and calm when listening to participants and reacted

to all answers and ideas in the same way so that participants would not feel I supported or opposed their opinions, which could affect their level of comfort and their answers. Moreover, if the recording is not clear, this may lead to some ambiguities for researchers. Although not all difficulties were totally resolved, two strategies were used in this study to minimise them. Firstly, two devices, a cell phone and a recorder were used during the interviews, and secondly, the recordings were sent to the participants so that they could listen to them and send their final approval with the opportunity to add some more explanations if they wanted. Any such comments were added to the final transcripts.²⁰

Interviews were semi-structured because the three case studies are related to complicated political, social and religious values, which require deep discussion and the interviews also needed to avoid deviation from the important aspects of this research. An unstructured interview would not allow the researcher to guide the discussion to fulfil the main goals of the research; and a structured interview would restrict the interviewees and interviewer to predetermined questions with little flexibility, which would be less likely to achieve desirable results. For example, one interviewee agreed with the Saudi government's decision to impose tax on undeveloped properties, and he attempted many times to accuse the housing minister of negligence and leniency with princes who own vast tracts of land. He then moved on to accuse different ministries regarding different topics. The semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to interrupt him politely by acknowledging his point and then referring him back to discussing the research questions. Therefore, the semi-structured interview is the appropriate type for this study, because specific themes need to be covered and the questions will guide the interviewees whilst also providing the opportunity to talk freely or add more interpretations or explanations of their opinions within the acceptable and useful limits of this research. This method allows the interviewer to be precise with interviewees and overcome any ambiguities that occur during the conversation (Wojnor and Swanson, 2007). In addition, the semi-structured interview format helps to facilitate the interview by allowing the

²⁰Two women toned it down their criticism to tribal and religious values after they listened to record later therefore their desires were respected.

interviewer to modify the sequencing and wording of questions to be more appropriate for each interview situation (Watkins and Gioia, 2015, p.57).

4.5.1 Pilot Study for Interviews

A pilot study for the interview phase was conducted with 15 volunteer Twitter users (10 men and five women) who participated in one or more of the hashtags under investigation. Watkins and Gioia (2015, p.57) note that a pilot study “is an opportunity to carry out all aspects of the data collection plan on a smaller scale, before the large scale mixed method study begins”. The pilot for this part of this study was conducted to check, experience and discuss any emergent problems before conducting the actual interviews. For example, one of the benefits gained by conducting a pilot study was that it identified that some participants preferred not to be asked direct questions about traditional and religious values, but sometimes mentioned them generally in their answers. I decided to begin by asking them about the factors influencing their discussion in general and when participants’ answers contained religious and social values I would then focus gently on these sensitive factors because it was the participants themselves who had brought them up.

Another insight gained by conducting a pilot study was that some participants said that they were not sure if they understood precisely the meaning of some terms such as ‘equality of deliberation and ‘political deliberation’, because those terms are not commonly used in a society like Saudi Arabia that is considered un-democratic. However, I decided not to remove these terms because they were very important. Instead, I prepared small cards which included the definitions for these terms and presented these at the beginning of all interviews. I also gave a short presentation (less than two minutes) to explain these terms because I wanted to make sure participants understood my questions and that I could include all their answers in my analysis.

4.5.2 Identifying Participants for the Main Research

In order to make sure interviewees could speak with a degree of experience and expertise about the quality of deliberation of Twitter, my aim was to interview active Twitter users. Existing studies do not provide a clear definition of 'active users'. According to Laggat (2010), an active Twitter user has tweeted at least 10 times, has at least 10 followers and follows at least 10 users; while Carlson (2011), says that the active Twitter user should have at least 30 followers and follow at least ten of them. CEO Dick Cotolo emphasised that any Twitter user who logs onto Twitter once a month is considered an active user. Although the previous definitions of active Twitter users have been used in other research, the researcher believed that those definitions were not useful for this study because they concentrated on the number of followers, how many other users these users follow and the numbers of their tweets; but they did not focus on their interactions with others in discussing the main topics of the hashtag. Because this study focuses on the active Twitter users' role in conversation, a more appropriate specific definition of who would be considered as an active user was created as follows:

- 1- An active Twitter user has participated in the identified hashtag on Twitter and replied to and commented on others' replies or to others' original Tweets.
- 2- Has on average tweeted more than others in the sample taken from the hashtag
- 3- Has more followers than other Twitter users who participated in the same hashtag and presented in selected sample.

However, not everyone who has a huge number of followers and participates in an identified hashtag would be a suitable active user for the purposes of this research. Because this study discusses the quality of deliberation, it requires people with experience of exchanging ideas and opinions with other users about those issues. Therefore, a condition for being selected for interview is that the active user should react to others.

Excel was used to prepare a list of those who tweeted in the sample. The researcher then ranked them according to the number of tweets they made in the sample and removed any user who did not engage in debate. Those remaining were then

contacted, starting with the most active users. I initially contacted 42 participants. 11 (9 men and 2 women) declined to participate and four did not answer calls or emails. In the end I managed to recruit nine interviewees for each hashtag (a total of 27 across the three case studies),

The participants who agreed to be interviewed included three between 18 and 20 years, thirteen between 21 and 30 years, seven between 31 and 40, and five over 41 years old. Participants differed in terms of employment: two Saudi MPs, two clerics, eight government employees, five employees in the private sector, three journalists, three businessmen, two housewives, two high school students and one unemployed. This set of participants included ordinary people whose educational level was no higher than secondary school, as well as PhD and Masters graduates who had qualified in Saudi Arabia or at Western universities. This diversity of ages, occupations and educational experience arguably provides a wide spectrum of opinions about the issues, influenced by different backgrounds and experience.

4.5.3 Settings and Analyzing the Interviews

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for interviews with three women who asked to be accompanied by their husbands or brothers because of religious and tribal values. The researcher used a very formal way of addressing the women (by using Mrs or Ms) and avoided calling them by their names, as this is considered sensitive in Saudi society; and social and religious values force men and women in Saudi Arabia to be careful when talking with an unrelated member of the opposite gender. This strategy encouraged the women's participation because they felt comfortable to answer all the questions. The researcher preferred to conduct interviews with each participant separately instead of in groups because Saudi society is not democratic. If I had interviewed them as a group, some participants might have felt reluctant to present their opinions out of concern of offending someone or losing respect among their relatives or friends. However, with an interviewer who has promised confidentiality, they may express their opinions more openly, especially if they know these will be anonymous. Moreover, conducting interviews requires specific skills, such as patience and guiding the interviews

from beginning to end. According to King and Horrocks (2010), some interviewees may be unwilling to answer or give detailed information about certain issues, whilst others may divert the interview by giving irrelevant answers. To avoid this problem, steps were taken to clarify terms at the beginning and during the interviews participants were gently coaxed back to the relevant themes.

After the last written agreement and confirmation to participate at interviews was received, the researcher divided his timetable into four weeks, as participants were in four different cities, and planned to spend one week in each: Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam and Madinah. At the start of each interview a consent form that had been previously emailed to participants was presented and read to ensure the participant understood the nature of the research and its aims and had signed the consent form and emailed it back to the researcher. This form included the researcher's pledge to only use the data for scientific research and to save it anonymously on a device that was not connected to the internet. All these steps were taken to encourage confidence in the researcher and motivate participants to be more open and willingly give detailed information. Confidentiality and anonymity were once more orally emphasised, and any participants' queries were answered. Then, the researcher asked permission from participants to record the interview by tape recorder and cell phone and explained that it helped to listen again to the information given during the interview (Mouton and Marais, 1988). Participants were reassured that only the researcher would hear these recordings and that they would be deleted when no longer required for the purposes of the thesis.

The formal interview did not start immediately as the researcher briefly discussed topics of general interest to put the interviewee at ease before moving smoothly on to the questions designed to obtain the interviewees' perspectives about the themes and questions of the research. Furthermore, the transcripts were written immediately and separately after each interview. According to Gillham (2000), interviews should be transcribed as soon as possible while still fresh in the researcher's memory. Moreover, the interviewer recorded all the interviewees and took notes during the recording. The interviews were transcribed in their entirety to ensure that the participants' meanings were more likely to be correctly understood.

4.6 Cultural, Linguistic and Ethical Considerations

4.6.1 Cultural Considerations

Certain aspects of the Saudi culture were taken into consideration when conducting this study as gender segregation and communicating with the opposite sex may be considered a significant factor, which could influence how interviews are conducted. The researcher's wife (a postgraduate student at UEA) and sisters (postgraduate students at KSU) were prepared to conduct interviews with other postgraduate students. Thus trained, they accompanied the researcher to all nine interviews with women, but ultimately their help was not required, because none of the women minded being interviewed by a male, even though some of them were not accompanied by a male relative, such as a husband or brother.

4.6.2 Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the University of East Anglia's ethics guidelines, no data was collected before ethical approval from the Ethics Board of the University of East Anglia was given²¹. The researcher used some actual tweets as examples to obtain ethical approval, but hid the names of senders, their profile pictures and the date of tweets to preserve anonymity, and no tweet that was deemed as possibly causing any problem to the sender was used. According to Cronquist and Spector (2011), social media discussions can raise difficult issues related to ethics and privacy. In this study, some tweets included strong criticisms which may have caused problems for the authors of those tweets if they had been quoted. Thus, when tweets that contained harsh religious, political or social terms were cited, the content was rephrased to make the sender difficult to identify; any information that could reveal the identity of the Tweeter, such as friends' names or the organisations or social groups they belonged to or supported were removed.

Interviewees in this study were informed that they had the right to refuse to answer any question as well as to leave the interview at any time. Interviewees were told in advance that this study discussed issues that were sensitive in Saudi society, especially

²¹ This study was approved by the General Research Ethics Committee at UEA 20th May 2016.

those related to political, tribal, and religious values; they were reassured that their identities would be concealed and that codes were going to be used instead of names and that data would be stored securely and destroyed when the PhD was completed.

4.6.3 Linguistic Considerations

Because this research was conducted in Saudi Arabia, Arabic was used in communications with participants, and the interviews were then translated into English. Although I was supported by a translator from the media department at King Saud University, where I had been working since 2012, I was concerned that translations might have some inaccuracies. To overcome this problem, I collected and analysed tweets and interview data in Arabic and then translated them into English, finally a translation back from English to Arabic was made to highlight any mistakes. Liamputtong (2010) advises this approach in social research instead of using a single translation to reduce the errors that can result from translation and to achieve a higher level of accuracy.

4.7 Conclusion

This study combines analyses of tweets and interviews to explore the quality of Twitter users' political deliberation as they discuss sensitive social and political issues in Saudi Arabia. The sample of tweets was analysed with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. A basic frequency analysis provided an overview of the diversity, openness, rationality, respectfulness, interactivity and rationality of the debate. A thematic analysis shows that as Twitter users engage in debate, they negotiate a sense of what it means to be a good citizen.

These findings were explored in more depth with the help of semi-structured interviews with active Twitter users from Saudi Arabia. This method provided insights into how Twitter users perceive the suitability of Twitter for public debate and how they rate the quality of that debate. It reveals how a sense of good citizenship motivates Twitter users to engage in informed, rational and respectful debate.

Chapter 5

Saudi Women's Political Participation in Municipal Elections on Twitter

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses Twitter users' deliberations in response to the Saudi government's decision to allow Saudi women to vote and be candidates in public municipal elections for the first time. It argues that social and religious values play a crucial role when Twitter users discussed Saudi government decisions about women's issues. Twitter users demonstrated their connectedness to their society's social and religious values when they opposed the implementation of what they perceived as 'Western plans' to take women out of their domestic roles, which they considered damaging to Saudi religious and social values, and used (or possibly misinterpreted) religious verdicts to support their arguments. Drawing on a mixed-method research design, 811 tweets in the hashtag #the-danger-of-women's-political-participation-in-municipal-election were analysed. In addition, nine active Twitter users were interviewed to investigate their perception of the quality of deliberation on Twitter and their perspectives regarding the influence of Twitter users' connectedness to their society's values and on the quality of the deliberation.

Social media platforms, especially Twitter, are a crucial tool for Saudi citizens in their fight for women's rights. In general, Saudi women's issues are hotly debated because of complex social and religious values. Saudi women have struggled for several years to obtain rights and have used social media platforms for these campaigns, including the 2013 and 2015 campaign to allow women to drive cars, and the 2011 and in 2015 campaigns for women's right to participate in municipal elections. Thus, social media platforms can be considered crucial tools which empower Arab women to claim their rights (Mourtada, et al., 2011). Guta and Karolak (2015) confirm that the protection of individual privacy on the internet empowers Saudi women by providing a space to discuss the cultural and social limitations that have been enforced on them by their

society. Saudi youth, including young women, who have grown up with social media, discuss women's issues online – behaviour that some conservatives consider a challenge to religious norms (Bernardi, 2010).

The findings of this chapter show that despite the sensitivity of the topic, the Twitter debate about women's rights was mostly rational, open and diverse. Moreover, the deliberation reflected that Twitter users were aware of the sensitivity of this issue in the Saudi context. They explored the values that govern their society and demanded the sources of power in Saudi Arabia to take action, which revealed a change in the relationship between these Twitter users and certain power elites. However, Twitter users set clear parameters for the debate, and not all views were welcomed by everyone. Women who were perceived as transgressing social and religious values were subjected to abusive tweets by some opponents of the government decision

5.2 Quantitative Results

5.2.1 Diversity and Relevance of Content²²

The quantitative analysis confirms that the deliberation about women's political participation was diverse regarding the type of Twitter users, discussed topics and attitudes towards the government decision. All this raised the quality of deliberation. Firstly, as illustrated in Table 5.1, 59% of Twitter users who posted on the hashtag #the-danger-of-women-political-participation-in-municipal-election were men, 38.5% were women and the remaining 2.5% included organisations such as the Saudi government, non-government organisations and media agencies. That municipal election represented the first participation of Saudi women as candidates and voters in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and, although the percentage of men who participated in discussion about this women's issue was higher than the percentage of women, participation by both genders demonstrates the importance of the issue for both male and female Saudis, and reflects the usual ratio of men to women who used the internet in Saudi Arabia in 2015- i.e. 68% men and 32% women (Ministry of communication and information technology, 2015).

²² Diversity and relevant content are two elements of the quality of deliberation.

Moreover, the very low level of participation by organisations such as newspapers, magazines and TV may be attributed to the desire of these organisations to avoid engaging in discussion about sensitive issues, in particular women’s rights. This finding was to be expected, as traditional media in Saudi Arabia do not tend to participate in debates that touch upon complicated social and religious values (see Chapter 2). But of note was that women’s political participation has had media coverage in different T.V. programmes and newspapers for several years, which might have increased awareness regarding the importance of women’s participation in civic life. This media coverage increased sharply in the three years before the municipal elections in 2015²³ (see Appendix 2).

Table 6: 5.1 Distribution of study sample according to gender and names used on Twitter

Name used on Twitter	Male		Female		Organisation		Total	
	No	%	No.	%	No	%	No.	%
Real name	377	78.5	182	58	18	100	577	72.5
Pseudonym	103	21.5	131	42	----	-----	234	27.5
Total	480	59	313	38.5	18	2	811	100

²³I conducted an investigation to analyze the media campaigns, in some newspapers and TV channels, about Saudi women’s political participation in municipal elections from 2001 to 2015.

The second characteristic of diversity was the topics discussed. Twitter users in this sample discussed three main topics: firstly, social and religious values were referred to 432 times; the second most mentioned topic was women`s civil rights, especially the rights of Saudi women, which came up in 301 tweets. Although women`s civil rights was not selected as being a main topic in the second and third case studies (see Chapters 6 and 7), concerns with women`s civil rights could be seen as implicit in the demands that Twitter users were making, namely: the right to affordable housing and the right of access to public ways. The third most covered topic, present in 73 tweets, were requests for action by individuals or organisations perceived as those who should shoulder the responsibility for causing or resolving a specific issue (see Table 5.2).

Table 7: 5.2 Distribution of tweets according to main topics used²⁴

Topics	Frequency	Percent %
The topic of social and religious values	426	52.5%
Women`s Civilian rights	281	34.5%
The topic of requesting actions	73	9%
Irrelevant tweets	31	4%
Total	811	100%

²⁴The analysis showed that there were some sarcastic Tweets and some about technology, but because their rate was less than 1.5% they were added to the more appropriate topic (which is explained in Chapter 3).

The third characteristic of diversity was Twitter users' attitudes toward the Saudi government's decision regarding women's political rights. As seen in Table 5.3, 74% of participants using this hashtag agreed with and supported the Saudi government's decision regarding women's participation in Saudi municipal elections in 2015, whereas 21.5% rejected this decision and the remaining 4.5% were neutral. Arguably, the long-standing infringements of Saudi women's rights and conservative Saudi society's attitude toward women's rights, which were described in Chapter 2, influenced attitudes in this case study, where the percentage of Twitter users who rejected the Saudi government's decision regarding women's political participation was the highest in the three case studies (see Chapters 6 and 7). Moreover, the main topic requesting action in this case, as a percentage, was lower than for the other two case studies. This may emphasise that women's rights usually spark discussions that focus on complicated social values and some debated religious regulations about women's participation in political elections, more than focusing on who should shoulder the responsibility to allow or prohibit Saudi women from participating in elections. As the majority of tweets agreed with the government's decision, they focused on correcting what they saw as misinterpretations of holy text regarding Islam's position on women's political participation rather than requesting action (see section 5.3).

Researchers such as Wilhelm (1999) and Schneider (1997) confirm the importance of the relevance of posts to the main topic of discussion as an element in measuring the quality of the debate. The analysis showed that although some tweets' contents were not relevant to the topic of the hashtag, 96% of the tweets were related to the topic of the hashtag (see Table 5.2). This percentage is high, arguably because women's issues in Arab countries and Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 2) are very sensitive therefore this issue is taken seriously and Twitter users discussed it with some care.

Table 8: 5.3 Distribution of tweets according to attitude

User's attitude toward the law	Frequency	Percent
Agreement	600	74%
Rejection	174	21.5%
Neutral	37	4.5%
Total	811	100%

5.2.2 Openness

This section discusses how Twitter users still perceived the topic of women's rights as sensitive, as the number of Twitter users who chose not to reveal their real names was higher than in the other two case studies. However, overall the debate can be described as open. This study defined openness as being when users disclose their identities, which means here when Twitter users used real names rather than **pseudonyms** (see Chapter 3). 58% of the women and 78.5% of the men who engaged in this discussion used their real names (see Table 5.1). The percentage of women who used their real name was surprising (58% of women who participated on this hashtag) because Arab countries, particular Saudi Arabia, are conservative societies that usually disapprove of women using social media to discuss their rights. According to a study by the Dubai School of Government (2011), women experience the cultural and social restrictions imposed on Arab women as the biggest barriers that prevent them from using the internet and social media to discuss social issues. Only 42% of women in this sample did not use their real name to discuss this issue on Twitter, which is interesting because it indicates progress in the engagement of women in public discussion about sensitive issues in Saudi society. As explained before, the gender identity of Twitter users seemed straightforward to identify, and these were accepted at face value; but it is possible that women could avoid social disapproval and online abuse by hiding their gender identity as well as use **pseudonyms**.

In contrast, this case study had the highest percentage of male Twitter users using **pseudonyms** out of the three case studies, which may indicate that men wanted to say things that were controversial or sensitive (e.g. something very discriminatory against women or something strongly in favour of women's rights). Social media platforms may facilitate Saudi citizens to overcome these obstacles and engage in discussion about these subjects. Java et al. (2007) and Zhao and Rosson (2009) emphasise that Twitter has been used by citizens to obtain different goals such as conducting conversations about people's concerns about socially sensitive matters. Remarkably for Saudi society, both genders discussed Saudi women's participation in elections. Therefore, 'openness' was a measure that explained how free and safe Saudis felt to engage in discussion on Twitter.

5.2.3 Reciprocity

This section emphasizes the importance Twitter users attached to reciprocity, as evidenced in their interaction with each other's viewpoints (Graham and Witschge, 2003). Although most of the tweets did not receive replies, re-tweets or likes, this was unsurprising because women's political participation in Saudi Arabia is a sensitive issue politically and religiously. 79% of tweets in this sample did not receive replies, but there was a high level of interaction with the rest (171 tweets), and 54% of these tweets received more than two replies. Table 5.6 shows that 71% of tweets that were re-tweeted had more than two re-tweets although the majority of tweets (68%) were not re-tweeted. 73% of this sample (593 tweets) did not receive a like, but 66% of tweets that received likes got more than two (Table 5.7). The common characteristic of tweets that received replies, re-tweets and likes was the type of sender and the content. Tweets that were responded to were usually sent by clerics, activists in human rights or journalists active on Twitter. Moreover, the tweets that contained evidence tended to be re-tweeted, but tweets without evidence were not. This could indicate that Twitter users tended to trust or value tweets with evidence in particular (so they wanted the debate to be evidence-based). Moreover, Twitter users valued specific experts who criticised previous Saudi government decisions. Although the percentage of interaction was low, I believe that it contributed to increasing the quality of deliberation regarding this case study because it indicated the rationality of users when they interact with evidenced tweets or presented their opinions clearly instead of simply re-tweeting or liking other tweets.

Table 9: 5.4 Number of Replies

The number of replies	Frequency	Percent
No replies	640	79%
One reply received	78	9.6%
More than 2 replies	93	11.4%
Total	811	100%

Table 10: 5.5 Number of Re-tweets

The number of re-tweets	Frequency	Percent
No re-tweet	552	68%
One re-tweet	75	9%
More than 2 re-tweets	184	23%
Total	811	100%

Table 11: 5.6 Number of Likes

The number of likes	Frequency	Percent
No likes	593	73%
One like	74	9%
More than 2 likes	144	18%
Total	811	100%

5.2.4 Rationality and Respectfulness²⁵

This section emphasizes that the discussion about Saudi women's political participation in municipal elections was rational and respectful although some tweets presented a patriarchal and aggressive discourse against women. To identify what constituted a rational tweet a definition of what was meant by an irrational tweet was deemed to be: content which shows a lack of common sense or judgment. Thus, rational tweets should include respectful and clear opinions (which may be suggestions, recommendations, criticisms or any viewpoints), whether supported by justification/evidence or not. Graham and Witschge (2003) believe rational deliberation should use justifications to support claims by providing critical estimates which demonstrate the soundness of those claims. Therefore this study follows their recommendation by paying attention to these characteristics 17% of tweets in this case study included concrete evidence such as links to or quotes from religious texts (verdicts from the Holy book, the Prophet's *Hadith* or clerics' opinions) to comment on the Saudi government's decisions, which were also considered to indicate rationality.

Arguably, because respect is a precondition for serious and rational discussion, where participants are respectful towards counter-arguments, opinions and participators, tweets also had to include respectful content to be classified as rational. This study defined 'respectful' tweets as those that did not use any expressions offensive to any race or religion, and did not use language that was aggressive or derogatory. The analysis showed that 91% of tweets did not contain any impolite, aggressive or offensive content (see Table 5.4) thus were classed as 'respectful'. The 9% of disrespectful tweets included aggressive wording and some sarcastic comments, which used gender discriminatory language, as discussed in sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.3.

Respectfulness is a very important measure of the quality of deliberation about women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Powerful patriarchal groups, such as clerics and men with traditional values, have rejected even basic women's rights such as education during the last century. Any move towards greater gender equality is bound to upset these

²⁵Rationality and respectfulness are different elements of quality of deliberation, but they are combined here because respectfulness is described in this thesis as an element of rational content.

groups. If debate is respectful, there is a greater chance that all members of society feel that their views are being heard and that they can contribute to the wider common good. The collective of citizens may eventually work out a consensus.

Table 12: 5.7 Distribution of tweets according to respectfulness of contents

Respectfulness of Tweet	Frequency	Percent
Respectful	738	91%
Disrespectful	73	9%
Total	811	100%

Table 13: 5.8 Rationality of the debate

Level of Rationality	Frequency	Percent
Rational	667	82%
Irrational	144	18%
Total	811	100%

Table 14: 5.9 Distribution of tweets according to attachments

Type of Attachment	Frequency	Percent
Link	26	19%
Image	113	81%
Total	139	100%

Conclusion:

The results of the quantitative analysis show that three main topics dominated the discussion: social and religious values, civil rights and requesting action. Social and religious values and civil rights topics were the most common; and because they relate to the complicated and overlapping social and religious values in Saudi society, more details are given in the qualitative analysis to understand the Twitter users' perspectives regarding giving women their rights. Also, how users employed evidence, the sources of this evidence and any similarities and differences in the use of these sources between supporters and opponents of the law is considered. In addition, evaluations of women's ability to succeed is discussed to understand how Twitter users perceived Saudi women's position compared to that of other women in different contexts. Moreover, the topic of requesting action is addressed to understand who were considered responsible by Twitter users and exactly what those responsible were asked to do. Elements of good citizenship: connectedness, knowledge and interaction, are discussed in relation to these topics.

5.3 Qualitative Analysis of Tweets

The qualitative analysis attempts to provide a more in-depth understanding of the results of the quantitative phase by conducting a simple linguistic analysis that focuses on the elements of good citizenship such as connectedness and knowledge of the issue. The ways in which Twitter users feel connected with the wider community of Saudi citizens are evidenced in the ways in which they negotiate Islamic and Saudi values (see Chapter 2). Knowledge is evidenced in Twitter users' exchanges of information about social and religious values, but also information about the actions of government and clerics.

5.3.1 The Topic of Social and Religious Values

This section suggests that for many Twitter users, religion is an important guide for their understanding of women's role in society. In this hashtag, Twitter users addressed the topic of religious and social values 426 times. The majority of these tweets (66%) supported women's political participation – the rest were against this decision. Religion functions as a reference point and evidence to underpin arguments. Yet while these Twitter users agree on their importance, they disagree over the interpretation of Quranic texts.

5.3.1.1 Islamic Values

Supporters and opponents of the government decision regarding Saudi women's political participation depended on religious sources to support their arguments. Opponents of women's political participation referred to Quranic verses and the Prophet's *Hadiths* (sayings). An example is tweet 5.1, in which a male Twitter user argues that “a people will not succeed if led by women”, in accordance with what the Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him] says. Others cited the views of clerics who rejected women's political participation, such as the former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz bin Baz, Sheik Dr Mohammed Alaraifi (who has more than 20 million followers on Twitter), Sheikh Abdu-Alaziz Alturaifee (1 million followers), Sheikh Al-Abad, and

Sheikh Dr Al-Barak. Except the Grand Mufti, all these clerics have a strong media presence, which increases their influence among citizens.. Although Sheikh Dr Al-Barak`s followers on Twitter (350,000) are fewer than Sheik Dr Mohammed Alaraifi`s and Sheikh Abdu-Alaziz Alturaifee`s, the name of Al-Barak and the link to his opinion about women`s political participation was mentioned and re-tweeted 24 times in this sample. Al-Barak was interviewed on TV about the Islamic ruling on women`s political participation in the first week of the election, which may explain why opponents of the new law chose to share a clip of this interview on Twitter.

Moreover, opponents of the government decision regarding women`s political participation used different arguments, such as the belief that Saudi liberals and the West are using religious phrases, such as the phrase `According to Islamic laws`, in order to deceive clerics and to corrupt society (see tweet 5.2). Other Twitter users said this expression was a `dirty gate` (a dangerous ploy) which was being used to involve men in the work of women and women in the work of men, which is not compatible with Islam. However, abuse and discrimination against women is not condoned by Islam, and [study](#) such as [Wadud \(2009\)](#) notes that connecting the erosion of women`s rights to Muslim culture is a misconception.

Previous experiences of women`s political participation, such as their participation in the Saudi Parliament in 2013, were also cited by some Twitter users to strengthen their rejection of women`s political participation. For example, tweet 5.3, which was re-tweeted 204 times and received 13 replies and 39 likes, They claimed that employing women in women`s shops and women`s participation in Saudi Parliament are going to be under the Islamic laws, but this came under the CEDAW laws. They will be the same in the end. (CEDAW) laws that, in their view, aimed in reality to change the religious values of Saudi society. Using diverse religious evidence and different clerics` opinions, that Islam prohibited women from political participation, explained the extent to which Twitter users employed their knowledge, as well as displaying their connectedness to their society`s values, which increased the quality of deliberation and shows in how religious texts are being interpreted.

Figure 7: Tweet 5.1



Translation: The Prophet Mohammed [peace be upon him] says “a group will not be successful, if they give over the administration of their affairs to women”

Figure 8: Tweet 5.2



Translation: “According to Islamic laws”

Figure 9: Tweet 5.3



Translation: They claimed that employing women in women’s shops and women’s participation in Saudi Parliament are going to be under the Islamic laws, but this came under the CEDAW laws. They will be the same in the end.²⁶

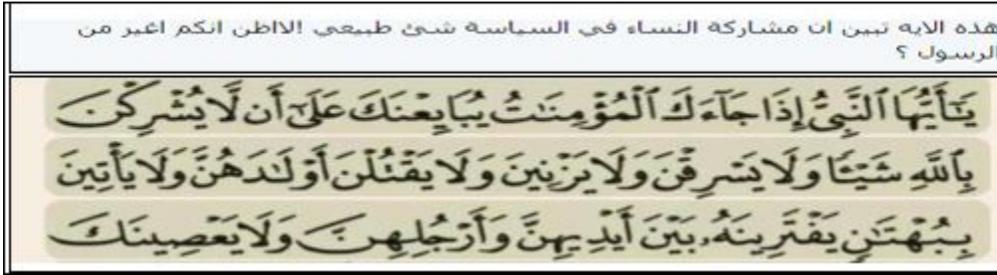
²⁶ This Twitter user implied that CEDAW, with its demand for gender equality, was a Western plan to destroy Saudi society’s Islamic and social values. According to this Twitter user, the plan would succeed despite the Saudi government having rejected any term of CEDAW that was not compatible with Islamic regulation (Makkahnewpaper, 2017).

Twitter users who supported the government's decision argued that Islam does not prohibit women from participating in the political field or from doing any type of job, and therefore also used religious evidence such as Quranic verses and the Prophet's *Hadiths*. For example, tweets such as 5.4 and 5.5 mentioned that the Holy Book does not have any verse prohibiting women from working in politics, "I don't think you are more *ghayra*²⁷ of the Prophet". Also, some tweets mentioned "previous mothers of the faithful" (the Prophet Mohammed's wives, peace be upon him) who participated as counsellors for Muslims. Other tweets cited verses in the Quran which used different examples of women who played roles in political life such as the *Yemenian* Queen of Sheba (tweets 5.6 and 5.7). These examples were used to emphasise that the Islamic religion does not prohibit women from participation in political work. Another tweet (5.8) emphasised that the problem had more to do with the interpretation of the *Qur'an's* verses, and the conservatives were just trying to prohibit women's participation in this election.

These debates about religion are closely tied to the role of patriarchy in Saudi society. Rajkhan (2014) emphasises that in some cases, some conservatives interpret religious texts literally. He adds that religious thought has become a weapon in the hands of Saudi women to claim their rights by studying these texts in depth to use them to support women's rights. Tweet 5.9 indicated that opposing women's participation does not defend Islamic values but simply attempts to preserve their miserable heritage. The debate around the influence of patriarchy is explored in more depth in the next section.

²⁷ There is no single English word that captures the meaning of "Ghayra" which describes a male's awareness of, or emotional concern for, the chastity of his female relatives. Ghayra here refers to something which is considered a positive characteristic in Muslim society and in particular in Saudi Arabia: the desire of a man (Father, uncle, brother, and even cousin) to protect the "honor" of their female relatives which may include issues of "chastity".

Figure 10: Tweet 5.4



Translation: This verse does not prohibit women from working in politics. I do not think you are more *ghayra* than the prophet of Allah (peace upon him).

Figure 11: Tweet 5.5



Translation: In the era of Prophet Mohammed [peace upon him] there were great women participating in consultation and wars.

Figure 12: Tweet 5.6



Translation: In the Quran (I found a woman who ruled and she was given everything and had a great throne).

Figure 13: Tweet 5.7

#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية
بلقيس ملكة سبأ امتدحها الله وقال اتيناها م كل شئ
فمن حقها تتعين ف اي شئ وكل شئ ماعدا ان تكون نبيه او رسول

Translation: God praised the Queen of Sheba and said: "We have given her all things. So, it is her right to be appointed in all things."

Figure 14: Tweet 5.8

#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية
=البعض يلوح بحديث "ما أفلح قوم .."
كالعادة يحيون توظيف النص وفق هواهم 😞
تفضل 🙏 سلسلة

Translation: Some Twitter users indicate to Prophet's saying (a group will not be successful.....²⁸). As usual, they like to employ religious texts as they want.

Figure 15: Tweet 5.9

#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية
هؤلاء لا يدافعون عن الدين هم يدافعون عن ذكورية المجتمع و الموروث الباس !

Translation: Opposing women's participation does not defend Islamic values but simply attempts to preserve their miserable heritage (mentioned in section 3).

²⁸ The complete sentence, omitted here by the tweet's sender "if they give over the administration of their affairs to women"

5.3.1.2 Social Values

The analysis of this deliberation confirms that even when someone supports women's political participation, there is still something in their tweets that places women below men in the social hierarchy; and that they critically discuss Western values (Saudi Arabia in relation to 'The West'). Al-Rasheed (2013) describes Saudi Arabia as the most patriarchal state in the world where women's exclusion is deeply rooted in society's culture. She adds that men occupy most paid jobs although the Saudi government has promoted employment and educational opportunities for women (see Chapter 2). Government attempts to grant women basic civil rights are in tension with established social values, such as segregation between genders and giving women roles other than domestic ones which are defended by conservative groups in society. Some Twitter users directly addressed this issue. According to tweet 5.10, for example, King Salman would give Saudi women their rights inside a community that did not admit their rights.

Figure 16: Tweet 5.10



Translation: King Salman tries to give Saudi women their rights in a society that refuses to **recognise** their rights.

Montagu (2010) says that women's issues are always an indicator of Saudi society's adherence to its customs and traditions. Although women's issues are very sensitive in Saudi society, Saudi citizens have started to discuss them on social media, which may show that patriarchal social values are being discussed in Saudi society, and that citizens have a strong desire to discuss the role of those values in denying women their rights. Attempts to legitimise the restriction of women's rights with references to these values therefore no longer go unchallenged. However, Saudi social values undoubtedly play a crucial role in the Saudi government's relationship with its citizens. The government is careful not to challenge these values head on, and to this date they remain enshrined in law. Saudi Arabia's tenth term of basic law of governance

emphasises the importance of protecting Arab and Saudi society's values in Saudi families (Bureau of Experts, 1992).

Some opponents of women's political participation support their arguments with references to religion and social values and the Basic Law of Governance. However, the main reason for denying women their rights was not Islam, according to one Saudi royal. In a media conference about Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision of an Economic Future, Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman answered foreign journalists' questions about whether the Saudi government intended to allow women to drive (Albaha, 2016). His answer was very clear when he said that this was not a religious matter, but a traditional matter. Saudi society has the ability to decide, and according to Tirnoveanu, 2015 (p.47):

“With regards to religion as a key factor in shaping gender roles in Saudi society, it is not necessarily a given fact that it dictates a discriminatory or negative behaviour towards women. In fact, there are many references in the *Qur'an* to strong female role models that lead and have powerful statements to make. The gender gap is a consequence of the nomadic and tribal culture that underpins Arabian history.”

Patriarchal and religious arguments are a powerful way that were used by those who oppose women's political participation to put pressure on the government. According to Bukhari (2011, p1), Islam and patriarchal tribal family structure give legitimacy to the ruling family.

References to social values were a recurring theme across the sample. Opponents of women's political participation placed these values at the heart of Saudi identity with Western values as its 'Other'. This group opposed the idea of women being taken out of their domestic roles and considered it a corruption of Saudi identity and an implementation of Western plans. This group presented the CEDAW agreement as a proof of the Western attempt to destroy Saudi social values, because this agreement gives women their rights and makes them equal to men in everything, which they believe is not compatible with Saudi values, as it may threaten gender segregation. This result chimes with the results of Almahmoud's study (2015), which emphasises that clerics and

conservative men believed that the campaign to support women's right to drive in 2013 was a Western conspiracy. Many tweets in this group warned of a Western threat to Saudi women. Invoking a key theme of patriarchal discourse, they referred to Saudi women's bodies as the property of Saudi men (e.g. tweets 5.11, 5.12, and 5. 13).

Figure 17: Tweet 5.11

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is: "#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية الليبراليين لا تهمهم الإختخابات البلدية ما يهمهم هو إخراج المرأة من بيتها وإفسادها ورميها بين الرجال ."

Translation: Liberals do not care about women's rights; their concern is how to take the woman out of her house.

Figure 18: Tweet 5.12

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is: "ليس #الهدف من إدخال #المرأة في مجالس البلدية النظر لرأيها؟؟ وإنما الهدف النظر لجسدها ... #خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية"

Translation: The aim of engaging women in election is not for their opinions, but for their bodies.

Figure 19: Tweet 5.13

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is: "#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية أنهم لا يريدون أنتخاب المرأة يريدون الوصول الى المرأة"

Translation: **They do not want to elect women**; they just want access to the women²⁹.

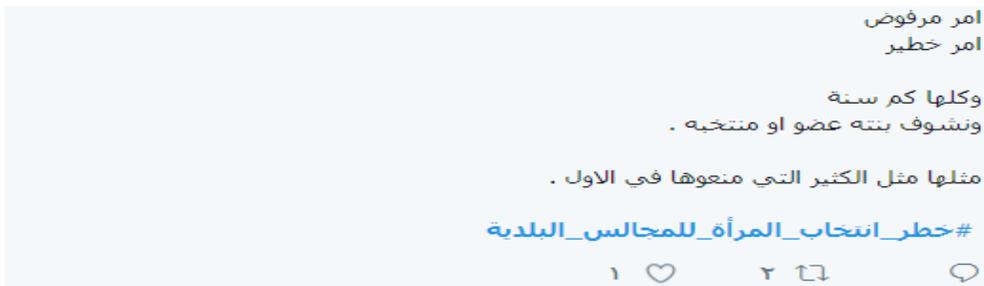
²⁹ According to this Twitter user supporters of women's rights are not motivated by an interest in gender equality, but their sexual desires.

Supporters of women's political participation highlighted how ingrained these patriarchal statements are in Saudi public discourse and how previous generations had mobilised them in order to oppose women's rights as well as emphasizing the importance of challenging patriarchy to improve Saudi society. Supporters suggested that opponents would soon forget their objections and would even encourage their wives and daughters to participate in future elections, as had been shown by past experiences (tweet 5.14). Also, they ridiculed opponents' views as 'old-fashioned' by suggesting that it had been them who had previously rejected not only women's education, but also TV, satellites and Smartphones (5.15). Other Twitter users in this group (e.g. tweet 5.16) expressed surprise at the contradictory attitudes by some of first group toward women's participation in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, thereby highlighting how women's political participation is compatible with Muslim values:

"In Turkey, political participation is presented as part of being a good Muslim woman, but in Saudi Arabia it is portrayed as Westernization and seditious".

There was serious controversy over the effects on Saudi society of giving women the right to participate in municipal elections as both voters and candidates. One faction saw this as an example of 'Westernisation' which would strike deeply at the heart of traditional Saudi values and way of life, the other saw it as an opportunity for Saudi women to become active participants in civic life, which would benefit rather undermine Saudi society. The next section explores the arguments about women's social and political roles and how Saudi Arabia compared to other countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim in this respect.

Figure 20: Tweet 5.14



Translation: Rejected as a dangerous issue, but after some years we are going to see their daughters and wives as members or candidates, similar to what they have done before.

Figure 21: Tweet 5.15



Translation; No danger, the danger is negative minds that prohibited women's education and satellites a few decades ago.

Figure 22: Tweet 5.16



Translation: In Turkey political participation is presented as part of being a good Muslim woman, but in Saudi Arabia it is portrayed as Westernization and seditious.

5.3.2 The Topic of the Civil Rights of Women and Their Ability to Succeed

This section shows the high quality of deliberation attained through the diversity of topics and arguments that discussed women`s rights to political participation; and also demonstrates that the issue of democratization emerged.

One group of tweets discussed women`s political rights as citizens and confirmed women`s success in various places around the world, which may reflect a desire to see Saudi Arabia to be closer to West regarding women`s political participation, because many women have demonstrated their ability to succeed in positions of political leadership. They varied in their argument from highlighting the success of women in developed democratic countries such as Germany, the UK and the USA as well as those in developing countries. Tweet 5.17 mentioned that German Chancellor Angela Merkel has led one of strongest economic systems in the world for several years, that Hillary Clinton was the first lady of the USA from 1993 to 2001 and gave some other examples of successful women in different scientific fields.

Arguably, Twitter users also discussed the positioning of Saudi Arabia in relationship to the West regarding women`s political participation. The first group who supports women`s rights with these examples are not suggesting that Saudi Arabia should be the same as Germany or the U.S.A, but are merely holding these up as examples of women`s ability to participate in political activities. This may also imply that they think that not everything in Western society is bad. Other Twitter users have chosen examples of successful Muslim women; as they believed these to be more acceptable to a conservative society where some members reject any Western model. So, they showed that Muslim women could succeed in their work, even if these countries had secular political systems, such as Turkey. For example, tweet 5.18 pointed out the first and second Turkish Muslim veiled women who became presidents of municipal councils. Other Twitter users went beyond that by suggesting that Saudi women have the ability to succeed because they had successfully completed their studies abroad, before go back to Saudi Arabia. This however did not mean they were denying the social and religious

values of their society. Tweets 5.19 and 5.20 included pictures of successful Saudi women who have received scientific awards for their excellence in different fields in the U.S.A and Australia; which may indicate ideas about women's ability to succeed in different fields of work.

Figure 23: Tweet 5.17



Translation: My brother the presidents of Chile, Croatia, Argentina, Germany and Britain are women. ○
People!! To what extent this situation will be continued (we did not accept women at responsible positions).

Figure 24: Tweet 5.18



Translation: ○ my brothers you should treat Saudi women like you treat Turkish women (who became successful presidents of municipal councils).

Figure 25: Tweet 5.19



Translation: If those successful Saudi women are dangerous, we welcome this danger.

Figure 26: Tweet 5.20



Translation: Saudi woman has desires and abilities, and she is not a danger.

There were a range of arguments that defended patriarchal values and rejected democratising Saudi Arabia by giving women their rights, however, those opinions showed to what extent the deliberation was diverse. This group of tweets included scepticism about Saudi women succeeding in public jobs. One tweet stated that even if Saudi women had success in scientific and educational fields, this did not mean they could participate in Saudi municipal elections, because the role of women was not commensurate with the nature of the work of municipalities. I thought that they referring to women who worked in municipalities having to visit public places, which would be controversial. For example, when visiting public places, women would be with a team from the municipal council that included both men and women, and they would discuss and make suggestions together in those places. These actions are largely not acceptable in Saudi society according to traditional social values and some debated Islamic regulations (see section 5.3.1).

In contrast, another group suggested that Western countries are no suitable model for women's rights as women in many developed and developing countries do not have equal rights . This group gave this as a reason to keep Saudi women away from political participation. According to Ross (2008) Chile, Russia, and Nigeria are classified as developed and developing countries, but the women there are not equal to men in political and social participation. Some Saudi citizens may well be cynical about the West being a model of women's emancipation; Pratt (2016) notes that some Western governments have supported Arab governments that have done little to emancipate women, and that Arab women who want equal rights are often unfairly accused of supporting the West even though they may not agree with the West's political agendas.

Interestingly, 60% of tweets that criticised the fears about Saudi women's participation were sent by men, under their real names. This percentage may indicate

how Saudi society has changed, in particular that some Saudi men are beginning to publicly support women's rights. Saudi women in this sample seemed more cautious. Saudi women who supported women's political participation used sarcastic comments more often than men to criticise patriarchal attitudes in Saudi Arabia. In these tweets, women proposed solutions to 'protect' Saudi society from 'dangerous' women. Sarcasm allows them to be critical of Saudi society, but without appearing to challenge head-on the patriarchal system which they still experience as very powerful (Alshree, 2014).

Although no one asked for a Western-style democracy directly, these tweets clearly showed a desire for more democracy and it seems they wanted a version that fits with Saudi values. The topic of civil rights for women indicated three aspects which need to be considered: Firstly, over the last few years the Saudi government has started giving women some of their basic political rights. For example, in 2007 the Saudi Parliament employed six women as part-time consultants on family issues; and King Abdallah issued a royal order to appoint 30 Saudi women as Saudi MPs with full authority and equality to male MPs, as well as Saudi women being allowed for the first time to participate as candidates and voters in the municipal election of 2015 (Shaban, 2015). Secondly, many examples of Muslim women's activities in other Muslim societies, which were mentioned in tweets, emphasised that there is nothing related to religion which prohibits women from participating in developing their communities. Traditional social values seem to be the main reason behind rejecting women's participation in social and political life. Thirdly, a feeling of change in Saudi attitudes to women's political participation may be reflected in the high proportion of Twitter users who supported Saudi women's participation in municipal elections, including many of the 63% men who used this hashtag. Nevertheless, women used sarcasm to avoid engaging in direct clashes with extreme users, which could lead to unexpected consequences such as accusations of being disrespectful and affronting their families' customs and traditions. Furthermore, the desire to have Saudi women participate politically on a par with men is not the same as calling for Saudi Arabia to adopt a Western-style democracy. Given that many Saudi women are

now highly educated and there is a policy of 'Saudization', many Saudis see that it makes economic sense to allow women to take on roles in public life.

Both perspectives, however, demonstrated Twitter users' knowledge and a diversity of opinions about women's political participation and their ability to succeed as political leaders. Moreover, giving Saudi women's rights will lead to democratising the society without damaging its social and religious values. I believe that Twitter users opposed to the opinion that exaggerated of the risk of women's participation in political activities on Saudi values.

5.3.3 The Topic of Requesting Action by Government, Clerics and Citizens

This section discusses the diversity of perspectives and demands which demonstrates that Twitter users actively demanded that powerful groups in Saudi Arabia (the Royal Family, the government and clerics) take action against or protect Saudi women's political participation in municipal elections in 2015. Frequently recurring topics about women's political and social rights in this debate gave rise to tweets blaming those responsible and exchanging different ideas about the best ways to give Saudi women their rights or to avoid the negative consequences of doing so. Only 9% of tweets in this sample fall under the topic of requesting actions, which is very low compared with the other two main topics (social and religious values and women's civilian rights). Twitter users on this hashtag focused on presenting their views and exchanging ideas with others. Only rarely did they request action by powerful Saudi groups. Analyzing this 9% of tweets was worth doing because of the kinds of topics that were discussed. It was also interesting to see who Twitter users saw as responsible for taking action, such as the Saudi government, religious official organizations or individuals.

Firstly, the Saudi government received demands from both supporters and opponents of women's political participation in municipal elections. Each group provided their arguments and justifications, which is a sign of diversity of attitudes and ideas, and an indicator of how Twitter debates were rational because of using different justifications. This was not the first time citizens used social media to demand government action.

Al-Saggaf and Simmons (2015) assert that Saudi social media users who discussed the natural disaster of Jeddah 2009 included both defenders of the government and others who blamed Saudi government organisations. Similarly, some of the supporters' tweets in this case study requested that the Saudi government take action to give Saudi women their rights as Saudi citizens (tweet 5.21). In contrast, other tweets requested the Saudi government, particularly the Royal Family, to protect Saudi values. An example of this is tweet (5.22): "We all trust the King of Saudi Arabia and the Crown Prince, to restrict this danger because they are religious men". Thus, trust in royal family members' regard for Islamic law meant they were perceived as having the responsibility to protect Saudi social values. Noticeably, Twitter users who demanded that the government did something were also those whose statements were usually patriarchal and rejected Saudi women's rights in order to reinforce religious and social values in Saudi society. These different arguments are considered as an evidence of a shift in the government/citizen relationship.

Figure 27: Tweet 5.21



Translation: Because women are Saudi citizens who are subject to the law, they have the right to participate in making these laws in any field.

Figure 28: Tweet 5.22



Translation: We all trust the King of Saudi Arabia and the Crown Prince, to restrict this danger because they are religious men.

Secondly, Saudi clerics are considered to be influential in Saudi society, so Twitter users requested that they play an effective role in convincing the Saudi government to cancel women's political participation in municipal elections. So this deliberation on Twitter affirmed the traditional role of clerics, but it also facilitated political engagement.

Citizens tried to engage powerful groups in debate, such as the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta, the official religious organization, along with some influential clerics who are active on Twitter. Some tweets focused on the crucial role played by clerics in Saudi society. They demanded that the General Presidency of Scholarly Research, Ifta and influential clerics move to protect Islamic law through advising the Saudi government. Van Diemen (2012) confirms that Islam plays a crucial role in both Saudi foreign policy decisions and in internal affairs policy-making; clerics' view therefore matter to the Saudi government and citizens. These include Dr Almisned and Dr Albraak, academics in religious studies departments in Saudi universities, as well as Twitter users such as Drs Alareefi and Alturaifi who have millions of followers. Twitter users usually like to quote these last two clerics' opinions because they are active on Twitter more than other clerics and present their criticism and recommendations to the Saudi government regarding women's issues. For example, tweets 5.23 and 5.24 called on religious men to explain the dangers and consequences of women's participation in this election for citizens and the political system; as women's participation could be considered as the first steps to Westernize Saudi society.

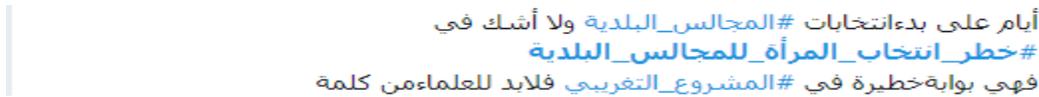
Figure 29: Tweet 5.23



#باعلماءنا_كفى_صمتا_ولتعلوا_أصواتكم_ضد_هذه_الزمرة_الفاسدة_التي_تعيب_بثواب_المجتمع_وقيمه_ .
#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية

Translation: To our clerics: It is enough to be silent. You have to raise your voices against this corrupt group who manipulate by established values of society.

Figure 30: Tweet 5.24



أيام_على_بدء_انتخابات_#المجالس_البلدية_ولا_أشك_في_#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية_فهي_بوابة_خطيرة_في_#المشروع_التغريبي_فلايد_للعلماء_من_كلمة

Translation: Some days to the start of the election. I do not doubt its negative impacts. It is the gate that is wide open to Westernization. So, the clerics should act.

This demonstrates again how opponents of women's political participation imagine the identity of Saudi society as unique and non-Western because of its religious and social values. It also shows how Twitter is a space where the central role of clerics in Saudi society is being confirmed. However, rather than simply citing clerics' views, opponents of women's political participation engaged in discussion with clerics and demanded that they take action. This result supports Alswaid`s argument (2016) which suggested that Twitter connected Saudi citizens with clerics. While they might not wish to see women to be part of political change, the conservatives among the Twitter users in this sample nevertheless are part of an important shift in Saudi society. There is some evidence to suggest that a form of dialogue between citizens and powerful religious elites is emerging.

Thirdly, the political deliberation on Twitter showed how Saudi citizens (men) feel connected to their fellow citizens (women). Men argued for women`s rights as citizens and publicly supported them although their support may be inappropriate according to established social values in society. For example tweet (5.25) argued that Saudi women are citizens and should receive their rights easily. It emphasized that women should not been required to protest or plead their rights from government or Saudi men. Moreover, some Twitter users called upon men and women in Saudi Arabia to actively engage in the political process. But there are also many who reject women`s political participation because women`s previous political participation so far has not been successful (tweets 5.26 and 5.27).

In addition, some Twitter users such as tweet 5.28 directly blamed the women who had participated as members of the Saudi Parliament, because they had not served the community, had not participated in debates or made more of an effort than the men had done in the past. Other Twitter users, both men and women, suggested that it was the responsibility of Saudi women to make women's political participation a success by actively engaging in the formal political process. This opinion seems unfair because women, as citizens, should receive their rights equally with men in society and no one should connect their rights with their success or failure in political participation. Such unfair arguments show that women still need a lot of support at official and popular level in order to achieve their rights. Arguably, the reason that women might not have enjoyed

the experience of standing for election in the 2015 municipal elections was that it was not easy for them. Alswaid (2016) notes that despite only 21 female candidates being elected, (865 women had stood out of a total number of 6,000 candidates), and this was an example of Saudi women's determination as they had overcome substantial barriers in order to stand. Not least of these were the stringent rules that restricted their campaigning. **Female candidates were forbidden to directly address male voters which forced them to appoint male agents to represent them in front of male voters**; the penalty for disobeying this ruling was 100,000SR. Further, female candidates could not obtain lists of registered voters nor put pictures of themselves on campaign posters. Some clerics opposed their nominations vociferously and Abdulrahman Al Barrak issued a fatwa prohibiting women from standing for election or voting and men from voting for female candidates (ibid).

Figure 31: Tweet 5.25

النساء السعوديات مواطنات لذا يجب أن يحصلن على حقوقهن بسلاسة. لا ينبغي أن يُطلب منهم الاحتجاج أو المطالبة بحقوقهن من الحكومة أو من الرجال السعوديين.

Translation: Saudi women are citizens therefore they should receive their rights easily. They should not be asked to protest or plead their rights from government or Saudi men.

Figure 32: Tweet 5.26

إ ادري ماهي الفائدة من المجالس البلدية . لم نرى لها اية دور في تطوير البلد
#خطرانتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية

Translations: I don't know what is the benefits of Municipal councils ? They did not achieve any benefits for Saudi Arabia.

Figure 33: Tweet 5.27

اصلاً المجالس البلدية ومجلس الشورى مناصب تشريعية لاتحل ولا تربط مايفرق يكون العضو فيها رجل او امرأه

Translations: Originally, the municipal councils and the Shura Council hold honourable positions that do not have any influential role. No difference if the member of Shura Council is a man or a woman.

Figure 34: Tweet 5.28

#خطرانتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية : ماذا قدمت المرأة في مجلس الشورى لتكون في مجالس البلدية .. منذ دخولها الشورى مارأينا أي تميز بل العكس .

Translation: What did Saudi women do in Shura council to be in municipal election? We did not see any distinguish but on the contrary.

5.3.4 The Relationship between The Saudi Government and Citizens

This section argues that there has been a change in the relationship between the Saudi government and Twitter users; as social media platforms, particularly Twitter, has enabled Saudi citizens to make demands and criticise the Saudi government and officials, something they could not have done in traditional media. However, on this hashtag those demands did not receive any interaction from the government; which is contrary to Mohammad (2018) who found that social media offer citizens the opportunity to engage in political discussion with government officials, even if that has limited influence. Al-Rakaf (2012) says ordinary citizens in Saudi Arabia cannot criticise Saudi government policies, but Twitter gives them a useful space to express their opinions about them. Twitter users in this sample criticised efforts by the king of Saudi Arabia and the official religious organisation regarding the first women's political participation in municipal elections in 2015. 59 tweets included direct and indirect criticism of the Saudi political system and organisations. According to Murphy (2012a), the Saudi government does not tolerate those who ignore its edicts or criticise its decisions and causes them to be silenced. However, tweet 5.29 suggested something different: that king Salman is very strict about everything except women's issues, which he leaves to liberals to misguide women. Moreover, this tweet (5.30) also blamed some powerful institutions such as the clerics for their ambiguous attitudes to this issue, saying:

“Our clerics your silence until now is enough, you have to raise your voice against the corrupt faction that is destroying the values of society”.

The other 43 tweets included direct criticism of the government of Saudi Arabia, but all these tweets criticised the government in general without naming those responsible. Twitter users usually criticise others directly through naming them or commenting on their opinions, but here they may have preferred to criticise government organisations generally, instead of mentioning some of them personally, because they did not know which of those responsible deserved criticisms, or possibly to avoid unexpected conflicts with them. For example, Saudi Arabia's continued efforts to satisfy Western countries at the expense of Islamic Law in the case of women's issues were mentioned (tweets 5.31 and 5.32). These tweets may be referring to the CEDAW

Convention. However, Saudi Arabia was also blamed for its role in the suppression of women by the *Wahhabi* approach, which establishes gender discrimination (tweet 5.33). This result confirmed to what extent Saudi citizens became able not just to demand their basic rights, but also to criticise the political leaders, which showed the importance of the role of discussion on Twitter.

Figure 35: Tweet 5.29

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is: "#سلمان_الحزم في كل شئ إلا عند المرأة فهو أمر متروك للعلمانيين يعبثون بالنساء !!!". The text is in black on a white background.

Translation: King Salman is decisive with everything except women's issues which he leaves to the liberals.

Figure 36: Tweet 5.30

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is: "#باعلماءنا كفى صمتا وتعلوا اصواتكم ضد هذه الزمرة الفاسدة التي تعبت بثوابت المجتمع وقيمه . #خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية". The text is in black on a white background.

Translation: Our clerics, your voice must be raised against those who corrupt society's values.

Figure 37: Tweet 5.31

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is: "#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية السعودية لا زالت تسعى جاهدة لإرضاء الغرب الصليبي الكافر !". The text is in black on a white background.

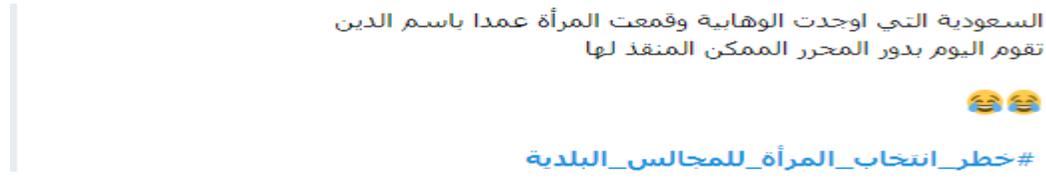
Translation: Saudi Arabia tries to satisfy Western countries.

Figure 38: Tweet 5.32

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is: "#خطر_انتخاب_المرأة_للمجالس_البلدية السعودية تطبق الشريعة !! ولكن عندما يشتهي الصليبي الكافر النظر للمرأة السعودية فهناك تسهيلات من الربيع!". The text is in black on a white background.

Translation: Saudi Arabia employs Islamic regulations!! **But when the unbeliever Crusader craves** to see Saudi women this is facilitated for them.

Figure 39: Tweet 5.33



Translation: Saudi Arabia, which created *Wahhabism* which suppressed women, tries to free women.

5.4 Twitter Analysis-Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative analyses of tweets demonstrated a high level of diversity, openness, relevance, interaction, respectfulness and rationality in the discussion on Saudi women`s political participation in municipal elections in 2015. Twitter users showed their connectedness to Saudi social and religious values which motivated them to demand that powerful elites (Royal family and official religious institution) protected those values. These demands exemplified the patriarchal attitudes and language that typify this conservative society. Those demands confirmed a change in the citizens` deferential relationship to clerics and the royal family when these were criticised for tolerating the `Western conspiracy` to undermine traditional Saudi values. In contrast, other Twitter users pointed out that giving women equal rights to participate as citizens would be in keeping with Saudi and Islamic values. Supporters and opponents in this case used evidence from the same sources: the *Qur`an*, the *Hadith* and clerics` perspectives, which showed how Twitter users adhered to the Islamic religion. Therefore, the interview section focused on gaining a deeper understanding of these results and to answer the research questions by focussing on the interviewees` perspectives regarding the importance of diversity and the influence of Saudi social and religious values on the quality of deliberation.

The absence of Saudi government organisations` and media agencies` participation in this hashtag was notable, and interviewees were also asked about this as well as issues such as censorship and self-censorship, online abuse against women and how they perceived that debates such as this one had impacted on the relationship between Saudi citizens and powerful elites.

5.5 The Interviews

The aim of interviews was to explore the following questions:

- What are the motivations that encouraged Twitter users to engage in debate about women's political participation in municipal elections in 2015?
- To what extent is the debate on Twitter considered an appropriate place which allows Saudis to discuss the sensitive issues of their society such as Saudi women's political participation in municipal elections in 2015?
- To what extent and how does the debate on Twitter empower Twitter users to criticise government organisations' efforts regarding Saudi women's political participation in municipal elections?
- What are the crucial factors that influence the quality of deliberation when Twitter users debate Saudi women's political participation in municipal elections?
- How do Twitter users evaluate the discussion on Twitter about sensitive issues, and what do they think the quality of deliberation on Twitter will be in the future?

Table 15: 5.10: Interview sample of nine Twitter users who used this hashtag

	Name ³⁰	Education	Position/Job	Gender	Followers
1	WWU1	Masters	Employee in the private sector	Woman	19,482 ³¹
2	WWU2	PhD	Saudi Parliament Member	Woman	Hidden ³²
3	WWU3	Bachelor	Housewife	Woman	68,801
4	WMU1	Bachelor	Government employee	Man	11,018
5	WMU2	High school	Student	Man	65,443
6	WMU3	Bachelor	Engineer in the government sector	Man	241,000
7	WMU4	PhD candidate	Cleric and teacher at a government school	Man	65,110
8	WMU5	Masters	Counsellor in the education sector	Man	60,258
9	WMU6	Masters	Employee in the private sector	Man	34,020

5.5.1 Motivations to Engage in Debate about Women’s Rights on Twitter

The diversity of participants, which included men and women as well as media organisations, and their different perspectives about women’s political participation were crucial factors that enticed Twitter users to engage in discussion. The interviewees saw Twitter’s deliberations as an opportunity to have a mainly respectful and informed debate with members of the opposite gender about Saudi women’s rights with diverse participants with a range of opinions. This is consistent with findings by Alswaeed (2015), where 80% of his sample suggested the participation of men and women in debate strongly motivated citizens to use Twitter. Firstly, all the interviewees considered public debate about Saudi women’s rights, in particular the social and religious values that would restrict Saudi women’s participation in municipal elections, to be very important. The consensus was that after the creation of Twitter and other social media platforms, Saudis were arguably able to breathe more freely, and could express their opinions more than in previous decades which explained why Saudi citizens felt motivated to participate in

³⁰ WWU the first letter stands for either Woman or Man, the second letter (W) refers to the topic (Women’s political participation), and U refers to ‘User of Twitter’.

³¹ The number of followers was recorded immediately after analyzing data and identifying active Twitter users.

³² The number of followers is hidden for security reasons.

discussions (Almalki, 2016). One of the female interviewees WWU1, who had been writing in different Saudi journals since 1985, provided precise justification for her view that Twitter had enabled Saudi citizens such as herself to communicate opinions that could not be presented in newspapers and television:

“This is because the gatekeepers in these agencies prohibited the criticism of traditional values and certain officials, as well as prohibiting the discussion of ambiguous Islamic values related to women’s rights. These criticisms were impossible in the age of traditional media because the government did not allow citizens to criticize the royal family or official religious organizations.”

According to the general media policy on Saudi Media (The Ministry of Media, 2018), articles 9 and 10 state that the content of a media platform must be appropriate, and respect other people and government organisations such as the official religious organisation, and these strict regulations explain why some Saudis were turning to social media such as Twitter to express criticisms. Although the interviewee is right in saying that the Saudi government does not have the same direct control over Twitter as it has over traditional Saudi owned media, such as newspapers and television, it nevertheless seeks to oversee and manage what Saudi citizens post online. Three of the other interviewees, however, said that even if the Saudi government cannot play the role of gate-keeper directly (mentioned in Chapter 2), it has issued some regulations to control the content on social media platforms. The somewhat vague stipulation that social media content must not insult ‘Saudi and Islamic values’ does limit freedom of expression; as violations of this rule may lead to severe punishment. As it is very difficult to know exactly what kind of content is prohibited, Twitter users are very careful and self-censor.

The interviewees mentioned various reasons which explained the absence of media agencies from participation in this discussion; therefore that absence of the real role of those agencies impacted on the quality of deliberation.

MWC6 connected the absence of media agencies and government organisations from participation in this hashtag to the general Saudi media policy and other government regulations which limit their freedom. Moreover, WMU1 linked the absence of media

agencies from engaging in discussions about this issue to the name of hashtag which indicates rejection of the law. WWU3 said Saudi media agencies usually do not like to engage in discussion in controversial issues which may cause them to lose their audiences, because some Saudi citizens do not accept opinions which oppose their perspectives about women's issues. On the other hand, all the interviewees were surprised by the absence of Saudi official organisations from participation in the hashtag because these organisations arguably have the function of increasing citizens' awareness. WWU2 went further to explain the absence of media agencies or government organisations from the discussion; and suggested:

“Media agencies have conducted media campaigns for several years to increase social awareness regarding the benefits of Saudi women participating in life. So, those media channels and newspapers thought it was better not to stir up controversy during the elections”

WMU3 agreed with her opinion and added that government organisations did not participate in the debate because:

“Those organisations have official accounts and speakers on social media to communicate with people, therefore these organisations do not need to engage in this hashtag”

However, if official organisations were to participate in public debates that discuss public interest issues to answer citizens' enquiries and meet their demands in terms of carrying out their duties, their public participation on social media may influence participants' attitudes and their beliefs. Moreover, the participation of government organisations would add validity to the information people discuss by confirming or denying it. On the other hand, WWU2 and WMU3 made sound points regarding the absence of media agencies and official organisations in the discussion, as my preliminary investigations of some popular private and government newspapers and T.V programs

that discussed Saudi women`s political participation³³ revealed they had run media campaigns in the last few years before the election(Appendix2).

Secondly, the equality between all Twitter users was considered a crucial motivation that enticed users to engage in debate. Seven interviewees believed that on social media platforms such as Twitter, clerics and ordinary people debated as equals, especially when it came to the topic of women`s rights. Murphy (2012a) confirms that Saudis have become more able to formulate their own opinions, especially about what is allowed by their religion, instead of just following the opinions of clerics appointed by the Saudi government. The BBC emphasised that Twitter helps citizens in Saudi Arabia to say online what they cannot say offline because it is available to both rich and poor people, the king`s family and ordinary people (cited in Noman et al., 2015, p.2). According to WWU2:

“No one could have imagined that Saudi women would engage in discussion with clerics equally and publicly.”

Another female interviewee (WWC3) mentioned that:

“In the past, we as women wished just to talk to ordinary men on media platforms; but nowadays I am able to comment on clerics` tweets and even reject some of them as I have a different opinion”

These two female interviewees have a lot of experience as they attended many business meetings with men in different countries over the last 20 years, because of the nature of their jobs. So, they had the confidence to express the truth about the difficult circumstances that restricted women`s freedom for decades. However, WMC5 and WMC6 had a different opinion. While they agreed that Twitter could help overcome social and religious restrictions and facilitate the dissemination of citizens` opinions and allow

³³ I investigated a range of newspaper and some common T.V media campaigns from 2001 to 2015.

communication with others, they suggested that Twitter does not guarantee equality. Arguably, these two interviewees are men and had a different opinion from women because they have not suffered from discrimination on the internet and had lived in Western countries for several years. They had used social media in these countries and had noticed how people had freedom of expression on media platforms and other public spaces. This may have led them to be more cautious when assessing the extent to which Twitter provided a space where all Saudis are free and equal. These two interviewees offered their own definition of equality on Twitter. They suggested that for Saudi citizens, equality on Twitter should mean listening to others and respecting their views; but it also meant talking respectfully and avoiding government punishment by not challenging clerics' opinions.

Other interviewees had also noticed some of the ways in which equality and respect are limited on Twitter. For example, WMU4 criticised the quality of the debate on this hashtag because of some extreme and disrespectful content, especially against women. He believed this discussion was ultimately irrational because the conversation was controlled by some clerics and their extreme followers. All three female interviewees WWU1, WWU2, and WWU3 confirmed that and they believed that the conversation included rude, insulting and defamatory words against women, demonstrating that Saudi society was patriarchal. Chaudhry (2014) notes that some insulting behaviour on Twitter comes from several high-ranking male Saudi officials and gives as an example that in response to the appointment of 30 women to the Shura council, a controversial Saudi cleric used Twitter to publicly insult the recently appointed women members, equating them to 'prostitutes' and 'the filth of society'. Those interviewees included two women who had worked for several years in foreign countries and a man who had studied in the USA for eight years. These experiences may account for their ability to distinguish the differences in deliberation between a very socially and religiously conservative society like Saudi Arabia and deliberation in democratic societies such as the USA and the UK. WMU6 partly agreed with this previous opinion but said that:

“Twitter debate is often aggressive and abusive towards women, but had become somewhat more rational in the last few years, and Saudi conversation on Twitter looks like other conversations in different places nowadays”

Thirdly, all the interviewees admitted that they had been motivated to post on Twitter by their desire to participate in deliberation about Saudi social issues. They said that there had not been a culture of discussion in Saudi Arabia before Twitter; therefore Saudi citizens had to learn how to debate and respect others` opinions. Six interviewees asserted that before discussing on Twitter, they might not have accepted opposing views, but after engaging in discussion with others they understood that it was possible to exchange opinions with others, even if they hold opposing views. WMU1 said:

“I consider exchanging opinions between genders very important for the public discussion of women’s rights because the diversity of views could increase the quality of deliberation.”

All the interviewees praised Twitter for facilitating a diverse debate, to which both men and women had access; moreover, six interviewees were generally very optimistic about the future of debate in Saudi Arabia. WM5 believed that:

“Twitter users in Saudi Arabia have experienced suppression and could not use traditional media to discuss their community’s issues. However, in the era of the internet and social media, Saudi citizens have grasped a historic opportunity to encounter different opinions that reflect the diversity of Saudi society socially and ideologically.”

5.5.2 Feeling Connected to Other Citizens and Having a Sense of Shared Values

Interviewees thought that this debate on Twitter was motivated by users feeling connectedness to Saudi social and religious values, and wanting to increase awareness of women's rights and correct misconceptions about Islamic regulations on this matter, which match the result of the analysis of tweet contents. According to Rajkhan (2014), no Islamic law prohibits women from participation in building civic life, and she points out that it is erroneous to say that there are religious reasons for not allowing women political participation.

Interviewees had experienced Twitter as a forum where citizens can negotiate the values that govern their society. Seven interviewees reported that they used Twitter to challenge what they saw as an erroneous interpretation of Islam. To them, Twitter is a tool to challenge the misconception that Islam prohibits women's political participation. These seven interviewees, three women and four men, were representative of a wide cross-section of society because they were of different ages and had different jobs and various levels of education level. Four of them had studied abroad and others inside Saudi Arabia, so interviewees' perspectives were not just influenced by one culture. The other two interviewees WWU4, and WM5 however, reported using Twitter to reassert traditional social values, such as gender segregation in schools and the workplace which they believed distinguish Saudi society from other countries. These two interviewees are activists who support the preservation of traditional Saudi social values and have written about that many times on Twitter and Facebook. It is arguably the social circles they move in rather than their religious beliefs that explain why they emphasised the important role of the Grand Mufti of the Kingdom to organise women's political participation in municipal councils instead of ordinary government employees. Incidentally, it may be worth noting that the Grand Mufti is no lover of Twitter. Chaudhry (2014) notes that the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia issued a *fatwa* against Twitter in 2011, demanding that real Muslims should avoid it, as it was is a platform for trading accusations and for promoting lies.

What all nine interviewees had in common, however, is that they used Twitter to engage in public debate about the values that govern Saudi society. They considered it

important to engage in this debate and they wanted to make a difference. While they held opposing views, they all expressed a sense of civic duty. They had a clear sense of belonging to Saudi society and wanted to connect with fellow citizens and debate collective values with them.

Four interviewees WWU1, WWU2, WWU4, and WM5 emphasized that they valued informed debate that depended on accurate and relevant religious knowledge, when they engaged in discussion about Saudi women's issues. They felt the debate should be conducted with great care because of the complicated social and religious issues involved. These four interviewees also believed that as Saudi society is conservative and rooted in traditional social values, any attempt to influence beliefs should be done carefully to avoid any discrepancy with traditions and customs. Murphy (2012a) says that although many Saudi social media users appear to support change and are progressive in some ways, they are conservative and traditional in others. The findings of this study echo those of Murphy's. The interviewees confirmed that they were discussing women's rights cautiously and choosing appropriate expressions to avoid any clashes with social and religious values. Moreover, five interviewees stressed that debate on Twitter needs to be supported by evidence as well as a sense of what constitutes 'acceptable and appropriate' evidence to strengthen their arguments, such as religious quotations from the *Qur'an*, the prophet's *Hadith* and the basic law of governance of Saudi Arabia.

In conclusion, Twitter users demonstrated a clear sense of connectedness. They aimed to spread awareness about women's rights, as citizens, and wanted to further develop their society. They believed that a careful use of evidence strengthened arguments on both sides. They confirmed the importance of knowledge and using appropriate evidence to exchange opinions about sensitive issues in a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia. They felt it was important to explain the importance of women's participation in municipal elections and provide the actual Islamic ruling toward their participation whilst paying attention to the context of a society where social and Islamic values play a crucial role in shaping citizens' attitudes towards sensitive issues. While they advocated a cautious, and some might say conservative, approach to political

debate and social change, the majority stressed the importance of a diverse debate and praised Twitter for facilitating debate among all citizens. These key themes which emerged across interviews with Twitter users chime with those of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of tweet contents.

5.5.3 Government Censorship and Self-censorship

The influence of Saudi religious and social values on the quality of deliberation was confirmed by the interviewees' attitudes towards government censorship. They agreed that self-censorship was important, and admitted that they knew that the Saudi government monitors deliberations on Twitter. However, they were divided in their attitudes to government censorship.

Firstly, eight out of nine participants believed that applying self-censorship was a duty and necessary on all Saudi social media platforms, because Saudi society has some complicated Islamic and social values that make women's political participation a controversial issue (see sections 5.2.2.1 and 5.2.2). The interviewees believed that people conduct self-censorship regarding their participation to avoid engaging in conflicts and controversy which may lead to social isolation or avoid trouble from the government.

Secondly, the interviewees divided into two groups regarding their evaluation of the current government's monitoring and its duties. The first group, WWU1, WWU2, WWU3, WMU1, WMU2, WMU3, and WMU6 wanted the Saudi government to impose more monitoring on social media platforms which discuss women's rights because these platforms sometimes include aggressive and abusive content. AlMaghlooth (2014) says that some social media users such as bloggers have demanded that micro-blogs and social media websites are closely monitored because they believe that if these websites are not controlled they may become tools of destruction for social values and cohesion. All the female interviewees and two men who studied abroad in USA and UK confirmed that they were surprised by the online aggression against women on social media platforms in Saudi Arabia; and they demanded the Saudi government punish social media users who offended women. WMU3 and WMU6 believed that the type of subjects discussed, such as women's rights and religious issues, played a crucial role in motivating

the government to monitor content, because these subjects attracted citizens from various ideologies and social levels to participate.

The second group of participants WMU4, and WM5, confirmed that society needs to have free debate and change, but they emphasised that the government should step in sometimes because there were some changes which they did not want to see, especially when certain social and religious norms were being threatened. However, they thought that the balance between complete free expression and protecting Saudi social and religious values is difficult to get right.

In short, although the interviewees stressed the importance of freedom of expression in the political deliberation about Saudi women`s political participation, the majority of them did not desire complete freedom of expression because Saudi society has sensitive social and religious values which make Twitter users wary when they engage in discussion about this issue. Finally, it seems that for some interviewees good citizenship entails a measure of self-censorship to avoid causing offence. Therefore the real diversity of free opinions will not happen when Twitter users agree to having their freedom curtailed.

5.5.4 The Influence of Deliberation on Twitter on the Relationship between the Government and Citizens

Twitter is considered as a crucial tool that enables citizens to be heard in various ways and to provide access to officials to discuss citizens' rights, and in particular women's political participation in municipal elections, when that was a hard thing to achieve in the past. The interviewees said that no one could deny that social media platforms, especially Twitter, have connected citizens with power elites in Saudi society such as the government and clerics. Interviewee WWU3 pointed out that:

“Most Saudi ministers and officials have at least one official Twitter account (if they do not have a private one) and some interact with citizens through these accounts.”

Golbeck et al. (2010) emphasised that Twitter has allowed ordinary people to send their concerns and comments to officials directly. WMU5 confirmed that most ministries and official organisations in Saudi Arabia had active accounts on Twitter, which allowed them to receive public opinion about their organisation and which facilitated answering enquiries immediately. It is however possible that this interviewee exaggerated the speed of replies, and not everyone can receive officials' answers as he does, because he has worked as a journalist for three decades and declared himself to be fighting corruption issues, which motivates officials to interact with him and answer his enquiries immediately to avoid any negative reaction from him.

Arguably the interviewees see Twitter playing a crucial role as a political communication tool that connects citizens to the political system because five of them believed the increasing deliberation on Twitter was partly due to the absence of civil society organisations and political parties that could present citizens' demands. As Noman et al. (2015) have observed, creating political parties is banned in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, civil society organisations remain underdeveloped because of the law that restricts these organisations' activities and their financial support. According to seven interviewees, Twitter hashtags that discussed specific issues could influence political decision-making. WMU3 said:

“The Saudi government pays attention to Twitter, as it is apparent that some decisions were influenced by demands there”.

He gave the example of the tax on unused property where, although the Saudi parliament council initially rejected imposing fees on unused land inside cities that was not used in 2009, it was later agreed upon, following a Twitter campaign that demanded an imposition of the tax. Interviewees did not comment about whether activity on Twitter had influenced the government decision regarding women's political participation.

According to Murphy (2012b), King Abdallah responded to women's demands in 2011 to allow them to participate in municipal elections; he appointed 30 women as members of the Saudi parliament and ordered the participation of women in municipal elections in 2015. This participation was done with many concessions to traditional Saudi values that insist on gender segregation. For example, the BBC (2015) reported that at these elections

“Female candidates had to speak behind a partition while campaigning or be represented by a man”

This is compatible with Al-Saggaf and Simmon's (2015) findings that the Saudi government paid attention to issues discussed on social media. Chaudhry (2014) believes that Saudi online protests have indirectly resulted in some social advances for women because they gained international as well as local attention, resulting in pressure being put on the Saudi government to re-evaluate its treatment of women.

5.6 Conclusion

King Abdullah issued a royal order, in 2011, to allow Saudi women to participate in the 2015 municipal elections as candidates and voters. It was this decision which sparked discussion on the hashtag: #the-danger-of-women's-political-participation-in-municipal-election about the impact this decision might have on Saudi society. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the tweets revealed a high level of quality of deliberation in terms of its diversity, openness, respectfulness, relevance of posts to the hashtag topic and rationality as well as some interesting results such as users' connectedness to Saudi social and religious values, their valuing informed debate and their actions as citizens. Moreover, the results confirmed the change in relationship between users and sources of power in Saudi Arabia (the government, the official religious institution and other clerics).

First of all, the results presented how the diversity of participants, topics and attitudes to Saudi women's political participation enabled Twitter users to engage in discussion to exchange perspectives about the government decision. That diversity confirmed the quality of deliberation because of the relatively high number of women who participated in this hashtag as well as the nature of the issue which pertains to women in Saudi society. Moreover, the importance of Saudi women's participation was confirmed by interviews and corresponded with the results of previous studies such as that of Alswaeed (2015). Compared to the other two case studies, where opposition to a government decision did not exceed 1%, a relatively large percentage (21.5%) opposed the government's decision. The positive side of this is that the range of views increased the quality of the dialogue; however, this also shows the continuation of a patriarchal discourse in Saudi society. There was an absence of participation by government organizations and very weak participation by media agencies which did not go beyond general media coverage of the elections. This was explained in interviews as due to the sensitivity of women's issues in Saudi society, as well as to the nature of the hashtag, which was created to mobilize citizens into opposing the participation of women. Interestingly, the results showed more support for women's political participation than opposition.

Second, the results revealed a change in the relationship between Twitter users and the sources of power in Saudi society (the Saudi government, the Saudi official religious institution and clerics) regarding the negotiation of social and religious values. Although the topic of requesting action in this case (9%) was the lowest of the three case studies ³⁴ requests in this case were more diverse. Firstly, the government was asked to protect social values from outside conspiracy, whereby Western countries and liberals were seen as planning to destroy Saudi social and religious values. Twitter users mentioned Saudi Arabia's signing of CEDAW as a concern in this regard. However, these users did not mention the clear announcement of the Saudi government which rejected any term of CEDAW that was not compatible with Islamic regulations.

Thirdly, citizens were also urged to protect the social and religious values of their society because women in many democratic societies had not achieved equal rights, even if this equality was being claimed by these countries. Firstly, Twitter users suggest that citizens protect the social and religious fabric of their society through telling their female relatives not to vote and protest to the government. On the opposite side, some Twitter users urged citizens to take responsibility for supporting women's rights. These two different opinions were also confirmed by the interviews` both sides being motivated by their connectedness to Saudi social values and other citizens` rights.

These demands to democratize society through giving women their rights on a hashtag intend to oppose the political participation of women, indicates a certain shift in attitudes. Although Saudi society is described as patriarchal, the majority of male users supported women`s participation and the majority of tweets that included harsh criticisms against those who rejected women`s participation were sent by men under their real names. In addition, women did not criticize Saudi government in this hashtag, but they criticized men, which revealed these Saudi women`s desire for equality and their ability to stand against a patriarchy which was attempting to prohibit them from their rights.

³⁴39% in imposing tax on undeveloped property and 16% in unlawful use of the public property.

Thirdly, Twitter users confirmed the strong influence of clerics in Saudi society at all levels. At the level of government, clerics were asked to advise the government and explain the expected negative consequences of women's participation and that did not happen in other case studies where experts and clerics were not asked to advise the government. The participation of clerics in the other two case studies, aimed to increase the awareness among citizens. In this case study, clerics were asked to advise ordinary citizens. These requests demonstrate that Saudi clerics are still perceived as having a central role. Further, the Islamic religion was used by supporters and opponents of Saudi women's political participation to strengthen their arguments and convince others. Religious and social values occupied 52% of tweets in this case study, which was more than in the other two case studies and confirmed the strong relationship between women's issues and Saudi religious and traditional social values.

The interviews answered the questions listed in section 5.5 and revealed the motivations behind Twitter users' engagement with the debate on women's political participation was because of the importance of the issue and its relation to different interpretations of holy text. Twitter was considered a suitable place to voice concerns regarding women's political participation and the need to debate the values that surrounded the issue. It afforded Saudi citizens equal access which was seen as one of the main factors influencing the quality of deliberation as it meant that users were exposed to a range of ideas and information. Although censorship was judged to affect the quality of deliberation this was not seen as necessarily negative, given the serious concerns about online abuse, particularly against women. It was also noted that powerful individuals and elites were becoming increasingly aware that platforms like Twitter was a way to communicate with Saudi citizens and this would remain the case.

The important results here are the changes in Saudi society which rejected women's education and work in the last few decades, but now showed strong support for their political participation; and where some male Twitter users started defending women rights under their real names. This can be considered a challenge to established Saudi social values which believe that women's participation in political sector will damage traditional values. Moreover, it illustrates the change in the relationship between Twitter

users and sources of power in Saudi Arabia. Lastly, the diversity of participation and topics increased the quality of deliberation and sends a signal about the possibility of develop public deliberation on Twitter.

Chapter 6

Imposing Tax on Undeveloped Property

6.1 Introduction

Undeveloped property is considered one of the main problems that cause the shortage of housing in Saudi Arabia because it occupies massive areas of big cities in Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 2). The draft of law to impose tax on undeveloped property remained under scrutiny by the Bureau of Experts at the Saudi Council of Ministers for a year (Albagami, 2012). The Saudi Parliament then approved the law proposal in 2011; and in 2014, the Ministry of Housing prepared the file about imposing the tax and referred it to the Council of Senior Scholars to decide on the *Shari'ah* ruling; but the Council of Senior Scholars referred it to the Supreme Council of the Economy without a decision, which sparked a debate about whether it complied with Islamic law or not (see Chapter 2). On 23rd November, 2015 the Saudi Council of Ministers finally approved the law (*ibid*).

The recent rise in using social media in the last few years has had a significant influence on conducting political debate in Saudi Arabia. Clerics and economic experts have used Twitter for communicating messages and engage in discussion with ordinary citizens; as this case study demonstrates. This chapter firstly investigates quantitatively the tweet contents to identify the elements of quality of deliberation: diversity, relevance, openness, reciprocity, rationality and respectfulness. Secondly, this chapter investigates qualitatively the quality of deliberation more deeply by analysing the arguments, counter arguments and sources of evidence and by looking for the elements of good citizenship such as connectedness and knowledge of the issue. Lastly, the interviewees' perspectives regarding the quality of the deliberation on this hashtag and the elements of citizenship identified by the quantitative and qualitative analysis are provided.

This chapter argues that Twitter users were proactive when they discussed the law of imposing tax on undeveloped property, in contrast to the other two case studies, where users were reactive to government decisions. Moreover, Twitter users demonstrated their

connectedness to other citizens through their keenness to apply the law because they perceived it as beneficial to other citizens and the government. The deliberation also shows that many users valued informed debate. Although the overall rate of interaction on this hashtag was quite low, experts' opinions appeared to have had a significant influence on the debate.

6.2 Quantitative Results

6.2.1 Diversity and Relevance of Contents

The analysis showed a high level of quality of deliberation regarding the diversity of participants and topics discussed. First of all, the quantitative analysis showed a diversity of users; 61% of Twitter users in this study who discussed matters using the hashtag #Undeveloped_Properties_Tax were men, 31% were women, and 8% were organisations (see Table 6.1). This reveals the increasing presence of women who engage in such discussions, although social and religious values suggest that Muslim men are still considered to be responsible for providing the family house, in accordance with Islamic values (Hodge, 2005). Murphy (2012) observes that many Saudis are conservative and adhere to customs and traditions. Saudi society is not only described as patriarchal and conservative among the Arabian Gulf communities, but Al-Jenaibi (2016) confirms that Saudi society is regarded as the most conservative among all Islamic societies. This explains to some extent why male users, in this sample, espouse Islamic values, such as shouldering responsibility for securing a house for their families.

The participation of Saudi media agencies and non-government organisations was not interactive because they did not engage in discussion with other users about this government decision. In my opinion the sensitivity and the type of topic discussed play a crucial role in the participation of organisations on Twitter about Saudi issues. Therefore, the participation of organisations in the housing shortage issue (8%) was higher than in the case studies described in Chapters 5 and 7 (2% and 2.6% respectively), which may be attributed to the nature of the issue. Organisations tended not to tweet about sensitive issues such as Saudi women's political participation (Chapter 5) or the corruption issue (Chapter 7), which included some examples of discrimination and class hatred. On the

other hand, more than 90% of the organisations which used this hashtag were media agencies, including TV channels such as *Eqtisadiya* and *MBC*, as well as newspapers such as *Sabq*, and *Alriyadh*. Notably, all these agencies' participations were in the form of news reports about the housing shortage. However, these agencies did not engage in discussion about the Saudi government's legislation on social media platforms such as Twitter, but used the active hashtags to promote their articles, programmes and news reports. Arguably, the Saudi media did not engage in debate with citizens on Twitter because government censorship may keep news media from discussing or encouraging debate about a sensitive issue such as women's issues and officials' corruption. Khazen (1999, p.2), the editor-chief of the **independent** newspaper, *Al Hayat*, in London, says: "We are more careful with sensitive Saudi news, it is a matter of economics". He may be referring to the Saudi princes who own this newspaper or mean that Saudis would not buy the newspaper if it discussed any sensitive issues, and thus reduce advertising income. The remaining 10% of organisations posting on this hashtag were investment companies; which means that government organisations such as the Ministry of Housing, the Saudi parliament and the Saudi Council of Ministers did not participate or interact with Twitter users on this hashtag, although they received many requests and suggestions that indicated that citizens' desired to work with the government for the benefit of society.

Table 16: 6.1 Distribution of tweets according to type of user

N	Gender	Users	Percent	Real Name	Percent	pseudonym	Percent
1	Men	1,445	61%	1,402	98%	43	2%
2	Women	757	32%	366	48%	391	52%
3	Others	155	7%	155	100%	-----	-----

Secondly, the analysis of tweets demonstrated that this discussion was diverse and focused, regarding the discussed topics, about the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia. These included an exchange of opinions and criticism of government organisations' efforts and generally revolved around two main topics (see Table 6.2) the economic consequences; and requesting action. The economic consequences topic represents 47% of all tweets, which is understandable since the housing shortage has influenced citizens' standard of living. The topic of requesting action makes up 39% of tweets; and asked the government to fight corruption and work side-by-side with citizens to facilitate the implementation and success of the law. These tweets demonstrated a change in the ability of citizens to publicly criticise the Saudi government and confirm the results of previous studies that discussed the role of Twitter in enabling Saudi citizens to discuss their society` interests publically (Alothman, 2013; Faqihi, 2015; Bukhari, 2011 and Murphy, 2012). Both topics, economic consequences and requesting action, reflect the freedom to express various opinions in discussing this issue. While overall Twitter users agreed with the government's decision, some dared criticise the government. There was a debate in which the pros and cons of the tax were debated; and there was a diversity of arguments (so the debate was quite nuanced). Moreover, citizens wanted to contribute to improving society together with the government.

Table 17: 6.2 Distribution of tweets according to main topics

N	Main topic	Percent	Frequency
1	Economic consequences	47%	1,108
2	Requesting action	39%	919
3	Irrelevant contents of Tweets	14%	330
4	Total	100%	2,357

Third, the analysis of tweet contents showed a diversity of Twitter users' perspectives about the law of imposing the tax on undeveloped properties, even though the majority concurred about the government decision. According to Table 6.3 most users (85.5%) agreed with the decision, but with interesting and very different perspectives regarding the implementation of the law and the practical steps that needed to be taken by Saudi officials and government organisations. The percentage of those rejecting the decision was negligible (0.5%), which either confirmed that the Saudi government's decision satisfied Twitter users, or perhaps that critics were too scared to say anything. Nevertheless, the diversity of opinions also needs to be discussed qualitatively to explore the elements of the quality of deliberation (see section 6.3.1).

Moreover, as Table 6.2 shows, 86% of the tweets using this hashtag were related to the topic of imposing the tax on undeveloped properties. This percentage demonstrates the extent to which Twitter users engaged seriously in deliberation about the housing shortage to discover the gaps in the law and to find solutions to guarantee the success of law and prevent tax avoidance. 14% of tweets in this sample were considered unrelated and were divided into two types. Firstly, there were advertisements for unrelated products such as those by medical companies and restaurants. The other type included irrelevant content, such as demands for people to boycott the municipal elections or suggestions to apply a tax on car parking like in the USA. One tweet asked whether there was a relationship between the tax and spinsterhood, another stated: "There is discrimination against Shiite Muslims in Arab Gulf Countries". All the above are examples of irrelevant tweets which are unrelated to the imposing of tax on undeveloped properties. Those noticeable advertisements show that companies are perhaps showing awareness that debates on Twitter attract a lot of interest and are taking the opportunity to advertise their services. Similarly, people with a political agenda are using popular hashtags to promote their causes. Although this lowers the rationality of the debate, it does indicate Saudi perceptions about the power of Twitter, as these companies and individuals presumably would not bother posting anything if they thought it would have no effect. So this was perceived to be a debate that was of interest to a big audience which could be targeted by adverts.

Table 18: 6.3 Distribution of tweets according to attitude

N	Users' attitudes toward the topic	Percent	Frequency
1	Agreement	85.5%	2,015
2	Neutral	14.08%	332
3	Rejection	0.42%	10
4	Total	100%	2,357

6.2.2 Openness

Twitter users, and in this case study particularly women, may not feel safe to criticise the government decision about imposing the tax on undeveloped property. Although Table 6.1 shows that the majority (82%) of the sample used real names which may indicate that many Twitter users felt able to openly discuss their government's decision to impose tax on undeveloped properties, (72%) of tweets sent by users who used **pseudonyms** included harsh criticisms and made demands of the government. This result is an important addition to the work of ALMaghlooth (2014) who suggests that Twitter empowers Saudi citizens to criticise the government. Twitter users in this case study arguably felt they could discuss the government, but they could not openly criticise them harshly. Although 85.5% of the sample supported the Saudi government's decision to impose a tax on undeveloped properties, many tweets that criticised the Saudi government and indicated a penetration of corruption into government organisations and misuse of laws were posted under a **pseudonym**; and these users may have hidden their identities to avoid any conflict with government. It is noteworthy that most of female users who participated in this discussion used **pseudonyms** (52%) to hide their identities, which is the highest in three case studies. 62% of female users who used **pseudonyms** criticised government decisions and concentrated on corruption. This result came in contrast to that for women who participated in discussing Saudi women's political participation who unsurprisingly did not criticise the government's decision at all. Women seem to speak out under their real names if the issue is very much about them and their rights and they

support government decisions, but about other issues such as the shortage of houses they hid behind **pseudonyms** to criticise the Saudi government's decision and to avoid possible conflict within a patriarchal society that considers women's engagement in discussions with unrelated men as shameful. These results will be further discussed in the qualitative section to discover the type of tweet content that sent by female users who used **pseudonyms** and how male Twitter users responded to women's Tweets.

6.2.3 Reciprocity

The interaction with tweet contents in this case study was higher than interaction in other two case studies; moreover, it demonstrated the importance of experts' opinions and attaching evidence and providing justifications in Twitter users' discussions about imposing tax on undeveloped properties. Users on this hashtag showed a distinctive pattern in their interactions; although the majority (about 50%) of posts did not receive any interaction (replies, re-tweets or likes), there were a few spikes, as a small number of tweets received a large number of responses. Table 6.4 illustrates that 36% of the tweets received more two or more replies and 46.5% of tweets received two or more re-tweets. Moreover, the analysis also shows that 35% received two or more likes. Those tweets were those which appeared to be sent by experts or whose contents were supported by attached evidence or personal justifications and included precise and clear opinions. More investigation in the qualitative analysis was conducted to understand why those experts' tweets and other contents received high level of interaction.

Table 19: 6.4 Number of replies

Number of replies	Frequency	Percent
No replies	1,318	56%
One reply received	190	8%
More than 2 replies	849	36%
Total	2,357	100%

Table 20: 6.5 Number of re-tweets

Number of re-tweets	Frequency	Percent
No re-tweet	1,143	48.5%
One re-tweet	119	5%
More than 2 re-tweets	1,095	46.5%
Total	2,357	100%

Table 21: 6.6 Number of likes

Number of likes	Frequency	Percent
No likes	1,421	60%
One like	118	5%
More than 2 likes	818	35%
Total	2,357	100%

6.2.4 Rationality and Respectfulness

In this section, I argue that Twitter users' discussion about imposing the tax on undeveloped property was rational and respectful. This study identified rationality (see Chapters 3 and 5) as deliberation that includes respectful and reasonable content, including clear opinions and comments about Saudi government decisions, whether supported with justifications or evidence or not. Accordingly, 78% of tweets in this sample were rational (Table 6.8). Furthermore, attachments consisting of 201 videos or images and articles by Saudi experts were employed with the aim of promoting or casting doubt on the law imposing tax on undeveloped properties. Although only 8% of tweets coded as rational were supported by evidence (Table 6.7), 78% of the sample was considered rational because Twitter users presented their opinions clearly and respectfully. Some were supported by clear personal justifications, others by the opinions of religious or economic experts. The latter confirms that citizens value the opinions of experts and refer to them when engaging in public debate (as discussed in the qualitative analysis below).

Respectfulness is one element which is used to measure the quality of deliberation; therefore this study also conducted a quantitative analysis of the extent to which tweets on this hashtag were respectful. As outlined in Chapter 3, tweets were coded as 'respectful' if they did not use aggressive or derogatory language, such as offensive terms relating to race or religion. Accordingly, 95.5% of the sample of 2,357 tweets (Table 6.9) was described as respectful; the rest (4.5%) were disrespectful because they included aggressive comments and some online abuse against women. Although the high percentage of respectfulness (95.5%) among Twitter users in this discussion may send a positive signal about the quality of discussion, the emergence of verbal abuse of women online is unexpected because the subject of hashtag is not a women's issue. Therefore this abuse deserves more investigation and was explored in the qualitative analysis.

Table 22: 6.7 Distribution of tweets according to attachments

Type of Attachment	Frequency	Percent
Links and YouTube	120	5%
Images	71	3%
No attachment	2,166	92%
Total	2,357	100%

Table 23: 6.8: Distribution of tweets according to rationality

Rationality of tweets	Frequency	Percent %
Rational tweets	1,833	78%%
Irrational tweets	524	22%
Total	2,357	100%

Table 24: 6.9 Distribution of tweets according to respectfulness

Respectfulness of tweets	Frequency	Percent %
Respectful	2,250	95.5%
Disrespectful	107	4.5%
Total	2357	100%

Conclusion:

To sum up, the quantitative results of tweets` contents demonstrated that the deliberation about imposing the tax on undeveloped property had a high level of quality regarding diversity, openness, relevance, respectfulness and rationality. Regarding the diversity of participants who discussed this law; although male participants outnumbered females, the result confirmed women`s desire to express their views and make demands and criticisms on issues of public interest, even if this involved challenging social values. Twitter generally facilitated citizens` political communication and exchange of ideas; and the discussion showed Twitter users` ability to engage in rational discussion in a non-democratic country, which confirmed the crucial role of Twitter.

Some opinions were repeated more than others such as demands for transparency, making corrupted officials accountable and implementing the law imposing tax on undeveloped properties fairly. Those demands and criticisms showed the extent to which Twitter users felt able to express their opinions. These opinions deserve more investigation in the qualitative analysis, which also investigates the two main topics in more depth to afford a fuller understanding of the quality of deliberation; and provides an insight into how Twitter users exchanged their ideas with each other and used economic experts` opinions. The extent to which this deliberation included the following elements of citizenship: connectedness, knowledge and pro-activeness, is also explored.

6.3 Qualitative Analysis of Tweets

6.3.1 Economic Benefits of Imposing Tax on Undeveloped Properties

The discussion about the draft of the suggested law to impose tax on undeveloped properties demonstrated Twitter users' connectedness to their society by their focus on the interests of citizens and the Saudi state. They also displayed knowledge about the suggested law and its surrounding circumstances, as well as appreciating the importance of experts in discussing this issue. Egan (2005) confirms that citizens usually start by exchanging and considering the different arguments provided, with the aim of acquiring social benefits in the public interest. 47% of the total tweets were on the topic of the economic consequences and 39% on the topic of requiring action by power elites. Different arguments, counter-arguments, justifications and evidence for both sides of the debate (opponents and supporters toward government decision) on this law were used; all of which are investigated below.

Twitter users demonstrated their connectedness to other citizens when they thought about collective interests and not just about themselves; and believed that the law of imposing tax on undeveloped property had various foreseeable benefits for all citizens. The first group of Saudi tweets (72% in the topic of economic consequences) argued that there were significant direct and indirect economic benefits for Saudis if a tax was to be imposed on undeveloped properties inside cities. Users provided justifications and supported their arguments about the benefits of imposing tax on undeveloped property with some popular experts' opinions, such as those of Abdualhameed Alamri and Isam Alzamel (see 6.3.3). The topic of economic consequences did not appear in the other two case studies in this thesis, which may be due to the type of issue involved. The housing shortage affects most Saudis economically either directly or indirectly, in that it affects their relatives. Drawing on the economic idea that if the supply increases, the price decreases, some Twitter users in the study sample suggested that the price of property was going to decline; and that decreasing prices have crucial impacts on two sectors: the government and citizens (see tweet 6.1). Firstly, the Saudi government would benefit

through spending the tax money on developing health, housing and others sectors as well as enabling citizens to own houses, which might relieve pressure on the government regarding its duties to guarantee welfare for Saudis. The Government's efforts confirmed the validity of this opinion, as the regulation of undeveloped property's tax, paragraph 15, stipulated that the fees are used to solve the housing problem which includes building houses and developing schemes in different cities in Saudi Arabia. For example, on 20th August, 2019 the Ministry of Housing announced that 25 million Saudi riyals were spent to develop Riyadh housing projects to the west of the airport and that this was the first amount received as part of the tax on undeveloped property in 2019 (Housing Ministry, 2019). Secondly, imposing the tax would force investors to move from investing in real estate sectors into investing in other economic fields; and thirdly, this move would lead to establishing new projects, resulting in active markets and creating new job opportunities for citizens. For example, one Twitter user tweeted on 19th October 2015:

"This is not a housing problem, but releases billions of \$ which may create new jobs". (Tweet 6.2)

Figure 40: Tweet 6.1



نفع للمواطن ونفع للمطور العقاري ونفع لاقتصاد البلاد ونفع في استثمار الارض واستحداث الوظائف الخدمية. ابفهم ليش زعلانين؟ #رسوم_الاراضي_البيضاء

Translation: It is beneficial for property developers, the country's economy and creates new service jobs; I do not know why you are angry.

Figure 41: Tweet 6.2



الليست أزمة سكن فقط بل فك المليارات المعطلة التي تساعد في قيام كثير من المشاريع الحيوية التي كانت ستفتح فرصة عمل كبيرة #رسوم_الاراضي_البيضاء

Translation: This is not a housing crisis, but it is releasing suspended billions of \$ which may help to create vital projects that would have opened up great opportunities of jobs.

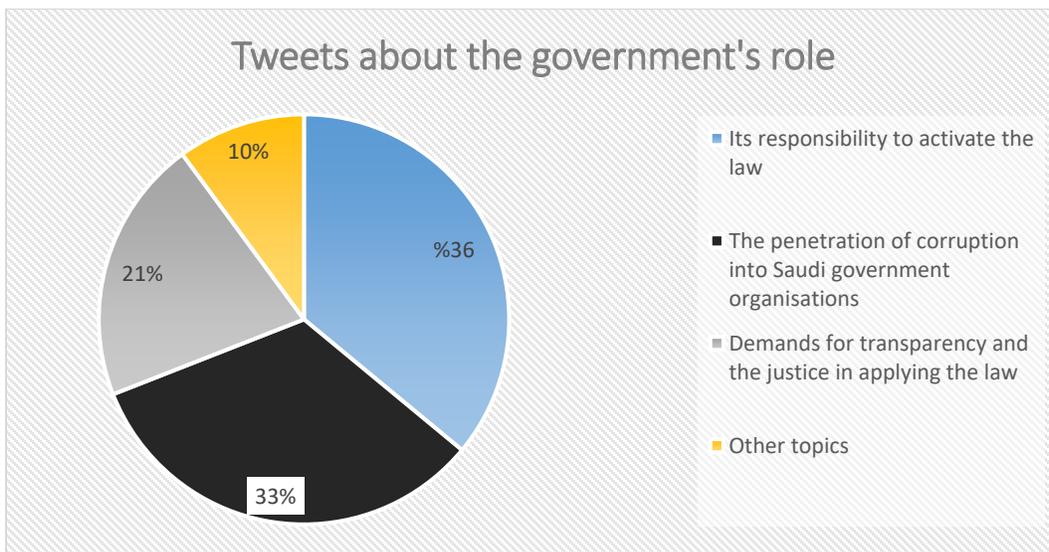
A counter-argument on the matter of the decline in prices and deals was used in 307 tweets by the opposing group in the sample. Although they agreed with the former group that a serious step had been taken by the Saudi government to solve this matter, they doubted the effectiveness of this decision on prices, because they believed the Saudi property market differs from other markets and is not subject to a known supply and demand base. Rather than giving detailed information about their suggestions, they presented as proof property owners' opinions such as those of Alieed and Altueem, who present on the *Almajed* channel and write for journals in Saudi Arabia. They have a massive experience of the Saudi real estate market, as well as being known for their disagreement with some economic experts' opinions in their analysis of the housing shortage.

In short, this discussion confirmed how Twitter users did not personalise the issue, and thought about the consequences for all members of society and the Saudi government. Moreover, the analysis demonstrated that Twitter users valued an informed debate through their attaching evidence and providing justifications as well as referring to experts.

6.3.2 Requesting Action and Twitter Users` Efforts

The debate showed a change in the relationship between Twitter users and the Saudi government because Twitter users become proactive instead of reactive with the government's decision. Moreover, Twitter users become more confident in discussing and publicly criticising Saudi government organisations` performance and demanding they acted to protect citizens` rights. Citizens` efforts to protect their rights occupied 39% of this hashtag (919 tweets). This topic included four sub-topics: criticising the penetration of corruption into government organisations, misuse of the law, requested government transparency and fairness, and efforts to assist the successful implementation of this law and protect citizens` rights by explaining the supposed weak points and proposing appropriate solutions to the draft of the law (see section 6.3.2.3). All these sub-topics illustrated the extent to which Twitter users felt sufficiently able to make demands and suggestions in the public interest and demand the protection of citizens` rights.

Figure 42: 6.3: Tweets about the Government`s Role



6.3.2.1 Demands to Activate the Law and Criticism of Government Organizations for Corruption and Misuse of the Law

The debate also revealed a change in the relationship between Twitter users and the sources of power in Saudi society. Twitter users demonstrated an element of civic identity by positioning themselves in relation to sources of power (the government and the royal family). 328 tweets (36%) in this topic criticised and/or identified the cause of the problem as government organisations' actions and policies. Some Twitter users in the sample argued that the Saudi government would not force undeveloped property owners such as the Saudi princes to pay the tax, because of the penetration of corruption in Saudi organisations. Worth (2012) emphasises that openly criticising the Saudi royal family has become commonplace; but the findings of this study suggest that not all Twitter users chose to directly criticise the government. Instead, they opted for a less confrontational approach. They used two different strategies, implicit and explicit, to implicate the officials and ministries accused of corruption or misusing the law. According to Esarey and Qiang (2008), social media users in China usually resort to various strategies to criticise undesirable state conduct. Similarly, in the following section, the strategies commonly used by Twitter users in this study to criticise the government will be investigated.

The first strategy is implicit, where Twitter users avoided mentioning the name of the person or organisation accused of corruption, simply mentioning 'the government', which made it difficult to detect the actual identities of those deemed responsible. This implicit approach to criticising the actions of non-democratic government organisations and attributing responsibility to officials may be accepted if the political system is an absolute monarchy and the limits on freedom of expression are not very clear. Citizens may use this method to stay safe and avoid possible difficulties with the Saudi government or disapproval and social isolation. Chinese social media users employed a similar implicit method when they criticise Party committees or government organisations for negative events, but do not mention who should shoulder responsibility for the problem (Esarey and Qiang, 2008).

One of the sample tweets, re-tweeted 38 times, indicated implicitly that plots of real estate had been given unfairly to a generic Saudi government official, who appeared in a cartoon attachment showing him with rules and regulations thrown into a rubbish bin, and suggesting that the law which allowed such people to acquire such property would protect them against paying the tax (see tweet 6.5). 32 Twitter users in this sample referred to utility bills which had been unpaid by Saudi princes, influential people and stakeholders for several decades. Although these tweets did not mention the names of those responsible explicitly, some supported their tweets with a link to the Aqil Al-Bahili interview on a popular channel in the Arab region (see tweet 6.6). Aqil Al-Bahili emphasised that Saudis should understand that if VIPs (a term commonly used in Saudi society to describe princes) had not paid bills for public utilities such as water and electricity for several years, how and who could force them to pay the tax, which might cost millions of Saudi Riyals, especially as the people knew that the majority of these properties were owned by VIPs. A similar conclusion was reached by Alothman (2013) who confirmed that social media motivated Saudi citizens to expose the corruption which penetrates government organisations and its development projects.

Figure 43: 6.4: Strategies for Criticising Government Organisations

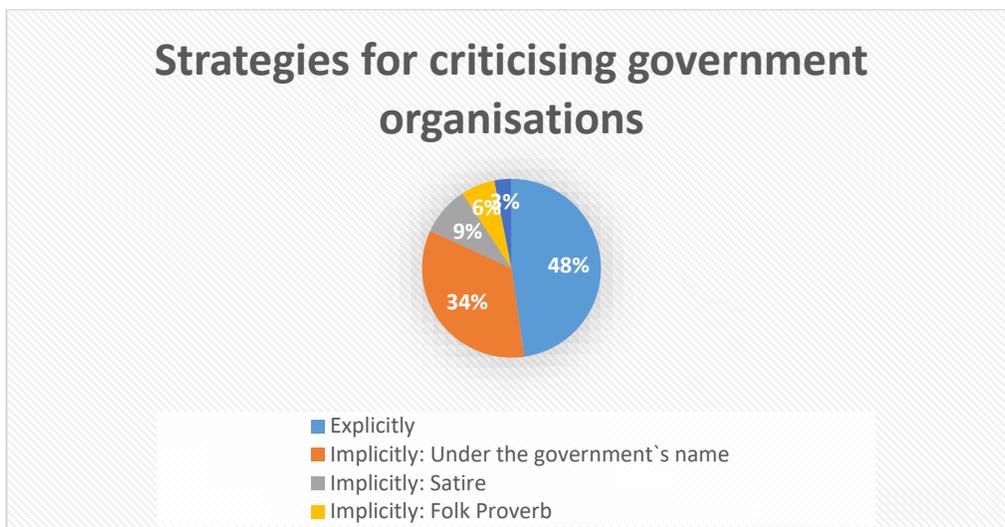


Figure 44: Tweet 6.5

#رسوم_الاراضي_البيضاء
القانون الذي سمح بامتلاك اراضي بالكيلومترات هو الذي
سيحتمهم من دفع الرسوم.

Translation: The law which allows them to own thousands of square kilometres of property is going to protect them from paying the tax.

Figure 45: Tweet 6.6

عقل الباهلي ما يدفعون فواتير ماء وكهرب كيف تبيهم يدفعون
قيمه رسوم للأراضي البيضاء

Translation: Al-Bahili, if they do not pay their utility bills, how can you suggest they will pay the tax.

The following section discusses how Twitter users felt more able to expose the corruption of officials; but avoided engaging in possible conflict with the Saudi government through employing satire. Satire and sarcasm are another method used to criticise government organisations implicitly and was used 55 times in the sample to mention those responsible for corruption. Using satire means that the content of the tweet cannot be understood literally. According to Tayal et al. (2014) "Sarcasm is saying or writing in such a way that the textual meaning of what is said is the opposite of what is meant". Moreover, sarcasm is a type of conversation or text that includes an indirect meaning (*ibid*). Some Twitter users derided those who demanded that the law should apply to all Saudis, when they added the comment with the picture of King Salman holding his brother, Prince Mishaal's hand. One tweet wondered whether King Salman was going to apply this law to his brother, who is described as one of biggest property owners in Saudi Arabia, just to please the citizens, and puts an exclamation mark at the end of tweet (see tweet 6.7). Folk proverbs were used in 49 tweets in this sample to satirise government organisations. For example, one mocked citizens who hoped government organisations would apply the law fairly, saying: "The guard is the thief". So, all previous three tweets meant that the law was perceived as not applying to the princes and Influential businessmen; moreover, that corrupt officials are those responsible for implementing the law; and therefore this law would not succeed.

Figure 46: Tweet 6.7

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is: "#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء #رسميا_فرص_رسوم_الأراضي يعني_سلطان_يخطي_أخوه_مشعل_يدفع_رسوم_بالملايين_عشان_يرضَى_الشعب_!". The text is in black font on a white background.

Translation: Do you think King Salman is going to force his brother Mishaal to pay millions of Riyals to satisfy citizens?

The second strategy is explicit, where people mention the name of those they believe should shoulder responsibility because they are guilty: 48% of tweets that criticised government organisations on this topic explicitly named those responsible when they presented their dissatisfactions. Those criticised included the Saudi Parliament, the Ministry and the Minister of Housing and Saudi MPs. Transferring the law to the Saudi Parliament sparked the discussion, because these Twitter users believed that Saudi MPs pay more attention to their own interests than to those of Saudi citizens (see tweet 6.8). Some pointed out that Saudi MPs, their relatives or friends were themselves owners of undeveloped property, therefore they would be against the tax law. Twitter users highlighted a common characteristic of a corrupt political system. A similar pattern of results was obtained by Winder (2014) who suggested that the debate, on Twitter, in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council member states was not revolutionary, but it was more focussed on accountability and government legitimacy. This suggestion echoes what Erdmann and Engel, (2007) say about corruption in Kenya. They believe that Kenyan resources have been manipulated to facilitate their allocation according to a variety of relationships, which include kinship or shared religion or ethnicity.

This explicit criticism seems to strongly indicate that these Twitter users believe that those MPs do not represent Saudi citizens and the Ministry of Housing is biased in favour of property owners and ignores citizens' interests, because most of its decisions were in the interests of property owners rather than those of ordinary citizens (see tweet 6.9). Tweet 6.10 showed a cartoon which describes the bureaucracy in the Ministry of Housing's efforts to find solutions as a train with three carriages (studies, committees and meetings) endlessly moving in a closed circle while citizens awaiting the decision died and were buried in graves around the train. This boldness did not stop at criticising

officials or government organisations but extended to criticising members of the royal family and naming them. This result confirmed Almaglooth` study (2013) about the change of Saudi citizens` ability to be able to criticise any official. He mentions that in the past Saudi citizens could not even criticize a "coffee server" which means staff who occupy less important positions, but now they have the ability to criticise to the responsible ministers, princes, and government officials and name them directly and precisely.

Figure 47: Tweet 6.8

مجلس الشورى لأنه معين وغير منتخب سيظل يرى الأمور
 بنظرة صاحب المصلحة لا نظرة المواطن العادي !!
 #رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء

Translation: The Saudi Parliament is going to think about issues as the beneficiary not as an ordinary citizen.

Figure 48: Tweet 6.9



Translation: The mother (The Ministry of Housing) ignores her son (the citizens) and cares for a stranger's child (the property owners).

(Rabea, 2015).

Figure 49: Tweet 6.10



Translation: The housing solutions are like a train with three carriages (studies, committees and meetings) endlessly moving in a closed circle.

(Aimantoon, 2015)

6.3.2.2 Twitter Users Request Government Organizations' Transparency and Fairness

The analysis revealed that Twitter users felt they could demand transparency in government and official organisations. Research in democratic countries has shown that public deliberation is crucial for the exposure of corruption (Im, 2000). The findings of this study suggest the potential that social media such as Twitter may have in providing a similar platform for public deliberation in non-democratic countries, such as Saudi Arabia. Twitter users in this study demanded and emphasised the importance of transparency and fairness (the rule being applied to all Saudi citizens in this and similar cases).

These demands formed 33% of the tweets (301) that discussed the government's role. Their questions were about the issues related to the housing sector, such as enquiries about the 200 million Riyals allocated to the Ministry of Housing by King Abdallah in 2011 to build 5,000 houses (see tweet 6.11). According to Fox (2007), the transparency of government organisations gives ordinary people an opportunity to blame and shame governments and expose embarrassing lapses by governments which they would prefer to hide. Twitter users in this sample asked about how public money had been spent and believed that it was their legitimate right to know. They engaged in a kind of public deliberation to which citizens in democratic societies may be much more accustomed. Some Twitter users living in Saudi Arabia emphasised their right to know who the owners of unused estates were, even if the results were only presented the following year (see tweet 6.12). The use of Twitter by citizens to make such demands to the Saudi government was also revealed by Boghardt (2013, p.1), who stated: "The Saudi Twittersphere reveals public discontent with the government's performance on addressing domestic problems like unemployment and corruption."

Figure 50: Tweet 6.11

نفس الشيء حصل 2011م بعد صدور الأمر الملكي بناء 500 ألف
مسكن
الوزارة لم تنجز 5% حتى اليوم
الواقعية مطلوبة
#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء

Translation: In 2011, after the royal order to build 500,000 units, the ministry did not complete even 5%.

Figure 51: Tweet 6.12

نعم بعد موافقة #مجلس_الشورى على قانون
#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء نحتاج أن نطلع على التفاصيل..حتى
لأنكون مثل ذلك الأهل الذي طار في "العجة"!

Translation: After the agreement of the Saudi Parliament on this law we would like to know the details. We do not like being fooled.

Regarding the fairness of applying the laws to all Saudi citizens, there was deliberation between users who believed that the government was going to impose the law on all Saudis, and those who disagreed and justified their position with evidence of the government's unfair dealings where Saudi government organisations had sometimes applied laws to ordinary people but excluded influential people, such as in the case of unpaid utility bills. More than 62 tweets directly demanded that the Saudi government applied this law to all residents, because the resolution of the matter of taxing unused estate depended on not exempting anyone from the law. Tweet 6.13 enquired:

"Are the princes going to pay the tax or just those property owners who are ordinary citizens?"

Some Twitter users also believed that:

"Saudi society's problem is not in making a decision, because the Saudi government makes a lot of decisions, our problem is to what extent we apply it and to whom it is applied" (tweet 6.14).

Both these tweets included cautious questions about whether the law was going to be applied to princes as well as to ordinary people.

These tweets may indicate a new era of accountability in Saudi Arabia, which was later alluded to by the Crown Prince in a TV interview on the *Al-Arabiya* channel on 25th

April, 2016, when he was asked about the new organisation of utility fees and how many palaces and government organisations had not paid their utility fees for several decades. He did not deny this corruption, and his answer was very clear when he said that no one would be excused from paying these fees under the new regulations; and even princes should know that now they would face public opinion on social media. This confirms the strength of Twitter and its influence on political discussion and public opinion in Saudi society. Recently, the Crown Prince re-emphasised his promise to fight corruption and apply the law to all when Saudi police arrested more than 200 princes, ministers and other influential people in the state accused of corruption (Saudi Press Agency, 2017). The final report of the Supreme Committee for Combating Corruption in Saudi Arabia revealed that 381 people had been summoned and that their situation had been handled under the supervision of the Public Prosecution. The kingdom recovered about 400 billion riyals from the funds that were illegally obtained, represented in several assets such as real estate, cash and other assets (Alarabiya, 2018).

Figure 52: Tweet 6.13

#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء
السؤال .. هل الامراء سيدفعون الرسوم ولا بس المواطنين من
تجار العقار ؟

Translation: Are the princes are going to pay the tax or just ordinary people?

Figure 53: Tweet 6.14

مشكلتنا ليست في إيجاد النظام، نحن أكثر دولة تفر أنظمة، ولكن
ما مدى تفعيله وتطبيقه على أرض الواقع وعلى من سيطبق ؟
#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء

Translation: Our problem is not in establishing the system. Our country is the most law-making country, but to what extent do we apply these laws and to whom are they applied.

6.3.2.3 Citizens' Efforts to Promote the Law and Protect their Rights

The debate confirmed that Twitter users were very proactive, as 191 tweets attempted to suggest the best ways and solutions for maintaining citizens' rights. According to Alswaeed (2015), Twitter provides Saudi users with an opportunity to express their social and political opinions, which had been prohibited before the emergence of social media, as well as enabling them to engage in discussion with decision-makers and elites. The first tendency (151 tweets) included Saudis Twitter users' expectations about the weak points and gaps in the draft of the tax law on undeveloped properties. These tweets were about the perceived means by which property owners might try to avoid paying the tax (see tweet 6.15). For example Twitter users suggested that the owners of undeveloped properties would transfer ownership of these lands (to each other or to family members) before the due date of paying the tax; moreover, that these taxes could be avoided by creating fences or walls around these huge tracts of land (see tweets 6.16 and 6.17).

Figure 54: Tweet 6.15

الاهم اغلاق الثغرات القانونية التي يمكن للاحتكار الالتفاف
حولها.
#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء
#رسميا_فرض_رسوم_الأراضي
#الأراضي_البيضاء

Translation: The most important aspect of creating the law is filling the gaps and amending the weaknesses in it to prevent manipulation

Figure 55: Tweet 6.16

#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء
هوامير العقار سيجزئون أراضيهم البيضاء إلى الحد الأدنى
الذي لا تطاله الضرائب ثم تسجل بأسماء تحت سلطتهم قريب
ونسيب .

Translation: Property owners are going to divide their lands into small parcels and transfer ownership to their relatives.

Figure 56: Tweet 6.17

#رسوم_الاراضي_البيضاء سيعمد اغلب تجار تلك الاراضي
من القيام بتسويرها واستخراج فسح بناء وعمل مخطط بناء
وبعدئ ذلك ما حد يقولك شي

Translation: Property owners are going to start fake buildings, then stop working.

The second tendency 22% of tweets that contained the topic of citizen rights contained a suggestion as to how the law could be improved (41 tweets) made some suggestions as to the best solutions and regulations which would force undeveloped property owners to pay the tax and prohibit avoidance strategies. Unlike conventional media, social media plays a crucial role in facilitating the delivery of citizens' views to governments (Al-Saggaf and Simmons, 2015). There was one suggestion that identifying a specific amount, such as 100 Saudi Riyals for each metre would be unfair, because the land prices in South Riyadh were cheaper than in the northern and eastern areas. This Twitter user suggested that the tax amount should take account of the current market price for land (see tweets 6.18 and 6.19). He added that regulations and efforts would however not be beneficial if those responsible did not identify a specific date to start applying the tax; and suggested that the date should be the king's decision. Some Twitter users felt that if all undeveloped properties were covered by the new regulations, this would be regarded as fair by Saudi citizens. Twitter users in this sample also employed religious clerics' opinions and comments. More than 20 tweets attached links and cited Altwraifi's ideas to solve this problem. His solution was simply to restore properties that had been unfairly given to stakeholders, as this was causing harm to the citizens. Another cleric's opinion, which was re-tweeted 23 times, maybe because it agreed with the decision on religious grounds, explained that imposing the tax on unused properties was appropriate within Islamic regulations, because it would benefit most citizens who did not have houses, but that the problem was to know how the stakeholders had received these properties. All these tweets demonstrated how Twitter users came up with solutions which they believed would be beneficial for their society and other citizens. Although these solutions were the main suggestions, Twitter users also made a range of different suggestions which is an indicator of the diversity of the debate.

Figure 57: Tweet 6.18

حتى تكون مجدية يجب أن تكون حسب اسعار الاراضي
باختلاف موقعها وبنسبة محددة من قيمتها
#رسوم_الاراضي_البيضاء

Translation: To be fair, the tax should be based on location and market value

Figure 58: Tweet 6.19

#رسوم_الاراضي_البيضاء
من أكبر الأخطاء تحديد رسم ثابت للمتر ! مثلا ١٠٠ ريال لكل
١٠٠٠٠٠
بل تحديد نسبة من سعر المتر ؟ مثلا ١٠٪ من سعر المتر !

Translation: One big mistake is to identify a specific amount of tax, such as 100 Saudi Riyals per metre; the correct way is to identify a percentage of the value of each metre.

6.3.3 Experts:

This section argues that Twitter users, in this sample, demonstrated they valued informed debate by using reports and statistics from government sources and preferring to draw on evidence from specific economic experts known for their constant criticism of government decisions. According to Dryzek (2002), people's claims expressed through debate on behalf of or against decisions must be supported by reasonable justifications to convince others. As justifications strengthen tweet contents and play a crucial role in convincing others; and because, ordinary people may not understand every matter, so getting support from experts' opinions is a logical step in furthering discussion (Gutmann and Thompson 2004). More than 140 direct links to videos and articles by Saudi experts were employed by Twitter users in this sample. These links were used to promote or to cast doubt on the law. Twitter users' reliance on evidence suggests that they considered expert opinions as powerful rhetorical device, useful to convince others of an argument. It also indicates that Twitter users on this hashtag valued rational and informed debate.

In the era of conventional media, experts could not criticise the government on TV channels because those channels committed themselves to supporting government

policy on Saudi media. In the era of social media platforms experts have a great opportunity to interact and debate with a variety of people about issues like the housing shortage and share their criticisms, demands and suggestions. The influence of experts is increased if their evidence comes from trustworthy sources which are more difficult to reject (Mir and Zaheer, 2012; and Pursuit, 2013). Experts Abdul-Hameed Al-Amari and Isam Al-Zameel usually interact with other Twitter users including ordinary people, and analyse government decisions drawing on official statistics and studies on Twitter, in newspapers and on TV channels, and provide people with important information about the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia.

Abdul-Hameed Al-Amari and Isam Al-Zameel are journalists for different journals in Saudi Arabia, as well as having worked in government jobs before moving to the private sector; therefore, their long and varied experiences may have increased their fame among Twitter users. The frequency which Twitter users refer to these experts' views in support of their own arguments, suggests that they trust these experts. Indeed, 65 tweets that used expert opinions attached direct links that referred to Abdu-Al-hameed Al-Amare and Isam Al-Zameel, and their names were mentioned more than 160 times. They are Saudis and have enough experience in this context, which serves to increase their credibility among Twitter users. Those two experts usually present clear opinions about beneficial government decisions and do not hesitate to criticise the government's unsuccessful decisions or ministers' inadequate efforts in the economic and housing sectors. An example of this is Abdu-Al-hameed Al-Amare's announcement on the Al-Dannah channel about the penetration of corruption inside Saudi government ministries (Unemployment and government performance, 2012). Isam Al-Zameel has written many times about government corruption in organisations and ministries in journals and in his blog and journal, such as his article of 18th June, 2011 (Al-Zameel, 2011). These two experts received specific thanks in 51 tweets from Twitter users in this sample regarding their efforts in the interest of citizens. Citing them is a way of criticising the government without openly appearing to do so, which may be considered a way of staying safe.

Furthermore, their focus on citizens' interests may explain their large number of followers. The former expert has 750,000 followers on Twitter, and the latter has 943,000,

which arguably demonstrates that they have built their reputation as ‘men of the people’. Abdu-Al-hameed Al-Amare’s and Isam Al-Zameel’s tweets indicated the benefits of imposing the tax on unused real estate and provided several links which demonstrated the positive impact of the tax on different sectors. Their tweets usually received a huge number of positive and critical replies and likes from supporters or opponents, who circulated tweets with different video clips of programmes that presented the two experts on different channels watched by Saudis. These channels are considered pro-government, because they follow the Saudi government’s general policy on media (see Chapter 2) and include MBC, *Al-Arabia*, *Almajed*, *Al-Eqtisadiyah*, and *Khilijah*. The links to experts’ articles were from the newspapers *Al-Ryadh*, *Alwatten* and *Al-Eqtisadiyah*, such as Abdu-Al-hameed Al-Amare’s tweet, on 17th November 2015, about the law of imposing the tax on undeveloped properties which got 1,498 re-tweets and 308 likes. Moreover, MBC TV channel’s tweet on 19th November 2015 included a link to Abdu-Al-hameed Al-Amare’s interview and received 363 re-tweets and 269 likes (see tweet 6.20)³⁵. This range of media resources used as evidence confirmed the extent to which Twitter users’ discussion was rational, as this evidence included criticisms about channels and newspapers that follow Saudi policy. Moreover, 13 Twitter users used sarcasm to criticise experts’ erroneous suggestions or their weak arguments about housing shortage in Saudi Arabia (see tweet 6.21). This tweet included Abdul-Hameed Al-Amari’s previous suggestions, which confirmed that the price of properties would decrease, whereas the price had increased.

Figure 59: Tweet 6.20

تعليق عبدالحميد العمري عن إحالة مشروع
#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء لـ مجلس الشورى
youtu.be/UFsAD626K-I

Translation: Abdu-Al-hameed’s opinion about transferring the law to the Saudi Parliament.

Figure 60: Tweet 6.21

سنوات من الرسوم وفي النهاية #العقار تضاعف ثلاث
اضعافه نصيحة ركر على تطوير مهارة الرسم أحسن
#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء

³⁵ This tweet is an example of experts’ tweets that were re-tweeted and liked a lot. This person just shared the link, but did not comment on it. Therefore it is impossible to know whether they supported arguments which were made in that interview or not, which would have allowed the researcher to measure another element of the quality of debate

Translation: Many years of drawing, and in the end the property price tripled, please you (the expert) should improve your drawing skills.

Though Twitter users, in this case study, utilised experts' and property owners' views to strengthen their arguments and persuade others to change their opinions, this is different to what happened in first case study and in some democratic countries such as the USA and UK, where many people do not trust experts. Therefore the use of economic experts' opinions to encourage Twitter users in this case differed from that described in Chapter 5, where Twitter users turned to clerics' opinions. This may be attributed to the type of issue involved, because women's political participation is a complicated issue socially and religiously and clerics have discussed women's issues for several decades and people have started to reject some of their interpretations. This is in contrast to housing issues, where citizens usually do not reject the opinions of experts. Public attitudes towards experts in Saudi Arabia seem notably different from those in Western countries. Writing about the UK and US, Shaw (2016) for example notes how people have had enough of expert opinion in politics and how political leaders, such as Donald Trump, position themselves in opposition against an elite of experts.

On the other hand, the analysis confirmed that Twitter users did not just depend on economic experts and consultants' opinions to support their opinions but utilised a variety of available resources. For example, they sent 25 tweets that included links or information from official reports by the Saudi authorities concerned, such as quarterly reports by the Ministry of Justice and Housing about the price of real estate and the number of completed deals. These were used to compare figures over the previous five years and to explain how prices and deals had started to decline (see tweets 6.22 and 6.23). This result echoes Mohammad (2018) whose study revealed the role of social media to benefit citizens' political participation through enabling citizens to access sources of information and publish their personal opinions. This variety of evidence shows that Saudis used available official resources to support their opinions in discussion, which indicates that Twitter users value a rational, informed debate; moreover, it may be attributed to their attempts to protect themselves and avoid any conflict with government.

Figure 61: Tweet 6.22

بعد فرض #رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء في النطاق العمراني،
تراجعت قيمة الصفقات التجارية بنسبة تصل لـ39%

Translation: After imposing the tax on undeveloped property in urban charges, the value of business transactions fell by 39%.

Figure 62: Tweet 6.23

الاقتصادية تنشر اليوم تقريرها السنوي
عن أداء السوق العقارية
قيمة الصفقات تتراجع 16% إلى 366 مليار ريال..86% منها
أراضي
#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء

Translation: Aleqtisadiah Newspaper released today an annual report regarding property market performance which indicated a decline in the value of real estate transactions.

6.4 Twitter Analysis Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the deliberation on Twitter about the draft law of imposing tax on undeveloped property revealed a high level of quality of deliberation regarding following elements: openness, diversity, relevance, respectfulness, and rationality. The topics and perspectives that supported or opposed the law of imposing tax on undeveloped property were diverse. Moreover, these different perspectives showed the extent to which Twitter users valued informed discussion. Twitter users used reasonable justification, evidence and trustworthy experts` opinions to strengthen their arguments.

The result also indicated a change in the relationship between the Saudi government and citizens, as citizens felt more able to demand that the law was fairly implemented, that government organisations should prevent corruption and misuse of authority and position and be transparent in their dealings. Twitter users did not just react to the government decision as the in first case study (Saudi women`s political participation in municipal elections) but they become proactive by analysing the government law, explain its weaknesses and going beyond that to suggest solutions.

Twitter users presented their sense of connectedness with other citizens by showing their desire that imposing tax on undeveloped property benefited all citizens and the state before thinking about their interests. Therefore, the following interview section concentrates on gaining a deeper understanding of those results through engage in discussions with key Twitter users on this hashtag. The research questions are addressed by exploring the interviewees` perspectives regarding the importance of experts, diversity of participants and topics as well as their feelings about connectedness with others in society and the influence of these factors on the quality of deliberation. Moreover, the interviewees` perspectives about the influence of government censorship and self-censorship on the quality of deliberation are investigated.

6.5 Interviews

Data obtained from the interviews revealed the role of knowledge in empowering Twitter users and helping them to present themselves as informed citizens, which encouraged them to engage in discussion. Moreover, experts were seen as playing a crucial role in facilitating discussion among users through transferring their knowledge and educating others. Interviewees confirmed the influence of government censorship on the quality of the discussion and saw the diversity of participants and topics as increasing the quality of the debate. Interviewees were asked about some of the results of the analyses of tweets to get their opinions on what these results implied. Therefore, interviews were conducted with nine of the most active Twitter users who participated in this discussion to address the following questions:

- What are the motivations that encourage Twitter users to engage in deliberation about the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia?
- To what extent is the debate on Twitter considered an appropriate place that allows Saudis to discuss the sensitive issues of their society, such as the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia?
- To what extent and how does the debate on Twitter empower Twitter users to criticize government organizations' efforts regarding the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia?
- What are the crucial factors that influence the quality of deliberation of Twitter users' discussions on Twitter about the housing shortage in Saudi Arabia?

The nine interviewees were allocated specific codes to maintain anonymity and protect confidentiality, as show in Table 6.5.1.

Table 25: 6.10 Interview sample of nine Twitter users who used this hashtag

N	Name	Education	Position	Gender	Followers
1	HMU1	Bachelor	Economic expert and journalist	Male	943,414
2	HMU2	Bachelor	Economic expert and journalist	Male	760,484
3	HMU3	PhD	Consultant at various investment companies	Male	350,113
4	HMU4	High school	Unemployed	Male	193,992
5	HMU5	Secondary school	Private company employee	Male	158,530
6	HMU6	High school	Real estate dealer	Male	187,000
7	HWU1	Secondary school	Housewife	Female	357,000
8	HWU2	Bachelor	Government employee	Female	612,000
9	HWU3	Master	Journalist	Female	192,000

6.5.1 The Importance of Experts and Diversity of Arguments and Participants

Analysis of the interview data demonstrated the importance of diversity of participation and topics, as well as the crucial role of experts in the discussion about imposing the tax on undeveloped property. There was an interesting difference in how interviewees perceived experts' role in public debate on Twitter. The interviews revealed there were two different perspectives regarding the importance of experts in discussion on Twitter. The first group saw that experts' knowledge enabled them to facilitate public debate and increased its quality. They believe that experts should participate in discussion to increase awareness among citizens regarding the new law. HMU2 perceived Twitter as:

“A platform that provided experts with the freedom and space to share their knowledge in this way; and which increased the rationality of discussion.”

HMU6 believes that:

“Real estate and its systems need an expert in real estate and in the Saudi market in particular, in addition to the fact that citizens did not get used to discussing government decisions in public platforms, which showed a lack of experience and

lack of knowledge in this sector when they participated in discussion about government decision.”

He stressed the importance of the participation of experts to help citizens understand the real estate sector.

HMU1 add that experts used this deliberation to analyse the monthly official reports which indicated decreasing property prices and declining sales figures. He believed that ordinary people were able to ask questions and analyse these reports together, unlike in the era of traditional media. HMU3 agreed and added:

“Drawing on my experiences which I got from working as an advisor at two international financial companies in the USA for several years, I was able to obtain international reports about the Saudi real estate market, which are not easy for ordinary people to find, and to discuss them.”

He then discussed those reports with other Twitter users to explain unclear details.

The interviewees in the first group included three economic experts (HMU1, HMU2, and HMU3) and a dealer in real estate (HMU6). They participated in the debate on Twitter because of their feelings of connectedness to society. These feelings motivated them to explain the laws, advice citizens and answer their enquiries. This was because they were unofficially prohibited in traditional media from making harsh criticisms, recommendations or demanding that government organisations and officials act (see Chapter 2). The second group included the remaining five interviewees: a housewife, an unemployed person and public employees. This group admitted that they engaged in discussion on this hashtag with the aim of educating themselves more about the law of imposing tax on undeveloped property and to understand the expected benefits from its implementation. Unlike the first group, they did not perceive themselves as experts on the topic of discussion and they saw Twitter as offering opportunities for learning.

This is notably different to the first case study (Saudi women's political participation), where all the interviewees were keen to show others the correct interpretation of Islam or the dangers of the 'Western conspiracy'. When discussing women's rights, it seems that Twitter users felt surer about their knowledge. While they highlighted the importance of religious texts as evidence, they perceived themselves as experts with a duty to share their knowledge with the wider community of citizens.

Secondly, the interview data highlighted the important role of the diversity of topics and participants in this discussion; diversity being considered one of the elements of the quality of deliberation. Five participants emphasised that Twitter has allowed discussion of different topics regarding the housing shortage with a wide variety of users, which was impossible in the era of traditional media, and interestingly HWU2 said:

"These discussions were not just conducted with like-minded users, but also with those with contrary opinions, unlike traditional media platforms which presented debates largely by pro-government elites."

Moreover, according to HMU3:

"The diversity of users in this debate included economic experts, religious men, women, and men, who had divergent views on the tax and the methods of enforcing it, which broadened the range of deliberation and allowed users to encounter diverse arguments."

According to six interviewees, three women and three men, the diversity of perspectives showed the extent to which Twitter users, particularly women, could participate in developing Saudi society in future because they demonstrated they could support their arguments with different justifications and evidence including the opinions of trustworthy experts or previous experience, which reflected their knowledge. This debate on Twitter was thus seen by these interviewees as diverse in terms of participants and opinions; and this was seen as increasing its quality and of benefit to society.

6.5.2 Feeling Connected and Responsible towards Other Citizens

The analysis of interview data confirmed that Twitter users in this hashtag were perceived as very active and that their motivation to participate in discussion was their connectedness to other Saudi citizens and their sense of their responsibility to their society. Firstly, eight interviewees believed that Twitter hashtags were used by citizens to raise awareness about the expected positive and negative implications of applying the tax law through exchanging ideas rather than passively accepting the law. They also believed that this free exchange of ideas could take place on many other social media platforms. Indeed, raising awareness through discussion could be achieved using various strategies, such as informing people about Saudi citizens' bad experiences and previous government decisions which were not carried out. According to HWU2

“I regret that I hastened and did not wait for the results of the law’s enforcement because Twitter users were optimistic regarding the impact the law would have’. Moreover, she adds that “the discussion on the hashtag participated in informing people about Saudi citizens’ bad experiences and previous government decisions which were not carried out”.

She added that she had bought a very expensive house, like many Saudi citizens, but the quality of the building was poor, and she hoped no other citizens would repeat her mistake. HMU1, HMU2 and HMU3 confirmed the importance of using personal experiences as evidence to support tweet contents, in order to increase awareness regarding the imposition of tax on undeveloped property among Saudi citizens on this hashtag. They believed that personal experiences had more influence than official reports and statistics. HWU1 pointed out that unsuccessful previous government decisions, such as the Saudization of the private sector, were used to predict that this law would also not succeed.

Secondly, the interviews addressed the extent to which Twitter users sensed connectedness to other citizens and their society. HMU1, HWU2, HMU4, HWU1 and HWU3 emphasised the importance of this debate on Twitter as an opportunity to educate themselves as well as educating others by exchanging beneficial information about their rights and how to protect themselves; HMU3 said:

“I attempted to explain weaknesses in the law and suggested the best solutions to protect society and citizens’ rights.”

HWU3 noted the importance of educating citizens about the benefits of the law and said that the results could appear after several years. These examples confirm that the interviewees believed that Twitter users’ debate on Twitter included some elements of good citizenship, such as a sense of obligation to help other citizens and allegiance to their society and government when they attempted to make this law a success. This was because users did not wait for government decisions to be issued officially; but searched for information and attempted to participate by making suggestions to improve the terms of the law, which demonstrated that Twitter users were very active citizens. On the other hand, although Twitter users did not discuss any women’s issues under this hashtag, some women received online abuse. All participants except one male (HMU4), who has lived in the USA, confirmed that freedom is guaranteed at least partly for all Saudis on Twitter, but that Saudi women, especially those who are members of big tribes and families and who are active on Twitter might receive threats and abuse. HMU6 believed that tribes and families which were determined to maintain their traditional cultural norms think that if women in their families appear on Twitter under their real names, this could bring shame. As a result, these tribes will not forgive or support a member who does something which they feel could destroy their reputation; therefore tribal and family members and other men will be abusive towards these women online.

Four interviewees (HMU2, HMU3, HMU4, and HWU2) were surprised at the online abuse against women who engaged in discussions about Saudi community issues; although the other five believed that it was to be expected, because Saudi society is a male-dominated society. This harshness resulted in women being forced to stay in ‘bubbles’ and exchange opinions only with like-minded friends, and this avoidance of social pressure may impact on the discussion. These issues may explain why 52% of women users in this sample used **pseudonyms**, although the issue is public and concerns all Saudis. Moreover, this result demonstrates that Saudi men still have control over women (see section 5.2.2).

6.5.3 Government Censorship and Self-censorship in the Deliberation

Analysis of the interview data showed that government censorship and self-censorship was perceived to influence the quality of deliberation although it was deemed necessary in some cases. All the interviewees believed that governments in many countries, including Saudi Arabia, usually monitored media platforms directly or indirectly; and that monitoring may have crucial effects on freedom of expression, as it restricted and influenced the quality of deliberation. However, HMU2 and HMU5 did not think the Saudi government's monitoring of this hashtag would influence the quality of deliberation or their opinions when discussing this issue with other users, because the discussion focused on employing the law correctly and fight corruption in government institutions. They pointed out that the Saudi government had created the Saudi National Anti-Corruption Commission to fight all types of corruption; therefore they were working with government to fight corruption. HMU1 said:

“I had used different social media platforms from 1999 (when he established his blog) then moved to Facebook (before creating his Twitter account). I had not encountered Saudi government interference even though I had criticised officials, ministers and Saudi government organisations many times, and by the way you can still read my blogs and tweets.”

All the interviewees accepted government monitoring on Twitter with the aim of protecting women from online abuse. These demands were very different from those in the first case study where interviewees wanted online discussions to be monitored to protect Saudi society and values in terms of its religious regulations, tribal values, clerics, the Royal Family and so on. But in this case study they focused on protecting female citizens from online abuse; which demonstrates a sense of connectedness to other citizens.

Some interviewees saw a need for self-censorship, such as HMU1 who emphasised that he did not engage in discussion if he did not know the religious, political and social dimensions of the issues. This was to avoid any problems with the government, and a strategy which he considered to be self-censorship. Ryan (2011), points out that even although self-censorship prohibits important discussions and criticisms which address social and cultural issues, it avoids citizens being penalised by the government. On the other hand, HMU5 believed that **logically** users should not need to think about censorship on Twitter discussion, because their behaviour **already** on Twitter would be like their behaviour in life where they respect each other's social, religious and political values, and which has kept them safe from government punishment **He adds Saudis usually avoid harshly criticising others' social values or society's religious values in public.** Moreover, one of the male interviewees (HMU6) and all three female Twitter users confirmed that self-censorship is usually present because of the traditional and religious norms which influence behaviour and the quality of discussions on social media platforms such as Twitter. However, self-censorship may have to be a skill which develops with practice; and users who are unused to public debate may need to think about their safety on Twitter.

6.5.4 The Relationship between Government and Citizens

The interviewees generally felt that the discussion on this hashtag signalled a change in the relationship between the Saudi government and Saudi citizens, due to users' ability to access reliable sources of information equally. Two of the interviewees, HMU6 and HWU3, said that freedom of expression on Twitter was demonstrated by Saudi citizens openly discussing the housing shortage publicly, whereas these ideas would normally have been said in private. This opinion reflects Almistadi (2014), who says that Saudis discuss different social affairs, Islamic affairs and corruption on Twitter. However, these interviewees might have exaggerated opinions because Saudi citizens cannot harshly criticise government policy in public without risking repercussions by the government. HM3 however went on to explain that Twitter afforded citizens a space for limited criticism, but provided them with exposure to a range of opinions and information which helped them to consider the arguments more rationally. I believe that the interviewees' definition of 'free' is a pragmatic one. Moreover, they explained that Saudi citizens usually do not engage in discussion about government decisions in public places; and it was difficult to do in the era of traditional media, when ordinary people's opinions and criticisms could not be voiced clearly and accurately, as Saudi citizens did not have the right to criticise the political system in their country. This echoes findings by Al-Rakaf (2012).

HWU3 believed that Twitter enabled Saudi citizens to engage in public discussion about government decisions which was unimaginable few years ago. HMU1 and HWU1 added that Twitter facilitated Saudi women to engage with men in serious and rational discussion, which was taboo in the last decade. HWU3 is one of the active Saudi women on Twitter who focuses on community issues; and she mentioned how Saudi women had started to engage in discussion and criticise government organisations' performance on Twitter to avoid the many restrictions present in a patriarchal society. Although she echoed other participants' opinions about the benefits of equal access and dissemination of information for all Twitter users in Saudi Arabia, she added:

“This participation in political discussion has meant more for Saudi women than for men when they engaged in discussion about the draft law of imposing tax on undeveloped property.”

In this she was alluding to how Saudi women have traditionally not been given an equal voice to men; thus although some women received online abuse during this discussion, having equal status and equal access to information on Twitter was very important for women and facilitated their participation as citizens in Saudi social, political and economic issues.

Six interviewees also mentioned that access to information sources helped Twitter users criticise unsuccessful government actions, because having detailed information about the housing shortage or any another crisis emboldened them and strengthened their arguments. Moreover, HWU3 mentioned:

“Twitter helps ordinary people to access resources or to receive new information and more explanations from other users who have the skill to simplify official information or give details about the housing shortage and the property market in Saudi Arabia on Twitter.”

They also believed that engaging in this deliberation on Twitter enabled Saudi citizens to present themselves as well-informed people, which would have been very hard and sometimes impossible in the era of traditional media. HUM1 pointed out that in the past, accessing information had to be via limited media platforms such as newspapers and TV programmes, which were under the control of the government and powerful stakeholders. HUM2 added that no one then could have imagined the speed with which Saudi audiences could access information from different areas in the world, such as China or the USA. AISwaeed (2015) mentions that 90% of Twitter users in his sample admitted that Twitter’s features, such as freedom of expression, diversity, and transparency, enticed Saudis to engage in discussion about social issues.

6.6 Conclusion

On 23rd November, 2015, the Saudi Council of Ministers approved the law of imposing tax on undeveloped property; ending the long wait for this law which was issued as a solution to Saudi Arabia's housing shortage. Reactions to this issue demonstrated the crucial role of social media platforms, and Twitter in particular, in allowing Saudi citizens to communicate with each other and exchange their perspectives. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of tweet contents and the interview data presented some very interesting points regarding the quality of deliberation and the elements of good citizenship.

First of all, Twitter users in this case study were proactive through their efforts to read the draft of law and find any weaknesses which could be used by property owners to avoid paying the tax. Citizens focused on the public interest when they explored those weak points and demanded officials to solve them. They did not stop here but went beyond that to find useful solutions to prevent tax avoidance. This differed from the other two case studies where users tended to be largely reactive to government decisions, although there were a few proactive attempts in the third case study to interact with government organisations. Secondly, Twitter users felt able to publicly demand that the Saudi government protect the public interest, which was also mentioned in the third case study in a more limited way. In the case of imposing tax on undeveloped property, Twitter users demanded transparency and they attached evidence with their demands, and requested the government to act against the corruption which had penetrated into many government organisations. Twitter users indicated some government organisations as being responsible, such as the Saudi parliament, the Saudi Council of Ministers, the National Anti-Corruption Commission and the Ministry of Housing; and suggested implicitly and explicitly that some royal princes and officials were manipulative people who would avoid paying the tax. Twitter empowered users to present their claims and strengthened their ability to play crucial role in their society, which was impossible on the era of traditional media. On the other hand, those interviewed agreed with monitoring deliberation on Twitter with aim of protecting women from online abuse. Although interviewees from the first case study demanded the government monitored discussion, the reasons were different as they demanded monitoring for protection from Western and

liberal 'conspiracy' which aimed at destroying Saudi values. But in this case they presented their connectedness to other citizens and demanded protection for women. The deliberation on this hashtag elicited online abuse against women, which can be seriously detrimental to the quality of discussion on platforms like Twitter. The quantitative analysis showed that there were 107 'disrespectful' tweets on this hashtag and these were generally aimed at women. The majority of these tweets, which were connected to social and religious values, included insults and threats which were trying to silence women. These tweet contents reflected to what extent those Twitter users were concerned to uphold conservative values.

Thirdly, the analysis revealed the extent to which Twitter users appreciated informed debate by their use of official reports and studies which confirmed the benefit of imposing the tax. Twitter users' interaction in this case was more than in other two case studies, which can be attributed to tweets being posted by economic experts that were seen as trustworthy, or included reasonable justifications which depended on personal experiences or citing previous unsuccessful government decisions. Moreover, the experts in this case felt they should share their knowledge and help educate others, and non-experts felt they should educate themselves. This was in contrast to the first case study where everyone felt they were experts already. However, Twitter users in this case were freer from social and religious restrictions than their peers in the other case studies, as this one did not relate to specific persons or women's issues. This may have facilitated criticising government performance that related to public interests.

Fourthly, female Twitter users, in this case study, appeared bolder in harshly criticizing the government performance. Unsurprisingly, women did not criticise the government's decision to allow women's political participation in municipal elections, instead their criticisms, often in the form of sarcastic comments, were directed at opponents of the law. Although organisations participated on this hashtag more than in the other two case studies, the media agencies simply used the hashtag to promote their products; moreover, other non-government organisations did not interact with other users

even if they commented on the law. Government organisations did not participate in this hashtag, although they received many demands and accusations, which demonstrates that they did not use Twitter as a two-way communication tool on this hashtag.

Chapter 7

Twitter Users' Debate about the Unlawful Use of Public Property

This chapter investigates the quality of deliberation among Twitter users about the unlawful use of public property such as streets and pavements in Saudi cities. Some Saudi businessmen have annexed small streets, which are located between their huge properties, or used pavements as entrances to their palaces. This chapter focuses on the political deliberation on Twitter in January 2016 after the Municipality of Jeddah Governorate announced that the pavement on Sarri Road was being used unlawfully by Subhi Butarji, the owner of a private hospital. This media campaign was a reaction to Butarji's comment on Twitter about Saudi youths' reaction against the Saudi government's decision to increase fuel and energy prices as part of the state budget for 2016. He attempted to advise Saudi youth to respect government decisions; and said that Saudi citizens must rely on themselves and stop depending on the government. Twitter users used Google Earth software and other programs to expose Butarji's infringement, whereby he had used a public pavement in Jeddah illegally, by ornamenting the pavement on Sarri Road with flowers and planted trees converting the pavement into a main entrance to his palace, and thereby preventing people from using the public pavement.

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse the contents of tweets of the hashtag #كفايةدلج (#Enough_Manipulation) during the 12 days, from 2nd to 14th of January, 2016; because this period included some Saudi government decisions and announcements, which came as a reaction to this popular campaign. The results of the analysis demonstrate a change in the relationship between the Saudi government and Twitter users; as the government reacted to users directly in this hashtag in contrast to other two case studies. This change in the relationship was accompanied by a change in the strategy used by Twitter users to encourage the government to meet their demands by providing evidence acquired from sources such as Google Earth and identifying the violations as corruption to say "we are here and our demands are very

important". Furthermore, class hatred was apparent on this hashtag, but was absent in the other two case studies. Twitter was also presented as crucial factor in facilitating political communication between government and Twitter users, as well as providing a space in which to conduct political discussion between Twitter users.

7.1 Quantitative Analysis

7.1.1 Diversity and Relevant Contents

This section argues that the deliberation about the government decision to stop unlawful use of public property on the pavement at Sarri Road was diverse, regarding participants and topics although the users were united in their attitudes. Moreover, women participated; although their percentage was the lowest of the three case studies in this thesis. Table 7.1 shows that the majority of Twitter users using the hashtag **#Enough_Manipulation** were men (74.4%), with women accounting for 23%; and organisations, including Saudi government organisations as well as media agencies such as newspapers and electronic newspapers, making up the other 3%. Men's participation in this issue was higher than the percentage of the male participation in the two previous case studies: 59% for women's political participation and 61% for the housing shortage. This may be attributed to the type of issue being discussed. At the time of the discussion on Twitter about Butarji's unlawful use of the pavement, which was arguably causing jams on Sarri Road, driving was restricted to men³⁶ in Saudi Arabia; so men may have been more directly affected by this violation than women. Nevertheless, Saudi women's participation in this issue was 23%, which sends signals about the desire of Saudi women to engage in political discussion about social issues, even if they were not drivers. Media agencies also participated actively in posting information about this issue. According to Starke et al. (2016), the mass media provides the public with transparency of information. However, most media agencies that tweeted using this hashtag were Saudi electronic newspapers such as *Ajel*, *An7aa*, *Alweeam* and *Sabq*, which may indicate that social

³⁶Saudi Arabia agreed to let women drive in June 2018.

media platforms such as Twitter were considered by Saudi newspapers as an important space to address Saudi citizens interested in discussing the unlawful use of public property. Moreover, this participation was noticed by citizens who asked media agencies to support their demands. The newspapers supported citizens' demands, in contrast to the previous two case studies (Saudi women's political participation and imposing the tax on undeveloped property) where media agencies did not engage in discussion or comment on government decisions. I believe these electronic newspapers were biased towards the government because their activities came after government organisations' decisions to remove that violation. Moreover, newspapers did not criticise property owners in second case study, maybe because some of them were from in the royal family.

In terms of the topics in this sample of tweets, criticism was the most common topic; making up 66% of the sample, with a sarcastic strategy commonly being used; which might indicate that Twitter users may feel more secure about criticising government organisations by using sarcasm, and may also use it to avoid engaging in conflict with others or to circumvent traditional or religious restrictions. The topic of requesting action was the second most common for this issue (16.5%), which may simply reflect the dissatisfaction felt regarding certain Saudi organisations that had done nothing to stop the unlawful use of public property. The third most common topic (5.5%) was Twitter and technology; a topic not discussed in the two previous case studies. Its use here may be related to the speed of the Saudi government's reaction to the Twitter campaign that empowered Saudi citizens to demand that government organisations and officials deal with unlawful use of public property, as well as applying the laws equally to all. The least common topic was values (3%) which focused on the moral issues involved when citizens blamed the business man. Unrelated tweets occupied 9% (see Table 7.2) of this sample and included a variety of topics, some of which were related to other issues of Saudi society but had no direct relationship to the unlawful use of public property in Saudi Arabia.

This result reflects the extent to which Twitter users attempted to focus on and discuss the Saudi government's decisions regarding the unlawful use of public property. The importance of the relevance of tweet contents to the main topic of debate is in considering it as an element in measuring the quality of the debate.

Table 26: 7.1: Distribution of study sample according to gender & name used on Twitter

Gender Name used on Twitter	Male		Female		Organisatio n		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Real name	5943	89.5	976	49.5	231	100	7150	80
pseudonym	700	10.5	1075	50.5	----	----	1775	20
Total	6643	74.4%	2051	23%	231	2.6%	8925	100

Table 27: 7.2: Distribution of tweets according to topic

Topics	Frequency	Percent
Requesting action	1,468	16.5
Saudi values	244	3
Criticism	5,890	66
Twitter and apps	487	5.5
Unrelated tweets	836	9
Total	8,925	100

Table 28: 7.3: Distribution of tweets according to attitude

Users' attitude toward the issue	Frequency	Percent
Agreement	7,999	89.34%
Neutral	836	9.66%
Rejection	090	1%
Total	8,925	100%

7.1.2 Openness

This section demonstrates the extent to which Saudi women felt obliged to hide their identities in order to participate in discussions about public issues. The quantitative analysis showed that the majority of Twitter users on this hashtag used their real names (80%), 88.5% of these were men; however, 50.5% of the women used **pseudonyms** (see Table 7.1), which may indicate the existence of restrictions such as traditional values on women’s participation in discussions of social issues. As in the previous case studies, there is evidence to suggest that social values influence Saudi women’s participation in political discussion on Twitter. Although women tended to use their **pseudonyms** in debate, they made an important contribution to public discussion. 23% of posts were by women which added to the diversity and therefore increased the quality of deliberation. In general, it would appear that the majority of the sample used their real names because the topic of corruption is less sensitive than the topic of women’s political participation (as explained in Chapters 2 and 5).

7.1.3 Reciprocity

The analysis demonstrated that the interaction by Twitter users who engaged in discussion about Saudi government decision to stop unlawful use of the pavement on Sarri Road was generally low; moreover, it was primarily tweets that included sarcastic comments or officials` announcements that were re-tweeted, liked or commented on. Although the majority of tweets (78.5%) did not receive any replies, 8% had more than two, the majority of which were official announcements. In contrast to replies, 25.5% of

the sample received a high level of interaction through re-tweeting, which may be attributed to the high percentage of attachments in this sample, which accounted for 41% of the total sample, and included videos and caricatures. I believe that 57% of sample was not re-tweeted because the Saudi government had issued their decisions and removed the violation. On the other hand, 71.5% of tweets received no likes from other Twitter users, 15.5% received one like and 13% received more than two likes. Perhaps Twitter users preferred to re-tweet as a sign of approval and re-tweeting is arguably a more active way of participating as it is spreading the message. Replying to tweets to support, criticise or discuss its contents is also a more active interaction than a like. Overall, this analysis presented a low interaction with tweet contents compared to the other two case studies. This may be attributed to the type of issue and to the speedy government reaction and its official announcements which enticed people to participate more than interaction.

Table 29: 7.4: Number of Replies

The number of replies	Frequency	Percent
No replies	7,011	78.5%
One reply received	1,162	13%
More than 2 replies	752	8.5%
Total	8,925	100%

Table 30: 7.5: Number of Re-tweets

The number of re-tweets	Frequency	Percent
No re-tweet	5,105	57%
One re-tweet	1,557	17.5%
More than 2 re-tweets	2,263	25.5%
Total	8,925	100%

Table 31: 7.6: Number of Likes

The number of likes	Frequency	Percent
No likes	6,392	71.5%
One like	1,383	15.5%
More than 2 likes	1,150	13%
Total	8,925	100%

7.1.4 Rationality and Respectfulness

This deliberation was generally respectful and rational although the majority of tweets included sarcastic contents. This thesis defines rational tweets as those having clear and respectful content relevant to the topic of discussion. Therefore, 83% of tweets in this case study sample were considered rational, the lowest level of rationality in the three case studies of this thesis, which may be linked to the high number using sarcasm as well as expressing class hatred and racism against the businessman, officials and female Twitter users, as described in the qualitative analysis. This result may be attributed to the rise in social tension because of the increase in unemployment and poverty. According to Alotwee (2013) some Saudi experts in economics, sociology and security have confirmed that the middle class in Saudi Arabia is shrinking and the gap between rich and poor is widening which explains the increasing levels of crime and turmoil in society.

Twitter users in this sample add 3,635 attachments to 41% of the tweets to support their arguments, which was the highest number of attachments in the three case studies which may influence the rationality of debate (see the qualitative analysis). Increasing the percentage of attachments may be due to the huge number using images, cartoons and videos with sarcastic criticisms about the infringements being removed– 72.7% of these tweets included pictures and 27.3% had links and videos. All these issues will be analysed in more detail in the qualitative analysis section below.

Respectfulness was described in Chapter 3 as tweets that did not include any discriminatory, aggressive or impolite content. Although 9% of Tweets in this sample included offensive, aggressive and racist expressions against the businessman, some officials and government employees and against some Saudi women Twitter users who engaged in this debate, most tweets (91%) in this sample were respectful, which reflects the quality of deliberation. These results require more investigation in the qualitative analysis to understand the reasons behind them and to understand why the first case study and this case study included disrespectful tweets more than the debate on imposing tax on undeveloped property.

Table 32: 7.7: Distribution of tweets according to the rationality of contents

Type of Attachment	Frequency	Percent
Rational	7,408	83%
Irrational	1,517	17%
Total	8,925	100%

Table 33: 7.8: Distribution of tweets according to respectfulness

Respectfulness	Frequency	Percent
Respectful	8,103	91%
Disrespectful	822	9%
Total	8925	100%

Table 34: 7.9 Distribution of tweets according to attachments

Type of Attachment	Frequency	Percent
YouTube	994	27.3%
Images	2,641	72.7%
Total	3,635	100%

Conclusion

The quantitative results demonstrate that the deliberation about the government decision to stop unlawful use of public property on the pavement in Sarri Road can be considered to have a high level of quality of deliberation. First of all, there was diversity of participants as both women and men participated, however; it appeared that the majority of women feared using their real names to engage in discussion about public issues in Saudi society. The newspapers also participated directly, for the only time in the three case studies. They commented on the government decision about unlawful use of public property and criticize violators. In addition, in contrast to the other two case studies where experts' opinions were fairly prominent, there was a noticeable absence of this on this hashtag.

The diversity of topics could be divided into two main tendencies: firstly, discussions that centered on the regulations and requested action by power elites in society; and secondly, those that criticized the government's performance, officials and the offending business man (Butarji) by using a sarcastic strategy. The quantitative analysis showed that these were recurring topics, but what the analysis could not reveal was the elements of citizenship such as the extent to which users felt connectedness to their society and other citizens and investigate to what extent Twitter users valued informed debate by showing knowledge of relevant regulations when they discussed this issue. Therefore the qualitative analysis can shed more light on these inquiries.

7.2 Qualitative Discussion

The qualitative analysis of tweet contents argues that Twitter users presented some elements of good citizenship through their connectedness to social and religious values as well as their valuing informed debate which depended on knowledge of official regulations and laws to discuss the unlawful use of the pavement on Sarri Road. Twitter users' opinions could be divided into four main topics: criticism, requesting action, Twitter and technology, and values when they discussed businessmen's violations of public property, in particular Butarji's violation, as well as the Saudi government's decisions and actions taken on this issue. There were various reasons behind using those topics by supporters and opposers which are explored below.

7.2.1 Requesting Action

Active citizenship was shown when Twitter users' demanded that Saudi government organisations and officials shoulder their responsibilities, to prevent unlawful use of public property and punish the violators. There was also a clear indication of valuing informed debate by Twitter users. 17.6% of the sample were examples of citizens demanding that the government takes action and strengthening their demands through presenting detailed information in their tweets. These demands may have been influenced and encouraged by the general context of the Saudi government's fight against corruption. According to Starke et al. (2016) social networking sites and social media platforms enable users to access and broadcast information which applies pressure on corrupt public officials. Saudi government organisations and officials were blamed for corruption by 1,229 tweets in this sample. Although 99% of these tweets encouraged the Saudi government to fight corruption specifically on this issue, those tweets also included criticism and made demands to government organisations, officials and violators which demonstrates the quality of deliberation; as some tweets focused on calling corrupt officials to account and others enquired about the type of punishment that should result and the best way to apply it.

First of all, government organisations were requested to take real steps to fight corruption and deal effectively with society's problems. However, that space was also

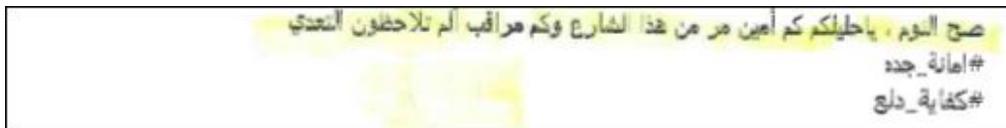
deemed appropriate by these government organisations to defend themselves and explain their position on corruption. For example, some of the study sample believed that the region’s princes were fully responsible for businessmen’s abuse of public property in their cities and requested the Emirate of Makkah to investigate, identify and bring the violators to account, as well as explaining the causes of this violations (tweet 7.1). Moreover, some Twitter users wondered why government officials and organisations had not taken any action until the Twitter campaign started in January 2016. Although it is logical that Twitter users` interacted with announcements by the princes and the municipality of Jeddah on this issue, users also accused municipal observers of not conducting their work faithfully (tweet 7.2 and tweet 7.3). Nazaha (2015) observes that Saudi Arabia’s rank in fighting corruption in government organisations improved in 2015; nevertheless, some Twitter users believed that corruption still penetrated Saudi organisations and demanded that all employees responsible be investigated tweet 7.4.

Figure 63: Tweet: 7.1



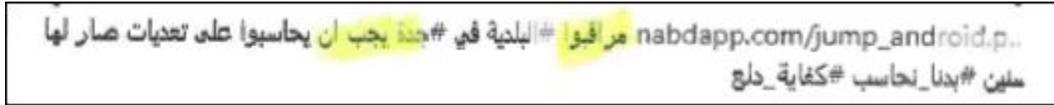
Translation: I request hopefully that the **districts`** princes form committees that **investigate the violators, in their areas, and hold them to account publicly.**

Figure 64: Tweet 7.2



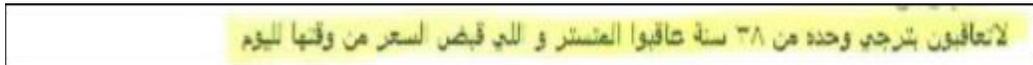
Translation: “Good Morning! How many of Jeddah municipality`s officials and monitors who pass from this road Did you not see **this violation.**

Figure 65: Tweet 7.3



Translation: Translation: “Jeddah’s municipal monitors should be accountable for this violation, which has gone on for years”.

Figure 66: Tweet 7.4.

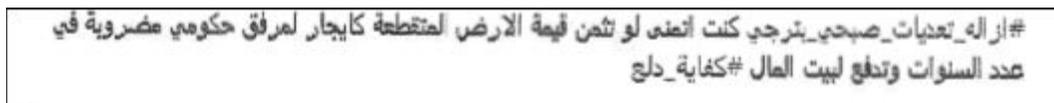


Translation: “Do not punish Butarji alone, you have to punish those who received bribes and covered up violations for 38 years”

The previous examples confirm that Twitter plays a crucial role in political communication between Twitter users and Saudi government organisations and facilitated demands for public accountability. According to Starke et al. (2016), “Free media fulfil their tasks to hold public officials accountable, to create a more transparent society, to deter corrupt actors from illegal action by increasing the risk of detection, and to reinforce anti-corruption laws”.

Secondly, Twitter users showed how they valued informed debate by attaching evidence to support the contents of their tweets. Therefore, when these Twitter users entered the debate they played a significant role in helping others to understand the government's regulations and how to identify those responsible. There were different perspectives about how unlawful use of public property should be addressed. Accordingly, 16% of tweets in the topic of requesting action discussed the possible punishments and charges against the violators; but there were different views on this issue. A total of 316 tweets demanded that the guilty person be punished and believed that removing his items from the pavement was not enough, because the violator had benefited from the infringement for a long time. Yet other Twitter users, who believed that this was not enough, also requested the Saudi government to insist that businessmen paid the costs of removing the offending obstruction (see tweet 7.5). It was interesting to note the way that some Twitter users calculated the amount due for the violation, which demonstrated the extent to which Twitter users have useful knowledge about their government's regulations, which is considered one of the elements of good citizenship.

Figure 67: Tweet 7.5



#ازاله_تعديات_صبحي_بترجي_كنت_اتمنى_لو_تضمن_قيمة_الارض_المتقطعة_كإيجار_لمرفق_حكومي_مضروبة_في_عدد_السنوات_وتدفع_ليبيت_المال_#كفاية_دلج

Translation: I hope any rent for use of public property will be paid to the government.

They used the municipality of Jeddah's website to understand how the Saudi government calculated the value of renting public places, for example:

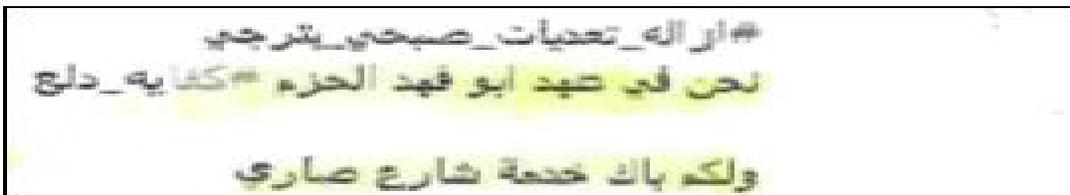
Figure 68: Tweet 7.6



Translation: “200 (The area of the pavement used) * 10,000 Saudi Riyals (Rental for similar public places) * 38 years (The period of using the pavement) = 76,000,000 Saudi Riyals”.

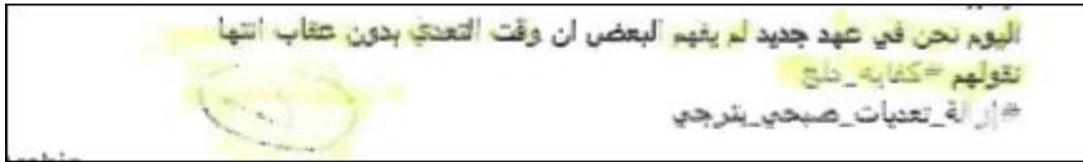
Thirdly, Twitter users expressed their thanks for the reactions of the government in taking strict steps to protect public property in Saudi Arabia, which confirmed the presence of different perspectives, arguably increasing the quality of deliberation where 580 tweets (4% in the topic of requesting action) were a clear exposition of those Twitter users’ positive attitudes toward the role of King Salman and his government in fulfilling their responsibilities:

Figure 69: Tweet 7.7



Translation: “We are in the King Salman era, welcome back Sarri Road”.

Figure 70: Tweet: 7.8



Translation: “We are in a new era; some citizens do not understand that the time of excesses with impunity is over” (tweet 7.8). “The features of a new stage in the fight against corruption in this country”

Moreover, these tweeters believed that the king of Saudi Arabia and the prince of the Makkah district were very strict on corruption; and they provided as evidence the prince’s decree to the Secretariat of Jeddah to check Jeddah city and make an inventory of irregularities with the aim of submitting the report to him within 30 days. This result supports the two previous case studies (see Chapters 5 and 6) wherein many Twitter users showed their satisfaction about the Saudi government’s efforts to give women their rights to participate in municipal elections and to help Saudis to own houses. This tendency of Twitter users might be supported by previous strenuous efforts by the Saudi government to fight corruption and the exploitation of government positions to allow unlawful use of public property. The Saudi government and officials have announced that they will not tolerate corruption and corrupt people, consistent with the provisions of the 16th Article of the Basic Law on Governance, which prohibits the infringement of public property and utilities (Bureau of Experts at the Saudi Council of Ministers, 2012). The 2013 international report regarding the level of penetration of corruption into government organisations confirmed that Saudi Arabia’s ranking was 63rd (Alarabiya net, 2013). Saudi Arabia continued its progress in fighting corruption to rank 48th in 2015 (Nazaha, 2015), confirming that there have been sensible efforts to combat corruption. The findings of this study suggest that this context may have encouraged Twitter users to be braver in criticising government organisations, as well as feeling more entitled to request that appropriate action be taken to protect public interests.

In short, this discussion demonstrated the diversity of participants and opinions, as well as the sense of good citizenship through the knowledge users had about the system of the municipality and their ability to stand against or/and interact with Saudi organisations' announcements. Moreover, connectedness might be considered present in citizens' attempts to save their government money by suggesting he paid to remove his unlawfully placed materials or pay rent for the 38 years he had used the pavement.

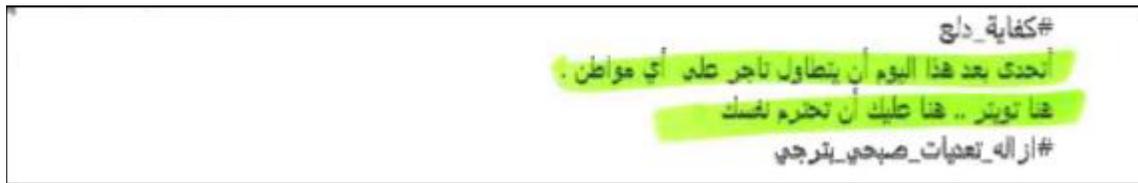
7.2.2 The role of Twitter and Certain Apps in Empowering Saudis

Twitter users who engage in deliberation on the hashtag #KifaiahDalla demonstrated clearly the role of Twitter and apps such as Google Earth in supporting active citizens in opposing the unlawful use of public property by some businessmen, as well as demanding that Saudi government organisations take responsibility for dealing with those violations. The role of Twitter and certain apps in empowering Saudis was evidenced by 491 tweets, which made up 5.5% of the tweet sample. This topic was not present in the two former case studies (Chapters 5 and 6), which may be attributed to the speedy response of Saudi government organisations to Twitter users' demands concerning the unlawful use of public property. The media campaign started at the end of December 2015, but people increased their demands after the government announcement which confirmed that the pavement was as planned in 1979 and had not changed. Those tweets are discussed to understand how these Twitter users evaluated the role of Twitter and other apps as a tool for making effective demands for government action.

Firstly, apps such as Google Earth has allowed Twitter users to post pictures of unlawful use of public property in different Saudi cities, and compare them with the official city plans. They exposed and debated unlawful use of public property and demanded that the government takes action against corruption. Apps such as Google Earth were important sources of information. Twitter users shared that information with others and used it for calls to improve society. They were acting in the interest of the wider collective of citizens.

Some tweets in this frame expressed their viewpoints about the role of Twitter and other technologies in a variety of ways. Across these tweets a sense of civic responsibility and power emerged. Twitter users described citizens as watchdogs who protect the wider good of society from the corrupt interests of corrupt individuals. For example, one addressed corrupt businessmen, and intimated that citizens had become more powerful and influential:

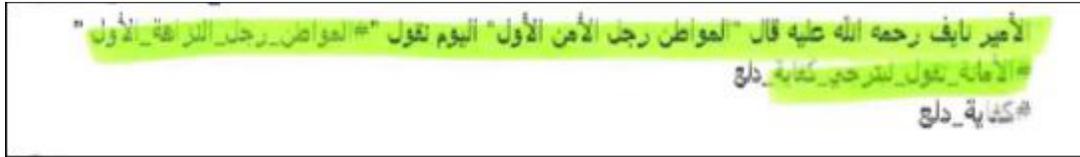
Figure 71: Tweet: 7.9



Translation: “I maintain that today no businessman can insult any citizen. *Here is Twitter - here you (the violators) have to respect yourselves.*”

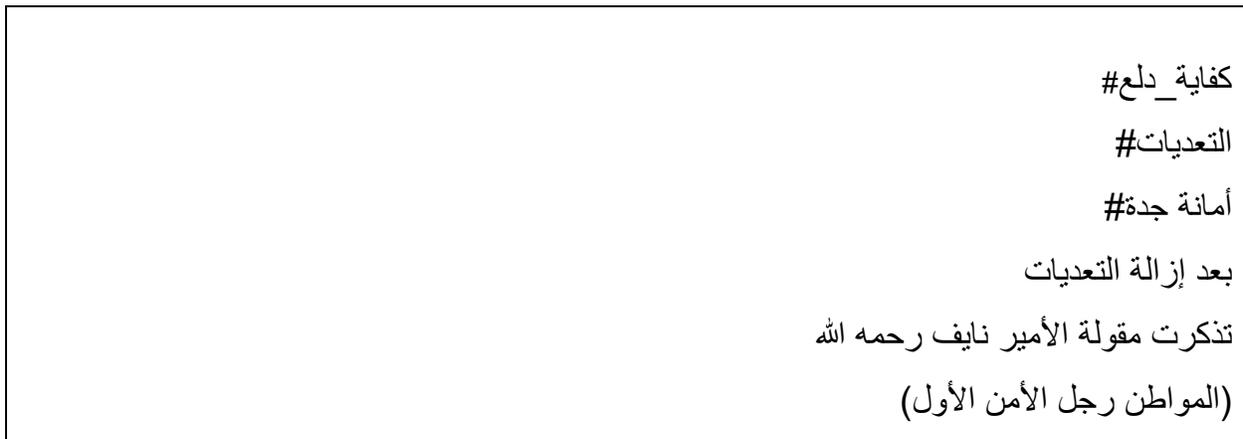
Other Twitter users added that Twitter users had overtaken some official organisations because Twitter enabled citizens to take the initiative in reporting corruption through using Google Earth to take a photo to compare with official city plans to expose the unlawful use of public property. Repeated initiatives in this sample to uncover corruption reflect the obligation some Twitter users feel to protect their society. For example, tweet 6.20 quoted the former Saudi internal minister, Prince Naif bin Abdal-Aziz who famously said: “The citizen is the foremost security man. (Tweet 7.10)” Other users went beyond that when they tweeted: “The citizen is considered the foremost man of integrity.” (Tweet 7.11) Such Tweets emphasise Saudi citizens’ role in fighting corruption. Some Twitter users went even further and demanded the closure of some official organisations to save government capital because Twitter was playing a crucial and influential role in fighting corruption. Brunetti and Weder (2003) say that free media decreases the cost of fighting corruption, adding that when the media has great freedom there will be less corruption.

Figure 72: Tweet: 7.10



Translation: The Prince Naif said “*The citizen is the foremost security man*” today we say “*#citizen_is_the_foremost_integrity_man*”.

Figure 73: Tweet: 7.11

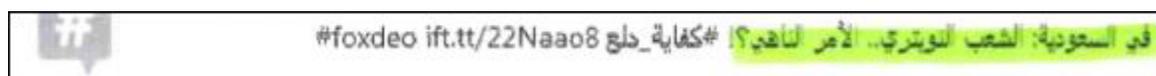


Translation: *#Enough_Manipulation, #Infringement_Committee, #Jeedah_Amanah* I remembered the saying of Prince Nayif, may God have mercy on him “*The citizen is considered the foremost man of security.*”

Using Twitter enabled Twitter users to put Saudi officials and government organisations under pressure. Alothman (2013) says social media enables Saudi citizens to understand social issues better, which leads to social improvements as well as the Saudi government being influenced by these platforms; and forces officials to be more careful. Twitter users expressed a similar belief in the role of Twitter in opposing and reducing corruption through exposing corrupt officials and organisations to public scrutiny in Saudi Arabia. For example, one of tweet included two parts: the first showed the officials’ clean clothes in the era of traditional media, but the second part depicted how Twitter revealed the dirty clothes under that clean outerwear. Another tweet showed the power of using mobile and video applications, when citizens captured officials standing

up with raised hands, which means how corrupt officials recognised Twitter's role in exposing their corruption. Twitter has a crucial influence in exposing corrupt acts which may result in jail or dismissal for employees. According to Starke et al. (2016), mass media impacts on corruption through creating public outrage and putting the reputation of officials at stake, as seen in the case of the elected former prime minister of Iceland, Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, who was forced to resign after local protests. Therefore Twitter users exposing the unlawful use of public property by using Twitter and Google Earth software, arguably demonstrates their ability to act unofficially to protect public interests. On the other hand, some Twitter users had an exaggerated view of the power of Twitter users, such as one who tweeted:

Figure 74: Tweet: 7.12



Translation: "In Saudi Arabia Twitter holds sway"

In conclusion, the discussion about the unlawful use by Butarji of the pavement on Sarri Road using the hashtag #Kifaiah_Dalla showed how Twitter and using apps such as Google Earth to expose corruption played a crucial role in exposing unlawful use of public property and empowered Twitter users to request Saudi officials and government organisations to act and shoulder their responsibilities. It **demonstrates how Twitter users feel connected to their society and attempt to protect its interests. Moreover**, other tweets emphasised that Twitter had become a 'fair emirate' and a free channel that helped Twitter users to expose corrupt people as well as deliver demands to government organisations and officials directly and avoid their unscrupulous entourages.

7.2.3 Criticism and Sarcasm

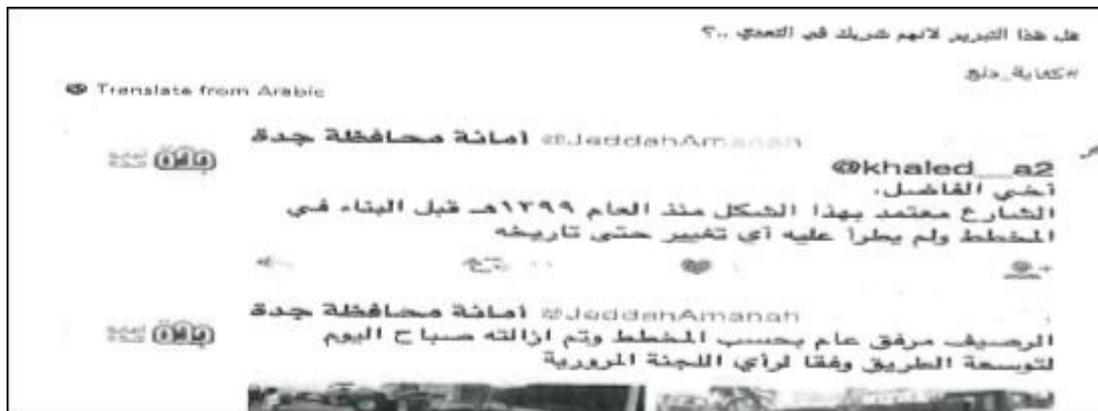
The third topic was the criticism of Saudi government organisations and businessmen who violated public property. **Twitter users employed memorable texts such as sarcastic text, local poems, proverbs and common traditional Saudi expressions to express their views more safely.** According to Painter and Hodges (2010), satire has been used as unique tool in society to challenge government authority without fear and to avoid engaging in conflict with these authorities. In this case, Twitter users were much more sarcastic when criticising corruption than when debating other two case studies which may be attributed to the type of issue because Butarji's case already contained elements of irony- such as the irony of a man admonishing Saudi youth to obey the government when he was not doing that himself, or the irony of having a government that purported to fight corruption when they had let infringements like Butarji's go on for years. According to Yang and Jiang (2015) using well-known, memorable texts such as common poems may enhance the broadcasting of tweets that include public scandals about official incompetence and corruption. More than 5,800 tweets on this hashtag had sarcastic content, including video clips with some comments, local proverbs and photos with ironic comments. These tweets mostly concentrated on two topics: Saudi officials and organisations, and the corrupt businessmen violators. **However, most tweets (68%) criticised corrupt businessmen whilst focusing on Butarji.**

Firstly, Twitter users criticised the government because it is unusual for the government to engage with citizens. Twitter users in this study criticised the content of the first announcement by the municipality of Jeddah which denied Butarji's violation; then, they criticised the second announcement that municipality had started removing the illegal obstructions on the pavement on the recommendation of government committee. 112 tweets such as (7.13) attached the two announcements with sarcastic enquiries regarding the swiftness with which the municipality of Jeddah seemed to have changed its decision. Other tweets derided the municipality's informers and all its presidents when they asked questions like 'Where were they for three decades?' and 'Why didn't they notice the violation on Sarri Road?' Several tweets, such as tweet (7.14 and 7.2), included comments with pictures of many 'Twitter birds' looking for corruption in Jeddah, which

refers sarcastically to the massive number of violations of public property. According to Painter and Hodges (2010), satire has been used as unique tool in society to challenge government authority without fear and to avoid engaging in conflict with these authorities.

For example:

Figure 75: Tweet: 7.13



“Is this justification because the Jeddah Municipality is a partner in Butarji’s violation, after two shameful announcements by the Jeddah municipality”

Figure 76: Tweet: 7.14



Translation: Fighting corruption in Jeddah.

Aimantoon, (2016)

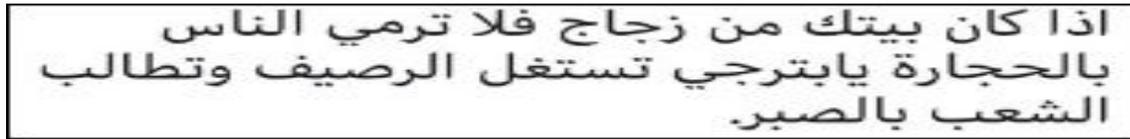
Most tweets on this topic (68%) criticised corrupt businessmen whilst focusing on Butarji. These tweets used different devices such as video clips with appropriately sarcastic comments, proverbs, poetry or photos, perhaps to avoid conflict with some traditional, religious or political values in Saudi Arabia. Druick (2009) says satire is “the use of humour, irony, exaggeration or ridicule to expose and criticise people’s stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary and other topical issues.” Adding video clips with appropriate poetic comments to describe Butarji when he heard the construction equipment early in the morning of 4th January, 2016 that removed the ornamented entrance to his house and widened Sarri Road (such as tweet 7.15) received 15 likes, 78 re-tweets and 5 replies. Many focused on the moment he woke up stunned because of the noise after decades of unlawful use of this pavement. Moreover, other tweets blamed Butarji because he had been using the pavement illegally for decades yet criticised people because they were dissatisfied with some Saudi government decisions. This meant that, as he had been acting illegally, he was in no position to moralise to others. Moreover, they reminded him with this popular proverb see tweet (7.16).

Figure 77: Tweet: 7.15



Translation: My brother I would like to hear your advice, but the noise of the construction is louder than your voice. Please speak up.

Figure 78: Tweet: 7.16



Translation: "Butarji, if your house made from glass, do not throw stones at people, you use the pavement unlawfully yet demand people to be patient."

On the other hand, a total of 140 tweets included photos of Saudi businessmen suspected of having committed infringements of public facilities or demanded an investigation into their property. This may arguably indicate a form of class hatred, as there was no hard evidence against these businessmen, and no accusations were made against working class people. According to Watanabe et al. (2018, p. 13525)

"Hate speech refers to the use of aggressive, violent or offensive language, targeting a specific group of people sharing a common property, whether this property is their gender (i.e., sexism), their ethnic group or race (i.e., racism) or their beliefs and religion".

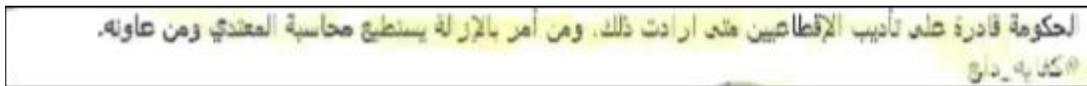
Depending in this definition of hate speech 140 tweets focused and criticised business men and present some of their properties which Twitter users claimed that those business men unlawfully used those properties. I believe this is not the first or latest attack against business men in Twitter because before Butrji comments and after activists launched many campaigns against businessmen. For example, they launched on «Twitter», an attack against businessman «Saleh Kamel» Chairman of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who accused the Saudi youth that he is «spoiled» in first week of May 2016(Thenewkhalij, 2016). This result was in accordance with other studies that indicated a negative side of social media platforms. Therefore, this result of analysis presented that Twitter users used abusive language and disrespectful language beyond the limits of public manners which was similar to results reached by Malmasi and Zampieri (2017), Watanabe et al. (2018) and Siegel (2015).

Figure 79: Tweets: 7.17



Translation: Many of the upper class are silent and did not say "KifayahDalla" (do not criticise working class) therefore no one insults them, because that class respects the working class.

Figure 80: Tweet: 7.18



Translation: The government is able to discipline the feudal lords whenever it wants. Moreover, who (officials) ordered to remove violations are able to bring the violators to account.³⁷

Using popular proverbs and poetry as tools to ridicule the illegal transgressions of some businessmen in Saudi Arabia was also popular. Twitter users employed more than 18 popular proverbs and many poems to criticise and expose the corrupt acts. Arguably, these tweeters used the most appropriate methods and platform to criticise Butarji. They used a sarcastic style on Twitter, which may have been the smart way to avoid conflict with the Saudi government or with Butarji who could file a formal complaint about Twitter users who had insulted him and destroyed the reputation of his family.

³⁷ This is one of several Tweets in which Twitter users divided Saudi society into a working class and an upper class. This Twitter user does so by using the term 'feudal lords'

7.2.4 Values

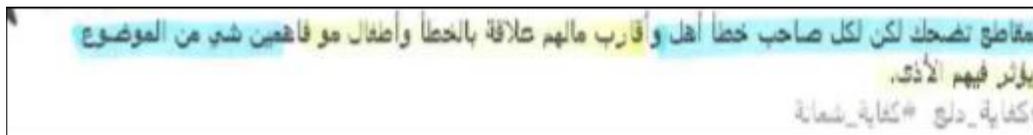
The following discussion showed Twitter users' connectedness to their society's religious and social values which are mentioned in the Basic Law of Governance of Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 2). Although the topic of values made up just 2% of the sample these tweets deserve analysis for comparison with the other two case studies. Twitter users did not make much use of the topic of values to discuss this issue, as they did in the previous case studies. There were two recurring types of themes. Firstly, Twitter users' discussing other participants' morals when they blamed the violator and other businessmen for their infringements of public facilities and preventing people from exercising their right to use those facilities; Secondly, Twitter users discussed Islamic verdicts regarding backbiting and disrespecting the personal rights of violators as citizens.

Twitter users debated whether it was morally right to name and shame people on Twitter; and some of them believed that was unacceptable because Saudi social values prohibit defamation of citizens and recommend protecting the social fabric through respecting families' rights (see Chapter 2). Many tweets concentrated on the importance of respecting others and their families, even if they were violators, and to not ruin their social reputations. One tweet (7.19) says that video clips are interesting, but each violator has family and friends who have no part in the violation, as well as children who do not understand what is going on but are affected by the attacks. On the other hand, class hatred may have been behind attacks on businessmen and accusations of corruption. Some Twitter users believed that tweets blaming Butarji were exaggerated to the point of insult. Some Twitter users, like (tweet 7.20), believed that this attack was not acceptable and attributed it to 'class hatred'. These tweeters identified that the vengeful campaign on this hashtag revealed an outbreak of class hatred in Saudi Arabia. Starke et al. (2016) say that use of social media can involve pointing fingers at people based on imprecise evidence and that this naming and shaming may lead to the creation of correspondingly harsh discussion and the exchange of accusations between users. However, other Twitter users in this sample rejected this analysis and said that they were being accused of class hatred just for saying the truth and fighting corruption. For example:

“Accusations of class hatred do not mean that corruption is justified” (tweet 7.21)

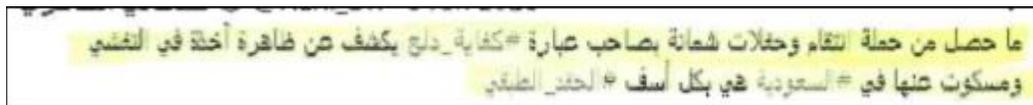
Another tweet commented that this accusation may have been justified if criticism of Butarji had come before his violation.

Figure 81: Tweet: 7.19



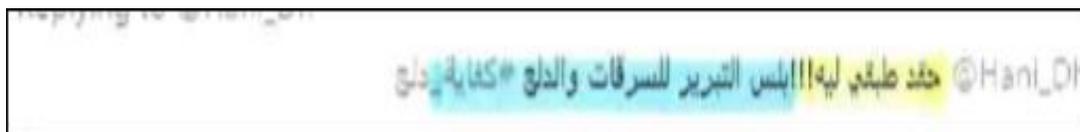
Translation: Video clips are interesting, but each violator has family and friends who took no part in the violation, as well as children who do not understand what is going on but are affected by the attacks

Figure 82: Tweet: 7.20



Translation: What happened was campaigns of revenge and name-blackening in *KifayahDalla* reveal a prevalent phenomenon, class hatred, we are silent about in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 83: Tweet: 7.21

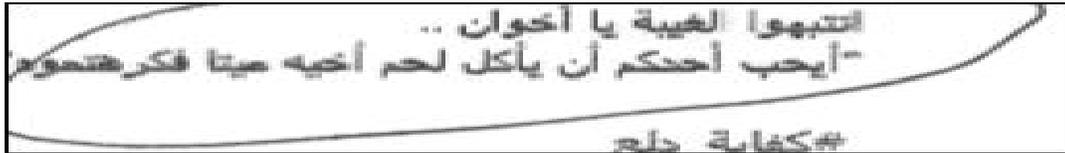


Translation: “Accusations of class hatred do not mean that corruption is justified”.

Secondly, the topic of values was also used to explain the verdict of Islam on some unacceptable actions committed by violators or on Twitter users who discussed Butarji’s unlawful use of Sarri Road. Some tweets advised Twitter users to stop talking about Butarji’s violation, because this is deemed unacceptable in Islam. This tendency

confirmed to what extent Twitter users felt connectedness to religious values of Saudi society. For example, one tweet (7.22) this saying by the Prophet Mohamed (Peace be upon on him):

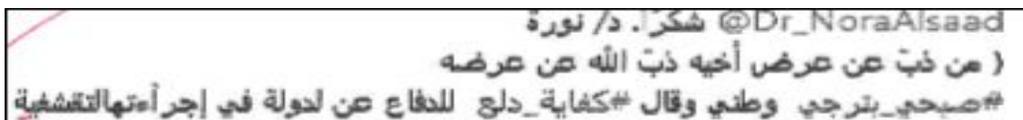
Figure 84: Tweet 7.22



Translation: “O may brothers pay attention to backbiting... Is there anyone of you (Twitter users) who likes eating the meat of his dead brother and then you hate him”. This Twitter user advised others to avoid backbiting violators because of religious values³⁸.

Other tweets suggested that society, including Twitter users posting on this hashtag, should advise and assist sinners instead of blaming them. For example, tweet 7.23 reminded readers of the meaning of Prophet Mohamed’s (peace upon him) saying that whoever defends his brother in his absence, will be protected by God.

Figure 85: Tweet: 7.23



Translation: thank you Dr. Nora. Whoever defends his brother in his absence, will be protected by God. Butarji told *KifayahDalla* to defend the government’s austerity measures. This is another tweet which suggests that back-biting violators is against religious values

In short, class hatred was an issue only in this case study in contrast to the previous two studies. I believe that this happened because of the widening gap between rich and poor in Saudi Arabia see (Alotwee, 2013); and the fact there have been so many scandals involving businessmen now which have been discussed by a public who ignore

³⁸ Backbiting includes different things such as unpleasant or cruel talk about someone who is not present and slander.

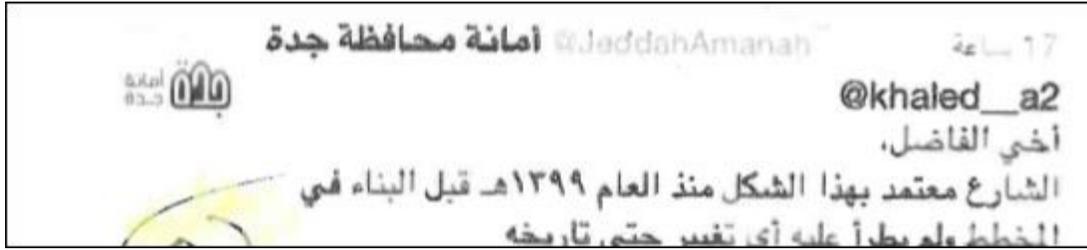
violations by ordinary citizens. Moreover, this debate showed that Twitter users were not only concerned with morality but also demonstrates allegiance to the principles of Saudi law because the Saudi Basic Law of Governance (see Chapter 2) prohibits retaliation against persons and affirms that the law will hold every violator accountable.

7.3 The Relation between the Saudi Government and Citizens

This section argues that the relationship between Twitter users and Saudi government differed in this case study. In the previous two studies the analysis presented how Twitter users were empowered to demand that the government and officials acted to protect society's interests; but government did not interact with Twitter users' demands, at least on Twitter. But in this case Saudi government organisations interacted with citizens' tweets publicly on Twitter. Plascencia (2015), emphasises that virtual social networks such as Twitter have become crucial tools for political participation and accountability and adds that these platforms have become an alternative form of communication between government and citizens to that of traditional platforms. The analysis of tweet contents shows that Saudi government organisations used Twitter as a two-way political communication tool, to interact through responding to users' questions and publicly justifying their performance.

Firstly, the Municipality of Jeddah and the Emirate of the Makkah Region interacted within a few days with those users who specifically demanded that the infringement on Sarri Road be removed, and that corruption inside and outside Saudi government organisations be addressed. According to Alasem (2015), social media platforms are considered by governments to be convenient tools to increase openness and transparency as well as to get a better understanding of the public mood and give citizens a voice. On 3rd and 4th January, 2016 the Municipality of Jeddah interacted with Twitter users' demands to investigate Butarji's infringement through official tweets, saying:

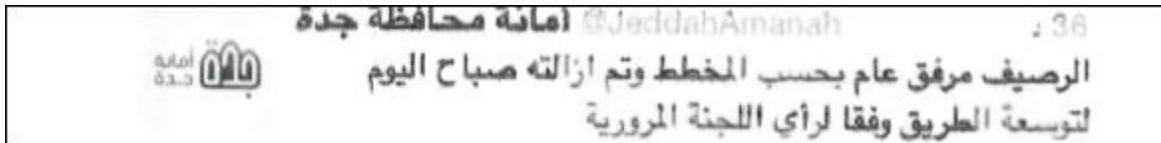
Figure 86: Twitter: 7.24



Translation: “My respectful brother, this street has been officially adopted since 1979, before building started, and this plan has not changed since then”.

This tweet shows a great respect for citizens shown by the government, which did not happen in the two previous cases, because the Saudi government neither answered citizens through those hashtags, nor tried to justify its actions. A historical profile of the scheme adopted since 1979 was shown, and the government organization confirmed that the pavement in its current form had not changed. This tweet received a lot of re-tweets and replies, but some of the replies ask why the Jeddah municipality did not mention the subject of current use of the pavement by Butarji, which indicated a lack of transparency. On the next day, the municipality of Jeddah announced via Twitter that:

Figure 87: Tweet: 7.25



Translation: “The pavement is public property and (the infringement) was removed this morning to widen the road in accordance with the recommendation of the Traffic Committee”.

This tweet received hundreds of re-tweets and 76 replies, which reflected the nature of this discussion because some Twitter users tweeted about how the Municipality of Jeddah had changed their opinion in less than 24 hours; whilst others thanked the Municipality for their tweet which they considered made the issue transparent. Moreover, the Emirate of the Makkah region announced:

Figure 88: Tweet: 7.26



“The prince of Makkah region Khaled Alfaisal orders the road violation by one businessman be removed”.

This official announcement served to tell citizens about complete removal of the violation; it received 536 re-tweets and emphasised that the Saudi government had started to pay attention to political discussion on Twitter. This interaction impacted on this discussion because Twitter users appreciated this step, even if some of them believed that it was taken to shut down the discussion, as they mentioned in previous tweets. This communication by the Saudi government seems to be a confirmation of a change in the way Saudi officials and organisations deal with citizens’ enquiries; and Twitter users had not received such speedy communication from the government in the other two case studies. The reason for this may be that the law of tax on undeveloped properties and Saudi women’s political participation in elections were issued directly by the Saudi government. However, In this case, government communication and official decisions and actions came as a reaction to a media campaign by Twitter users against unlawful use of public property by some influential Saudi businessmen which contravened general attitudes and the official policy of Saudi government organisations on corruption.

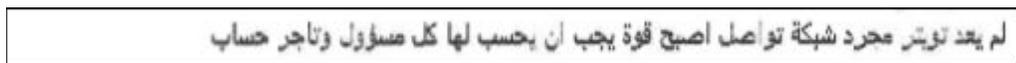
Secondly, the analysis demonstrated that Twitter users used a new strategy to motivate the Saudi government to meet their demands regarding removing violations. Moreover, this case study showed that Saudi organisations did not have a precise plan to deal with audiences on social media platforms. In this campaign, Twitter users employed different strategies from those used in the previous two cases, because in discussing Saudi women’s political participation in municipal elections and in the housing shortage they just presented the benefits and disadvantages of the Saudi government’s

decisions. In this case, however, they exposed the unlawful use of public property with different types of evidence, which forced the government to deal with this problem immediately to ensure social stability and security. Twitter users in this case study used photographic evidence which meant the government and officials could not ignore them and interpretations of religious texts or elite opinions were not relevant in the face of these evidences. Gladwell (2010) suggests that social media platforms facilitate the powerless to work together and present their concerns loudly, which may result in changing the traditional relationship between government and people. Twitter users expressed a feeling of civic power and a perception that the relationship between them and their government seemed to be changing because of Twitter. Some Twitter users in this study warned organisations and officials to be careful when serving and dealing with Saudi citizens. For example, tweet 7.27 commented that Twitter was not only a networking site for communication but had become a power which forced those in authority and businessmen to pay attention to the forum it created. Tweet 7.28 emphasised that: “Twitter is the voice of Saudis so officials should listen to it carefully. This hashtag is an example and we hope this continues.” Other tweets reflected the trust of Saudi Twitter users in those responsible when they responded to demands. For example, tweet 7.29 stated:

“Twitter is the voice of the citizens, when the state has a real desire to reform and citizens` voices are heard by officials; then change can happen.”

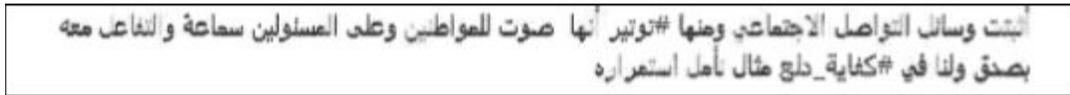
These two tweets imply that Saudi government organisations and officials are perceived as treating demands to stop corruption and particularly unlawful use of public property seriously, when they know about it.

Figure 89: Tweet: 7.27

A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic. The text is enclosed in a black rectangular border. The text reads: "لم يعد تويتر مجرد شبكة تواصل أصبح قوة يجب ان يحسب لها كل مسؤول وتاجر حساب".

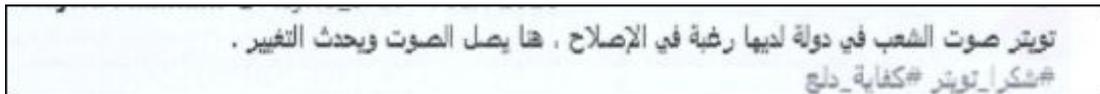
Translation: **Twitter is no longer just a communication network, but it has become a force which every official and business man should be wary of.**

Figure 90: Tweet: 7.28



Translation: “Emphasised that social media platforms in particular Twitter is the voice of Saudis so the officials should listen to them honestly [#Enough_Manipulation](#). This hashtag is example we hope this continue.

Figure 91: Tweet: 7.29



Translation: [Twitter is a voice of citizens where the state has real desire to conduct a reformation. Here \(on Twitter\) the voices of citizens are heard and the change will happened.](#)

The information above demonstrates that the relationship between Saudi government organisations and citizens changed positively from the citizens’ point of view. According to Fatany (2012), social media have played a crucial role in creating a common social dynamic, as well as becoming a common channel that connects government with citizens. Saudi government officials and organisations involved with the Butarji violation started interacting immediately with citizens’ demands and tried to be more transparent through explaining their actions to audiences. Although the municipality interacted with Saudi audiences on Twitter through two official announcements, these tweets revealed a lack of routine when communicating with the public via social media. For example, in a tweet regarding the pavement in front of Butarji’s palace, they explained that the pavement’s shape and position were as planned in 1979 but did not mention anything about his unlawful use of public property. Twitter users provided evidence that explained that business man used pavement unlawfully and waited for an official explanation which would satisfy them. Moreover, there were also contradictory government announcements from the municipality of Jeddah, which denied any illegal use of the pavement, and by the Emirate of the Makkah Region. This supports Alasem (2015) who found that official Tweets by the Saudi government were not of a particularly high standard. On the other hand, some Twitter users criticised King Salman, but these tweets accounted for less than 1% of the topic of requiring action and empowering citizens, which may reflect a level

of public satisfaction or a fear of criticising the king. On the contrary, King Salman was thanked for his strictness and justice by 4% of tweets in this frame. Moreover, 94.5% of tweets included criticisms of Saudi government organisations and officials as well as Butarji. Other tweets (5.5%) included indirect criticism of the King of Saudi Arabia in his role as President of the government, the Prime Minister and the Commander in Chief of the armed forces.

In short, this case study is particularly interesting because it is an example of citizens using Twitter to put pressure on the government and expressing a sense of civic power (they are saying 'we are the people and you need to listen to us'). The government is using Twitter to engage in a dialogue with citizens, probably because there was a lot of anger and because it has made the fight against corruption one of its flagship policies. Government tweets did not admit that the government was at fault. So the government seems to have tried to manage the situation; although it did not seem to be particularly interested in enriching the debate. However, it is important to recognise that government organisation did enter public debate and that Twitter users took note of that.

Conclusion

The analyses of Twitter users' discussion about the Saudi government decision to stop unlawful use of public property in Sarri Road quantitatively and qualitatively presented the following elements of the quality of deliberation: diversity, openness, relevance, respectfulness and rationality. The discussion included four main topics; and one of them: Twitter and technology was not present in the previous two case studies. Although the majority of tweets supported the government's decision, perspectives were diverse, which indicated the rationality of the discussion. On the other hand, Twitter users did not draw on experts' perspectives to support their opinions such as in the previous two case studies, but they used the strategy of sarcasm to criticise government organisations' and officials' performance, moreover, they used sarcastic video clips and caricature to support their arguments and they had Google images as evidence. Moreover, the results confirmed a change in the relationship between the government

and Twitter users where the government interacted with users' demands then answered their inquiries and lastly thanked them for their efforts to protect public property. Twitter users attempted to put pressure on Saudi government by saying: 'We are the people and you need to listen to us', which reflected their sense of civic power. For the only time in the three case studies, class hatred was an issue in that exclusively accusing businessmen of being violators was perceived by some as class hatred.

On the other hand, Twitter users showed their connectedness to their social and religious values by focusing on religious verdicts when users criticised violators as well as noting the importance of respecting violators' families. So, the interview section focused on acquiring a deeper understanding of those results through semi-structured interviews with Twitter users in order to answer the research questions, and exploring the interviewees' perspectives regarding government interaction with Twitter users in this case study and the change in the relationship between government and citizens. Moreover, the interviewees' perspectives about the issue of class hatred mentioned in the discussion and its influence on quality of debate; and their ideas about the high percentage of sarcastic comments to criticise government performance and corrupt businessmen were also sought. Finally, the interviewees were questioned about the influence of government censorship and self-censorship on the quality of deliberation.

7.4 Interviews

The following data gathered from the interviews identified the importance of the diversity of the discussion and addressed the interviewees' feelings of connectedness to social and religious values, the change in the relationship between users and Saudi government, and the importance of government censorship to prevent class hatred and online abuse against women. These results are related to the findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses of tweet contents and the interviewees' perspectives about those findings are outlined. The researcher conducted interviews with nine of the most active Twitter users who participated in this discussion to address the following questions:

- What are the motivations that encourage Twitter users to engage in debate about unlawful use of public property?
- To what extent is the debate on Twitter considered an appropriate place which allows Saudis to discuss sensitive social issues, such as the unlawful use of public property?
- To what extent and how does the debate on Twitter empower Twitter users to criticise government organisations' efforts to protect public property?
- What are the crucial factors that influence the quality of deliberation of Twitter users' discussions on Twitter about unlawful use of public property?

The nine interviewees were given specific codes to maintain anonymity and protect confidentiality, as shown in Table 7.10.

Table 35: 7.10 Interview sample of nine Twitter users who used this hashtag

	Name	Education	Position/ Job	Gender	Followers
1	WCU1	Bachelor	Employee in government charity committee	Female	124,000
2	WCU2	PhD	Academic lecturer	Female	61,3000
3	WCU3	Secondary school	Housewife	Female	3,100
4	MCU1	PhD	Associate professor and the member of the Saudi Parliament	Male	51,800
5	MCU2	Bachelor	Former Director of Logistics Support for 4 Saudi banks	Male	423,000
6	MCU3	Bachelor	Previous Imam of the Holy Mosque	Male	4,220,000
7	MCU4	High School	Businessman	Male	98,100
8	MCU5	Bachelor	Counsellor in the education sector	Male	18,600
9	MCU6	Bachelor	Counsellor in the government sector	Male	1,160,000

7.4.1 The importance of Debate, and The Diversity of Topics and Participants

Twitter users believed that the diversity of topics and participants in discussion about unlawful use of public property in Twitter increased the quality of deliberation, but at the same time exposed a negative aspect of Saudi society. All the interviewees considered that that debate on Twitter was currently an appropriate and important phenomenon which expanded the freedom of Saudis and provided access to a public platform. WCU1 commented:

“Twitter allows users to discuss corrupt acts with different people freely, which was impossible in the era of traditional media.”

Moreover, 55% of the interviewees affirmed that Twitter reflected precisely what happened in traditional councils and meetings and what the commonly discussed subjects were. For instance, MCU1 said:

“I believe that debate in Twitter is a crucial because it allows citizens to discuss the issues of unlawful usage of public property in Saudi society, which were previously deliberated in citizens’ homes, coffee shops and work places”

MCU3 said this discussion presented the diversity of perspectives and the influence of religious and social values on the quality of deliberation. There were those who criticised government performance reasonably and that those who showed class hatred against business men and used discrimination against them because they were not originally Saudis. MCU4 said:

“Twitter includes a variety of opinions which reflects different ideologies in Saudi society and reveals the real face of Saudi society, which includes some ethical issues and class discrimination.”

He agreed with previous participant’s opinion and added that users expressed their hatred towards businessmen so the government would address their corrupt practices and protect the social fabric. MCU3 was a religious leader and MCU4 is a businessman; and both of them reported having suffered discrimination on Twitter before this debate. Therefore they have direct experience of this issue.

WCU3 mentioned:

“The diversity of topics and participants show that Saudis have not long experienced public deliberation; and this may explain the class hatred present in this debate’

WCU1 and WCU2 confirmed that the debate included diverse topics, but more important was the diversity of participants because women participated in a discussion about society’s interests, although they faced online abuse. Three men MCU1, MCU2 and MCU6 agreed that women still suffered from online abuse. This echoes the results of the first case study (Saudi women’s political participation in municipal elections) regarding the obvious online discrimination against women.

7.4.2 Feeling Connected and Responsible towards Other Citizens and Having a Sense of Shared Values

Twitter users expressed some elements of good citizenship when they engaged in deliberation about unlawful use of public property, such as their feelings of connectedness to their society's social and religious values that forbid abuse of others and wanting to protect other citizens' interests. Seven interviewees emphasised the importance of not only educating Saudi citizens about polite and constructive ways to discuss violators' corrupt actions, but also the importance of motivating them to respect others' opinions and avoid insulting violators personally or insulting their families. One interviewee said:

"Twitter users should avoid insisting on their opinions and should respect other users, even if they believe them to be wrong" (WCU3).

MCU1 said that he participated in hashtag for several reasons, but the important one was advising other participants who insulted businessmen:

"...because I am a cleric so I understand the religious verdicts regarding people's behaviour; I also feel connectedness to our social values. So, I hoped to protect our society's values which we grew up with, such as respecting all old people even if they are strangers"

This user is very active on Twitter, because his followers number a few million and he usually engages in discussion with them about Saudi social issues such as women rights, justice, corruption and class hatred. WCU3 admitted that businessmen did mistakes, but the government has the authority to bring them to account, therefore we should not forget the Islamic and Saudi values that require that people respect each other, especially women and children. WCU1, WCU3, MCU4, MCU5 and MCU6 confirmed that their participation aimed to protect the social fabric because Saudis did not usually post insults and hateful speech against each other, as on this hashtag.

Although the interviewees confirmed that they used Twitter to raise awareness among other Twitter users, their goals differed from those identified by their peers in the other two case studies. In the first case study, the housing shortage, spreading awareness focused on the positive and negative sides of imposing the tax law on unused properties. In the second case study, the political participation of Saudi women in elections, raising

awareness concentrated on explaining women's rights and confirming that Islam does not prohibit women from participating in political elections. In this case, fighting unlawful use of public property in Saudi Arabia, although some interviewees believed that Butarji did the wrong thing, they emphasised that other Twitter users not only exaggerated their criticism of him but insulted him and destroyed his reputation. Therefore, they felt there was a need to modify and refine the dialogue, to be more rational and to contribute to the advancement of society. They admitted that some tweet contents about the unlawful use of public property on Twitter was negative and introduced the issue of class hatred, which could have unhelpful consequences.

On the other hand, one set of opinions emphasized the importance of connectedness between citizens and officials and government organisations to protect society's interests. For example, MUU1 said that:

"Enlightening the decision-makers about illegal action is very important"

Sound reasons for doing this were also mentioned by MCU2, MCU6, WCU2 and WCU3. They focused on telling the officials responsible about corruption to achieve positive results, such as getting them to shoulder the responsibility to deal effectively with these corrupt actions. Moreover, they believed that when officials were told about corruption, this presented them with a real test to demonstrate their seriousness in fighting corruption. For example, MCU2 and MCU6 respectively stated:

"My role is to embarrass the official by placing his finger on the wound" (MCU2)

"Put the ball in the officials' court, force them to identify the imbalance and deal with it." (MCU6)

Other interviewees such as MCU1 and WCU3, emphasised that informing officials may make them pay more attention to fighting corruption in future and may influence decision-makers. WCU3 and MCU2, and MCU5 mentioned that the key issue was to restore the public property and impose fines on violators, which would contribute to raising government revenue. MCU6 said the government should not just impose fines but should make violators pay the removal costs, because the citizens have a right to be reimbursed.

7.4.3 The Importance of Government Censorship

The analysis of interviews indicated that interviewees believed that the Saudi government applies the law regarding electronic crimes to organise social media conversations and protect public morality and users' privacy; and this influenced the quality of deliberation. Moreover they confirmed that political, religious and social values pressured Twitter users in applying self-censorship and using the strategy of sarcasm to criticise government organisations and citizens' conversations.

66% of the interviewees said that there is censorship and there are strict social values and therefore, debate is not as free and rational as it otherwise might be. All admitted that the Saudi government monitored social media platforms, and Twitter in particular; and this might motivate Twitter users to employ sarcasm and indirect strategies to criticise the Saudi government with the aim of avoiding conflict with the political system (as explained in sections 7.2.3 and 7.3). For example, MCU3 and MCU6 mentioned that social media platforms are monitored by the Saudi government, but they could not ignore that a degree of freedom was extended on these platforms. According to WCU1:

“No one could have imagined that Saudi men and women would have a public space to express their opinions, even if the government monitors that discussion”

Government censorship is perceived as necessary by seven interviewees, although it influences the quality of deliberation. On the other hand, all the interviewees believed that Twitter users had started to understand how to conduct conversations on Twitter properly and deal with different opinions. For example, MCU2 and WCU3 said that the discussion about corruption demonstrated that people were able to conduct debate properly. But the problem remained that some isolated and abusive comments, such as class hatred and online abuse against women, affected the rationality of dialogue (WCU3).

Twitter users also used self-censorship to avoid any conflict with government or social values according to six interviewees. For example, MCU1:

“Saudi citizens are not free of Saudi censorship; indeed I pay attention to each word I post on social media platforms”.

Self-censorship is another tactic which may restrict social media users from criticising certain issues. Eight interviewees confirmed that they were influenced by religious and tribal values when they discussed this issue, because their criticism might have been interpreted as class hatred towards certain families or businessmen. They also suggested that because of religious values they did not always express their opinions. For example, compassion towards violators' family members had kept them from being too critical. They believe that conducting self-censorship might be the best way to avoid conflict with government or conservatives. MCU1, MCU3 and WCU1 believed that they choose the right words to criticise those people and to conduct a balanced discussion which was considered the best form of self-censorship to help participants maintain respect during discussion.

In addition, the female interviewees emphasised that social values and traditions were considered to be crucial factors in the nature of their participation; which is compatible with what was said by interviewees in the other two case studies (Chapters 5 and 6). This seems to reflect the effective influence of traditional and social values on Saudi women, even if they engage in the discussion of Saudi public affairs such as corruption issues. This may also explain the high percentage of women 50.5% (see Table 1) who used pseudonyms to participate on this hashtag and who made very harsh and critical comments.

7.4.4 The Influence of Twitter on the Relationship between Government and Citizens

According to all nine participants, the Saudi government's relationship with citizens changed after the emergence of social media platforms, Twitter in particular; especially in relation to citizens' ability to criticise the government regarding some social and political issues such as unlawful use of public property. For example, MCU1 said:

“Saudi citizens have an effective tool, Twitter, to present their voices to the government”

MUC3 believed that Twitter complemented the role of TV and newspapers by providing citizens with a public space to criticise and make demands of their government. MCU2 added:

“Although I use Twitter to discuss some very sensitive issues such as unlawful use of public property, which were prohibited from being broadcast by journalists because they believe these articles crossed the red lines (they criticised the Saudi government), I have not faced any problem from the government after tweeting about them.”

I believed that this man, who worked as a director of Logistics Support for 4 Saudi banks and is counsellor to a royal prince, exaggerated his evaluation of the freedom of expression allowed on Twitter³⁹.

Seven interviewees believed that the changes in the relationship between citizens and government, which emerged in this deliberation, were positive and would encourage more discussions to be conducted. Alothman (2013) believes that seeing aggressive criticism on Twitter against the Saudi government has become normal but it would not have been possible a decade ago. For example, MCU4 was convinced that the relationship had changed:

“Indeed, Saudi citizens have to take advantage of this opportunity instead of demanding full freedom, which should come with time, because this is a golden opportunity; so, Saudi citizens should use it to expose corruption and demand their rights”.

³⁹He was jailed because of his tweets against government policy in 2018. This happened after I collected the data from Interviewees.

MCU5 said:

“This is great freedom at this time, because Saudi citizens have an acceptable space without shedding blood or losing victims, such as happened during the so-called Arab Spring of the recent decade.”

The majority of interviewees described the relationship between the Saudi government and citizens as excellent, especially if the criticisms were correct, precise and honest. Interviewee MCU5 stated that one of the reasons that had contributed to building a good relationship between Saudi citizens and their government was the positive interaction between officials and citizens on social media platforms, and Twitter in particular. He added that officials recognised loyal citizens who were critical in the interests of society and not for other reasons, and he added that there were Saudi citizens who harshly criticised government organisations and officials but went further by criticising the king of Saudi Arabia and other members of the royal family, which was detrimental to social cohesion. In my opinion this interviewee (MCU5) is more reasonable than MUC2, because he identified the type of criticism which is more accepted by that government as it does not touch the Royal family. MCU3 and MCU4 agreed, saying they believed that Saudi citizens who criticised honestly gained the ears of officials, because for several years the Saudi government had appointed official speakers to interact with people, address their criticisms and answer their enquiries and update the community about current and complicated issues. For example, information from the official speaker of the municipality of Jeddah, their updated tweet, and the announcement by the Emirate of Makkah (tweet 6.66), emphasised the respect of Saudi government organisations by thanking all the citizens who had participated in taking action against the unlawful usage of public property on Sarri Road.

In short, these Saudi participants agreed unanimously about the change in the relationship between government and citizens in Saudi Arabia. They were optimistic for the future because they believed the relationship was going in the right direction. However, it is important to note that these interviewees consented to limits being placed on freedom of expression. They considered criticism acceptable only if it did not undermine social cohesion and their notion of social cohesion affirmed the absolute rule

of the royal family. Only one interviewee, MCU6 critically reflected on the extent to which the relationship between citizens and government had changed. He suggested that it was his criticism of a government office and his accusation of corruption that had led to his imprisonment in 2013. Other interviewees were more optimistic and believed that the Saudi government had started paying attention to citizens' voices on social media platforms. They suggested that the government had started to react to citizens' views immediately which showed that the government believed that citizens had proved themselves to be active and reliable in exposing corruption.

7.5 Conclusion

The qualitative and quantitative analyses showed that the discussion about unlawful use of public property included elements indicating a high level of quality of deliberation and a positive change in the relationship between Twitter users and the government. However, the results also exposed the hidden negative side of Saudi society.

First of all, the analysis revealed four main topics: requesting action, criticism, Twitter and other technology, and values. The diversity of topics demonstrated the extent to which the debate was rational; and the new topic in this case was about the role of Twitter and other technology programs such as Google Earth in facilitating and supporting political discussion among Twitter users. Criticism was the most common topic in this discussion, but a sarcastic strategy was often used, which indicated the limits on freedom of expression in Saudi society because of social, religious, and political factors. Moreover, although the topic of values topics occupied a low percentage, it discussed the social and religious values that govern citizens' speech and respect for others. This was in contrast to the other two case studies, where the topic of values occupied a much larger percentage. Interestingly, some of the tweets that addressed this topic debated how people should behave on social media, i.e. that they should consider the feelings of violators and their families, even the regulations had been breached.

Secondly, the result presented the change in the relationship between government and Twitter users when the Saudi government immediately interacted for the only time throughout the three case studies with users' demands on Twitter. There were three different stages to the Saudi government's reaction to Twitter users, whereby the Saudi government firstly answered enquiries by users, then explained its actions in removing the violation, and lastly thanked Twitter users and let them know them that the action had been completed. This interaction increased citizens' sense of empowerment and encouraged them to have more trust in their government. On other hand, the debate showed how citizens were saying 'our views matter and the government needs to listen'; and it shows that they used Twitter to express this view with confidence. Twitter users felt that their relationship with the government had changed a lot. However, the government had already publicly stated it was fighting corruption, which included the misuse of public property, so responding to citizens' concerns about Butarji's violation was no great change. Furthermore, the Saudi government had issued some regulations to control what was posted on social media (see Chapter 2) Citizens demanding that government organisations adhered to their own regulations was hardly in breach of these censorship laws.

Thirdly, the results showed that Twitter was used as a two-way political communication tool between the government and users; in contrast to the previous two case studies where it was used by ordinary users and certain elites to engage in political discussion. This demonstrates how Twitter users aimed to effect social improvements through participating in political deliberation and making demands to the Saudi government. Fourthly, active citizenship was manifested in this debate when Twitter users started exposing unlawful use of public property and producing evidence for it, which put more pressure on the government, and then demanding that the government remove the violations. Moreover, they researched the relevant information and regulations in order to explain how much violators should pay regarding their unlawful use of public property. This showed that the debate was characterised by knowledge of the issues. Fifthly, the elements of citizenship such as connectedness to Saudi social and religious values were apparent, but differed from how they presented in other two case studies. In the first case study, Twitter users demanded that Saudi values should be protected from external

threats such as the Western conspiracy to undermine their social fabric. In the second, Twitter users presented their connectedness to religious and social values by confirming the importance of justice and how the law should apply equally to all citizens. However, in this case study, there were demands that society be protected from a new bad phenomenon which had emerged from the society itself, i.e. class hatred and discrimination against businessmen. Sixthly, the debate presented the rationality of Twitter users as the target of their demands changed according to the context. For example, Twitter users` demands that social values be protected were addressed to citizens in the third case study; in the second case study, these demands were addressed to the government, but in the first case study citizens, clerics and the government were all charged to take action; which demonstrated how sensitive women`s issues are in Saudi society.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study investigated the role of Twitter in political changes in the Middle East, specifically Saudi Arabia, by analysing the quality of public political deliberation. The contents of 12,399 tweets posted over 4 days for each hashtag (12 days in total) when Twitter users responded to three different government decisions related to women's political participation, imposing tax on undeveloped property and unlawful use of public property were analysed. Tweet contents were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively before conducting interviews with nine Twitter users for each case study (27 Twitter users in total). The main findings include the following: The political discussions in the three case studies revealed a high level of quality of deliberation, a change in the relationship between citizens and power elites in Saudi Arabia (the government, the official religious institution and clerics), and demonstrated some of the elements of good citizenship in particular connectedness and knowledge of the issue. This chapter summarizes the main arguments of the thesis then identifies suggestions for future studies in the light of the study's limitations.

8.2 The Quality of Public Deliberation

8.2.1 Diversity and Relevance

The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the quality of political deliberation in the three case studies demonstrated the diversity of participants, topics and attitudes during political deliberation on Twitter, as explained in the three previous empirical chapters (see Chapters 5,6 and 7). Therefore, the most prominent results are presented below under three main aspects: diversity of participants, main topics discussed and the diversity of attitudes toward Saudi government's decisions.

Firstly, the results confirmed the diversity of participants which included men, women and others such as media agencies, different organisations or anonymous participants. Men occupied the highest percentage in three case studies which was expected, regarding the statistics for online users in Saudi Arabia. However, despite the possible cultural reasons for a lower percentage of posts by women which have been previously discussed, women's participation revealed their desires and abilities to participate equally in discussions about issues of public concern in all three case studies. Women presented their opinions, suggestions and made demands of government organisations. **Women's participation is an expected result due to changes in Saudi society such as an increase in the level of citizens' education (Hamdan, 2005 and Rather, 2012) and the increasing use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook among the youth which allows them to discuss women's rights as citizens (Chaudhry, 2014).** This result confirms what previous studies revealed about the role of social media, in particular Twitter, in enabling women to engage in political discussion in The Middle East and Saudi Arabia, although they received some abuse online (Howard and Hussain, 2013); Mesawa, 2016; Guta and Karolak, 2015 and Faqihi, 2015). The rare participation of media agencies and government organisations is understandable regarding their dependence on the government financially and administratively and the strict regulations that regulate media work and production.

Secondly, I observed that the discussion topics in the three case studies were diverse. The first case study includes three topics: social and religious values, requesting action and women's civil rights; the second case study included two main topics: economic consequences and requesting action; and the third case study included four topics: criticism, the role of Twitter, social and religious values and requesting action. In my opinion, this variety of topics confirmed the rationality of users and the quality of deliberation because the differences in those topics were influenced by the differences of contexts; which lead to deliberation using different arguments and perspectives, which arguably exposed users to different ideologies and information. This result corresponds to findings by Hamdan (2005) and Al-Jenaibi (2016) when they confirmed that Twitter plays a crucial role in opening the arena for conservative, moderate and liberal factions in Saudi Arabia, and that diversity can enrich the quality of the deliberation.

Thirdly, the difference in attitudes towards the government decisions increased the quality of deliberation; where the results confirmed the diversity of participant`s attitudes in the first case study because that issue is a controversial topic in Saudi Arabia. Usually people have been divided into conservative and liberal standpoints regarding their attitudes to women`s issues. Although the percentage of Twitter users rejecting the government`s decision was very low in second case study (0.5%) and in third case study (1%), this was expected, because those decisions were in favour of citizens, in contrast with women`s political participation which was considered as socially detrimental by conservative users, but positive by the majority. **In spite of the majority of Twitter users support government`s decisions, there are a variety of different arguments, claims, criticisms, suggestions and thanks which were addressed to the government and its officials.**

8.2.2 Openness

One of the biggest surprises I encountered in analysing tweets was the high percentage of men who used **pseudonyms** (21%) in the hashtag on women`s political participation, compared with only 2% and 10.5% in other two case studies. This result demonstrates the sensitivity of this topic in Saudi society. On the other hand, although the highest percentage of women using their real names was in the first case (58%) compared with case two (32%) and case three (49.5%), these percentages reflect women`s serious attempts to get their rights and show their ability to make demands and criticise government decisions regarding the public interest. Nowadays, Saudi women are gradually overcoming the social restrictions and misinterpretations of Islamic regulations that prevented them from discussing social and political issues with men. We read many comments and opinions by Saudi women who come from different social classes and hold different ideologies who use their real names in Twitter such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia`s Ambassador to the United State of America Princess Reema Bndar Al-Saud⁴⁰, who uses her photo in the profile, as well as many religious women such as Ebtsam

⁴⁰Reema Bandar Al-Saud. @rbalsaud. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia`s Ambassador to the United State of America.

Aljabry⁴¹ who interacts and shares her thoughts with other Twitter users of the opposite gender. So, Twitter has played a role in political changes through encouraging Saudi citizens of both genders to discuss sensitive issues.

8.2.3 Interaction

The findings suggested a fairly weak level of interaction in all three case studies: women`s political participation, imposing tax on undeveloped property, and unlawful use of public property; as only 21%, 44%, and 21.5% of tweets respectively received replies. Moreover, 32%, 51.5%, and 43% of tweets respectively were re-tweeted. This result contradicts results by Shephard et al. (2014) whose study presented strong evidence of re-tweeting. Moreover, this finding varies with what was reported in Almistadi (2014) who confirmed that re-tweeting has been used heavily by Saudis to increase the awareness about corruption in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the result showed that 27%, 40%, and 18.5% of tweets respectively received likes. Noticeably, some tweets by clerics, experts and officials received interactions more than other participants. Twitter users showed they valued informed debate because they interacted more with tweets that included experts` and clerics` opinions or official statistics. This result demonstrated to what extent Twitter users in Saudi Arabia trust certain economic experts because they are not described as pro or anti-government. This result shows the role of Twitter in exposing Saudi elites to public scrutiny, which means that **experts have to be more careful when dealing with Saudi citizens who have access to more information and present their opinions about public issues. Twitter has allowed citizens access to a range of information sources and to disseminate, criticise and analyse experts` opinions.** In general, although this level of interaction is comparable with that of Twitter users in other counties, I believe the interaction needs to involve everyone and this would mean involvement but powerful elites as well as ordinary citizens in an arena that was relatively free of online abuse' Or something like that.

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8.2.4 Respectfulness and Rationality

This section argues that Twitter users' debates about the three government decisions explored in this thesis were largely rational and respectful. In this thesis rationality was evaluated by three criteria: Firstly, the respectful contents of tweets; calculated as 91%, 95.5%, and 91% respectively for the three hashtags, which reflects a high level of respectfulness; secondly, presenting clear opinions; and thirdly, the relevance of tweet contents to the main topic of the hashtag. The results showed a fairly good use of attached evidence and sound justifications for arguments. The majority of attachments providing evidence consisted of experts' opinions and advice about the main topics of the hashtags. Therefore, after taking those criteria into account, a high level of rationality was apparent in the discussions by Twitter users in the three case studies; such that 82%, 78% and 83% of the hashtags' contents respectively were considered rational.

However, there is a dark side to social media and the internet, which includes hatred and discrimination. Therefore, some of interviewees were not surprised by the emergence of online abuse against women in what is a patriarchal society, but they were surprised by the class hatred against business men expressed in the third case study. I believe this class hatred has long existed in Saudi Arabia, but did not previously appear, because the old media did not allow it to be expressed. However, with the new media where an individual is the writer and gatekeeper, this class hatred has emerged. **The majority of tweets which included aggressive content, racist messages, and hate speech against women, clerics, officials, and government organisations were sent by users who used pseudonym. This result agreed with the result of Mondal et al's (2017) empirical study and emphasize what Rosener (2016, p.1) mentioned "Scholars often blame the occurrence of aggressive behaviour in online discussions on the anonymity".** This study extends the current research in Middle East through investigating the rationality of debates on Twitter, which may encourage more investigation about this in different contexts.

8.3 Connectedness and informed debate

This thesis argues that the differences in context played a crucial role in the way Twitter users expressed their feeling of connectedness with Saudi society and other citizens; moreover, the results showed the extent to which Twitter users valued informed debate across the three case studies.

First of all, the results confirmed the dominance of social and religious values on Twitter users' discussions about women's issues which presented their connectedness toward these values, but in third case study these feelings were somewhat less apparent. In contrast, the second case study did not demonstrate this adherence to social and religious values, although imposing tax on undeveloped property was rejected by many known clerics on official TV and on their Twitter accounts. Instead, Twitter users' sense of obligation to protect their society's interests came through strongly. This was manifest through explaining weaknesses in the suggested draft of the law of imposing the tax on undeveloped property and suggesting useful solutions for citizens to gain benefits from imposing the law. Moreover, Twitter users enquired about some previous decisions that were not implemented and the large budgets which had been allocated to solve the housing issue or to remove unlawful use of public property, which showed to what extent Twitter users felt obliged to protect public interests.

However, these variations in expressions of connectedness to social and religious values is due in part to differences in the topics under discussion, such that women's political participation was seen as more threatening to these values than imposing tax on undeveloped property. However, the debates also showed how Twitter users are re-evaluating these values as they begin to release themselves from the social restrictions that govern their lives, as mentioned by Bukhari (2011), Alswaeed (2015), and Winder (2014).

Although the results of this study confirmed that Twitter users started to challenge tribal and religious values through engaging in discussion about citizens' rights, many supported their opinions with religious evidence; and it appeared that many Saudi women were still hesitant and afraid to engage in discussions about sensitive social and political issues. Moreover, some male Twitter male users were also hesitant to discuss and

support women`s rights under their real names. I believe Twitter facilitated the exchange of ideas and perspectives for many Twitter users who started to reasonably compare objections to women`s political participation to previous prohibitions on women from accessing education and employment which some tribal and religious extremists had rejected in the past. As women were later given the right to education and employment, these users suggested that extremists simply employed religious texts to back their own interpretations. Therefore, both sides used religious sources to support their arguments, which demonstrated the extent to which the Islamic religion influences Saudi society. This echoes Murphy (2012), who said that although Saudis have a pro-change presence on Twitter and other social media platforms, there are also many socially conservative Saudis who share their conservative perspectives on Twitter. **This study went beyond Murphy`s study by explaining how conservatives argue against supporters of women rights with reference to society`s values and what types of evidences were used, by supporters and opponents to justify their position.**

Secondly, regarding good citizenship being manifest in sound knowledge of the issues, Twitter users` deliberation about three case studies presented interesting results. They demonstrated their valuing of informed debate by interacting with tweets that included reasonable arguments and justifications and which were supported by evidence from trustworthy experts and clerics. They also demonstrated their knowledge about previous Saudi government decisions and laws related to those issues in their attempts to find solutions to those problems. Moreover, they appeared able to access official statistics and to use those statistics and the law to evaluate new laws and decisions and present recommendations and comments which could help the new laws to succeed. All these presented the important role of Twitter in facilitating access to sources of information.

8.4 Government Censorship and Self-censorship

The findings of this study showed the influence of government censorship on the quality of deliberation; in spite of the Basic Law of Governance of Saudi Arabia and all Saudi media laws confirming that users are free to express their opinions and criticize government action, unless these discussions lead to the destruction of the social fabric or insult Saudi tribal and religious values. These ambiguous limitations have pressurised Twitter users to conduct self-censorship in order to avoid possible conflict with tribal values and Saudi power elites such as clerics and the government. According to Althiabi (2018) Saudi society has many cultural taboos which are not covered by laws, but breaching them can cause problems and entail external censorship. Therefore, citizens sometimes used sarcasm to make their comments and thus avoid any problems with government organisations or appearing to transgress social and religious values. Interestingly, all the interviewees believed that government censorship is necessary in Saudi Arabia, which was also mentioned by Almaghlooth (2014). However, in the first and second case studies, Twitter users used sarcastic comments in a limited way to criticize the Saudi government's decisions; because women's issues are very sensitive regarding religious and social values, and the discussion about the housing shortage involves members of the royal family and corrupt officials. **This may be because the debate happened not long after the government had announced its anti-corruption policy which may have made Twitter users feel it was safe to attack a businessman. On the other hand, attacking a rich person is different from attacking the government or royal family. Moreover,** the Saudi government has issued ambiguous regulations to monitor the public discussion, which makes people confused and unable to properly understand to what extent they are allowed to criticise government decisions. For example, the Public Prosecution warned through its official account on Twitter that the production, sending or retransmission of material that included cynicism, mockery or rabble-rousing which would prejudice the public order or affect public morals or religious values through social media or any technical means is an offense punishable by five years' imprisonment and a fine of three million riyals (an7a, 2018). Therefore, it is very likely that Twitter users will not

continue the same pace of demands and criticism of the performance of government organisations and officials that emerged in 2015.

8.5 Changes in the Relationship between Government and Twitter Users

The findings demonstrated a change in the relationship between Twitter users and sources of power in Saudi Arabia. Many research and studies emphasised the role of social media in political change in Middle East and Arab countries such as Mesawa (2016) and Howard and Hussain (2013). Bukhari (2011) and Alrakaf (2012) went beyond that when they suggested that the space for freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia had been extended which lead to an increase in citizens' confidence in their ability to actively participate in issues of public concern. Fitany (2012) and Al-saggaf and Simmons (2015) believe that Twitter and Facebook has connected the Saudi government with citizens and allowed them to make demands. Alssagaf and Simmons confirm that the Saudi government had responded to citizens' demands but they did not explain if this interaction was on social media platform or offline. Noman et al. (2015), and Murphy (2012) say Saudi youth have become braver in criticising the government, the Royal family and clerics, but also did not explain how, where and why. Therefore, this study went further in investigating how, where and why Twitter users criticised and made demands of the Royal family, government organisations, the official religious institution and clerics. First of all, in the third case study, Twitter users showed their ability to cooperate to expose corruption under their real names, provide evidence to protect themselves and put pressure on the government to release the results of their investigations and be more transparent. Moreover, they worked together to collect information and regulations that explained the penalties and demonstrated their sense of connectedness and a desire to protect the public interest. The Saudi government interacted several times with ordinary Twitter users on this hashtag. This reveals how Twitter users can be active, interactive and proactive citizens depending on the circumstances; and government interaction on this hashtag indicated an acceptance of citizens' participation in exposing corruption and protecting society's interests, but this does not mean that freedom of expression will be extended by the Saudi government.

8.6 Research Contributions

This thesis contributes to the field of political participation with the first empirical analysis of the quality of political deliberation on Twitter. This thesis measured the following six elements of quality of public deliberation: diversity, openness, relevance, respectfulness, interaction and rationality on Twitter. Secondly, this thesis argues that the quality of political deliberation in Twitter is impacted by context; therefore this thesis contributes to the current studies in the Middle East through investigating the impact of social and religious values on the quality of political deliberation on Twitter in the Saudi context. This thesis argues that the quality of deliberation can be measured empirically by focusing on ten elements: users' name (real or **pseudonym**), types of users (men, women, and organisation), main topic of tweet, attachment, attitude, respectfulness, reply, re-tweet, like, rationality. Obtain these ten elements facilitate to identify the six elements of quality of deliberation: diversity, openness, relevance, respectfulness, interaction, and rationality. This framework is particularly useful for an analysis of Twitter content in a complex socio-political context such as Saudi Arabia, because it addresses the type of name used (real or **pseudonym**) and the type of user (women, men or other) which facilitates measuring the differences between users in their expression and use of Twitter. The framework acts as an example of how massive data from social media platforms can be systematically analysed to identify both quality of deliberation and elements of citizenship.

What distinguished this thesis is its originality and significance in providing the field with a new analysis of the quality of political deliberation on Twitter. This was achieved by modifying the elements of quality of deliberation to fit the characteristics of Twitter and the study confirms the possibility of analysing deliberation on this platform. Moreover, the framework will help other researchers to analyse deliberation on Twitter in different contexts. The impacts of Saudi tribal and religious values on the quality of political deliberation was not previously investigated, therefore their impacts have been analysed in the context of what many consider to be the most conservative society in the world. The results confirmed the rationality, respectfulness, relevance and diversity of topics in political deliberation in Twitter users' deliberation about three Saudi government decisions to solve three sensitive social issues. Furthermore, many Twitter users

demonstrated their ability to challenge dominant tribal and religious values that have governed Saudi society for several decades.

8.7 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis reveals some new directions for further research. Firstly, this research focuses on the quality of political deliberation on Twitter and identified some changes in Saudi citizens' attitudes to certain sources of power in society such as clerics, tribal and religious values and the government. It would be interesting to investigate how Twitter continues to enable Saudi citizens to challenge dominant social and religious values over the next few decades. Current indications of change in Saudi society and in government policy have arguably not convinced Saudi youth that this heralds a relaxation of social restrictions, and these concerns may be manifest on social media platforms like Twitter. Moreover, this thesis has revealed changes in Saudi women's ability to engage in public deliberation, and also how they suffered some online abuse in all three case studies; therefore it is very important to investigate why Saudi women still suffer online abuse, how online abuse is used as a means of social control in this context and how government and citizens can effectively address this problem.

Thirdly, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of tweet contents demonstrated how Twitter users challenge clerics and engage in debate with them about different topics related to women's rights. Saudi citizens used to respect clerics and did not argue with their opinions, even if they were not confident about the cleric's opinions. However, in the hashtag about women's political participation, citizens demonstrated an ability and willingness to argue against respected and popular clerics by using counter-arguments backed by evidence from religious sources. So, it would be interesting to investigate further study main reasons behind the changes in Twitter users' attitudes toward clerics which allowed them to criticise clerics' opinions in this hashtag.

The precise limitation of this study is the continued modification of Saudi media policy which changes every few years; therefore this study could address discussions in hashtags that focused on sensitive Saudi social issues during a period of about five years ending in 2017, when the new, stricter law regarding online production was adopted. This

law prohibits publishing any statements or articles that affects public morals or religious values, with a penalty of imprisonment up to 5 years and a fine of up to 3 million riyals. This makes the current study a historical documentation of Saudi online deliberation, and must be seen within a temporal as well as a cultural context.

There were also practical limitations such as the time available to the researcher, which meant that only three hashtags could be used as case studies and only 27 interviews were conducted with interviewees who represented a cross-section of society. These limitations reduce the generalisability of the study, but allowed greater insights to be gained by studying the phenomena in some depth.

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Appendix 1: The elements of quality deliberation on some previous studies.

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Jensen (2003a)	Argumentation	<u>The contribution relates to the overall debate</u>	Openness	Reciprocity	<u>Direct contribution</u>	Tone	information	Agenda setting
Choi and Kim (2005)	Reasoned discourse	Open mindedness	Freedom of expression	Reciprocity	Empathy	Public interest.		
Gutmann and Thompson (1996)	Opportunity	Publicity	Accountability	Reciprocity	Basic opportunity	Basic liberty		
Schneider (1997)	Equality	Diversity	<u>Quality: relates to the overall debate</u>	Reciprocity				
Wilhelm (1999, p.88)	Rationality	Opinion homogeneity	Supplying and obtaining information	Reciprocity				
Graham and Witschge (2003, p.178)	Rational-critical debate	Reflexivity	Reciprocity					
Bächtiger et al. (2003)	Justification	Respect	Concern for the common good	Openness of participation	Constructiveness	Authenticity		
According to Dahlberg (2001a, p.3)	Autonomy	Exchange and critique of criticisable moral-practical	Reflexivity	Reflexivity				

Appendix2: Media Campaign

Table 2.1



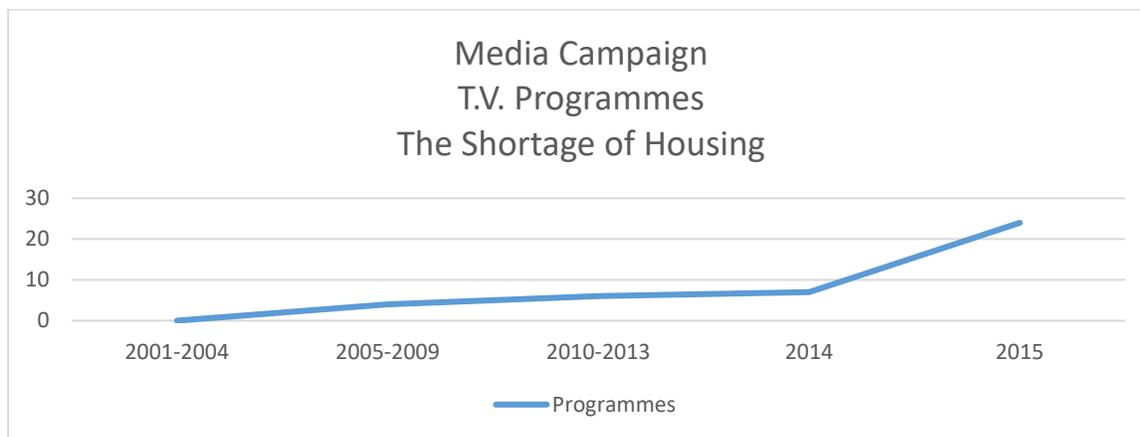
Table 2.2



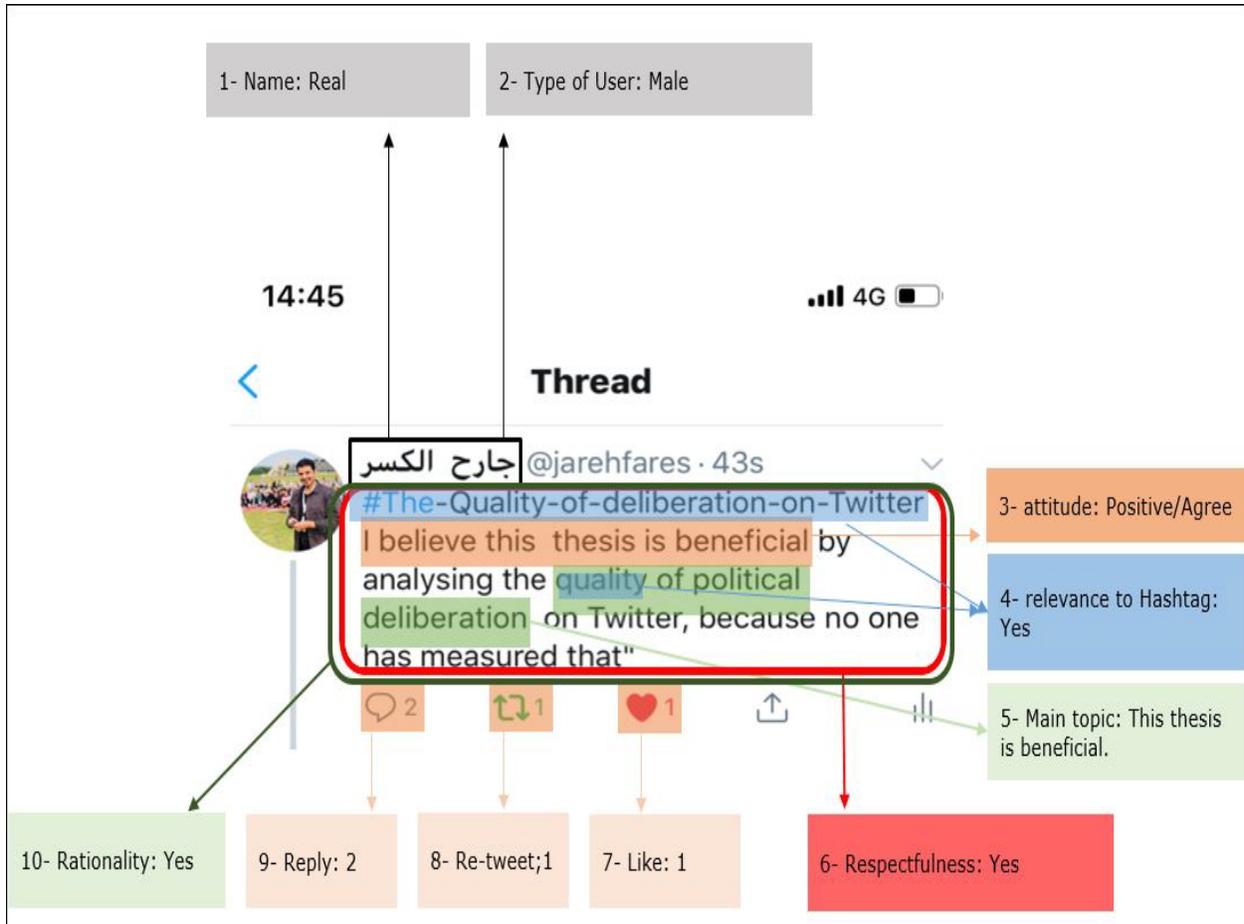
Table 2.3



Table 2.4



Appendix3: The elements of quality of deliberation at Tweet



Appendix4: How to identify the main topics of Tweet

4.1 Tweet which includes one topic

نعم بعد موافقة #مجلس_الشورى على قانون
#رسوم_الأراضي_البيضاء نحتاج أن نطلع على التفاصيل..حتى
لأنكون مثل ذلك الأهل الذي طار في "العجة"!

This Tweet includes one topic: Requesting action by the government- 'Transparency'.

4.2 Tweet which includes Two Topics.

تويتر صوت الشعب في دولة لديها رغبة في الإصلاح ، هنا يصل الصوت ويحدث التغيير
#شكراتوتير #كتابة_دلج

Translation: Twitter is the voice of citizens, if the state has a real desire to reform; and citizens' voices are heard by officials, then change can happened.

The second Topic: The relationship between officials and citizens. If we remove the second topic, the tweet will be beneficial and meaningful.

The first Topic: The role of Twitter. If we remove the first topic, the tweet will lose its meaning.

4.3 Tweet which includes two or more topics with evidence.

The second topic: Social and religious values. If we remove this topic the tweet will still be meaningful.

شده الابه تيم ان مشاركة النساء في السياسة شين طبيعي الاظن انكم اغبر من الرسول ؟

يَأْتِيهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بِأَبْعَانِكَ عَلَى أَنْ لَا يُشْرِكْنَ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَسْرِقْنَ وَلَا يَزْنِينَ وَلَا يَقْتُلْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ وَلَا يَأْتِينَ سَهْمَتِنَ بَفَرْسَتِهِنَّ مِنْ أَيْدِيهِنَّ وَأَرْجُلِهِنَّ وَلَا يَعْصِمَنَّكَ

The first topic: Women's rights. If we remove this topic, the tweet will still be meaningful.

Translation: This Translation: This verse does not prohibit women from working in politics. I do not think you are more jealous than the prophet of Allah (peace upon him).

Two topics are important for Tweet therefore I identified the first topic as the main topic of tweet because it was supported with evidence.

4.4 1Tweet which includes three topics without evidence.

اذا كان بيتك من زجاج فلا ترمي الناس بالحجارة يا بتارجي تستغل الرصيف وتطالب الشعب بالصبر.

The First topic: Proverb (sarcastic)

The second topic: Criticism

The third topic: Requesting action by people

Translation: "Butarji, if your house is made of glass, do not throw stones at people; you use the pavement unlawfully yet demand people to be patient.

All three topics have the same importance, because if we remove any topic the tweet will still meaningful. Moreover, the Tweet does not contain any evidence. Therefore, I simply chose the first topic.

Appendix5: Coding Sheet of the First case study

	Topics	Notices
1	The type of users	Male/ Female/ organisation/ other
2	Twitter user`s name	Real/ Pseudonym
3	Evidence	Photo/ links
4	Attitude	Agreement/ rejection/ natural
5	Respectfulness	Respectful/ disrespectful
6	1 st sub-topic: Corruption of those Responsible	Included / not included
7	2 nd sub-topic: The Role of Clerics toward government and citizens	Included / not included
8	3 rd sub-topic : The Council of Ministries, Saudi parliament and Municipal Council	Included / not included
9	4 th sub-topic: Women should participate but according to Islamic <i>Shari`ah</i> Guidance	Included / not included
10	5 th sub-topic: Women`s Participation is Usually Unsuccessful	Included / not included
11	6 th sub-topic: Explanation of Ethics	Included / not included
12	7 th sub-topic: Westernization / SIDAW agreement and Invitation to Liberalism	Included / not included
13	8 th sub-topic: online obvious against women	Included / not included
14	9 th sub-topic: conservatives/ Extremists	Included / not included
15	10 th sub-topic: Patriarchal society	Included / not included
16	11 th sub-topic: Discrimination against Women and a Sensitivity towards their Issues	Included / not included

17	12 th sub-topic: Giving Women all their Rights / Women are Successful	Included / not included
18	13 th sub-topic: Criticising the sources of power in Saudi society: official religious institution, clerics and government.	Included / not included
19	14 th sub-topic: Contradictions between Clerics and the Saudi Government	Included / not included
20	15 th sub-topic: Saudi society`s values which include a social and religious.	Included / not included
21	16 th sub-topic: Various Topics(but did not discuss women`s political participation directly)	Included / not included
22	rationality	Rational/ irrational
23	The number of replies	1= One reply /2= two replies / 3= more than 2 replies
24	The number of re-tweets	1= One re-tweet/ 2= two re-Tweet./ 3= more than 2 re-Tweets
25	The number of likes	1= One like/ 2= two. 3= more than 2
26	The topic of Requesting action	Used / Unused
27	The topic of criticism	Used / Unused
28	The topic of social and religious values	Used / Unused
29	The topic of technology and power	Used / Unused
30	The topic of civilian rights and gender equality	Used / Unused
31	Irrelevant topic	Used/unused

Appendix6: Coding Sheet of the Second case study

	Topics	Notices
1	The type of users	Male/ Female/ organisation/ other
2	Twitter user`s name	Real/ Pseudonym
3	Evidence	Photo/ links
4	Attitude	Agreement/ rejection/ natural
5	Respectfulness	Respectful/ disrespectful
6	1 st sub-topic : Corruption of those Responsible	Included / not included
7	2 nd sub-topic: The Role of Clerics	Included / not included
8	3 rd sub-topic: The Council of Ministries, Saudi parliament and Municipal Council	Included / not included
9	4 th sub-topic: Thank you King- his assistances and government.	Included / not included
10	5 th sub-topic: decreasing prices	Included / not included
11	6 th sub-topic: Mohammed bin Salman Against traders	Included / not included
12	7 th sub-topic: congratulation- lastly good news	Included / not included
13	8 th sub-topic: is the new is correct- it must be applied on all	Included / not included
14	9 th sub-topic: Thank you my gad	Included / not included
15	10 th sub-topic: thank you any expert or alamri and/ or alzamel	Included / not included
16	11 th sub-topic: do not be optimistic they will not applied it.	Included / not included
17	12 th sub-topic: In favour of citizens	Included / not included
18	13 th sub-topic: against citizens	Included / not included
19	14 th sub-topic: Corruption and using position to get interests	Included / not included

20	15 th sub-topic: property owners should develop their properties.	Included / not included
21		
22	The number of replies	One reply 1 / 2 to 5 replies 2 / more than 5 replies
23	The number of re- Tweets	Nothing 1 One re- Tweets 2 / two to 5 re- Tweets 3
24	The number of likes	One like 1 / two to 5 likes 2 / more than 5 likes 3
25	The topic of Requesting action	Used / Unused
26	The topic of criticism	Used / Unused
27	The topic of social and religious values	Used / Unused
28	The topic of technology and power	Used / Unused
29	The topic of civilian rights and gender equality	Used / Unused
30	Irrelevant topic	

Appendix7: Coding Sheet of the third case study

	Topics	Notices
1	The type of users	Male/ Female/ organisation/ other
2	Twitter user`s name	Real/ Pseudonym
3	Evidence	Photo/ links
4	Attitude	Agreement/ rejection/ natural
5	Respectfulness	Respectful/ disrespectful
6	1stT: Corruption of those Responsible. Municipal council, District princes, Officials. Dealers Secretary of Jeddah	Included / not included
7	2nd T : Blame, criticise, Popular proverbs, Unlucky in the expression	Included / not included
8	3rdT: Other merchants are afraid of disclose their corruption or investigate and focus on their business.	Included / not included
9	4th T : To ask for silence about his mistakes and to consider his favours and respect for his family, They believe this campaign as a class hatred, A great amount of hatred in this passion	Included / not included
10	5th T: Hypocrites with merchants and corrupts, justify them by turning criticism into class hatred. I he did some goodness he will not increase the studies` fees on scholarship`s students.	Included / not included
11	6th T : Twitter users clime to try corrupt merchants and enforce them to Pay the fine and bear the removal costs	Included / not included
12	7th T : Twitter users began to expose corruption of merchants and officials and expose abuses to public facilities	Included / not included
13	8th T: Climes Municipal council, District princes, Officials. Dealers Secretary to apply regulations as well as account Butrijii because his accusing of the Saudis	Included / not included

14	9th T: Twitter, google earth, and citizens` role on fighting corruption.	Included / not included
15	10th topic : Issues of unemployment among women and the consideration of public utility companies and exploitation of citizens	Included / not included
16	11thT: Religious perspectives.	Included / not included
17	12th T: The severity of King Salman and the new era of account corrupts and officials.	Included / not included
18	13th T: Thank you for the officials the prince of Makah district because his interaction before social media campaign.	Included / not included
19	14th T: Korian merchant donated by hospital; however where is the role of Saudi merchants.	Included / not included
20	The number of replies	One reply 1 / 2 to 5 replies 2 / more than 5 replies
21	The number of re- Tweets	Nothing 1 One re- Tweets 2 / two to 5 re- Tweets 3
	The number of likes	One like 1 / two to 5 likes 2 / more than 5 likes 3
22	The topic of Requesting action	Included / not included
23	The topic of criticism / and sarcastic.	Included / not included
24	The topic of social and religious values	Included / not included
25	The topic of technology and power	Included / not included
26	The topic of civilian rights and gender equality	Included / not included
27	Irrelevant topic	

