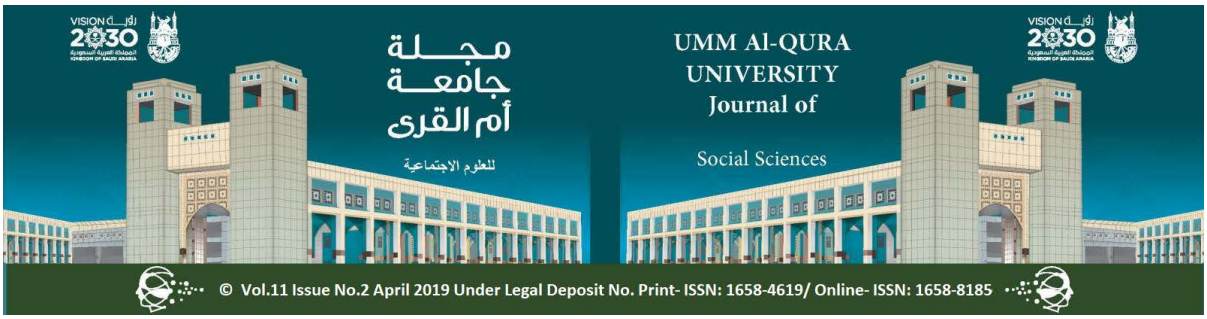

Public Perceptions of the Role of Social Media Networks in E-government in Building Social Capital for Social Inclusion

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Public Perceptions of the Role of Social Media Networks in E-government in Building Social Capital for Social Inclusion

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Abstract

From the perspectives of information science and social work, this interdisciplinary study attempts to investigate Kuwait public perceptions of the use of social media networks in e-government projects where information is created, exchanged, and shared, to build social capital in order to achieve social inclusion and social equality. The research adopts a quantitative approach to address its objectives, using the questionnaire method. The 610 completed questionnaires yielded an 81.3% response rate. The results indicate that the majority of respondents, regardless of their demographic characteristics, have a positive perception of the use of social media applications for exchanging and sharing information to build social capital and its related components (bonding, bridging, and maintaining), social inclusion, and social equality. Through the validation of its research instrument and model, this study proposes a new model for the use of social media applications by e-government programs as a new perspective in attempting to achieve social equality.

Keywords: Beliefs, Antenatal period, Physical activity, Kuwaiti women, Medical Anthropology.

تصورات العامة حول دور استخدام شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي في الحكومة الإلكترونية في بناء رأس المال الاجتماعي تحقيقاً للدمج الاجتماعي

د. سها العوضي
د. ملك الرشيد

الملخص:

من وجهتي نظر علم المعلومات والخدمة الاجتماعية، تحاول هذه الدراسة البينية استكشاف تصورات العامة في الكويت حول دور استخدام شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي في مشاريع الحكومة الإلكترونية حيث يتم إنشاء المعلومات وتبادلها وتعميمها، في بناء رأس المال الاجتماعي للفرد من أجل تحقيق الدمج الاجتماعي وصولاً لتحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية. واعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الكمي لتحقيق أهدافها، وذلك باستخدام أداة الاستبيان. تكونت العينة الغير احتمالية النهائية من ٦١٠ استبانة، بمعدل استجابة ٨١,٣٪. وأظهرت النتائج أن الغالبية العظمى من المشاركين، بغض النظر عن الاختلاف في خصائصهم الديموغرافية، كان لديهم تصوراً إيجابياً للدور الذي يمكن أن يلعبه استخدام تطبيقات الوسائط الاجتماعية لتبادل وتقاسم المعلومات لبناء رأس المال الاجتماعي والمكونات ذات الصلة (ربط، وتجسير، والمحافظة على رأس المال الاجتماعي)، وبين تحقيق الدمج الاجتماعي والمساواة الاجتماعية. ومن خلال التحقق من صدق أداة البحث، والنموذج الذي اقترحته الدراسة للربط بين مكوناتها، استطاعت هذه الدراسة تقديم نموذجاً جديداً لاستخدام تطبيقات الوسائط الاجتماعية في برامج الحكومة الإلكترونية كوسيلة حديثة تساهم في تحقيق المساواة الاجتماعية عن طريق ضمان فرص مشاركة جميع أفراد المجتمع بلا استثناء للاستفادة من الخدمات المقدمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رأس المال الاجتماعي، الدمج الاجتماعي، الحكومة الإلكترونية، شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي، مشاركة المعلومات، الخدمة الاجتماعية.

Introduction:

Over several decades, expansive social science disciplines have widely discussed the concept of social capital. When confronted with a wide range of questions about social capital, a number of information specialists, social workers, political scientists, and economists have investigated this concept in relation to their fields to identify its role in our social life (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Social capital constitutes the exploitation of information resources to exchange social relations that can be mobilized to achieve a certain aim (Narasimhan & Aundhe, 2014). Such social relations promote trust, information sharing and diffusion, collaboration, and interaction (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Social capital consists of information resources that are provided through social networks and social structures (Schellong, 2008). Adler and Kwon (2002) argued that information is the first direct benefit of social capital, as focal actors make broader sources of relevant, qualitative, and timely information accessible. Moreover, social capital enables the transfer and reciprocal outflow of information between focal actors and other factors of a network. Another benefit is related to solidarity, namely, the fact that frequent interactions between actors and trust networks allow the transmission of rich information, which can help in clarifying concepts and resolving conflicts. This internal solidarity is reflected positively in civic engagement at a societal level. Building and developing social capital

could have a great impact on deprived groups and contribute to social change through inclusion and community development (White 2002).

In recent years, a number of studies have been undertaken that attempt to understand social capital as a driver of individual and community resources. Although this perspective prevails in many social science disciplines, it has been discussed less frequently in the social work discipline to inform practice or policy development (Hawkins & Maurer 2012). For example, Ellison et al. (2007) and Valenzuela et al. (2009) identified that the main reason behind individuals' use of social network applications is to maintain and increase their social networks, thereby accruing social capital. However, Narasimhan and Aundhe (2014) found that poor formation of social capital, where information, experiences, understanding, and capabilities are not properly exchanged and shared, leads to an inadequate development of collective knowledge within communities. Other researchers argue that the use of web technologies in e-governments has played an important role in redefining government–public relationships for advocating more engaged citizens and attracting a larger number of participants who become able to express their political views by sharing information (Johannessen, 2012; Kang & Gearheart, 2010; Juris, 2004). Civic participation is not only about participation in electoral activities (Conway, 1985), but also about "individual or collective behavior aimed at resolving problems of the com-

munity" (Valenzuela et al., 2009, p.879). Such participation facilitated by social media network applications can foster civic engagement and achieve social inclusion. While civic engagement is considered a positive force that enhances social trust, norms, and values (Geys & Murdoch, 2010), social inclusion is more comprehensive. Social inclusion has been defined as "the extent that individuals, families, and communities are able to fully participate in society and control their own destinies, taking into account a variety of factors related to economic resources, employment, health, education, housing, recreation, culture, and civic engagement" (Warschauer, 2003, p.6). Social exclusion, however, is associated with many social problems, such as poverty and individual deprivation (Saunders, 2015). It has been defined as "the lack, or denial of resources, rights, goods, and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas" (Levitas et al., 2007, p. 9). Therefore, a number of governments have considered social inclusion, which is regarded as "the response" to social exclusion, as a social policy priority (Saunders, 2015). Moreover, the concept "social inclusion" is mainly connected with the principles of equality and equity, which constitute one of the most important principles and goals of social work (IFSW Code of Ethics, 2005), and away to achieve social justice. Although social justice has deeply ingrained in social work, it is not adequately reflected in the recent developments in the field (Lundy, 2004).

Recently, public participation in governments has declined to a great extent, as citizens have been isolated from community life and their ability to articulate demands for good government that ensures quality of life has noticeably decreased (Moon, 2003). However, the Internet has introduced new forms of interaction that could enhance different types of relationships, including a government–public relationship where information is shared and exchanged (Mandarano et al., 2010; Wellman et al., 2001). The public is increasingly interested in solutions and applications offered by the Internet, and expects to utilize such solutions in e-government initiatives, similar to those used in the private and corporate sectors. For this reason, local, regional, and national governments around the world provide access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions to offer effective government information and services, to achieve economic and social development, and to enable social inclusion (Asgarkhani, 2007). Web tools used in e-government projects have brought about several opportunities for online interaction, which subsequently empowers citizens at various levels, such as: information accessibility, political participation, influencing government decisions, linking groups to the broader community, and making governments more accountable to their citizens (Asgarkhani, 2007; Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2008; Adnan & Mavi, 2015).

Generally, public participation in the governments of

developing countries has declined, and their concerns for domestic and national challenges have increased (National Democratic Institute, 2007). E-government initiatives that are implemented by these countries have the potential to build social capital by providing rich information and reaching out to the public through web tools, such as social media applications, in order to achieve social inclusion and to attain social equality and social justice.

A considerable amount of literature has discussed the use of ICT governments as a means of knowledge exchange and sharing (Ho, 2002; Lowdens et al., 2001; West, 2004; Chadwick & May, 2003), particularly, the use of social media applications (Human Capital Institute, 2010), and social capital (Mandarano et al., 2010; Wellman et al., 2001). There is also a growing body of literature that focuses on e-government and user engagement (Chan & Pan, 2008, Jiang et al., 2006; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012), and civic engagement and social capital (Andrews, 2009; Putnam, 2002; Hays & Kogl, 2007). Although this literature has contributed greatly in developing an understanding of the impact of ICT on either building social capital or civic engagement (Kalu & Remkus, 2010), it does not explain in detail the relationship between the use of social media applications by e-governments to build social capital for social inclusion to achieve social equality. Moreover, to the best of researchers' knowledge, studies on such relationship in developing countries,

specifically the Middle East countries, are either non-existent or insufficient. This study uses Kuwait as an example of a developing country in this context.

Kuwait has adopted e-government since 2000 to improve government's performance and to promote efficiency and transparency (AlAwadhi & Morris, 2009). As much of e-government activities uses social media applications to create records, disseminate information, and communicate with the public (Bertot et al., 2012), Kuwait e-government has also used social media applications to present government information and promote government e-services (Kuwait Government Online, 2017). Although there is no law that specifically regulates the use of social media by government agencies, many government organizations and ministries have started Twitter and Instagram accounts where information is posted mainly with very little interaction is practiced, for example Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Health. The Transparency International (2016) has reported that Kuwait has been ranked 55 out of 168 countries around the world in Corruption Perceptions Index for 2015; meaning that the government in Kuwait is not revealing adequate information, practicing transparency appropriately, and sufficiently including the public. This could be attributed to the Electronic Media Law No.8 of 2016, which restricts public's participation. Several studies have tackled Kuwait e-government from different perspectives, such as its adoption

(AlAwadhi & Morris, 2009; Alotaibi, 2016; Alenezi et al., 2017), Kuwait is no exception, little is known about e-government and social media use in building social capital for social inclusion to achieve social justice. These limitations of the literature to date have urged to conduct this interdisciplinary study to minimize the gap by attempting to explore public perceptions towards the use of social media networks in e-government projects as a tool to build social capital in order to achieve social inclusion and social equality.

Literature review:

A growing body of empirical research confirms that individual deprivation is mainly caused by a lack of social interconnectedness. However, exclusion is not only related to poverty or a lack of resources; it concerns individual social cohesion, well-being, and health. This incites many social scientists, such as social workers and information scientists, to find solutions for information sharing to build social capital within societies in general, and within marginalized groups in particular, as a core of social inclusion (Zinnbauer, 2007). E-governments adopting ICT, specifically Web 2.0 applications, are expected to promote public participation and improve government–public relationships and communication quality. This, in turn, has implications for governments, which become more transparent, accountable, and trustworthy (Chun et al., 2010). The use of Web 2.0 tools in the public sector facilitates knowledge sharing across organizations and with stakeholders, which

positively influences employees' recruitment connectedness, engagement, and retention. It also has a social impact; for example, Facebook was used by the CIA as a leverage method to attract college students to internships and job opportunities (Human Capital Institute, 2010).

Many researchers have found that, once e-government is implemented and transparency, accountability, and responsiveness are subsequently achieved, government–public information sharing, communication, and interaction improve (Ho, 2002; Lowdens et al., 2001; West, 2004; Chadwick & May, 2003). However, Pasek et al. (2009) confirmed Putnam's (2000) predictions of the decline of social capital among young adults, which is associated not only with a decrease in political participation, such as voting, but also with a decrease across the entire spectrum of participation, including attending rallies and volunteering for campaigns. Mandarano et al.'s (2010) study, which investigated the influence of the digital age on building social capital, confirmed that governments are embracing Internet tools and applications to exchange information and communicate with their citizens and, through these methods, build a new form of social capital. Wellman et al. (2001) surveyed more than 39,000 visitors to the National Geographic Society Website to investigate whether the Internet increases or decreases social capital, and found that use of the Internet is associated with building social capital that increases interpersonal relations

as well as organizational involvement. When online, people engage with friends and families in various social activities and connect with their communities. Moreover, the Internet increases people's participation and involves them in online organizational and political activities.

User engagement remains critical, as it is associated with the successful implementation of e-government and its sustainability (Chan & Pan, 2008, Jiang et al., 2006). Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) found that individuals are more likely to display political behavior and engage in civic life in both online and offline conversations. A number of researchers found that civic engagement is strongly linked with the growth of social capital (e.g., Andrews, 2009; Putnam, 2002; Hays & Kogl, 2007). Andrews (2009) explored the relationship between civic engagement and social capital with regard to the ethnic heterogeneity of English urban local government areas, and found that public political participation is significantly associated with bridging social capital and has a positive relationship with ethnic heterogeneity and perceptions of social cohesion. Similarly, Narasimhan and Aundhe (2014) found that social capital formation within organizations is fundamental for addressing the challenges and problems of implementing ICT, especially in public–private partnerships. Freeman and Loo (2009) suggest that using social media technologies in governments can benefit users through user convenience and citizen in-

volvement. Users become able to retrieve information on these sites and provide greater participation in the political process of government. Valenzuela et al. (2009) examined the potential of social network applications as tools for building social capital and their association with civic and political engagement by surveying a random sample of college students in the US. The study revealed positive relationships between intensive use of Facebook and students' life satisfaction, civic engagement, and political participation. Adnan and Mavi (2015), conversely, found that the intense use of Facebook by Malaysian college students was an insignificant factor, in terms of influence, in bridging social capital, despite its success in connecting students to the broader community. Jaeger and Bertot (2010) argued that use of the Internet, which meets the expectations of many individuals, has increased public interest in accessing government information. Moreover, the use of social media sites helps in making government information available and allows interaction and direct contact with governments, thereby promoting transparency, participation, and collaboration (Jaeger & Bertot, 2010; Bonsón et al., 2012). However, Jaeger and Bertot (2010) argued that the use of new technologies might marginalize disadvantaged people that do not have access to the Internet. Their concerns also relate to issues of information organization, retrieval, and preservation. Similarly, Schellong (2008) argued that, although social networking services facilitate the social pro-

cess through bridging virtual and physical presence, they are not ubiquitous.

Online social networks have increased interactions in the offline environment, where interpersonal ties are strengthened and weak ties are maintained (Schellong, 2008). Kang and Gearheart (2010) found that city websites could encourage civic involvement if such websites are designed to allow citizen participation in city politics, projects, and improvements. Government websites present great opportunities for transparency, equity, and public participation when they provide citizens with deliberations and consultations on public affairs. In the same vein, Bonsón et al. (2012) attempted to explore the potential of social media tools in EU local governments for increasing transparency and public participation. They found that social media tools played an important role in enhancing transparency in most local governments, although they were still in their infancy and did not show any active presence in social networks or any adaptation to public demands. Moreover, Kalu and Remkus (2010) investigated the relationship between the use of ICT-induced networking and civic engagement, and their role in the development of social capital among non-profit leaders and local county commissioners. Although the results indicate that both county commissioners and non-profit leaders had similar preferences regarding the mechanisms of social capital, the networking results exhibited differences. While county commissioners rely on interper-

sonal networking, non-profit leaders are more likely to rely on ICT-induced networking. Johannessen (2012) discussed the "networked public sphere," where social media applications are used to exchange government information and debate political issues in order to develop social capital. The case study analysis confirmed that the use of various online media tools encouraged many people to share information and participate in online communities, especially for political debates, thus increasing social capital. Social inclusion is interconnected with social equality and justice (Riddell, 2009). Riddell (2009) stressed the importance of investigating cultural and economic injustices as a means of understanding the socially marginalized groups that do not have equal opportunities in community life. While some approaches emphasize social equality in terms of opportunity and outcome, other approaches stress the importance of removing barriers that hinder the social progress of disadvantaged groups, so that everyone is given equal opportunities.

To sum up, the literature review indicates that building social capital is an important factor for achieving social inclusion and attaining social equality. The use of ICT, specifically social media applications in e-government, could be an effective means to share, exchange, and deliver information, opportunities, and access to services, and thus become a platform for expressing opinions and interactions equally between the public–regardless of any demographic differ-

ences– and government, as well as a way to achieve social equality and social justice.

Research model and objectives:

The review of the literature suggests a number of constructs related to the use of social media applications for building social capital, social inclusion, and social equality. Social capital is regarded as the creation, exchange, and sharing of information in social networks and as the connections between individuals that are based on shared trust, ideas, and norms, which enable participants in a network to act effectively to pursue a shared objective (Putnam 1995). Social capital has been linked to sustainable development as well as to a variety of positive social outcomes, such as economic and social development, quality of life, lower crime rates, and democracy (Coleman, 1990; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Kalu & Remkus, 2010). Putnam (2000) described social capital in two dimensions, namely, "bridging" and "bonding." Bridging social capital is outward looking and refers to "weak ties" and loose connections between individuals who might share information and provide new perspectives emotionlessly. In contrast, bonding social capital is more in ward looking, refers to information exchange in homogenous groups, and emotionally close relationships (Kalu & Remkus, 2010; Ellison et al., 2007). Ellison et al. (2007) introduced the additional dimension of social capital "maintaining," which refers to "the ability to maintain valu-

able connections as one progresses through life changes" (Ellison et al., 2007, p. 1146). This leads to the first two specific objectives of this study:

- *Objective #1:* to explore public's attitudes toward the use of social media applications in e-governments as a tool to share and exchange information with the public and to build social capital.
- *Objective #2:* to identify the dimensions of social capital (bridging, bonding, maintaining).

The literature review has indicated an association between social capital and social inclusion. Therefore, the third objective investigates this relationship:

- *Objective #3:* to explore the relationship between building social capital and social inclusion.

As delineated earlier, social inclusion is related to social equality. It is therefore imperative to explore this relationship, which leads to the fourth objective:

- *Objective #4:* to explore the relationship between public social inclusion and social equality.

Furthermore, this study seeks to investigate whether social capital has any association with social equality, as presented in the fifth objective:

- *Objective #5:* to explore the relationship between social

capital and social equality.

Accordingly, the present study poses the following model and related hypotheses **(Figure 1)**:

H_1: Social media applications are used in e-governments as tools to share and exchange information and to build social capital.

H_2: Social capital has a significant positive relationship with social inclusion.

$H_2.a$: Bridging social capital has a significant positive relationship with social inclusion.

$H_2.b$: Bonding social capital has a significant positive relationship with social inclusion.

$H_2.c$: Maintaining social capital has a significant positive relationship with social inclusion.

H_3: Social capital has a significant relationship with social equality.

$H_3.a$: Bridging social capital has a significant positive relationship with social equality.

$H_3.b$: Bonding social capital has a significant positive relationship with social equality.

$H_3.c$: Maintaining social capital has a significant positive relationship with social equality.

H_4: Social inclusion has a significant positive relationship with social equality.

Figure 1 [Here]

Methodology:

Study Design

This interdisciplinary study is exploratory in nature. It seeks to investigate whether public participation in governments can be improved through the use of social media applications in e-governments as tools of information sharing and exchange to build social capital and thereby achieve social inclusion and social equality from the public' point of view. The study used a quantitative method to generate empirical evidence. A questionnaire was designed to address the research objectives and reflect the identified constructs: building social capital dimensions (bridging, bonding, and maintaining social capital) through the use of social media applications in e-government, social inclusion, and social equality. The measures of bridging and bonding social capital were adapted from Williams (2006), whereas the measure of maintaining social capital was adapted from Ellison et al. (2007). To test the relationship between social capital and social inclusion, statement items of social inclusion were adapted from Kalu and Remkus (2010), whereas social equality statement items

were based on items from Ellison et al. (2007). Subsequently, the wording of statements was altered to suit the context of this study. In addition, new statements related to all constructs were added to provide greater clarity.

As the questionnaire was designed in English and the study was to be carried out in Kuwait, where Arabic is the main spoken language, an Arabic translation of the questionnaire was necessary to ensure that every individual was given an equal opportunity to answer it, see Appendix A. Therefore, the questionnaire was translated, and back translated, in Arabic and English by two faculty members from the English Language Center at Kuwait University before the pilot study. A pilot sample of 61 subjects was selected to test the reliability and validity of the items listed, before the distribution of the questionnaire. Analysis of the pilot study suggested some minor changes for better clarity, which were made accordingly.

Data Collection:

Data was collected from individuals aged 21 years and above, as these are people eligible to use e-government services. Due to the explanatory nature of the current study, the researchers adopted a non-probability sampling method. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed among a convenient sample of 750 individuals from Kuwait society from September to November 2015. Third-year students from both the

Social Work and Library and Information Science programs at Kuwait University were trained to deliver the questionnaires to prospective participants (e.g., from public and private sector employees, and college students and their families) and to answer any questions they might have. After receiving 680 completed questionnaires from participants, and after excluding incomplete responses, a total of 610 valid questionnaires were analyzed, yielding an 81.3% response rate.

Results:

Sample Demographic Characteristics

The gender distribution of the sample was 36.7% males and 63.3% females. The sample was composed of 38.3% aged 21–25, 20.5% aged 26–30, 17.0% aged 31–35, 10% aged 36–40, and 13.8% aged 40 and over. Regarding the academic qualifications of the sample, 48.8% of respondents had a bachelor's degree, 23.9% had a college diploma, 19% had a high school diploma, and only 8.2% had graduate degrees. The majority of the sample were Kuwaiti citizens (89.1%), with only 10.9% non-Kuwaitis. In terms of ICT proficiency, while the majority of respondents perceived their ICT skills to be either good (46.9%) or very good (45.8%), only 7.3% of respondents perceived their skills as poor, see **Table 1**.

Table 1 [Here]

Factor Analysis:

Exploratory factor analysis was employed to remove redundant items and validate the most reliable ones. Table (2) shows only the valid and reliable items of the constructs. The explained variances of all constructs are greater than 74%, which suggests a high degree of construct validity (Hair et al., 2010). All constructs reported a reliability greater than 0.81 of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which indicates a high reliability of items (Pallant, 2005). The factor loadings are greater than 0.5 for all items, and the averages of both the constructs and instruments are also greater than 3 on a 5-point Likert scale, which suggests an acceptable level of consistency among the items.

Table 2 [Here]

The Differences based on Demographics:

It is imperative to identify whether there are differences among demographic characteristics in relation to study constructs. For this purpose, several tests were run against gender, age group, education, nationality, and Internet proficiency. In the case of two independent groups, a t-test was utilized to test for differences in perceptions between the two groups, while in the case of more than two independent

groups, a variance test analysis (ANOVA) was employed to test for differences. The following section presents the results of these assertions.

The results indicate that both male and female respondents expressed positive perceptions of the use of social media applications for bridging social capital, but no significant difference was found (p-value = 0.720). Although both males and females had positive perceptions of the use of social media applications for bonding and maintaining social capital, the analysis revealed greater values for females compared to those for males (p-value= 0.016 and 0.011, respectively). Moreover, both males and females were neutral regarding social equality, and there was no significant difference between their perceptions (p-value= 0.192). Regarding respondents' perceptions of social inclusion, males expressed negative perceptions while females expressed positive perceptions, and the difference between them was statistically significant (p-value= 0.000).

All age groups expressed positive perceptions of the use of social media applications for bridging and maintaining social capital, social equality, and social inclusion, without any significant difference. However, only those aged 26–30 were less perceptive of the use of social media applications for bonding social capital (p-value = 0.007) than the other age groups.

While the difference of the respondents' educational background on their perceptions of the use of social media applications for bridging and maintaining social capital and social equality was not significant, it was significant for their perception of the use of social media applications for bonding social capital and social equality. Namely, participants with higher educational levels, beyond a bachelor's degree, had lower perceptions of both constructs (p-value = 0.028 and 0.018 respectively).

All respondents, Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, had positive perceptions of all constructs, with no significant difference on nationality. Respondents with different levels of Internet proficiency reported similar positive perceptions of the use of social media applications for bridging social capital, social equality, and social inclusion. Only those with poor Internet proficiency were less perceptive of the use of social media applications for bonding and maintaining social capital (p-value = 0.001 and 0.039, respectively).

The Correlation Matrix among the Study's Constructs:

Correlation measures the degree of linear association between two constructs both in magnitude, which reflects the strength of the relationship, and in sign, which highlights the direction of the relationship. As illustrated in **Table (3)**, there were strong positive associations between social equality and

social inclusion (r= 0.75, p-value = 0.000), bridging social capital (r= 0.65, p-value = 0.000), bonding social capital (r= 0.69, p-value = 0.000), and maintaining social capital (r= 0.70, p-value = 0.000), which validates H1. In addition, there were strong positive associations between social inclusion and bridging social capital (r= 0.68, p-value = 0.000), bonding social capital (r= 0.78, p-value = 0.000), and maintaining social capital (r= 0.78, p-value = 0.000). Bridging social capital had a strong positive association with bonding social capital (r= 0.69, p-value = 0.000) and maintaining social capital (r= 0.64, p-value = 0.000). Bonding social capital had a strong positive association with maintaining social capital (r= 0.84, p-value = 0.000).

Table 3 [Here]

Research Model:

The proposed model consists of five constructs: Exogenous variables, which include the use of social media applications for bridging social capital, bonding social capital, and maintaining social capital, and a set of endogenous variables, which include social inclusion and social equality. The model suggests direct positive relationships between the use of social media applications for bridging social capital, bonding

social capital, and maintaining social capital and social inclusion and social equality. It also suggests a direct relationship between social inclusion and social equality.

Path Analysis of Structural Model:

Path analysis was used to obtain detailed results on the direct relationship between the exogenous variables of the use of social media applications for bridging social capital, bonding social capital, and maintaining social capital and the endogenous variables of social inclusion and social equality. The results show that H_2 and H_4 are fully supported, whereas H_3 is partially supported, as will be discussed below. The use of social media applications for bridging social capital has a significant positive relationship with social inclusion (22%, p-value = 0.000), which supports H_{2a}, and social equality (20%, p-value =0.000), which validates H_{3a}. The use of social media applications for bonding social capital has a significant positive relationship with both social inclusion (40%, p-value =0.000), which substantiates H_{2b}, and social equality (17%, p-value =0.017), which supports H3b. However, although the use of social media applications for maintaining social capital has no relationship with social equality (9%, p-value =0.127), which counters H_{3c}, it has a significant positive relationship with social inclusion (29%, p-value= 0.000), which verifies H_{2c}. Finally, the results reveal a significant path from social inclusion to social equality (41%, p-value =0.000), which asserts H_4. An ade-

quate fit was demonstrated between the hypothesized model and the observed data, see **Figure 2**.

Figure 2 [Here]

Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted of the Model:

Composite reliability is a measure of the internal consistency of a construct, which shows how a set of instruments specify a latent construct. Composite reliability of 70% or more is an indication of acceptable valid composite reliability (Thomas, 2011; Hair et al., 2010). Accordingly, since they are all above 85%, the composite reliabilities displayed in Table 4 provide sufficient evidence of acceptable levels of internal consistency for all constructs. In contrast, to evaluate the adequacy of the proposed model, the average variance extracted is a measure used, reflecting the overall amount of variance in the instruments that is accounted for by the construct. The higher the representation of the items to the latent constructs, the higher the extracted variance. Considering 50% or higher as adequate extracted variance for a construct is a common practice (see: Thomas, 2011; Sharma, 1996). The values in Table 4 are all higher than 72%. Based on the results of these two measures, it is safe to confirm the adequa-

cy of the proposed model and to validate the items measuring each construct.

Table 4 [Here]

Discussion:

The results of this interdisciplinary study have established that, in general, the majority of respondents have a positive perception of all study constructs. Regardless of their gender, age, education level, and Internet proficiency, respondents reported positive perceptions of the use of social media applications for exchanging and sharing information to build social capital and its related components (bonding, bridging, and maintaining), social inclusion, and social equality. The lack of any systematic difference between respondents suggests that using ICT, and social media applications in particular, to build social capital to interact with the government has a broad appeal, and is able to reach all social groups including marginalized groups, such as stateless residents, people with disabilities, and some elderly people. The respondents' positive perceptions could also be attributed to the fact that social media applications allow virtually all users to freely exchange rich information, share opinions, views, and ideas with their governments and make their voices heard without

revealing their identity.

The findings show that, although both males and females had positive perceptions of the use of social media applications for bonding and maintaining social capital, and neutral perceptions of social equality, males expressed negative perceptions of social inclusion, whereas females expressed positive perceptions. This may be explained by the social norm factors of Kuwaiti society, where men have greater chance to interact with the government at social, political, and economic levels, and understand how the government performs in person, especially when it comes to interaction with the public; hence, their perceptions were less positive. However, women might find that using social media applications offers them the opportunity to receive more information from the government, which could allow them to connect with government, conduct their own services, and participate in government decisions, thereby enhancing their presence in society as well as their equality with men.

The findings also show that, from among all the age groups, only those aged 26–30 were less perceptive of the use of social media applications for bonding social capital. This suggests that this age group has already established close relationships with their friends and families when they were younger, but that, at this age, they feel more independent and capable of dealing with the broader community without being influenced by peer or social pressure. With regard to respon-

dents' educational backgrounds, the findings reveal that those with higher educational levels, beyond a bachelor's degree, had lower perceptions of the use of social media applications for both bonding social capital and social equality. This may be attributed to the fact that those respondents might have a better understanding of government performance and to how "favoritism" is widespread in government departments, which fosters corruption in society and increases inequality between individuals (Alawadhi, 2009), therefore, they carry negative assumptions in this regard.

Unsurprisingly, the findings reveal that nationality did not show any significant difference, reflecting the Kuwaiti society, where Kuwaiti citizens, who live with a large number of non-Kuwaitis (about two-thirds of the population), are interactive and open to other societies and cultures. A United Nations (2002) report also indicated this, stating that Kuwaiti society is tolerant and open to the international community, offering cooperation and exchanging various educational and cultural information and programs. The findings related to respondents with poor Internet proficiency being less perceptive of the use of social media applications suggest that their insufficient Internet experience might make it difficult for them to frequently use and interact. This difficulty makes it hard for them to interact with their close relationships and maintain such interactions, as this requires a continual use of social media applications.

The findings also reveal that the use of social media applications by e-government programs for building social capital are perceived as effective tools for information sharing and exchange with government officials, thus achieving the study's first objective. Capitalizing on the viral delivery of information, such tools would also allow governments to send instant messages and information to announce events, activities, and programs to various stakeholders. Such information that is delivered and shared on platforms preferred by the public would increase transparency, accountability, and trust in the government (Bonsón et al., 2012). Moreover, the findings show significant positive associations between bridging, bonding, and maintaining social capital, thereby achieving the study's second objective. This confirms that bridging, bonding, and maintaining social capital are possible dimensions of social capital. Respondents perceived bonding social capital as necessary, as it creates strong informative ties with their families, friends, and close relationships. However, additional information and resources are perceived as required for connecting with the larger community, such as governments and heterogeneous groups, and thereby creating opportunities for bridging social capital. Moreover, regardless of life changes, respondents considered the maintenance of such information and connections as valuable. These findings are consistent with the findings of Putnam (2000), Williams (2006), and Ellison et al. (2007).

The path analysis results indicate a direct relationship between the use of social media applications for social capital dimensions (bridging, bonding, and maintaining social capital) and social inclusion, which concludes the third objective of the study. The authors of this study proposed the use of Internet-mediated programs by e-governments to create the opportunity for sharing and exchanging information to build social capital, with easy access for the public, as a way to increase social inclusion and diminish alienation of individuals, regardless of differing demographics. These findings confirm the results of Andrews (2009), Putnam (2002), and Hays and Kogl (2007). This stresses the critical role of ICT, and specifically social media applications, as new levers for advancing e-government programs, where information is created, shared, and exchanged to build social capital and thereby urge governments to design effective initiatives for bridging digital divides in order to enhance social inclusion and equality (Zinnbauer, 2007). Moreover, this study took one step further by attempting to explore hypothesized relationships between the use of social media applications by e-government initiatives for building social capital and social inclusion on the one hand, and the influence of social inclusion on social equality on the other. The path analysis results indicate, through validation of the hypothesized relationships, that the use of social media applications by e-governments helps to create social capital, which directly associates with both social inclusion and equality. Once social inclusion is achieved, a sense of social equality

is created, which fulfills this study's hypotheses as well as its fourth and fifth objectives. Therefore, the study's findings have developed a new model for the use of social media applications for building social capital, social inclusion, and social equality. This valid model is a valuable contribution to the body of literature for social sciences, and specifically for the library and information science and social work disciplines.

From an information science perspective, this study has several implications. Firstly, this study suggests that ICT, and social media applications specifically, are leveraging tools that should be used by e-government initiatives to create, deliver, share, and exchange information with the public. Secondly, this knowledge and information sharing enables the creation of networks through which various parties can interact equally and effectively with governments to build social capital and pursue shared objectives. Thirdly, social media applications also have the potential to increase social inclusion and public participation in the broader community, whereby social equality is created. From a social work perspective, Hawkins and Maurer (2012) argued that "at multiple sites, with varying levels of success, NGOs, public-sector agencies and community activists focused on social capital generation to improve social inclusion, employment, equality of opportunity, and economic and regional development" (p. 366). Such programs target changes in access to power, wealth, and reputation, which are targets of social justice interventions. The results of this study

present additional support for this point of view by reporting strong positive associations between both social capital and social equality, and social inclusion and social equality. These results, in part, imply that the government could enhance knowledge sharing, opportunity offering, transparency displaying, and trust building through well-designed, multi-purpose e-government programs. Such e-government programs with open-access information to all citizens would permit governments to reconnect with the public and re-establish lost or weakened connections and relationships of the government–public dialogue as a way to achieve civic engagement and social equality. This implication is even more feasible because Kuwait is the first country in the Arabian Gulf region to use social media, which has become a key component for the Kuwaiti government in providing and delivering information to the public (Kuwait Times, 2014). Moreover, the government has called for the optimal use of social media and new information technology to boost public contributions to its development (Kuwait Times, 2015).

Conclusions:

The study develops a new model for the use of social media applications for building social capital, social inclusion, and social equality that are valid in a developing country. The study confirms that bridging, bonding, and

maintaining are vital dimensions of social capital, and that governments' use of ICT to share information and interact with the public can enhance participation and reduce isolation. Access to information and government representatives can also provide a gateway to more widespread opportunities. These benefits should help overcome some aspects of social exclusion, which, in turn, increases social inclusion and creates a sense of engagement.

The findings support previous theoretical, practical, and research conclusions by confirming that building social capital is closely related to social inclusion of diverse groups of a society. This social inclusion has a direct association with social equality in rebuilding trust with the government by offering the public fair and equal access to information and opportunities. In conclusion, the current study contributes to a better theoretical understanding of the role of social media applications in building social capital that influences social inclusion and social equality. Furthermore, it adds an important building block to the body of literature of both the diverse field of information science and the field of social work, by presenting an initial validation of its research model as an important future tool for the policymaking, program design, and outcome monitoring of governments.

The study presents the concept of social capital in the fields of information science, social policy, social welfare, and social work as a potentially useful guiding principle to

inform the design of tools that enable information sharing and exchange as well as the implementation of inclusion and equality strategies for e-government programs. The study's purpose, therefore, is twofold. Firstly, it represents an autonomous contribution to the academic debate on the relationship between the use of social media ICT applications by e-government programs for building social capital and achieving social inclusion on the one hand, and social equality on the other. Secondly, it proposes a model of social capital, social inclusion, and social equality through direct research input for decision makers and officials' consultative process when advising on the use of social media networks to communicate with the public.

Despite the fact that this study was limited to a relatively small sample of members of the public from Kuwait, the results could be applied to the majority of individuals in the community who frequently express their need for more government information and for more involvement in government decisions. The findings could also be applicable to communities with a social, economic, and political status similar to that of Kuwait. Further research is required to investigate the relationship between ICT use and social inclusion. Rejuvenating the desire to explore additional ways to reconnect with governments exemplifies one of the wider opportunities that are stimulated by using ICT. Future research could also investigate the quality of public participation in order to iden-

tify the level of engagement in broader communities.

To sum up, this study is an example of a successful collaboration between two social sciences fields. The tools of the information field were used to help achieving social inclusion and social justice, which are essential goals of social work. In addition, the study is a call for policymakers and stakeholders to enhance government–public interaction and to foster social capital by benefiting from the opportunities offered by social media application tools in terms of a country's design and implementation of social inclusion initiatives. E-government implementation programs should emphasize the use of ICT, and social media applications specifically, as a primary way to access and exchange information, services, and experiences equally, leading to a more transparent, accountable, and trustworthy government. This has implications for building social capital as well as public trust in governments, which will eventually bring about social inclusion and cohesion, and will diminish social exclusion and individual isolation. Government officials should also establish a framework of rules, policies, and regulations to govern the use of social media applications with regard to creating, exchanging, and sharing information, as well as in relation to the multiple interconnections between social capital, social inclusion, and social equality.

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Appendix A

Social Networks and E-government

Section One: General Information

Please answer the following questions with one tick (✓) only for each question. You may provide any additional information where requested.

C1. Please indicate your gender ❒ Male ❒ Female **C2. What is your age?** ❒ 20-25 ❒ 26 -30 ❒ 31 -35 ❒ 36 - 40 ❒ 40 - above **C3. Education** ❒ High School, or less ❒ Diploma ❒ University Degree ❒ Graduate Studies **C4. Nationality** ❒ Kuwaiti ❒ Non-Kuwaiti	**C5. How would you rate your proficiency with the Internet?** ❒ Poor ❒ Good ❒ Very good **C6. Have you used the social network systems, such as, Instagram , twitter, youtube, facebook...etc?** ❒ Yes, (please specify)..... ❒ No

Section Two: Social networks and government

7. If Kuwait government uses social networks to communicate with the public are you going to use them?

❒ Yes

❒ No

The following statements provide an indication of perceptions of using social networks in communicating with government. Please indicate your opinion by circling the number which best represents your choice.

1= Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neither Agree nor Disagree

4= Agree

5= Strongly Agree

8. Bridging Social Capital

Interacting with the government via social networks…….					
X1: a. makes me feel I am part of the community.	1	2	3	4	5
X2: b. makes me interested in what goes on at the country.	1	2	3	4	5
X3: c. makes me want to know more about government.	1	2	3	4	5
X4: d. makes me able to participate in all government decisions	1	2	3	4	5
X5: e. makes me feel like a part of a larger community.	1	2	3	4	5
X6: f. would enable me to spend time to participate in government discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
X7: g. makes me feel that everyone in the community is connected.	1	2	3	4	5

9. Bonding Social Capital

Interacting with the government via social networks…….					
X8: a. enables me to turn to any official to inquire about any service or information.	1	2	3	4	5
X9: b. makes me confident that government staff solve any problem that might encounter me.	1	2	3	4	5
X10: c. makes government staff help me in conducting my transaction well.	1	2	3	4	5
X11: d. makes government staff share enough government information with me.	1	2	3	4	5

10. Maintaining Social Capital

Interacting with the government via social networks…….					
X12: a. enables me to find out information about government anytime and anywhere.	1	2	3	4	5
X13: b. always makes me part of the community.	1	2	3	4	5
X14: c. enables me to interact with the government even if I am outside the country.	1	2	3	4	5
X15: d. enables government staff to interact with the public to conduct their transactions	1	2	3	4	5
X16: e. enables users to interact with the government constantly.	1	2	3	4	5

11. Social Inclusion

Interacting with the government via social networks…….					
X17: a. makes me willing to interact with government officials.	1	2	3	4	5
X18: b. enables me to communicate my ideas to government.	1	2	3	4	5
X19: c. makes it easier for me to attend government public meeting to discuss government performance.	1	2	3	4	5
X20: d. makes me interested in attending political rally.	1	2	3	4	5

11. Social Equality

Interacting with the government via social networks…….					
X21: a. makes me feel that I am a person of worth and equal with others.	1	2	3	4	5
X22: b.makes me take a positive attitude towards myself.	1	2	3	4	5
X23: c. makes me able to contribute to the community, just like others.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your participation!

Figures and Tables

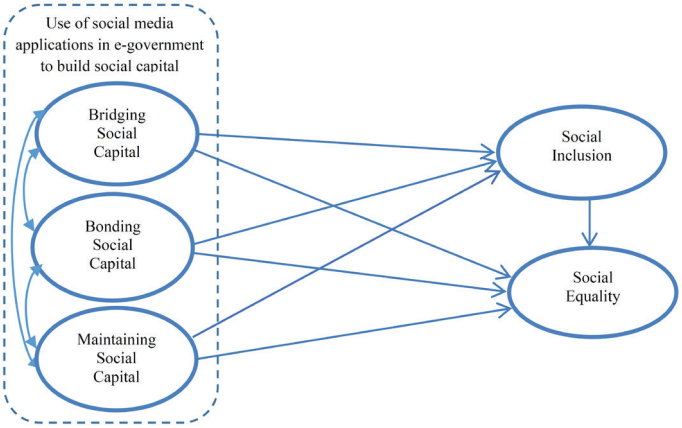

Figure 1: Proposed Model of Social Capital, Social inclusion, and Social Equality.

Table 1: The Demographic Characteristics of the Research Sample

Demographics		*Frequency*	*Percent*
Gender	Male	223	36.5
	Female	384	62.9
	Missing	3	0.49
Age	21-25	230	37.7
	26 -30	123	20.1
	31 -35	102	16.7
	36 – 40	63	10.3
	40 – above	83	13.6
	Missing	9	1.47
Education	High School	113	18.5
	Diploma	142	23.2
	University Degree	290	47.5
	Graduate Degree	49	8.0
	Missing	16	0.26
Nationality	Kuwaiti	541	88.6
	Non-Kuwaiti	66	10.8
	Missing	3	0.49
ICT proficiency	Poor	44	7.2
	Good	282	46.2
	Very good	275	45.1
	Missing	9	1.47

Table 2: Explained Variance, Factor Loading, Reliability Coefficient, and Mean of Research Items

Constructs	*Explained Variance*	*Reliability*	*Factor Loadings*	*Mean*
Bridging Social Capital	74.04%	0.82		**3.49**
X3: makes me want to know more about government			0.841	3.71
X4: makes me able to participate in all government decisions			0.864	3.28
X6: would enable me to spend time to participate in government discussions			0.876	3.45
Bonding Social capital	74.45%	0.88		**3.52**
X8: enables me to turn to any official to inquire about any service or information			0.86	3.48
X9: enables me to turn to any official to inquire about any service or information			0.874	3.49
X10: makes government staff help me in conducting my transaction well			0.876	3.53
X11: makes government staff share enough government information with me			0.84	3.56
Maintaining Social Capital	79.62%	0.87		**3.54**
X14: enables me to interact with the government even if I am outside the country			0.854	3.49
X15: enables government staff to interact with the public to conduct their transactions			0.915	3.55
X16: enables users to interact with the government constantly			0.868	3.52

Constructs	*Explained Variance*	*Reliability*	*Factor Loadings*	*Mean*
Social Inclusion	73.66%	0.81		**3.53**
X17: makes me willing to interact with government officials			0.863	3.37
X18: enables me to communicate my ideas to government			0.897	3.53
X19: makes it easier for me to attend government public meeting to discuss government performance			0.813	3.38
Social Equality	77.37%	0.85		**3.26**
X21: makes me feel that I am a person of worth and equal with others			0.854	3.55
X22: makes me take a positive attitude towards myself			0.915	3.51
X23: makes me able to contribute to the community, just like others			0.868	3.63

Table 3: Correlation among Constructs

	Social Equality	**Social Inclusion**	**Bridgin Sc**	**Bridgin Sc**	**Maintaining Sc**
Social Equality	1.0				
Social Inclusion (p-value)	0.75 (0.000)	1.0			
Bridging SC (p-value	0.65 (0.000)	0.68 (0.000)	1.0		
Bonding SC (P-value)	0.69 (0.000)	0.78 (0.000)	0.69 (0.000)	1.0	
Maintaining SC (p-value)	0.70 (0.000)	0.78 (0.000)	0.64 (0.000)	0.84 (0.000)	1.0

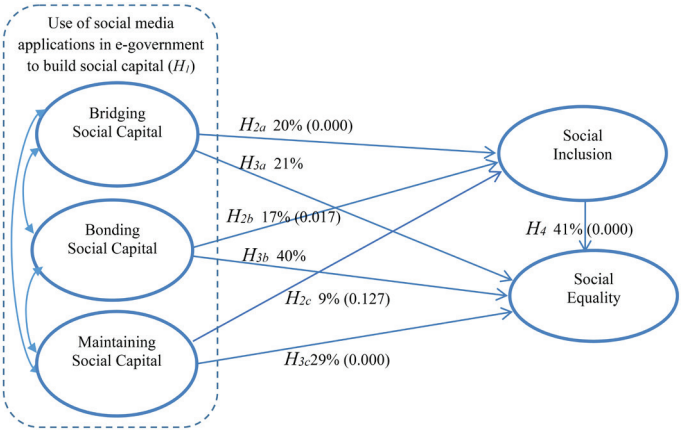

Figure 2: The Fitted Research Model.

Table 3: Correlation among Constructs

Constructs	*Composed Reliability*	*Average Variance Extracted*
Bridging Social Capital	85.94%	67.1%
Bonding Social Capital	86.01%	72.68%
Maintaining Social Capital	91.23%	77.63%
Social Inclusion	89.68%	74.36%
Social Equality	86.21%	68.26%