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Using Online Platforms for Political Communication in Bahrain Election Campaigns

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ABSTRACT

The rise of SNS facilitated politicians with new opportunities to communicate directly with voters. Especially during election campaigns. Twitter provides female politicians with a space to exercise their political tasks beyond traditional media, especially in some Arab countries. Based on the framing theory, this study aims to identify how the female politicians in Bahrain utilised Twitter to present themselves for Parliamentary election campaigns in 2018. The researchers scrutinised the phenomenon using a thematic analysis of $n = 263$ tweets posted by two Bahraini female candidates. Results revealed that although politicians largely preferred Twitter in election campaigns to reinforce support and mobilisation for political engagement, two selected candidates lacked interaction with their supporters. Thus, the researchers concluded that the Bahraini female politicians have a long way to represent themselves in digital media politics as men widely benefit from personalisation more than females.

Keywords: Election campaigns, female political candidates, political communication, political interaction, Twitter

INTRODUCTION

Politics and digital media are largely inseparable. By offering a direct and free flow of communication between the political parties, policymakers, and the public, digital networks improve political activities (Fountaine, 2017; Kruikemeier, 2014) as digital media has advanced how politicians communicate and integrate with their

supporters/voters. Earlier, the connectivity was somehow indirect, managed by several media filters, which still play a vital role in elections. Nevertheless now, the flow of information is continuous and direct, without less barriers (Coelho et al., 2017). This change affected political communication, benefitted social networking sites (SNS) at every level because political parties embraced SNS as an important platform to share and receive political messages and awareness (Ahmed et al., 2016; Kruikemeier, 2014).

Digital media strengthened the presence and visibility of political tycoons worldwide (Methi, 2014). Political parties largely prefer social media to meet their political goals, as in large democratic states, political groups feel communicating with the public is a fundamental part of their political proceedings (Fountaine, 2017; Kruikemeier, 2014). Politicians and their parties tend to highlight the political discourse on traditional media platforms. However, today this process is more disciplined, organised, improved, and capable of meeting certain political objectives (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). SNS give new dimensions to communication, and politicians took full advantage (Coelho et al., 2017; Fountaine, 2017). SNS are used for political purposes, enhancing online and real-life political participation, especially during the election. Citizens who have access to political parties and political information tend to be a part of their activities thus, ensuring active participation, particularly in election campaigns (Fountain, 2017).

Thus, this study attempts to understand how and to what extent female politicians in Bahrain portrayed themselves during election campaigns in 2018 through Twitter. The first section involves a brief comprehensive review of the online media in political communication and its increased usage during electoral campaigning. The second section cited relevant literature highlighting the framing theory and social media usage in politics. Then, the third section involves the methodological techniques applied for the data gathering and analysis process. Finally, the fourth section contains a discussion on results, practical implications, and study limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing Theory

The framing theory supports the basic proposition of this study as it describes the framing process in terms of "temporary and spatial bonding of the interactive messages" that regulates the communication (Bateson, 1972) and the selection of "some aspects of a perceived reality" and emphasis such content (Entman, 1993). Media framing indicates perceiving and interpreting the media content, specifically news, in terms of the familiar context. The media framing theory describes how Media delivers content with narrowed and pre-planned contextualisation (Arowolo, 2017). Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) describes it as a tenuous bridge between media agenda-setting and the framing of the message. The media content is created under certain textual and visual structures that ensure decoding inside

an axis of "thought" (Entman, 1993). The power of media messages to influence the audience's perception by creating certain frames that further shape up opinion, e.g., during the elections (Rempoutzakos, 2017).

Scheufele (1999) considered media framing as a social construction and fabrication of social realities. One of the supportive notions can be derived from McQuial's classification of media research in terms of its effects into four stages. Stage 1 continued from the early 1920s to the late 1920s, when media content was highly framed with the strategic framing of political propaganda during World War I. Stage 2 ended in the 1960s when researchers revised the existing media effects on political perceptions. Stage 3 was initiated in the 1970s to search for new strong media effects. Finally, stage 4 was shifted from merely attitudinal changes to the cognitive effects and changes. Consequently, we feel that framing needs to be further examined based on social constructivism in every region.

Today, the framing of media content is a widespread phenomenon, especially during elections. The coverage content is mainly based on conflicts and self-representation rather than the policy debate (O'Malley et al., 2012). Research has focused on media framing with the three central questions: (1) How does the news content frame the political process (elections) that alter the public opinion, (2) How do advocacy groups, politicians, and political parties active dominate media to polish their image and frame the relevant matters in a particular manner, and (3) How do audience actively acquire that information, and further shape their perceptions accordingly (Pan & Koskcki, 1993).

Particularly through SNS, political content is especially mediated to meet certain political goals. Such platforms provide a digital architecture enabling the users to generate, frame, and share the content to fulfil their objectives. For example, political candidates/actors intend to use their social media accounts during elections and follow the strategic communication process (Fountain, 2017; Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). Online interaction between politicians and the public is another major strategy to run political campaigns where politicians and their thoughts, opinions and often demonise their competitors as digital media has become the cornerstones for a transparent and strong democratic process (Zhang & Song, 2018).

During elections campaigns, mainstream media platforms particularly, social media, perform their duty to persuade the audience and influence their perceptions (Arowolo, 2017; Scheufele, 1999; Ziani et al., 2014). Youssef (2020) indicted that SNS are commonplace to share and disseminate political information directly from the government or political entities. As a result, political communication and framing are comparatively more easy and efficient benefits for the political parties as political parties, and other organisations frame their message to gain personal political interest. Mass media play a fundamental role to connect political parties with the public by using strategic media policies (Fountaine,

2017). Based on several political themes, media frames determine the effectiveness of the campaigns and campaign messages (Muñiz et al., 2018). Besides traditional media, SNS also enable political parties to regulate their campaigns on their own. They allow them to strategically interact with the supporters to generate effective political debates (Sahly et al., 2019). The impacts of political messages are subtle (Jiménez, 2017), and these impacts are the desired outcomes that politicians aim to gain by using SNS as an interactive platform for political campaigning (Lin, 2016).

Social Media and Politics

SNS facilitate the self-expression and dissemination of personal claims. Politicians get opportunities to interact with the public and improve their political communication. Different politicians and their groups are interlinked, openly representing their personalities and opinion (Calderaro, 2018). Turnšek and Jankowski (2012) examined the use of social media for political purposes and found that YouTube was among one of the most preferred SNS by politicians. However, CNN broadcasted the greatest number of political news and special bulletin news regarding politicians revealing SNS use for political interaction among all the channels. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) also analysed SNS for political display in the U.S and found that most political parties preferred SNS for political communication purposes, with Twitter being comparatively more preferred than Facebook.

As SNS have transformed the way people communicate, the interaction between political parties and the public have also reached another level (Kruikemeier, 2014). Yunus (2013) validated this in Turkey to raise political awareness and meet the desired political goals and found that different socio-political movements determined SNS use for political purposes. Data revealed that locals are highly interested in staying connected to political leaders and sharing political information. This usage is also facilitated by the ease of access which helps the political tycoons frequently reach the public. Methi (2014) investigated the use of SNS for political purposes in India and found that most Indian politicians prefer SNS, especially during the elections.

Similarly, Hečková (2016) scrutinised the elements of SNS messages by politicians during the elections worldwide. They revealed that the political messages contain mainly three elements: Persuasion, ideology, and propaganda. Finally, Bossetta (2018) analysed SNS use during the 2016 U.S presidential elections for campaigning purposes. Based on selected Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat posts and interviewed three prominent digital consultants who worked during the elections, the politicians mainly used Twitter and Facebook for political campaigning aspirations.

Furthermore, Shami and Ashfaq (2018) examined Twitter and Facebook for political purposes helping to sustain a friendly relationship between the politicians and the public. They concluded that the role of SNS

are strategic to meet the political ambitions by maintaining the political communication as these platforms are interactive and offer two-way communication facility enabling direct communication as public relations in a political process have an explicit significance. Moreover, the exchange of symbols and messages through digital media has greatly benefitted the political parties that bring important outcomes for the political system.

Table 1

A brief overview of studies concerning SNS, politics, and self-representations of female politicians

Author & Date	Research Design/ Methodology	Description
Turnšek and Jankowski (2012)	A quantitative study, content analysis	YouTube was preferred by political parties to share the elections-related videos. News channels, i.e., CNN also focused primarily on the political content.
Yunus (2013)	Cross-sectional study, field interviews, and surveys	Opposition parties largely prefer SNS to reinforce political activities. Many socio-political movements took place in Turkey due to direct and framed content transmission between political parties and the public.
Shami and Ashfaq (2018)	Review of relevant theoretical concepts	The use of social media is strategic to meet political goals. Political Public Relations are an important determinant of political success.
Stier et al. (2018)	Cross-sectional study, survey method	Social media-based political campaigns are effective, based on debates about salient social issues. This two-way communication process helps the political parties to meet their agendas during the electoral process.
Winfrey and Schnoebelen (2019)	Quantitative, qualitative, and rhetorical methods	Women took an active role in the political campaigning process. Although the media also disseminated stereotypes about female candidates, still their role remained prominent and beneficial.
Bostanci (2019)	Cross-sectional study, survey method	Unionist women used social media to disseminate details about political protest and their personal opinion. This usage determined the effectiveness of their political activism.

Women Activism, Digital Media, and Self-Presentation

The political reformation and development programs in a state depend on the contributions made by men and women. The close attention to fair participation is based on the idea that no society can progress without equal socioeconomic and political rights to both genders (Winfrey & Schnoebelen, 2019). If rights are fairly distributed, more opportunities for progress are inevitable (Salih et al., 2013). OpCit Research (2013) examined the self-regulation of media campaigns by female politicians, the potential barriers, and the capability of SNS to remove these barriers. Findings revealed that almost all women politicians preferred traditional and new media; still, the campaigning through SNS platforms was significant. Moreover, female politicians also revealed growing interest in using SNS to run their political campaigns for availing better opportunities to increase political support and engagement (Evans & Clark, 2016; Winfrey & Schnoebelen, 2019).

Sreberny (2015) discussed the importance of SNS as an important source to advance women's political activism by providing them opportunities to know their rights and raise their voices. As a result, individual voices are amplified, and women being political activists, gain explicit attention (AlSalem, 2016). For instance, famous tweets by Mona Seif and Gigi Ibrahim to condemn military trail against the public, Lina Ben Mhenni's Facebook page to discuss the Tunisian war,

and Olfa Riahi's remained some prominent examples of women's political interest and activism in the region. In addition, Suiter (2015) investigated the use of SNS for political campaigning during the 2013 elections by the Irish female politicians, and results revealed that the majority of the politicians preferred to use both SNS due to ease of access and communication as well as to reinforce support and mobilisation for political engagement.

Furthermore, Stier et al. (2018) analysed SNS use by candidates during the German 2013 elections and found that the candidates primarily shaped political communication by using such platforms as communication mediators. Also, the textual analysis model indicated that the majority of the posts contained discussions between politicians and the public about salient social issues. Finally, Bostanci (2019) analysed the women's political activism through SNS during Gezi Park protests in Turkey and revealed that unionist women frequently used their SNS accounts to disseminate personal protest opinions about the political scenarios.

Likewise, Winfrey and Schnoebelen (2019) examined the role of women in political campaigns and reinforcing gender stereotypes through them via analysing n=133 relevant studies and found that despite gender stereotypes, women took active participation in the online campaigning process. Thus, the role of female politicians was highly acknowledged regarding their gender stereotypes to bring equality in the overall political process. Therefore,

SNS are seen to facilitate both men and women politicians to practice freedom of expression and politics. Furthermore, the SNS play a vital role in mediating the political communication between the politicians and the public, particularly for women politicians. Thus, SNS can somehow equalise their role's political representation and self-regulation (Carroll & Fox, 2014).

Bahrain General Elections 2018

The general elections were held in Bahrain from November-December 2018 to elect the 40 members of representatives. The electoral process consisted of two rounds: The first round took place on November 24th, 2018, and the second was on December 1st, 2018. The elections were based on "sham" as they included refraining the dissolved opposition members from running.

Moreover, record Bahraini women took part and elected as a member of the Parliament. During the first round, Fawzia Zainal and Fatimah Abbas won their seats. However, during the second round, Sawsan Kamal, Masuma Abdulrahim, Zainab Abdulameer, and Kaltham Abdulkareem won the seats in the national assembly. Thus, we assume that women in Arab, particularly Bahrain's political decision process, are newcomers. It could result from the Arab political 2011 uprisings, which led to a large representation of women in legislation and political systems (Shalaby, 2018). For instance, during uprisings in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen, Arab women actively participated and remained prominent. Their contribution was also motivated by

a long-term absence of women in Arab political scenarios and certain socio-political inequalities (AlSalem, 2016; Elareshi & Ziani, 2019). They took part in protests along with men to raise voices against discrimination, despotism, and absolutism. They wanted to establish a new, improved society with several socioeconomic and political improvements (Salih et al., 2013).

Following the other Arab countries, Bahraini women have increased socioeconomic improvement due to their collective efforts besides men. Moreover, Bahrain is an Islamic state rapidly moving towards modernism to balance gender roles and contribution regarding the State's progress (Aljishi, 2018). Consequently, this study examines how Bahraini political women self-presenting themselves in 2018 election campaigns. The research question is, therefore, concerned with exploring political women in Bahrain express themselves as to how do Bahraini women politicians self-frame themselves on Twitter in terms of (a) Twitter presence/tweet type, (b) the tone, (c) self-presentation, (d) susceptibility, and (f) the preoccupations of the local candidate?

METHOD

During the 2018 parliamentary elections, to identify the patterns of female political campaign's self-representation on Twitter, the study analysed the official tweets of two candidates. The selection of these candidates was based on the highest number of followers on their Twitter accounts. These selected candidates had prior experience in electoral marketing, as they were previously

nominated in the Bahrain Parliament elections in 2014. The first candidate appears as a young-*liberal* woman named Roua Al-Hayki (@Rouaalhayki), who won the 2014 elections for the 6th constituency in the Northern governance with 61.30 per cent votes. Roua Al-Hayki was a former deputy in the Bahraini Parliament. Her background is more related to development strategies and the business consultation sector. Roua joined Twitter in September 2009 and has 2,529 followers and following 775 (4,494 tweets).

The second candidate appears as a mid-aged-*conservative* woman named Fawzia Zainal (@fawziazainal5), who had previously been campaigned for the election in 2006 and 2014 but did not win. In 2018, Fawzia re-joined the 2018 parliamentary elections (as an independent candidate for the fifth constituency in the southern governance) with the Royal Court and the Supreme Council for Women. She won the election (53.47 per cent votes) and became the first woman to lead her constituency in Bahrain. However, her background is more linked with conventional and new media experience as she also worked in national television and radio. Based on the Twitter account, Fawzia joined Twitter in October 2014 and has 1,097 followers and 160 (650 tweets).

Unite of Analysis

We conducted a thematic content analysis of the gathered data that helps to represent the data descriptively. As compared to a formal content analysis, Thematic content analysis is limited only to textural data. Therefore, we conducted a qualitative analysis of all the two candidates' official tweets tweeted/retweeted from October 20th to November 23rd, 2018. We manually captured all the tweets (including retweets, Twitter-based replies, and tweets linked to other social media platforms, e.g., YouTube or Instagram) of both candidates' Twitter, which was later analysed. Table 2 summarises the selected unit of analysis in the current study:

A total number of n=263 tweets were gathered and further analysed using thematic analysis highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006) and followed the designated five phases of thematic analysis outlined by Fountaine (2017) (Table 2). Furthermore, we used the qualitative analysis for analysing tweets through the MAXQDA program specialised for qualitative data analysis (Saillard, 2011).

Table 2

Unite of analysis

Theme	Unite
1	Type of tweet

Table 2 *(Continued)*

Theme	Unite
2	The Tone The language/dialect used
3	Self-presentation

4	Susceptibility
	        Empathy
	        Flattery
	        Family & friendship
	        Low levels of conflict and negativity

5	The preoccupations of the local candidate
	        Election campaign period
	        Social, political, and economic concerns

RESULTS

Regarding how both candidates framed themselves on Twitter during the election campaigns, we found:

Theme 1

Roua had a great involvement in Twitter activities compared to Fawzia. Roua. Notably, Roua had more than doubled tweets than Fawzia (n=191 vs n=65 respectively), while the number of retweets remained close between the two candidates (9 vs 7 respectively). These results also indicated how political candidates remain active on SNS platforms, especially Twitter, highlighting the importance of online platforms in election campaigns (Fountaine, 2017; Kruikemeier, 2014).

Type of Tweet. The overwhelming majority of the tweets were text-type style (including many hashtags), aimed primarily at posting information about campaigning activities. During their campaigns, it is noticed that they did not tweet any clips or videos directly on Twitter; instead, they linked them to other SNS platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. For example, Roua included around n=53 links to video clips on other SNS (e.g., n= 41 clips on YouTube and n=12 clips on Instagram). In contrast, Fawzia included around n=41 links to videos/clips directed to her Instagram profile. Within the videos/clips, Fawzia mainly focused on presenting her electoral program and commenting on the election campaigning events (n=29 clips). Besides, Fawzia also framed herself using the photographs of her meetings with her voters/supporters. Whereas Roua focused on the videos that she published on marketing the practical and field aspects. Here practical and field aspects mainly involved the interventions she made during the previous parliament sessions as she had already succeeded in the previous elections - 24 clips. Also, she much tweeted her interviews and press releases/statements about her achievements.

Although the number of published pictures of Roua (*n*=63) was less than those published by Fawzia (*n*=73), it was clear that Roua invested her online activity in highlighting her role as a former deputy of the Bahraini Parliament. Roua's activities included publishing pictures of her presence in the parliament sessions, discussing and questioning government members, and taking pictures with deputies and political leadership during the gatherings. The remaining pictures, published by Roua, were explicitly based on marketing tactics involving the media interviews published by the local newspapers and electoral banners.

Whereas Fawzia resorted to her photos (*n*=21 photos) representing a fusion of modern and traditional dresses, she intensified her pictures' publication with her constituents. Additionally, Fawzia also retweeted the election campaign banners and remaindering the public about the election dates and her campaign. Thus, the findings supported Golbeck et al. (2010) assumption that politicians use Twitter as a vehicle for self-promotion frames and depict them as busy and committed representatives.

Theme 2: The tone

Most of the candidates' tweets came in a "moderate" or "confident" tone. However, it appears that Roua used more of a political tone with her pitch related to more political nature than Fawzia. Notably, Fawzia was softer in her pitch and kept a delicate tone to communicate with her voters/supporters.

The Language/Dialect Used. Both candidates used a more "standard language" in their tweets. However, on one occasion, the two candidates used slang or dialect language in their tweets. It is an advantage in campaigns when candidates use colloquial or informal language that is attractive to voters and supporters. Using dialect language enables them to get closer and more accessible to the voter's mind and sentiments.

While most of the other tweets appeared in informal language, which is the main language used in Parliament, it seems that the two candidates were keen on using formal and informal language in their election campaigns to show they are competent and can perform their duties by possessing the necessary language tools for Parliamentary work. Unsurprisingly, this is seen as SNS are more about informal platform between the communicators to achieve interactivity, outreach, and campaigning.

Fawzia (Figure 1), compared to Roua, took advantage of using a single retweet in the English language. This tweet was for a journalist who presented her as participating in the elections for the third time and was very close to success in the previous elections against her male opponent. The English language is a smart technique to increase information circulation and news opportunities to reach wider online users who are not Arabic-speaking supporters (Sahly et al., 2019).

Overall, the tone and language used in both tweets were positive and not aggressive;

Figure 1. Fawzia used the English language

the competition between the two candidates was in harmony with the general sphere. It is also worthwhile to mention that the elections in Bahrain are characterised as "calmness" and "respect" between the competing parties (Aljishi, 2018). However, Roua was *daring* in her tweets, and the political experience can explain this she gained during her previous period as a deputy member of the Parliament. Hence, the relevant attitude is a good technique to get voters' attention and interact with them.

Theme 3: Self-Presentation

The two candidates sought to employ tweets in self-representation. Roua published twice as much as Fawzia (10 vs 5, respectively). In such a matter, while Fawzia was more *accurate* and *clearer* on the issue of self-presentation. Fawzia explained through

tweets the message or reason for her candidacy and the goals she aspired to regarding candidacy and expressing her confidence in succeeding. Fawzia presented herself within the framework of "a good citizen, who supports the pillars of the democratic march of the country and calls for fraternity".

Within the self-presentation matter, Roua used some famous statements (e.g., Arthur Ashe) to represent herself within the framework of "the strength of the will, determination, and the ability to succeed". She also represented herself within the framework of "success", as expressed from the investigation of "two-thirds of the electoral program in the previous Parliamentary period".

Although she appeared with some uncovered hair (not preferred by the

religious community) and looked like a more liberal woman, she referred to the religious phrase in an attempt to be in the same culture as her voters and supporters. In political communication, success in election campaigns depends on how candidates use their skills and abilities to master political communication, including political public relations with their voters and supporters using both new and old media platforms. However, such exercise might be not fully found in many Arab countries as in the western world, although social media is highly preferred in the Arab region (Elareshi & Ziani, 2019). It could be due to the lack of Arab professional campaign skills in using digital media (Ahmed et al., 2016; Calderaro, 2018; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016), and how to apply such platform in online political communication that is also emphasised by McGregor and Mourao (2016).

Theme 4: Susceptibility (Empathy, Family, and Friendship) Empathy

It was clear that the two candidates employed some techniques during the campaign to appear within the "sympathy for others" framework (Karolak, 2013). This framework symbolises the humane value of the candidates in supporting their campaigns. For example, Fawzia chose to be more sympathised with the daughter's illness of one of her direct competitors to show and highlight her human value. While Roua chose to interact emotionally with the victory of the Representative of Somali origin, Ilhan Omar (@IIhanMN),

in the American parliamentary elections as the U.S. Representative for Minnesota's 5th congressional district (Golden, 2018). Roua told her constituents that "whatever the difficulties, success, and victory are possible" through this sympathy.

Family and Friendship. The two candidates also sought to employ the family and friends' component to interact with their supporters within the framework of "family stability and surrounding friends". In her humorous message tweets, Roua's tendency to link and adopt the framework for surrounding friends and associations by thanking them several times. For example, she sent one tweet and acknowledged the administrative team of a magazine during the campaign. In contrast, Fawzia mentioned the close family relationship (husband, son), extended relatives, and constituency for their support during the campaign, including her voters and supporters.

Flattery. Both candidates also reinforced the likability frame using flattery. At the same time, Roua appeared more experienced than Fawzia in marketing a positive image of herself through the adoption of "compliment" in her speech addressed to the leadership and the local media or journalists and her campaign assistants. In addition, both conveyed their tweets acknowledging the help, contributions, and support of their campaign team, remindful of a good relationship. While as mentioned above, Fawzia praised her husband and son's contributions to her campaign.

Low Levels of Conflict and Negativity.
Under the likability framing, we found almost non-conflict and negativity between the two candidates. It seems that the two candidates' tweets are mainly characterised by a low level of conflict and negativity. The content of their speeches witnessed only acceptable and limited criticism of the performance of some ministers. Fawzia was satisfied with denouncing the acts of sabotage, which her photos were traced in the election campaign. Roua posted just one tweet containing a personalised aspect of negativity as she criticised the Finance Minister. Giving the common competitive races in the election, they neither attacked each other nor used negativity in general. Therefore, the fair competition between the two candidates was nicely captured.

Theme 5: The Preoccupations of the Local Candidate

Election Campaign Period. During the campaign, it appears that it did not have a significant presence in the two candidates' tweets. Instead, it only included simple tweets about the announcement of the candidacy or some interviews with their voters. In contrast, these important virtual spaces could express programs, projects, ideas, and details about daily meetings and reactions throughout the campaign period.

Social, Political, and Economic Concerns.
Within her social concerns, Fawzia focused primarily on the issue of women and their role in society. Additionally, she also expressed her intention to take care of people with special needs, providing services, and initiating new projects to facilitate them at maximum them. On the other hand, Roua focused more on developing more nurseries and improving the education system in general (Figure 2).

Among the political concerns, Fawzia spoke in general about her involvement in supporting the democratic process in Bahrain. In comparison, Roua appeared in

Figure 2. Roua's retweet

more detail in her speech, such as the role of parliamentary oversight work in supporting democracy and the balance strategies. Such concern reflects the accumulation of Roua's political experience and understanding of Parliament's oversight technique in political work.

Regarding the economic concerns, Fawzia made concrete proposals that included developing the local market for her candidacy to serve merchants and shoppers. Besides, she also called for maintaining economic growth and increasing competitiveness. Fawzia further suggested developing legislation that promotes investments. At the same time, Roua focused more on supporting the financial balance, legislations, and the Parliament's supervisory role for spending the budget. These results also highlight the role of social media (Twitter) in political campaigning.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to Hemphill et al. (2013), SNS provide a strong opportunity for politicians to share and exhibit their stance directly and alter supporters' perceptions through framing. These political frames work as communication tools that identify, evaluate, and prescribe the concerns to make sense of only what we watch or read. Additionally, although the issues are related to a certain region or country, geopolitical proximity is another major component that makes social media, particularly Twitter, a distinguished political communication and framing (Ahmed et al., 2019). Hence, we also found

self-representation frames widely used by the Bahraini female candidates to represent themselves on Twitter.

The analysis revealed a greater attendance of Roua over Fawzia in terms of tweets. Saraswati (2018) states that with the rise of SNS, political communication is remarkably increased. Especially during the elections, politicians pay special consideration to SNS usage for communicating and keeping themselves connected with their supporters. Using clips and video links also indicated that Fawzia preferred to use Instagram too. At the same time, Roua divided her online activity between Instagram and YouTube, which provided her with a more active role on the SNS. These results are consistent with prior research (e.g., Filimonov et al., 2016).

Both candidates used multiple frameworks to frame themselves (e.g., "the good citizen, who supports the pillars of the democratic march for the country and calls for brotherhood", "the strength of will, determination and ability to succeed"). They both also used common methods to attract the voters and appeared within the framework of "sympathetic", "stable surrounded by family and friends", and "loving their leadership to lead their families and assistants", with less tension or negative conflict between the two candidates during the election campaign. Notably, politicians access online media to post their messages directly to the public and increase their online interactivity (Meeks, 2016).

However, the analysis did not clearly show the two candidates' social, economic, and political concerns. Most of their tweets

appeared as general ideas that focused on the role of women in society, meaning that the two candidates did not show a good exercise of SNS. Herrnson et al. (2003) found female candidates focusing on issues other than the public issues, demanding more consideration.

Moreover, Roua relied on her speech and framed herself on her previous parliamentary experience stocks. She adopted her knowledge of using parliamentary oversight tools in political work, as she chose to link her experience with her programs and proposals in her election campaign. In contrast, Fawzia adopted the appearance, as part of her tweets, within the framework of the confident woman who can change and support the path of democracy in her country. It supports what Hečková (2016) assumed that SNS are used in politics for persuasion, ideology, and propaganda.

Although both candidates were effective campaigners, they failed to communicate with their audiences due to a lack of interaction from their followers (e.g., retweets, likes, messages). Politicians resort to digital platforms for a narrowcasting model, where delicately crafted political messages are spread among the discrete groups of audiences. Our results did not support Kruikemeier's (2014) assumption that using Twitter positively affects political candidates by framing themselves as likeable, busy, and capable politicians.

Furthermore, candidates' communication took a one-way direction, even though they used different hashtags. A national newspaper picked up one of Fawzia's tweets in her press conference but received inadequate responses. We do not have a clear explanation of this inadequate response that needs further investigation. One could say that Bahraini female politicians have a long way to represent themselves in such a sphere (SNS) as male candidates still benefit more than female candidates (Meeks, 2016).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study is significant due to its novel topic and methodological approach, although its primary limitations. First, we selected only Twitter and Twitter accounts of only two female candidates, which limits its scope. Second, the study was conducted in Bahrain, which further narrows its generalisability. Finally, the study's qualitative method could be questioned the validity of the issue between quantitative and qualitative research. In closing, other research areas can explore SNS use in political communication campaigns by considering not only Bahraini women but also other female candidates from the Arab world who share a similar political system, e.g., Saudi Arabia, as we need to continue to understand the impact of these platforms on political communication in the Arab world.

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