Is Social Media the Next Liberation Technology?

A study of how Facebook socially empowers young Moroccan women

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Abstract

Literature on "liberation technology" suggests that technology shocks can provide opportunities for empowerment to marginalized individuals. In this study, I use original interview data to explore how Facebook, a social media platform, may socially empower young Moroccan women. I first test the idea that women behave differently online because Facebook is not an authentic public space, and find that the data rejects this conjecture. Second, I test the idea that Facebook reflects a liberalized public space, and find that a qualitative analysis of the data lends credence to its validity. Interview data referring to how offline consequences have caused Moroccan women to change their behavior on Facebook implies that Facebook's cultural environment has already begun to adopt limitations from the offline world. This finding challenges the long-term effect of social media as a successful liberation technology.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents a study of how the social media site Facebook empowers young Moroccan women to overcome cultural limitations in their social interactions. Prior research on liberation technology indicates that social media sites may have the ability to empower women. In this study, I add to that body of literature by suggesting two hypotheses for *why* Facebook may be an empowerment tool for women, and then testing those hypotheses with original data collected from interviews in August of 2015. I conclude with thoughts on how social media sites may or may not provide lasting, liberalizing benefits to Moroccan women.

In this introduction, I will first characterize how Moroccan women face cultural limitations in their social interactions. Second, I will describe prior research indicating that Facebook empowers women to overcome those boundaries. Finally, I will outline how this thesis will attempt to describe the mechanisms by which Facebook empowers women in their social interactions.

Cultural boundaries of gender inequality

It is important to characterize how women in Morocco face cultural boundaries in their pursuance of social interactions. In this section I describe two phenomena: first, how culture in Morocco in some ways lags behind legal reforms for gender equality, and second, how theories of gendered division of public and private spaces in Morocco lend insight into cultural limitations of gender equality that are faced by Moroccan women.

The Kingdom of Morocco is a constitutional monarchy located in the northwest corner of the African continent. The government functions under the authority of King

Mohammed VI and a Parliament headed by a Prime Minister. The King appoints the Prime Minister from the majority party following legislative elections. The cabinet members that form the Council of Ministers are chosen by the Prime Minister and appointed by the King. The Moroccan population is slightly greater than 33 million people, of which 99% percent are Arab-Amazigh and 99% are Sunni Muslim. Morocco is a middle-income country, with a GDP per capita of about $8,300 as of 2015 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016).

While legal reform can in theory create change, the rule of law may not be fully realized until cultural norms of a society legitimize the new laws. Such seems to be the case Morocco with regard to its quota system for female parliamentary representation and the country's reformed Moudawana (Family Code).

Although women have held a very limited amount of ministerial and other appointed political positions, pressure from women's organizations helped to establish a permanent place for women in the legislature through the adoption of a quota system in 2002. Instead of reforming the practices of all political party lists, the quota mandated the creation of a national list of 30 seats reserved for female candidates to be elected country-wide, not by a specific district. In 2011, the quota increased to 60 seats out of the 395 available. The system thus increased the proportion of women to men in Parliament from less than one percent to almost twenty percent (Darhour & Dahlerup, 2003).

The quota, however, is flawed in its intent to create true gender equality. According to Hanane Darhour and Drude Dahlerup in "Sustainable Representation of Women Through Gender Quotas" (2003), because the women are elected to Parliament by a separate, national party list, "their political mandate is not based on a geographical representation or constituency," which means that "they lack an independent electoral or organizational

base." Although by law women now must make up almost 20 percent of Parliament, they lack normal geographic constituents, and are somewhat dependent on the quota system for their seats. Thus while women are seemingly encouraged to hold a more equal proportion of Parliamentary seats to that of men, very few actually win seats when playing by the same rules as male politicians. In 2011, only seven women won seats tied to geographic constituents.

In addition to the Parliamentary quota system, Moroccan women have also achieved great progress towards equality from a legal perspective through reforms to the Moudawana in 2004. King Mohammed VI introduced the new laws in late 2003, and declared that the Code should not be considered "as a legislation devised for women only, but rather as a code for the family, father, mother and children. The proposed legislation is meant to free women from the injustices they endure, to protecting children's rights and safeguarding men's dignity" (Ennaji, 2004). The wording of the 2004 Moudawana reflects the King's commitment to equality and justice, not only reforming matters like marriage and divorce, but also eliminating the use of degrading and debasing terms of women.

In terms of marriage, the new Code raises the legal age of marriage of females from 15 to 18, equaling that of males; mandates that women cannot be compelled to marry against their will; and designates that spouses have equal responsibility over the family. The 2004 reforms expand the rights of women to file for divorce when their husbands fail to meet the standards defined in the marriage contract, give inadequate financial support, or commit violence, abandonment, or other harms. The new Code also forbids unilateral repudiation, requiring both spouses to appear before a judge for divorce. In the case that divorce occurs, the new Code stipulates that women are first to receive child custody and

are entitled to child support from their ex-husbands. The 2004 Moudawana permits polygamy, but only if a judge deems that the husband in question is able to guarantee equity between his wives. Additionally, it grants women the right to bar their husbands from taking other wives in their marriage contracts ("The Moroccan Family Code").

Despite the quota for women in legislature and reformed Moudawana that paint a legally liberalized picture of gender equality in Morocco, the cultural norms of Moroccan society lag behind this progress. Although the 2004 Family Code reforms do much to make men and women equal under the law, the practice of inter-gender relations indicates otherwise. A joint report in late 2011 by The Advocates for Human Rights and Global Rights outlined the state of violence against women in Morocco:

> A 2011 national study on the prevalence of violence against women found that 62.8% of women in Morocco of ages 18-64 had been victims of some form of violence during the year preceding the study. This same study found that 55% of these acts of violence were committed by a victim's husband, and the violence was reported by the wife in only 3% of such cases. Another 2011 report identified that in cases of violence against women, the perpetrator is the husband in eight out of ten cases… One survey found that 33 percent of respondents believed that a man is sometimes justified to beat his wife. ("Morocco: Challenges with addressing domestic violence," 2011)

Of the few women who report incidents of domestic violence, few make any progress within the judicial system. Human Rights Watch reported in February of 2016 that in many cases, police officers refuse to record statements from victims of domestic violence, fail to investigate their claims and "refused to arrest domestic abuse suspects even after

prosecutors ordered them to." Public prosecutors themselves are not always better than the police, as Human Rights Watch notes how in some cases, they refused to file charges on behalf of domestic abuse victims ("Morocco: Tepid response," 2016).

Not only is there widespread violence against women with impunity, but the 2004 Moudawana reforms have also so far failed to change practices concerning illegitimate children. Although the Family Code protects a child's right to acknowledgement of paternity and child support for cases in which marriage has not occurred, giving birth out of wedlock remains a cultural taboo. In many cases, unmarried mothers are unable to obtain work and are considered unsuitable for marriage.

Additionally, although the Moroccan penal code was reformed in January of 2014 to no longer allow rapists of underage girls to avoid prosecution by marrying their victims, "In conservative rural parts of Morocco, an unmarried girl or woman who has lost her virginity—even through rape—is considered to have dishonored her family and no longer suitable for marriage" ("Morocco amends controversial rape marriage law," 2014). For some families, marrying the rapist solves these problems. It appears that legal steps toward gender equality in Morocco have yet to instigate the cultural shift needed to legitimize them.

Theories of gendered division of public and private spaces in Morocco also lend insight into cultural limitations of gender equality that women face in Morocco. In Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji's "The Feminization of Public Space" (2006), they assert, "The most spectacular impact of the Moroccan feminist movement resides in its gradual feminization and, hence, democratization of the public sphere" (p. 87). Sadiqi and Ennaji trace the gendered separation of the public and private spaces in Moroccan culture to ancient Greek

conceptions of Hermean and Hestian spaces. Hermean, the Greek god of communication, represents "visible male world" of action in public spaces, including concrete political, occupational, and other practices. Hestian, the Greek goddess of the home, represents the "invisible feminine world" of action in private spaces, including domestic chores.

Such is the case in Morocco, where men dominate public spaces like the street and marketplace, and women are mostly constrained to private spaces like the home. This is not to say that women are forbidden from public spaces; however, they are not encouraged to linger like men and instead tend to conduct their business and move on. Sadiqi and Ennaji (2006) note that the street can be an unwelcoming space for women, as sexual harassment is common, and it is taboo for a woman to sit at a café alone—a practice that is very common for men (p. 88). They describe further, "If a woman is involved in a public dispute, her family members usually are ashamed to be associated with her because it is taboo for a woman to insult, shout, or even speak loudly in front of other men" (p. 92) The ideal Moroccan woman, then, is one who leaves the home only when necessary. Although in the legal sense women are not confined to the home and enjoy similar social rights to those of men, Moroccan culture lags behind such progressive interpretations of gender equality.

Sadiqi and Ennaji (2006) then explain how Morocco's private-public dichotomy creates and maintains unequal gender norms. They elaborate, "The private space is culturally associated with powerless people (women and children) and is subordinated to the public space, which is culturally associated with men—who dictate the law, lead business, manage the state, and control the economy" (p. 88). In addition to being associated with private spaces, women in many cases lack agency even within the walls of

their homes. Though women may have jurisdiction over cooking, cleaning and other domestic matters, often such actions are to serve and satisfy the needs of men. In effect, the gender norms created by the public-private space dichotomy give men culturally sanctioned power over both spaces.

Social media and women's empowerment

In "Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information Technologies in the MENA" (2006), Skalli notes how even though Arab women are increasingly encouraged to obtain greater human capabilities, surveys of Arab populations show a lack of support for a utilization of those capabilities in the public sphere. For example, Arabs express support for greater equality in education but not in employment.

After acknowledging male dominance over the Arab public sphere, however, Skalli (2006) discusses "subaltern counter-politics," in which subordinated groups like women challenge the gender norms dictating the public-private divide (pp. 35-37). Skalli describes how women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are using new communication technologies like the Internet as alternative discursive means to insert their voices in the public sphere and challenge existing gender norms. In the words of Skalli, "There is an increasing realization among activists and media professionals in the MENA that the creative use of communication can participate in refashioning the political culture and challenging the definitions and confines of their roles in society" (p. 42). By using technologies like the Internet, women avoid traditional mechanisms of repression that filter or discourage their voices from the public realm.

This phenomenon is the focus of a body of literature on "liberation technology," which political sociologist Larry Diamond (2010) defines as "any form of information and

communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom" (p. 70). For example, Richard Newman (2010) describes how American textual proliferation in the 1700s—enabled by printing press technology—was an important empowerment tool for people of African descent, offering "new and contrasting views of race, slavery, freedom, and black identity (p. 185). Additionally, Iftikhar Ahmed (1994) explains how improved technologies could create employment opportunities for women as well as make women's work in traditional capacities more productive. According to Diamond (2010), the Internet in particular constitutes an important liberation technology, as it presents "dramatic new possibilities for pluralizing flows of information and widening the scope of commentary, debate, and dissent" (p. 72).

When Skalli wrote "Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere" (2006), women's Internet participation across the Arab was only six percent of all users. Skalli suggested, however, "that the newer technology is beginning to affect social and gender relations as well as facets of public life in ways that are only beginning to be understood" (p. 50). Although Skalli's article only discusses activist use of new communication technologies for feminist purposes, it follows that increasing female use of the Internet—whether more formally through activist blog posts or informally through the use of social media to socially engage in the public sphere—may further destabilize the separation of public and private life as well as the gender norms that govern them.

A 2011 report from the Dubai School of Government characterizes the rapid rise in social media usage across the Arab world, analyzing survey data from men and women from 22 Arab countries, with 469 responses in total. The report states:

> From merely being used as a tool for social networking and entertainment, social media now infiltrates almost every aspect of the daily lives of millions of Arabs, affecting the way they interact socially, do business, interact with government, or engage in civil society movements. By the end of 2011, Arab users' utilization of social media had evolved to encompass civic engagement, political participation, entrepreneurial efforts, and social change. (p. 1)

More specifically, the report describes the gender gap between female and male use of social media in the Arab world. Men, the study found, are twice as likely as women to use Facebook. The statistics are similar in Morocco, where women constitute only 38 percent of Facebook users. About a fourth of survey respondents attributed this virtual gender gap to societal and cultural limitations, like family barriers or stereotypes places upon women. The report similarly attributes the gender gap in social media use to environmental factors. Despite the gap, however, the survey data shows that the majority of both men and women (over 70 percent) similarly use social media to share opinions, connect with others, and obtain information.

In addition to this gender gap, the report discusses social media as a tool of women's empowerment. Many individuals surveyed across the Arab world responded that they perceive social media as a potential tool of empowerment for women in each of the legal, economic, political, and social arenas. However, the report cautions, "The overarching 'real life' barriers for women's empowerment may not be surmountable using social media alone. While 'virtual' participation might be a first step towards women's empowerment, it may not necessarily translate into real-life participation in mainstream political, civic and public arenas" ("The role of social media," 2011, p. 12). The report suggests that the

concrete, “real-life” barriers that women face in the political, civic, and social spheres must be directly confronted in order to truly achieve gender equality in the Arab region.

While virtual social participation may not transfer easily to the offline world, the way in which social media platforms like Facebook enable women to overcome cultural barriers to gender equality in the online sphere is certainly worth examining. In this thesis, I attempt to explain what about Facebook enables young Moroccan women to defy traditional gender norms in their online social behavior. I begin with my methodology, which includes qualitative interviews with women in Rabat, Morocco. I then use this data investigate two different hypotheses that attempt to explain the observed variation in young Moroccan women’s social behavior between online and offline spaces. I end the thesis will a discussion of the implications of my research for the existing body of literature on empowerment technology, as well as possibilities for further study.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

For this study, I conducted 48 qualitative interviews over 14 days in Rabat, Morocco. My subjects were Moroccan females between the ages of 18 and 38, most of whom lived in Rabat or its surrounding cities. The questions I asked mainly assessed the subjects' use of the social media platform, Facebook.

The Facebook profile

Facebook is a social media platform that facilitates three primary mechanisms of social interaction: public photo-sharing, public text-sharing, and private messaging using both photos and text. Users interact by sending and accepting requests to be other users' "friends," which gives each party access to the other's personal Facebook webpage. Facebook's public features appear chronologically on a user's "wall," also known as a "page" or "profile." The private messaging system acts much like an email inbox.

To share photos, a user can upload individual photos that are saved to his or her wall, create an album with a group of photos, and choose two photos— a "profile picture" and a "cover photo"— that act as headings of his or her profile. Users can add captions to each photo. Users can also "tag" another Facebook friend in any photo that they upload, which indicates that the tagged friend appears and the photo, and causes a copy of that photo to also appear on that friend's profile. A user can choose to view a friend's photos by clicking a link to see albums they have uploaded or by viewing pictures in which that friend has been tagged. Users can publically comment on photos with text, or by clicking a button to indicate that they "like" a photo. Every photo uploaded to Facebook tallies the number of likes that it has received. Individual comments also tally likes.

To share text, a user can either update the "status" function on his or her own Facebook profile, write a public message on a friend's wall, or share a comment on a friend's status or photo. Each of these communication mechanisms tallies likes. The status function serves a wide variety of purposes. For example, some users post statuses about their emotional state at a given moment, some post reactions to current events, some post quotes that they like, and some post links to articles and other websites.

Facebook also provides a vehicle for more private communication: "messaging." A profile's private messaging feature is visible only to the creator of that page, and contains conversations private to the two-or-more users participating in them. Users can use the message feature to interact with one another using text, photos, and cartoon icons. Users can also use private messaging to communicate with users with whom they are not Facebook friends. This feature is very similar to email.

Facebook users can choose to make their profiles as public or as private as they wish, from completely public to all other users, to only sharing their profile picture with those who are not official Facebook friends, to invisible to all those save for a few close friends. Users can tailor their profiles to show some friends more information than others. For example, some users will be friends with their parents to allow them access to wall posts and status updates, but exclude their parents from viewing certain photos. Facebook is highly customizable, and the opportunities are endless to make a user's profile as public or private as he or she wishes.

Data collection

The variables assessed in my interviews fall into six categories. First, I asked background questions of my interviewees. This includes age, level of education, city of

residence, marital status, who they live with, and occupation. If a subject lives with her parents, I also asked the occupations of her mother and father. Additionally, I asked subjects at what age they began using Facebook and why they decided to make an account. I then asked subjects why they continue to use Facebook now, and how often they use it.

Second, I asked questions about the subject's use of photos on Facebook. Does she post photos? How often? Does she post photos of herself? Would she ever post a photo to Facebook in which she is wearing something she would not wear outside? Third, each interviewee answered questions regarding the "status" update feature on Facebook. Does she ever post statuses, and if so, how often? What form does the content of her status updates usually take? Does she post quotes or advice? Does she ever post her opinion or political opinion? Would she ever comment on someone's political post? Does she prefer to share her opinions over Facebook or in person?

Fourth, I considered variables regarding relationships. Does the subject speak to both men and women on Facebook? Does she accept friend requests from strangers, and what factors influence whether or not she will accept the request? Would she accept an invitation to meet in person with someone who she met on Facebook for coffee or some other activity in person, and has she done so in the past? Would she be open to the idea of a virtual relationship, and has she engaged in a virtual relationship previously? Does she update her relationship status on Facebook? Does she feel like she is more likely to meet a boyfriend on Facebook than in person?

Fifth, I asked which, if any, pages and groups subjects followed. Do subjects contribute to them or participate more passively? Sixth, and finally, I asked subjects what

their parents and siblings think about Facebook. Does each of their family members have an account? Do families monitor or care how a subject uses Facebook?

I sought interview subjects in a variety of locations in Rabat. For example, I approached women sitting alone or with other women in cafes in the regions of Agdal, Hassan, Avenue Mohammed V, and l'Océan. I also sought interviews with women in a public park, Nouzhat Hassan, who were relaxing, commuting from the Medina, or caring for young children. I additionally attempted to find subjects through contacts of my interviewees.

Despite these efforts to obtain a diverse sample, it was difficult to avoid selection bias. Subjects that I approached in cafés only represent those young women who already feel empowered enough to sit at such public enterprises without the company of men. Subjects who strictly adhere to traditional gender norms and thus do not engage socially in the public sphere except for through Facebook and other social media platforms were difficult to meet and obtain consent for an interview. I attempted to find these types of women by soliciting interviewees in public places like Nouzhat Hassan, where they may be pausing to rest after a day of shopping at the Medina or watching over younger siblings who played on the jungle gym. Also, due to my desire to conduct honest and uncensored interviews, I was unable to interview subjects younger than 18 who would have needed written parental consent to participate in my study.

In addition to selection bias, another limitation inherent in my study is that in most interviews I used an interpreter who translated the content of interviews in real time from Moroccan Arabic (Darija), formal Arabic (Fusha), or French into English. While my Arabic

skills are sufficient to verify the accuracy of the translation, it is possible that minute details from the interviews were unrecorded in the transcription process.

Data analysis

Observable implications derived from each hypothesis test the interview data across a variety of qualitative indicators. The indicator variables for which I coded in my data are as follows: "maintains little to no overlap in the communities of individuals with whom he/she interacts between the Facebook and offline worlds," "talks to strangers, but would not meet them in person," participates in virtual relationships, but would not meet virtual partners in person," "posts photos in things would not wear in real life," "more likely to post opinions online than share them in person," "accepts friend requests from strangers," and "previously posted photos of self but does not do so anymore."

For every indicator, each of the 48 interview subjects received a score of 1 if a subject responded affirmatively, 0 if a subject responded negatively, and no score if the subject did not give adequate information to code for a particular variable. Resulting subject pools ranged from 21 to 46 subjects that received a 1 or a 0 for each indicator variable. These relatively small sample sizes constitute one of the greatest limitations of this study. To take the small sample size into account, for each indicator I performed a t-test to evaluate the likelihood (with 95 percent confidence) that the observed variation between affirmative and negative responses did not occur by chance.

I also performed a series of mean difference tests to assess whether the above indicators are correlated with certain background traits of the interviewed subjects. The background variables that I tested for correlation against the qualitative indicators were age, level of education, employment status, and mother's employment status. I similarly

quantified the background indicators on a 1-0 scale. I grouped subjects by age into categories of "greater than 25" (score of 1) and "25 and below" (score of 0). I scored level of education as "at least some college" (score of 1) and "no more than a high school degree" (score of 0). For employment, I coded interview subjects as either "employed" (score of 1) or "unemployed" (score of 0). For subjects' mothers' employment, I scored the interview data as "working" (score of 1) or "not working" (score of 0). Each mean difference test produced a p-value representing the likelihood (with 95 percent confidence) that a background variable is correlated with an indicator variable.

The reasoning behind each of the qualitative indicator variables, as well as a discussion of my results, will be discussed in later chapters.

CHAPTER III: IS FACEBOOK AN AUTHENTIC PUBLIC SPACE?

In this chapter, I will explore the first of two hypotheses that attempt to explain the variation between young Moroccan women's social behavior on Facebook and in the physical public sphere. The first hypothesis suggests that women behave differently on Facebook because Facebook is not an "authentic" public space. The second hypothesis suggests women behave differently on Facebook because the site is a "liberalizing" space that allows women to escape offline cultural norms.

It is helpful to first define the attributes of public spaces that exist on social media platforms before diving into the first hypothesis's discussion of if users consider those spaces to be authentic. Chambers (2013) argues that in today's technological society, "'Public' no longer means 'outside the home'" (p. 57). Rather than a strict dichotomy between the "private" home and that which lies outside of its walls, today's public-private distinctions are much more complex. In the words of boyd and Marwick (2011), "Although teens recognize the spatial dimension of privacy, this dichotomy does not reflect the realities of young people's lives… When teens explain where they can seek privacy, they focus more on who is present than the particular configurations of the space" (p. 3). In other words, young people define a space as public or private depending on *who* is in the space, not whether the space is on the street, at the mall, in a classroom or inside of the home. This reasoning implies that publics are both subjective and numerous, separated by social contexts (boyd, 2007, p. 8).

Social media platforms like Facebook, then, are not excluded from the potential to constitute public spaces in the eyes of young people around the world. In *Social Media and Personal Relationships (2013),* Chambers asserts that Facebook can indeed be used as a

public space. She writes, "Comments are not simply a dialogue between two interlocutors, but a performance of social connection before a broader audience" (p. 56). Through the feature of commenting on one another's profile walls and pictures, Chambers argues that Facebook enables users to simulate interaction akin to bumping into one another on the street. boyd (2007) further defines Facebook and other social media platforms as "networked" publics, because the social media technology "mediates the interactions between members of the public" (p. 8).

The nature of networked publics, however, is more complex than those taking place in the more traditional physical sphere of social interaction. In a world without social media technology, the potential audience of a given interaction is limited to those within a specific geographical area at a specific time as well as those who learn of the interaction indirectly through word-of-mouth at a later time. Networked publics, on the other hand, are free of such spatial and temporal restrictions. Social media platforms like Facebook enable users to fashion publics with audiences both as large as populations from many geographic areas at any time and as small as one person from one geographic area at a specific moment in time (boyd, 2007, p. 8-9).

In "Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites" (2007), danah boyd names three properties exclusive to social media technology that explain the fluidity of such networked publics: persistence, replicability, and invisible audiences. First, *persistence* refers to the fact that communications on social media are recorded automatically and saved indefinitely unless manually deleted by a user who either created a given communication or received that communication on his or her profile. Second, since communications are recorded and saved, social interactions that take place on social media are also *replicable*—

that is, communications can be copied verbatim. And third, despite features of certain social media platforms that allow users to mediate which other users can view their profiles, many social media interactions are subject to *invisible audiences*, or viewers about whom the user is not consciously aware (p. 8).

Although the above properties frame networked publics in the cyber sphere as *more* public than those spaces limited spatially and temporally in the physical world, the audiences of interactions on social media are not necessarily larger than those that occur offline. Some Facebook users, for example, aim to utilize the site as more of a private space by limiting and monitoring who is able to view their profiles. In "Social Privacy in Networked Publics" (2011), boyd and Marwick note that teens "want to participate in networked publics, but they also want to have control over the social situations that take place there. They want to be visible, but only to certain people" (p. 25). These factors to do not mean, however, that social media sites like Facebook should not be considered public spaces, as people have always sought to limit the extent of the audiences party to their interactions. For example, a teen may want to exclude her parents from her Facebook profile in a similar way that a fourth-grader may want to exclude his teacher from his conversations on the school playground (boyd, 2007, p. 16). Both the teen's Facebook profile and the schoolboy's playground interactions are public to some people and private to others. Public and private spaces are thus not posed in a dichotomy but on a greatly overlapping spectrum.

Hypothesis 1: Facebook is not an authentic public space

This first hypothesis rests on the idea that social media like Facebook are not authentic public spaces, either because users can choose to lie in their profiles and

communications, or because the mediums of social media sites are limited in their ability to facilitate true social interactions.

First, Facebook enables users to create their online presentations of self with the freedom to convey information that is completely false. In the words of Chambers (2013), "The choice of words and content of postings become a *performance of identity*" (p. 72). While Facebook users can certainly represent themselves authentically, they can also choose to invent their online presentations of self and interact with others under a façade. Users can post photos of others under the guise that the photos depict themselves. They can list interests that do not reflect their real opinions. For example, a user who reads only teen romance novels can list classic fiction as his or her favorite type of book to appear more mature. Facebook users can also post statuses about emotions they are not actually feeling, opinions with which they actually disagree, or information containing any number of lies. Under fake profile characteristics and identities, users can choose to lie in interactions with others through wall posts or private messages, and form relationships built upon falsehoods.

Early research on Internet communication, before the advent of Facebook or other similar social media sites, makes the claim that online identity is flexible according to the will of the user. Turkle (1995) argues that Internet users can assume a pseudonymous "mask" of representation online, which can be adopted or cast-off at will. In Ruth Page's more modern discussion of social media sites in "Hoaxes, hacking and humors: Analyzing impersonated identity on social network sites" (2014), she notes, "The metaphor of the mask implies playful performativity… where there need be no assumed correlation between the online and offline identities constructed by an individual" (p. 47). An online

mask may be entirely disconnected from an Internet user's offline identity, and, according to both Turkle and Page, the mask is usually playful. Participants of a 2008 study, for example, described how they adopted a certain persona on Facebook, and that their personas' behavior was consistently 'funny', 'joyful,' 'lighthearted', 'happy go lucky', and 'bouncy' (Van Blerk, 2008, as cited in Deumert, 2014, p. 39).

If lying or mask-wearing is prevalent among users of Facebook, and those who choose to lie do not face consequences in the offline world, then the social media platform may not represent a truly authentic public space. This explains why young Moroccan women behave differently online.

Second, Facebook is not an authentic public space because social media sites are unable to facilitate true social interactions. Chambers (2013) notes how mediated communication through social network sites is "'lean' rather than 'rich' and impedes people's ability to handle interpersonal dimensions of interaction" (p. 21). On sites like Facebook, users interact with one another using only images and text. Communication over social media sites lacks visual social cues and the use of voice, which creates ambiguities and impedes genuine interaction (p. 23). Furthermore, the lack of personal indicators allows users more control than they experience in the physical world over what they disclose and how they disclose it. This control means that more information is left to the imagination of those engaged in online relationships, and there is little distraction away from the limited personal indicators a user chooses to convey. The result is that social media users tend to be more attracted to one another than they would be if they had met in person, which Walther (1996) calls the "hyperpersonal effect." Byam (2010) also notes how social media users exaggerate the appeal of people with whom they interact online (as

cited in Chambers, 2013, pp. 138-139). Not only, then, are Facebook interactions less authentic than those that take place in the physical public sphere, but they also lead to illegitimate relationships. If social media sites are unable to facilitate authentic interactions, then Moroccan women may behave differently on Facebook.

Observable implications associated with hypothesis 1

Data collected over interviews with 48 subjects in Rabat, Morocco in August of 2015 can shed light on the validity of the above hypothesis, which suggests that if Facebook is not an authentic public space, young Moroccan women will adhere to the following three indicators:

1. Subjects maintain little to no overlap in the communities of individuals with which they interact between the Facebook and offline worlds.

The authenticity of Facebook as a public space in many ways rests on the transferability of users' interactions between online and offline contexts. That is, if a Facebook user interacts with the same community of people both on the site and in the offline world, then that user will be constrained in his or her ability to use Facebook in a way that is not authentic. For example, an individual whose social community on Facebook resembles that of his or her offline community would find it difficult to portray a fake identity on the site. If Facebook is not an authentic public space, then subjects should express that they maintain little to no overlap in the communities with which they interact between online and offline social environments.

2. Subjects accept friend requests and talk to strangers on Facebook, but will not accept an invitation to meet strangers in person. AND *3. Subjects participate in virtual romantic relationships on Facebook, or are interested in doing so.*

If Facebook is an authentic public space, then the site should facilitate communications that are comparable to communications in person, deepening relationships and building interpersonal trust. If Facebook is not an authentic public space, however, there should be a difference in the way users treat relationships that originate online from those that begin offline.

If the above hypothesis, suggesting Facebook is not a legitimate public space, is valid, then interview subjects who accept friend requests and talk to strangers on Facebook may not be willing to meet with those strangers in person, even after a great deal of online interaction. Similarly, the data should show that subjects are amenable to virtual-only relationships with people they meet online.

CHAPTER IV: HYPOTHESIS 1 RESULTS

The observed data for the three indicators described above thoroughly rejects the hypothesis that Facebook is not an authentic public space, and thus suggests that it cannot adequately explain the varied social behavior of young female Moroccan Facebook users. While each indicator on its own cannot discredit the theory, together they paint a compelling picture. In two of the three indicators, there is a statistically significant majority of subjects who reject their respective expected observable implications (see table 1), and the qualitative data lends further insights. I will now discuss the results of each indicator category in detail.

The first indicator variable tests the implication that if Facebook is not an authentic public space, then subjects will maintain little to no overlap in the communities of individuals with which they interact between the Facebook and offline worlds. Out of 46 subjects, only 4.3% responded in a way that supports this particular idea ($p<.0001$).

Qualitatively, the vast majority of respondents expressed that they approach Facebook as an extension of the social environment in which they interact in the offline world. Many subjects, when asked why they use Facebook, stated that they use it to stay in touch and interact with childhood friends, classmates and family that lives far away. Many others said that they use the site as a tool to arrange the logistics to meet with friends in person. One subject, Fatima,[1] even noted, "I will not accept a friend request unless we go to the same school or have friends in common." Another subject, Wiam, said that she interacts with others on Facebook to get advice about difficult social situations that she faces in the offline world. A young woman named Touria said that she chooses to limit the

[1] All interview subject names have been replaced with pseudonyms

amount of private information that she shares on Facebook, like her relationship status, because she does not want people to know and gossip about her personal issues. The interview data thus thoroughly rejects the idea that subjects will maintain little overlap in the communities of individuals with which they interact between online and offline social environments, and acts to discredit the hypothesis that Facebook is not an authentic public space.

Positive adherence to this first indicator variable is significantly correlated with the background variable of having a working mother (p=.0054, see tables 2 and 3), though without more information it is difficult to draw significance from this observed association.

The second indicator tests the implication derived from hypothesis 1 described above that subjects will accept friend requests and talk to strangers on Facebook, but will not accept an invitation to meet strangers in person. Out of 21 subjects, 71.4% responded in a way that supports this implication (p=.0423).

The qualitative data complicates this tentative conclusion in support of the first hypothesis. One subject, Touria, said that she "will only accept [friend] requests from strangers if I can determine that the person is real." Touria's comment acts to discredit this particular implication because she will only use Facebook as a social tool if it adequately reflects the offline world. Two other subjects, Amouda and Asma, expressed that it would be too risky for them to meet strangers from Facebook offline, because that person would be difficult to trust. Their caution reflects the fact that some users do use Facebook as a place to inhibit a fake persona, which supports the hypothesis that Facebook is not an authentic public space. Another subject, Ghadir, said that talking to strangers "is the purpose of Facebook," because "Facebook shows the real you." While the first part of her

statement acts to support the first hypothesis because it suggests Facebook is not interchangeable with the offline world, the second half of Ghadir's statement indicates the opposite. According to Ghadir, Facebook creates a space that can reveal a person's true nature, in some ways more successfully than the offline public sphere, which explains why she is more willing to talk to strangers online.

While the majority of women interviewed adhered to the second indicator in way that supports the hypothesis that Facebook is not an authentic space, the qualitative data highlighted above suggests that young Moroccan women care that Facebook users portray their actual selves on the site. While such qualitative evidence cannot alone falsify the data in support of the hypothesis, it does nuance our understanding of ideals and expectations that young women have for how other users interact with them on Facebook.

Also significant was the correlation between subjects who affirmatively adhered to this hypothesis and age ($p=.0048$), employment status ($p=.008$), and whether or not subjects had a working mother ($p=.0024$). In contrast to older, employed women with working mothers, younger, unemployed women who may face a filial expectation to be housewives like their mothers are likely to have few opportunities to meet new people in the offline world, and therefore may be more likely to agree to meet with strangers they have met online. It is difficult, however, to use these particular correlations to theorize about the authenticity of Facebook as a public space.

Finally, the third indicator variable tests the implication that if subjects are interested in or participate in virtual romantic relationships on Facebook, then they may not view the social media platform as an authentic public space. Of 34 subjects, only 14.7% supported this particular idea ($p<.0001$). Subjects that were uninterested in virtual

relationships fall into two areas of thought. The first group expressed that they do not participate in virtual relationships because those relationships would not be genuine. Rihab, for example, stated, “people are not real on Facebook.” Basma said that, “It is a bit difficult to have a serious relationship through or based on social media.” Sara noted that she does not trust virtual relationships. She said, “I feel like I have to know, physically, that the person exists.” While at first glace this supports the suggested implication of this indicator variable, what the women are suggesting is that they will only engage in romantic virtual interactions if they are convinced that it is real. In other words, women intend to use Facebook as an authentic public space, and will not interact socially in ways for which they cannot trust the other person to similarly treat his or her Facebook interactions.

The second group of subjects that did not support the suggested implication for the third indicator generally expressed that they do not participate in virtual relationships because all Facebook relationships must also be present in the offline world. A subject named Iman, for example, said, “I am open to starting something virtual, but it would have to become for real.” Farha, stated that, “Once you meet the person [offline], things not shown virtually will be shown.” Another subject, Aya, said, "Facebook makes you get to know someone mentally before you get to know them physically. You’ll know their personality before meeting." This group of women similarly feels that their ideal conception of Facebook is one with great overlap with their offline worlds, indicating that these women prefer to use Facebook as an authentic public space.

Adherence to this particular indicator is also significantly correlated with age ($p=.0258$), education level ($p<.00001$), and employment status ($p=.015$). It is possible that we observe these correlations because older, more educated and employed women may

face fewer potential consequences for pursuing virtual relationships that younger, uneducated and unemployed women are likely to be under stricter supervision from parents and other family members.

Outside of the construct of the implications framed by the above 5 indicator variables, there is some qualitative evidence from the interviews that support the first hypothesis that Facebook is not an authentic public space. Some subjects expressed—as previously predicted in the theoretical explanation for this hypothesis—that Facebook inhibited their ability to fully interact with other users to the extent allowed in offline contexts. Basma, for example, said, "I prefer to share my opinion face to face because… I like to see the reaction of the person. Sara stated that, "Emotions will not show 100% on Facebook." Similarly, Banou said, "There is miscommunication when you are not aware of someone's in-person reaction."

Despite this supporting evidence, the statistical and qualitative analysis of the interview data seriously calls into question the validity of the hypothesis suggesting that Facebook is not an authentic space, so this first idea cannot explain the varied social behavior of young female Moroccan Facebook users.

Hypothesis 1, revisited

As previously described, this first hypothesis rests on the ideas that Facebook users can choose to lie in their profiles and communications, and that the mediums of social media sites are limited in their ability to facilitate true social interactions. This section gives a qualitative explanation that supports the conclusions of the data for why Facebook users both choose to interact on Facebook in an authentic way and are able to interact in an authentic manner.

First, although Facebook provides avenues for lying about oneself and in one's online social interactions, more than the interviews conducted in this study indicate that users tend not to use them in such a way. Facebook's terms of conditions, as of March 2010, state, "You will not provide any false personal information on Facebook, or create an account for anyone other than yourself without permission" (as cited in Seargeant & Tagg, 2014, p. 50). Although these terms may not dissuade users, most people do not lie about themselves on Facebook because they use the platform in a way that heavily incorporates their offline worlds.

Survey findings of teens from the United States, Singapore and Israel also suggest that teens mainly use social media to socialize with people they already know, "grounding their online relationships in offline contexts" (Chambers, 2013, p. 89). As Chambers (2013) notes, "Online selves are involved in modes of interactivity which are embedded in offline power relations—with *offline* as well as *online* consequences. This 'digital' other is derived from and embedded in offline contexts" (p. 69). A user may create an online persona, but that persona is shaped by the fact that many of the user's Facebook friends are those with whom he or she interacts in the offline world. Furthermore, Seargeant and Tagg (2014) explain, "With smartphones and other mobile devices, we are 'always on' and this blurs the boundaries between our so-called online and offline lives" (p. 94). This is especially the case in Morocco, where the majority of users access Facebook on their mobile devices because computers are expensive and owned by few. A user's online and offline social audiences tend to overlap significantly, so that user is encouraged to present a true version of his or herself.

In addition to the overlap between offline and online contexts, Facebook users choose to portray their authentic selves on Facebook because, quite simply, they do not want to be anonymous online. In "Beyond Anonymity" (2006), Helen Kennedy argues that virtual identities are not always anonymous, but instead, "often continuous with offline selves" because users "still want an authentic experience of self" (pp. 860 and 866). In a study of 14 ethnic minority women in the United Kingdom, subjects made personal webpages after a series of preparatory exercises, including learning how to create a webpage, and thinking about the potential uses, advantages and disadvantages of a personal webpage. The subjects received no guidance about what content to include in their webpages, which, according to Kennedy, means that the webpages were true expressions of identity. Analyzing the results of the study, Kennedy notes: "It was found that the students showed no sign of wanting to hide their gender and ethnicity and so 'benefit' from the possibility of anonymity that cyberspace offered them. Rather, they made explicit and implicit references to their gender and ethnicity in their homepages" (pp. 866-867). Although social media sites like Facebook may allow users the option of providing fake information, it is clear that users tend to treat Facebook as an authentic public space in which they must portray their true identities.

Second, although the mediums of social media sites are in some ways limited in their ability to facilitate social interactions, in other ways sites like Facebook can foster deep connections comparable to those offline. A study of 496 American college students, for example, found that "those individuals in close relationships had high-quality interactions regardless of the medium through which they interacted" (Chambers, 2013, p.

35). A user is thus able to treat Facebook as a space for authentic social interaction when communicating with friends who are also a part of his or her offline world.

Additionally, the mediums of communication facilitated by Facebook—profiles, event invitations, interest and commercial pages, forums, etc.—provide users with flexibility of social interaction that in today's world constitutes authentic communication. For example, Chambers (2013) notes how today, "The *unplanned* phone call is potentially intrusive… Voice-based mediums of communication are usually dedicated to intimate exchange" (pp. 25-26). As technologic means of communication become increasingly embedded in everyday life, social encounters that lack some features of in-person interaction do not necessarily lack authenticity. In fact, flexibility in the intimacy of different interactions may be welcome to individuals. A Facebook user can choose to send out a mass-invitation to his or her birthday party, for example, instead of phoning or meeting with each person individually to invite them. Alternatively, a user may prefer to have a difficult conversation over Facebook's private message feature rather than in person to give themselves time in between exchanges to craft his or her response. In other words, just because Facebook may be limited in the means of social interaction that it provides, those interactions are not necessarily less authentic than those that occur in the physical public space.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the first of two hypotheses that attempt to explain why young Moroccan women may behave differently on Facebook than in the physical public sphere. This first hypothesis rests on the idea that social media like Facebook are not authentic public spaces, either because users can choose to lie in their profiles and

communications, or because the mediums of social media sites are limited in their ability to facilitate true social interactions.

Data from interviews with 48 young female Moroccan women in Rabat act to discredit this hypothesis, based on variables relating to how women use Facebook to control the objects of their interactions and build relationships. A review of literature on the subject further invalidates the idea. The following chapters, then, carry the assumption that Facebook is an authentic public space. In the next section, I discuss a second hypothesis to explain variations in how young Moroccan women interact socially on Facebook compared to how they do so offline.

Table 1: Summary Statistics, hypothesis 1

	Little to no online/offline overlap in communities of interaction	Talks to strangers, but would not meet in person	Participates in or is interested in a virtual relationship
Number of subjects	46	21	34
Totals (%)	Yes=4.3%. No=95.7%.	Yes=71.4%. No=28.6%.	Yes=14.7%. No=85.3%.
P value	p=.0001	p=.0423	p=.0001

Table 2: Background Statistics

	Age	Level of education	Employment	Working mother?
Number of subjects	48	46	48	30
Totals (%)	Older than 25=35.4%. 25 and younger=64.6%.	Some college and above=69.6%. High school and below=30.4%.	Employed = 37.5%. Unemployed =62.5%.	Working=30%. Not working =70%.

Table 3: Mean difference test, background factors, hypothesis 1

	Little to no online/offline overlap in communities of interaction	Talks to strangers, but would not meet in person	Participates in or is interested in a virtual relationship
Mean diff test, age ("greater than 25" v. "25 and below")	p=.999	p=.0048	p=.0258
Mean diff test, education ("at least some college" v. "no more than a high school degree")	P=.999	p=.8812	p=.00001
Mean diff test, employment ("employed" v. "unemployed")	p=.999	p=.008	p=.015
Mean diff test, working mother ("working" v. "not working")	p=.0054	p=.0024	p=.1442

CHAPTER V: IS FACEBOOK A LIBERALIZING PUBLIC SPACE?

In this chapter, I will explore the second of two hypotheses that attempt to explain the variation between young Moroccan women's social behavior on Facebook and in the physical public sphere. As discussed in the previous two chapters, we reject the first hypothesis, which suggests that women behave differently on Facebook because Facebook is not an authentic public space. We now assume that Facebook is an authentic public space, and turn to the second hypothesis. This next hypothesis suggests that Facebook reflects liberalizing public space, which allows women to escape offline cultural norms.

As the previous chapters suggest, just as public spaces in the offline world embody distinct cultural environments, so too must the public space of Facebook have its own cultural norms of behavior. In "Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites" (2007), danah boyd elaborates, "Publics are where norms are set and reinforced, where common ground is formed. Learning society's rules requires trial and error, validation and admonishment" (p. 21). This is not to say that the networked public of Facebook dictates how users act, but instead that it configures the environment in which users interact with one another (Chambers, 2013, p. 53).

Also implied in the previous chapters is that the home no longer represents a space that is exclusively private. Through social media platforms, Chambers (2013) notes that people render the home "more *permeable* to the outside worlds… opening a digital door to their homes for the outside world to look in, into what is nevertheless conceived of as a profoundly 'intimate space'" (p. 104). For example, social media users can post photos that feature the inside of their homes and family gatherings, activities traditionally isolated to audiences filially related to the user.

More abstractly, social media platforms de-privatize the notion of the home by creating a space unsupervised by parents for teens to interact socially. boyd (2007) explains, "While the home has been considered a *private* sphere where individuals can regulate their own behavior, this is an adult-centric narrative. For many teens, home is a highly regulated space with rules and norms that are strictly controlled by adults" (p. 18). Not only can social media share private details of home life with a more public audience, but it also creates outlets for teens to escape authority structures traditionally associated with private life from within the walls of their own homes.

Expanding the concept of a permeable home, the second theory follows that Facebook enables young Moroccan women to overcome cultural limitations in their social behavior because it is a space that embodies a liberalized culture unmediated by Moroccan gender norms.

An alternative, liberalized cultural environment

A foundational principle of social media platforms is that they facilitate communication between individuals without geographic proximity to one another. As early as 1962, Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase, 'global culture,' as a metaphor to describe "how new communication technologies empower personal relationships across vast geographic and cultural differences" (boyd, 2008, p. 134). Conversely to McLuhan's perspective of an all-inclusive global culture, Robert Asen (2000) describes the "counterpublics" allowed by new technology as alternatives to offline public spaces that would ordinarily "exclude the interests of potential participants" (p. 424). Both McLuhan and Asen, in other words, agree that social media technology creates an

alternative cultural environment that is liberalized and inclusive in nature, while at the same time excluding actors that enforce limitations of the offline world.

Although McLuhan and Asen argued their perspectives on communication technology before the advent of social media sites like Facebook, communication scholars of today share the same view. Buckingham (2000) notes that social media offers an important alternative environment for teens who fear observation in public spaces, or who are often ordered away from streets and malls by law enforcement agents (as cited in Chambers, 2013, p. 88). Chambers (2013) similarly explains how social media sites like Facebook can provide a social space for teenagers who are excluded or bullied by their peers in the offline world to interact free of those fears or constraints (p. 91). While Chambers refers mainly to LGBTQ identifying youth, her ideas also apply in a wider context that includes all populations who feel marginalized by the offline environments in which they live. Social media enables those teens to meet others with similar experiences, to hide the source of their limitation, or to engage in a liberalized environment without such cultural constraints or judgments. As scholars like Tierney (2013) note, sites like Facebook thus create a more democratic social sphere because they "empower minority or marginalized groups by providing a forum in which to voice their objectives" (p. 11).

With respect to today's young Moroccan women, gender normative constraints are in some ways enforced by the previous generation—that is, their parents, aunts and uncles—that was raised in a less Westernized, more conservatively Muslim civilization. While the lives and interactions of children are normally highly mediated by their parents, adolescents often act to segregate themselves to find privacy away from the adult world. According to the second theory as it is described in this chapter, social media provides a

liberalized cultural environment in which those young Moroccan women can interact socially outside of the scrutiny of their parents or others. In this sense, social media sites catalyze Moroccan female social participation because they create a public sphere that excludes actors who are disagreeable to the cultural environment that it creates (Chambers, 2013, p. 105).

New cultural environment, new behavioral norms

If, according to the second hypothesis, social media platforms reflect a more liberalized culture, then they will also present a new set of norms to which social media users must adapt their behavior. To a limited extent, the companies that own social media sites play a role in this regard. Facebook, for example, determines the layout of its personal webpages, and offers a specific set of mechanisms by which its users engage with one another: photos and text, both public and private, depicted chronologically on a user's 'wall'. As Lessig (2000) describes, software can be a social framework from which norms are created and performed. Individual users, however, dictate the majority of the norms that arise on Facebook through the specific ways in which they use the features that are offered.

One of the most prominent structural features of social media sites like Facebook is the flexibility with which users can interact. Due to the mechanisms of text and photo sharing outlined in the methodology chapter, users can choose the speed at which they communicate. Facebook users have employed this flexibility to create norms that dictate the intimacy of their social relationships online. In general, faster communications connote more intimate relationships, whereas slower interactions reflect more informal ties. A conversation using the Facebook messenger feature in which two participants

respond immediately to one another, for example, is more amenable to self-disclosure and secret sharing than a conversation in which hours or days punctuate the users' responses (Chambers, 2013, p. 52). Two Facebook users who are stranger or only acquaintances in the offline world may deepen the intimacy of their relationship using these types of quick communications on the site.

More common, however, is the use of Facebook to facilitate slower, more informal interactions. Due to the fact that a person contacted on Facebook does not need to respond immediately, users are more likely to give their Facebook address and accept friend requests from others, expanding their social circles (Chambers, 2013, p. 27). Facebook makes it easy, through wall posts or photo sharing, to keep loosely updated on the activities of old friends. Additionally, a "controlled casualness" enables users to manage the vulnerabilities usually associated with romantic relations, as flirting over social media platforms can often be less intimidating than doing so in person (Sims, 2007, as cited in Chambers, 2013, p. 123).

In *The Language of Social Media* (2014), Seargeant and Tagg refer to the environment created by social media sites in which these slower, more information interactions dominate as, 'carnival.' They define the term as follows:

> [Carnival] is life itself, but shaped according to a *pattern of play*… Carnival is not a spectacle seen by people; they live in it, and everyone participates because the very idea embraces all people… During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, *the law of its own freedom*… carnival is the *people's second life*, organized on the basis of laughter, *the entire world is seen in its droll aspect.* (p. 34)

Facebook meets the criteria laid out by Seargeant and Tagg above, and thus it represents a carnival. First, as discussed, user interactions are facilitated by a pattern a play involving text and photo sharing features offered by the site's software. Second, only those who participate as Facebook users can experience the site's interactive and entertainment benefits. Third, and similarly, Facebook depends on the individuals who use it. Fourth, Facebook gives users a great degree of freedom in the way in which they use its features to interact with one another. Fifth, and finally, Facebook represents an alternative public sphere for its users, second to that of the offline world.

As users manipulate the structural features of communication that Facebook provides, they create norms of interaction that form the basis of the site's liberalized culture. We turn, now, to a theoretical explanation of why young Moroccan women will adapt to the norms of this new environment when they present themselves online, rather than to the cultural limitations that they face in the offline world.

Self-presentation in Facebook's liberalized environment

Important to this discussion is that as children enter adolescence, they usually begin to experiment with the presentation of their identities, in both online and offline contexts (Tierney, 2013, p. 74). Social media sites like Facebook offer users a personal webpage to create and express themselves, with the flexibility to experiment with different self-portrayals. For example, a Facebook user can fill his or her profile with pictures of themself with friends, and/or religious quotes, and/or lists of books he or she has read, each choice of which would depict a different personality and value system.

What emerges is a three-stage cyclical process of culture and identity formation. First, individuals use Facebook to present their own identities. Second, as masses of

individuals use Facebook to portray their identities, they act to define the culture of Facebook itself (Chambers, 2013, p. 36). This collective culture reflects the norms of an increasingly large number of individual Facebook users from all over the world; thus, a 'global culture'. This culture will be more liberalized than many offline spaces, as it is also a pluralistic space that forms rules based on networks of 'friends' that share similar interests in the environment. Finally, Facebook is a tool of social interaction. The site's liberalized collective culture influences how users present their individual identities online, including the cultural behaviors that they adopt in their social communications. Chambers writes, "Our sense of self is compelled within a relational process through our interactions with other people and through more abstract ideas of collectively endorsed social customs and values" (p. 66-67). In other words, Facebook users adapt their social norms to the environment in which they are engaged.

We assume that young Moroccan women will choose to defy the gendered public-private divide described in chapter one and instead assume the agency awarded to them in Facebook's liberalized online public space. Creating a Facebook profile in most ways requires a degree of public self-expression, and users are left with no option but personal autonomy when interacting with others on the site. Text communication, for example, is sent directly and clearly from one individual to another, making it very difficult for another user to respond in place of the recipient. While in the offline world a young Moroccan woman may have little control, for example, over the friends with whom she interacts or the romantic relationships in which she engages, the cultural environment in which she participates on Facebook gives her personal autonomy over those matters.

Observable implications associated with hypothesis 2

Data collected over interviews with 48 subjects in Rabat, Morocco in August of 2015 can shed light on the validity of the above hypothesis. The hypothesis suggests that if Facebook reflects a liberalized culture, allowing women to escape offline cultural norms, young Moroccan women will adhere to the following three indicators:

1. Subjects will post photos of themselves wearing clothing that they would not wear outside of their homes.

Young women in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, vary greatly in the level of modesty that they assume in their dress outside of the home. Many women will only exit their homes in a *hijab* (a headscarf) and *djelaba* (a loose hooded cloak). Others will don more westernized clothing, like form-fitting jeans and American-brand blouses, while still covering their knees and shoulders. Still others will show their bare shoulders, and a few women have recently started to wear dresses and skirts that just barely expose their knees. Inside the home, women remove their *hijabs* and *djelabas*, and are typically less constrained by the norms of modesty that guide their dress in public spaces.

This public/private distinction becomes less clear with the introduction of Facebook. If Facebook reflects a liberalized culture, then Moroccan women will be exposed more relaxed norms of modesty. As they adapt to the norms Facebook's new cultural environment and experiment with identity presentation, such exposure may influence how women choose to portray themselves on the site. Thus, if this second hypothesis is accurate, then subjects will report that they post photos of themselves wearing clothing that they would not wear outside of their homes.

2. Subjects are more likely to share an opinion on Facebook (via status update) than in person.

Public spaces offer consequences for expressing one's opinion. Stating a minority or unpopular opinion may damage one's reputation. Offering an opinion also invites judgment and disagreement. In other words, one must assume certain risks when he or she shares an opinion in the physical public sphere. Women, especially, are expected to act in adherence to the gendered public-private divide, and refrain from asserting their personal opinions in offline public spaces, or in private spaces to older male family members.

This is especially the case in terms of sharing political opinions. Article 25 of the Moroccan constitution, revised in 2011, states that "The freedoms of thought, of opinion and of expression under all their forms[,] are guaranteed" (Ruchti, 2012, p. 8). Moroccan courts, however, continue to apply provisions of the penal code to imprison individuals "for nonviolent offenses of speech against the king [and] state institutions" ("Morocco: Free Student," (2013), p. 11). Moroccans thereby must exercise caution when discussing King Mohammed VI and other state institutions like the judiciary and Parliament.

If Facebook reflects a liberalized culture, then individuals will face fewer consequences for asserting their opinions in that environment, and will thus be compelled to share them. When directly the object of another user's question to comment, a user must either ignore it or respond, in many cases without the forced input of others. She also has the power to instigate social interactions with individuals with whom she would be monitored or barred from interacting in the offline world. The above theory thus predicts that subjects will be more likely to share an opinion on Facebook than in person.

3. Subjects will accept friend requests from people who they do not know from the offline world.

From previous theoretical explanations, we assume that Moroccan women are expected to participate little in the social interactions that occur in public spaces, as well as defer to parents and older family members to facilitate their interactions when inside the home. These women, then, have limited opportunities outside of school (which may also be an privileged experience) to meet new people and deepen existing relationships. If Facebook reflects a liberalized global culture, then young women will use it as a tool to meet and interact with new people. Subjects, then, should respond in interviews that they accept friend requests from people who they do not know from the offline world.

Repercussions of hypothesis 2

It is important to note that the above hypothesis may be self-limited in its ability to apply in future contexts. As the global environment that exists on Facebook continues to be defined by the collective culture of participating individuals, it is possible that it could change as the technology and people on whom it depends inevitably do so. Additionally, as the population of Facebook users increases, it is possible that the site will cease to reflect a culture that is truly global in nature and instead portray different cultural environments for the distinct networked publics that use it. That is, Facebook may one day reach a state in which so many Moroccans use it that they form a community of individuals that is mostly isolated from other Facebook-using groups. In either of these hypothetical but plausible cases, as well as many others, Facebook could eventually morph to a state in which it reflects some of the limitations that Moroccan women face in the offline world.

This phenomenon is mostly likely to occur due to "collapsed identities." While in many cases Moroccan teens view Facebook as a 'no-parents' zone, exclusive to interactions with peers, significant sections of the teen population's parents are beginning to adapt to social media technology for their own use (boyd & Marwick, 2011, p. 16). Parents may demand to be Facebook friends with their children to watch over them as they do in the physical world. So may other family members, teachers, and even employers may expect teens to accept their friend requests.

As discussed previously, individuals often act to limit the extent of the audience party to their interactions at a given time, so they can perform their identities differently in distinct social contexts. For example, a teen may want to exclude her parents from her Facebook profile in a similar way that a fourth-grader may want to exclude his teacher from his conversations on the school playground (boyd, 2007, p. 16). However, as Facebook increasingly supports a population of users that includes more than just teenagers, it will become increasingly difficult for teens to maintain segmented audiences of their online social behavior. In other words, the many identities that a teenager inhibits according to which audience is present are suddenly collapsed in the online public sphere.

In "None of this is Real" (2007), danah boyd discusses the resulting consequence of collapsed identities in both online and offline contexts. She writes that teen experiences with collapsed identities "are often uncomfortable, particularly when the collision of separate networks is unexpected. Digital worlds increase the likelihood and frequency of collapses and require participants to determine how to manage their own performance and the interactions between disparate groups (p. 3). As the population of Facebook users diversifies, users may face consequences for continuing to operate as though the social

media platform still represents a cultural environment in which they can freely experiment with identity-performance. Those consequences may cause Facebook users to alter and limit the way in which they interact on the site, which in turn will change the cultural norms that Facebook exhibits.

An additional implication

The second hypothesis, then, must not only address Facebook as a liberalized culture, but also the likelihood of repercussions of that space in the future. We thus add the caveat that while Facebook reflects a liberalized cultural environment—allowing women to escape offline cultural norms—it will eventually evolve to include limitations from the offline world. A fourth implication must follow the three above to test for subjects that have faced consequences in the offline world for their actions online, and have since changed their online behavior:

4. If the liberalized culture of Facebook will eventually evolve to include limitations from the offline world, then subjects will report that they used to post photos of themselves on Facebook, but do not post them anymore.

Publically sharing photos of oneself remains a particularly contentious issue for young Moroccan women, as Muslim culture mandates that women portray themselves with modesty. This indicator variable will test whether young female Facebook users have in fact faced repercussions from undesired or unintended audiences being party to how they use the expressive freedoms awarded to them online.

In the following chapter I will analyze the results of the data pertaining to the four suggested implications to test the second hypothesis that explains variation between young Moroccan women's social behavior on Facebook and in the physical public sphere.

CHAPTER VI: HYPOTHESIS 2 RESULTS

In this chapter, I will analyze the observed data for the four indicators described in the previous section to test the hypothesis that that Facebook reflects a liberalized culture—allowing women to escape offline cultural norms—that will eventually evolve to include limitations from the offline world. The analysis will help to assess whether this particular hypothesis adequately explains the varied social behavior of young female Moroccan Facebook users between online and offline contexts.

While each indicator on its own cannot discredit the hypothesis, together they paint a compelling picture. Of the three indicators suggesting that Facebook reflects a liberalized public space, two of them present a statistically significant majority of subjects who reject their respective observable implications (see table 4). For the third indicator, in which a majority of subjects support the hypothesis, the observed majority is not statistically significant. The fourth indicator, which tests the part of the second hypothesis suggesting Facebook will eventually evolve to include limitations from the offline world, reflects data that suggests the hypothesis may be accurate. I will now discuss the results of each indicator category in detail (see tables 5 and 6 for correlations between observed indicators and background data).

For the first indicator, the above hypothesis suggests the implication that if Facebook reflects a liberalized culture, subjects will post photos of themselves wearing clothing that they would not wear outside of their homes. Of 36 interview subjects, only 5.5% expressed that they adhere to such behavior ($p<.0001$).

This indicator cannot, however, reject the theory on its own. For example, a young woman may not feel comfortable sharing photos without a *hijab* or covered shoulders, no

matter if the platform on which she is sharing them reflects a liberalized cultural environment or not. For many Moroccan women, the *hijab* is only removed within the home, so even though Facebook may represent a liberalized culture, it is a still a public space and thus may not cause women to change that particular behavior.

Also significant is the correlation between those subjects who post photos of themselves wearing clothing that they would not wear outside of their homes and whether subjects have a working mother ($p=.010$; see table 4). This correlation is perhaps explained by research asserting that daughters of working mothers are less likely to adhere to traditional gender roles. According to a Harvard Business School study that analyzes data from two international surveys of 5,000 subjects from 24 countries, women who grow up with a working mother are more likely to both be employed themselves and hold leadership positions in those roles (Nobel, 2015). If daughters of working mothers are more likely to subvert traditional gender roles, then this could help to explain why some women would post photos of themselves on Facebook in clothing they would not wear outside the home. Additionally, if Moroccan women with working mothers are more likely to live culturally empowered lives relative to others, perhaps those women are also more likely to take advantage of alternative public spaces', like Facebook's, potentially liberalizing environments.

The second indicator predicts that if Facebook reflects a liberalized public space, subjects will be more likely to share an opinion on Facebook than in person. Of 29 subjects, only 13.8% answered affirmatively to this behavior ($p<.0001$), indicating that the vast majority of Moroccans are either equally likely or more likely to express an opinion in person.

It is important to note that some statements made in interviews complicate the direct relevance of this second indicator to the hypothesis concerning Facebook's liberalizing nature. A subject named Nour, for example, stated that she doesn't like to share her opinions on Facebook because she feels it would not make a difference among the many thousands of comments on the site. She said, "It's not like I'm in the Parliament or anything where my voice would be heard." Nour does not prefer to share her opinion in person because she is worried about the consequences of expressing herself online, but because she feels Facebook is more populous than the publics in which she normally interacts, making her contributions insignificant.

Adherence to this second indicator is also correlated with age ($p=.024$), education level ($p<.00001$), and employment status ($p=.014$). Perhaps this is because women who are older, more educated, and employed are likely to be more prominent members of Moroccan society and thus will face more consequences in the offline world for sharing controversial opinions than do younger, less educated and unemployed women who probably spend more time at home. These observed correlations, then, make sense in the context of this particular indicator variable, and lend credence to the hypothesis that Facebook reflects a liberalized public space.

The third indicator tests the implication that if Facebook supports a liberalized culture, allowing women to escape offline cultural norms, then subjects will accept friend requests from people who they do not know from the offline world. Of 43 respondents, 55.8% support this idea, but the observed majority is not statistically significant ($p=.453$).

Qualitative data can give some insight into this particular issue. Some interviews acted to question this supporting majority. A subject named Ouissal, for example, deleted

her Facebook because strangers wanted to talk to her. Ouissal's comments illuminate the fact that it cannot be assumed that all young Moroccan women desire the ability to increase their level of social interaction.

Other qualitative data, however, supported this third implication. Many women interviewed, such as Yasmine, Amal, Kenza, Maha and Rania, reported that the opportunity to meet new people was the reason that they began using Facebook. As one subject, Sabrina, put it, "Many girls cannot go out late, so they find that the only way to interact is through Facebook." These women do not necessarily accept any friend request that appears to them. Ghadir, for example, spoke about how while she accepts friend requests from strangers, she will vet them beforehand by looking at their profiles to ensure that they are employed and live in nice regions of Morocco. Only if the other person is employed, Ghadir said, could they have an intellectual conversation that is worth her time.

Especially in terms of talking and flirting with men, many subjects found Facebook to be a useful tool. For example, Basma, Rita and Marwa all stated that they felt more likely to meet a boyfriend on Facebook than in the offline world. Marwa said, "Facebook makes it easier because you are a button away from people you want to meet." For one subject, Karima, Facebook even changed her conceptions of love and marriage. Karima said, "I met my boyfriend on Facebook… I never meant to have one, and did not believe in love, but I have since changed my mind. Before [meeting my boyfriend], I wanted an arranged marriage with someone who I had never met, because I wanted the traditional 'thing'." The comments of these subjects adhere to this third indicator variable and thus lend credence to the hypothesis that Facebook represents a liberalized culture where women are better able to meet and talk to men.

The occurrence of subjects who accept friend requests from strangers on Facebook is also significantly correlated with whether subjects have a working mother (p=.0256). This correlation is difficult to explain. Perhaps, for example, women with working mothers tend to be more socially outgoing or face less parental supervision over their online interactions. However, it is challenging to draw implications from this particular correlation about the liberalizing quality of Facebook as a public space.

In contrast to older, employed women with working mothers, younger, unemployed women who may face a filial expectation to be housewives like their mothers are likely to have few opportunities to meet new people in the offline world, and therefore may be more likely to agree to meet with strangers they have met online. It is difficult, however, to use these particular correlations to theorize about the liberalizing nature of Facebook.

The fourth indicator variable tests the suggested implication that if the liberalized public space of Facebook will eventually evolve to include limitations from the offline world, then subjects will report that they used to post photos of themselves on Facebook, but do not post them anymore. Of 34 subjects interviewed, 29.4% supported this idea (p=0138). However, the significance of this particular indicator variable does not depend upon majority occurrence. The fact that almost one third of respondents reported that they had changed their behavior on Facebook to stop posting pictures of themselves suggests that the collective cultural environment of Facebook may very well be shifting to include limitations from the offline world.

Evidence in support of this particular implication also exists in the qualitative interview data. Many subjects spoke about how family members demanded they stop posting pictures of themselves on Facebook. Sabrina, for example, said that her brother

forbid her from having a Facebook "because he saw me sharing pictures and talking to boys." Safaa noted that her brother "says a good girl keeps pictures private," and said that if it were not for him she would "possibly" post photos of herself. Siham stopped posting pictures of herself because someone showed them to her family to claim that they used to date one another. Jamila also got into trouble with her family for posting a photo in which her bare shoulder showed, so she stopped posting photos of herself.

Subjects also often spoke about how they stopped posting personal photos because they feared that others would steal the photos for nefarious purposes. For example, a stranger stole one of Assia's photos to post it to a fake account. Basma, Manal, Naima, Jamila, Hafsa, and Sabrina also stopped posting photos of themselves at least in part because they feared their photos would be stolen. Jamila and Sabrina elaborated on this fear, stating that stolen photos often appear on pornographic websites.

The percentage of subjects who changed their photo-sharing behavior is also correlated with subjects' level of education ($p=.0002$). This correlation can be explained by the assumption that subjects who have at least some college education are likely to come from wealthier, more educated parents. These parents may be more likely than others to be on Facebook themselves, which provides a mechanism for the change in subjects' photo-sharing behavior. In other words, Subjects whose parents are likely to be Facebook users are more likely to face supervision and repercussions for posting photos that their parents deem inappropriate.

In addition to the specific indicator of changed photo sharing behavior, subjects implied in other ways that the public space of Facebook may be evolving to adopt cultural limitations from the offline world. A subject named Rihab, for example, said, "I never post a

personal opinion… because that information is private. I share that information in person with friends, but Facebook is not only friends, so I do not share it there." Though her comment is about opinion-sharing, not photo-sharing, Rihab credits the idea that as Facebook grows in popularity to include more users than just adolescents, it may change the behavioral norms that users adopt.

This qualitative data certainly lends evidence to the idea that the liberalized environment of Facebook may eventually evolve to adopt limitations that women face in the offline world. This data also adheres to the theoretical argument discussed in the previous chapter about how the presence of family members on social media sites may be a source of that shift in norms.

Conclusion

The hypothesis addressed in the past two chapters posits that young Moroccan women behave differently on Facebook because the site reflects a liberalized cultural environment, but eventually that culture may evolve to adapt some of the limitations that women face in the offline world. This theory rests on ideas of how cultural environments develop norms of behavior, and how individuals present themselves according to those norms.

Data from interviews with 48 young female Moroccan women in Rabat cannot prove nor entirely discredit this hypothesis, based on variables relating to how women use Facebook to share photos, express opinions, and build relationships. For the first three hypotheses—those that address idea of Facebook's liberalized public space—the data acts to discredit this particular hypothesis, but the qualitative data suggests that it still may have some explanatory value. For the final suggested implication—that which addresses

Facebook's adoption of offline cultural limitations—both the statistical and qualitative analysis of the interview data suggest that it is a credible postulation.

The next chapter explores the significance of this study in a broader context, and suggests areas for future research.

Table 4: Summary Statistics, hypothesis 2

	Posts photos in things would not wear in real life	More likely to post opinions online than share in person	Accepts friend requests from people they do not know	Previously posted photos, but does not anymore
Number of subjects	36	29	43	34
Totals (%)	Yes=5.5%. No=94.4%.	Yes=13.8%. No=86.2%.	Yes=55.8%. No=44.2%.	Yes=29.4%. No=70.6%.
P value	p=.0001	p=.0001	p=.453	p=.0138

Table 5: Background Statistics

	Age	Level of education	Employment	Working mother?
Number of subjects	48	46	48	30
Totals (%)	Older than 25=35.4%. 25 and younger=64.6%.	Some college and above=69.6%. High school and below=30.4%.	Employed = 37.5%. Unemployed =62.5%.	Working=30%. Not working =70%.

Table 6: Mean difference test, background factors, hypothesis 2

	Posts photos in things would not wear in real life	More likely to post opinions online than share in person	Accepts friend requests from people they do not know	Previously posted photos, but does not anymore
Mean diff test, age ("greater than 25" v. "25 and below")	p=.999	p=.024	p=.0514	p=.5702
Mean diff test, education ("at least some college" v. "no more than a high school degree")	p=.999	p=.00001	p=.1812	p=.0002
Mean diff test, employment ("employed" v. "unemployed")	p=.999	p=.014	p=.0814	p=.4462
Mean diff test, working mother ("working" v. "not working")	p=.010	p=.131	p=.0256	p=.9586

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I presented a study of the mechanisms by which Facebook empowers young Moroccan women to overcome cultural limitations in their social interactions. After a discussion of previous research indicating that technology shocks like the Internet and social media sites may have the ability to socially empower women, I explored two hypotheses that attempt to explain *why* Facebook may enable such empowerment. The first hypothesis proposes that women behave differently online because Facebook is not an authentic public space, while the second hypothesis suggests they do so because Facebook reflects a liberalized public space.

Using data from original interviews with young Moroccan women in August of 2015, I statistically and qualitatively analyzed implications derived from each of the two hypotheses. For the first hypothesis, a statistical and qualitative data analysis acts to invalidate the idea that Facebook is not an authentic public space. For the second hypothesis, a statistical investigation discredits the notion that Facebook reflects a liberalized environment, though a qualitative analysis of the interview data lends credence to its validity. Furthermore, interview data referring to how young Moroccan women have changed their online social behavior in response to offline consequences implies that the liberalizing norms of Facebook's cultural environment have already begun to adopt limitations from the offline world.

Implications and areas for future research

In the introduction, I explained a body of research on liberation technology, which asserts how technology shocks can provide openings for marginalized individuals and

communities to overcome cultural limitations and other forms of repression. Such research would posit that if Facebook is indeed an authentic and somewhat liberalizing public space, then young Moroccan women will be empowered to overcome cultural constraints when interacting socially on the site.

Larry Diamond (2010) explains, however, that repressive forces can adapt liberation technologies and effectively commandeer them. He notes how in China, for example, "Connection to the international Internet is monopolized by a handful of state-run operators hemmed in by rigid constraints that produce in essence 'a national intranet,' cut off from anything that might challenge the CCP's monopoly on power" (p. 73). In this study, many interview subjects reported that they had changed their photo-sharing behavior to be more culturally conservative in response to both familial supervision and increased rates of photo-theft for pornographic purposes. This finding and those examples cited by Diamond challenge those who champion liberation technology as a catalyst of lasting empowerment, because traditional cultural norms and repressive forces can adapt to liberalizing technological innovations.

Furthermore, perhaps it is the case that *because* Facebook is—as the first part of this study concludes—an authentic public space, its initially liberalizing qualities cannot be sustained in the long term. In other words, if Facebook is truly just an extension of the social environment in which users interact in the offline world, then it is logical that it may evolve to reflect similar cultural limitations to those women face offline. This implies that for a liberation technology to be truly impactful, it must create an environment or a tool of leverage that is exclusive to the community it aims to empower. A study of online forums

for women, for example, as well as other social media platforms that exclude men, would be helpful to explore this particular implication.

The tentative conclusions from this study should also be explored further through new studies that expand and diversify the number of subjects interviewed. Not only should young women be interviewed about how they consider and use Facebook, but also young men and parents of Facebook users. The selection bias apparent in this study can be partially mitigated through interviews with a sample of interviewees from many different urban and rural regions of Morocco, as well as greater efforts to interview Facebook users who rarely leave their homes. Additionally, future research on this topic can benefit from a time series analysis of how female Facebook use changes over time, in comparison to use of other popular social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram.

An important question that arises from this study is whether or not female social empowerment facilitated by social media platforms will translate into social empowerment in the offline world. That is, does empowerment online become empowerment offline? Puente and Jiménez (2011) argue that liberation online is insignificant unless it is capable of affecting women offline, "involving physical bodies and human agency" (p. 48). Certainly such a transfer of agency is possible, as the sharing of experiences facilitated by social media platforms can assist women to unite, organize and mobilize according to shared interests. While many have studied the organizing role of Twitter in the Arab Spring Revolutions demonstrates this mechanism in terms of political empowerment, little research exists on the effect of social media on women's offline *social* empowerment. Another study that compares the offline social practices of women who use Facebook to

those who do not use the site is necessary to explore this important question of social empowerment transferability between online and offline environments.

Finally, if social media sites that are inclusive to all individuals cannot sustain long-term independence from offline cultural norms and limitations, then these platforms lack the potential to create cultural change in Morocco that is necessary to reflect the legal progress of the revised family code (as discussed in the chapter I). More work must be done to understand the catalysts of social change in Moroccan society, because only then can we design policies and technologies to best spur long lasting social empowerment for the women of Morocco.

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