

**The Role of Social Media in Promoting Women's Rights in Morocco in the
Aftermath of the Arab Spring**

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Abstract

The societal and political changes that have swept Morocco in the last couple of decades have managed to empower large segments of the country's population. Many stereotypes have been shattered, with youth and women becoming the essential drivers for the political and civic changes. Meanwhile, the debate on the role of social media in these reforms has continued to grow significantly across Morocco. Social media have recently been linked with the growing interaction among people around the world and are often seen as new paradigms in communication efficiency. The core of the present article is to examine the role of social media in promoting women's rights in Morocco. In other words, the article questions whether the advent of social media has helped in promoting gender equality, and in improving justice and democracy in the country namely in the aftermaths of the Arab spring. This is done through investigating examples and cases where Moroccan women used social media to advance their agenda of gender equality and democracy promotion. The article starts from the assumption that social media have transformed the situation of women and helped in collaboration with factors such as modernity and the willingness of the government to enhance justice and democracy to greatly advance and push Moroccan women steps forward.

Key words: social media, women, rights, equality, Morocco.

Résumé

Les changements sociétaux et politiques qui ont affecté le Maroc au cours des deux dernières décennies ont réussi à autonomiser de larges couches de la population du pays. De nombreux stéréotypes ont été brisés, les jeunes et les femmes devenant les moteurs essentiels des changements politiques et civiques. Parallèlement, le débat sur le rôle des médias sociaux dans ces réformes a continué de se développer de manière significative à travers le Maroc. Les médias sociaux ont récemment été liés à l'interaction croissante entre les peuples du monde entier et sont souvent considérés comme de nouveaux paradigmes en matière d'efficacité de la communication. L'essentiel du présent article consiste à examiner le rôle des médias sociaux dans la promotion des droits des femmes au Maroc. En d'autres termes, l'article se demande si l'avènement des médias sociaux a contribué à promouvoir l'égalité des sexes et à améliorer la justice et la démocratie dans le pays, notamment au lendemain du printemps arabe. Cela se fait par le biais d'enquêtes sur des exemples et des cas dans lesquels des femmes marocaines ont utilisé les médias sociaux pour faire avancer leur programme de promotion de l'égalité des sexes et de la démocratie. L'article part du postulat que les médias sociaux ont transformé la situation des femmes et aidé en collaboration avec des facteurs tels que la modernité et la volonté du gouvernement d'améliorer la justice et la démocratie afin de faire avancer les femmes marocaines.

Mots-clés: médias sociaux, femmes, droits, égalité, Maroc

Introduction

In the last few years, social media have drastically noticed a wide range of use among people around the world and are often utilized as a new paradigm in getting access to information. They have become an integral part of the individual's daily life in a globalized context. For instance, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others provide platforms where people worldwide meet for communication and exchange information, regardless of the continental and regional distances that may separate them physically. Their significance in the modern world makes them the new trend of communication. They have excelled in changing the traditional tools of communication into more sophisticated ones where a person can interact with another easily. Recently, a crucial development in the use of social media is witnessed in diverse disciplines and spheres, including the area of human rights.

The diversity of changes occurring in the Arab world and Morocco is no exception plays an extraordinary role in stimulating the emergence of a new period of digitalized communication. Social media have played a role in accelerating changes, though not able to dissolve problems and differences (Morozov, 2011). Additionally, the emergence and development of social media are a token of the growing of citizen journalism, which is expected to work towards covering for what the traditional media has not been able to cover.

Indeed, the role of social media in promoting women's rights and in empowering them in the Arab world in general and Morocco in particular has mainly increased with the first sparks of the Arab Spring that lit the MENA region starting early 2011. In Morocco, social media have become a pillar tool by acting as a change agent and a means of gender equality. It is through social networking that many gender injustices and inequalities are now addressed. In this paper, the bulk concern is to investigate this fact. In other words, the objective is to see whether the utilization of social media, namely Facebook, twitter and YouTube has successfully done what traditional media could not do regarding the promotion of justice and women's rights in Morocco. Of interest is to ascertain the various manners that social media have served, and continue to serve the promotion of women's rights in Morocco. To do this, we rely mainly on women's movement use of social media to demand specific rights in the aftermaths of the Arab Spring in Morocco. To explain, the paper makes use of data collected through tracing three cases in which Moroccan women used social media to achieve their objectives and influence change and reforms in the post Moroccan spring movement . This has been done by following women's movement activism through social media and the impact they have had in terms of changing laws and influencing policies

To this effect, the paper is divided into four main sections in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction lays the foundation of the study by introducing the reader to the topic and the main elements that the researchers address in the paper. The first and second sections of the paper discuss respectively how social media have become an influencing means of communication mode namely in the Arab World and how social media has turned into an efficient arena to discuss and defend women's rights. The third part of the paper focuses on cases in which women in Morocco used social media to address and advance specific rights. The focus is on tracing cases to instigate constitutional reforms, criminalize violence against women and support Soulaliyyate women. An analysis and discussion of these specific cases is provided in section four of the paper. The paper ends up with a conclusion that includes in its turn recommendations that represent the final views about the research.

Social Media and Communication

Social media generally refers to the use of information communication technologies in order to allow individuals to communicate. It is a reasonably new form of communication that does not have only a communicative purpose, but political, cultural and social purposes. In contrast to the traditional media, which is based on the use of different tools to communicate, new social media utilize highly digitalized and accessible communication techniques. The latter are made possible by the world web technologies that permit users to get access to the information and exchange them over established social networks in opposition to the broadcast media (i.e., television, radio and newspapers). Social network sites have emerged as social forums through which individual users can interact. For instance, they may share information with their friends, relatives and professionals. Users can also form other relations and dispatch ideas and opinions or respond to what others have shared.

Social Media have become an influencing means of communication in the Arab world and in Morocco in particular. Many people join social network services to communicate. In opposition to the traditional means of communication, web-based sites are platforms used to send quick messages to be received by the recipient before even being verified to be true or not; they managed to make the news travel the world and reach out people in the entire universe. Therefore, unlike traditional media, new social media provide a room for people to freely interact and communicate with minimal government control over the content being spread and dispatched. In other words, the fast circulating messages are hardly controlled and tracked down by the state. Added to this, new social media give the individuals the opportunity to voice out their feelings without the fear of being victimized (Sytaffel, 2011). This way, the information dispatched online serve as an eye opener to other people in the world. For example, during the Arab uprisings, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube recorded significant subscriptions. To put it differently, the Arab world experienced a massive change through the use of social networks, which have helped in breaking the obstacle of fear and transgressing the limits imposed by authoritarian systems. Thus, social media turned to be a part of decision making instead of being a career for events. In a word, with their ability to shorten distance and shrink time, social media have made the world a global village allowing people the ability to interconnect and interact easily.

More importantly, the rise of the information and communication technologies namely with the development of social media has changed the world in many other ways, including the way activists use them to claim and defend their rights, influence public policies and redress the balance between different stakeholders. In other words, apart from their ability to rapidly spread information, social media eased the process of communicative political participation which paved the ground for more subversive ways of networking and social and political connections; with social media and their powerful mechanism they offer (facebook, twitter and youtube”), activists could mobilize, get organized and inspire protests against injustices and grievances and also bring their cases to international attention. Added to this, the decreasing cost of the mobile phones and their dimension from the point of sharing materials such as video and photograph in addition to the rapid proliferation of the internet has not only facilitated communicating the different forms of activism but as also, compared to other mass communication tools, helped the activists to produce the content of the media themselves and make others including the government aware of their grievances. Therefore, all over the world, social media have become a highly effective megaphone to disfranchised people and the activists who adopt their cases. With the power of words and articles being posted and with all the vibrant messages and notes delivered and shared , social media have

become extremely subversive and vital in influencing policies, changing laws and instigating reforms and helped in inspiring others from all over the world to join in virtually (Ennaji 2016). Notably, social media are expected to play an essential role in promoting social activism. In this regard, the main concern of this paper is to show how Moroccan women's use of social media has helped in getting more rights.

Social Media and Women's Issues in the Arab World

Social media are now receiving a substantial level of attention as a means through which women's issues are vulgarized and rights are defended. This results from the enlarged ability of women to voice out their demands and asks for their rights in one place. By November 2011, the number of women who use social media sharply rose. Tomlin (2012) in her article in the Huffpost blog asserted that 36 million women users were related to Facebook and Twitter during this period. Tomlin indicates there is a strong belief, among women in the Arab world region, that social media have an important role in the enhancement of their participation in political, economic and social aspects of life. This, Tomlin believes, permits women to acquire self-expression as a means to promote social change. To use her own words, Tomlin says that "Women are so embedded in social media in their lives that they use it seamlessly in their campaigns,"

Women's rights organizations and human rights activists argue that social media tools act as a medium for vulgarizing women's issues and pressuring the government to react to the problems. That said, with the advent of this new form of technology, it has become easier for women to fight for their rights and therefore to enhance social justice and gender equality between the sexes. Thus, social media function as a tool to run social activism and send provocative messages to the masses by activists calling for change; these include women who find refuge in the online media; they resort to this virtual activism to post messages, launch campaigns that serve their cause, create groups and establish followership in order to promote the women's cause.

Worth mentioning in this regard is the fact that social media have allowed women in the Arab World in general and in Morocco in particular to become leaders of change and activism. This fact was recognized in 2011 when the Nobel Peace Prize Committee decided to reward three women for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women, and for women's rights to full participation and peace-building work. Among the laureates was the Arab woman- Yemini Tawakkul Karman for the first time ever. She is a leading female political activist, who proved that social media are an important figure in Arab women's empowerment and civic engagement. In her acceptance lecture, Karman affirmed that, "the solution to women's issues can only be achieved in a free, democratic society in which human energy is liberated, the energy of both women and men."

The second pertinent example comes from Saudi Arabia. Social media played a crucial role in changing the stagnant women's situation regarding the possibility of women to drive. *The Women2drive campaign* was entirely led by women via social networks. Indeed, the campaign attracted enormous support, brought the injustice of forbidding women from driving in Saudi Arabia to the limelight and even attracted attention of the international community. This online activism has opened the door to public discussion which in its turn created an urgent need for change and reform in 2018. Thanks to the virtual campaign, women in Saudi Arabia are now able to legally drive.

In Egypt, the HARASSmap was launched in December 2010 and re-launched in October 2011. It aimed at raising awareness and dealing with sexual harassment of women in Egypt through an SMS supporting and online mapping system. Different stages took place. On June 21, people blogged about a sexual harassment day using the #ENDSH campaign. In

August 29, they raised awareness about sexual harassment for a safe Eid Holiday. Two other events took place in September and November 2 to secure women's safety against the harasser.

In Morocco, feminist groups and women's organizations have long ago made use of the internet to claim rights, ask for reforms and influence decisions. Importantly enough, the waves of popular sittings and massive demonstrations that swept the country in the wake of the so called Arab Spring calling for the end of dictatorship and corruption, more human rights and freedom of speech, employment and equality among many others, the feminist movement intensified its use of social media to expose and dispatch many human right issues and cases that women in Morocco still suffer from. In other words, through an extensive use of social media networks, Moroccan women seized both the Arab Spring and the easy access to social media to make their voices heard higher, get more rights and engage the masses in debates on women's status and issues. This has been done through creating networks and platforms to launch discussions, organize campaigns and raise awareness among the population for the sake of a better status for women in Morocco. The *CEDAW et Droits des Femmes au Maroc* Facebook pages were created by human rights advocates, both men and women, in Morocco. Their mission is to mobilize feminists and human rights activists to discuss women's issues and to put pressure on the government to adopt strategic measures for combating the gender based inequalities.

Masaktach hashtag (I will not be silent) is bringing out women's personal experiences of harassment and assault. It is another online campaign used by Moroccan women activists to sensitize people about the importance of speaking about gender based violence against women. In other words, the movement aims at raising the voices of Moroccan women, whether they are survivors or women speaking up against other forms of inequality. Another example is a campaign launched in conjunction with the international women's day, which lasted for 16 days by the association *Tahadi for Equality and Citizenship* (ATEC). It is a campaign to fight against sexual harassment in public transportation in various neighborhoods in Casablanca. The campaign was supported by a number of media leaders who considered it a welcome step because of the proliferation of videos and photographs documenting the exposure of women and girls to harassment within the means of transportation. The last example in this regard is the mobile application *Manshoufouch* for electronic reporting of cases of harassment. The purpose of this application is to enable women victims of sexual harassment, rape or any form of gender based violence to seek help. Indeed, the application is considered to be the first of its kind in Morocco to be launched by the *Free Women's Union* in order to monitor cases of violence and breaking the silence concerning this issue. Now by just pressing a button, women can easily report the abuse they may be subjected to and therefore bring aggressors to justice.

In addition to these virtual campaigns and mobile application, this paper provides three other prominent cases to show how women's movement has used social media to push for reforms and change laws. The focus is mainly on mobilizing to instigate constitutional reforms, criminalize violence against women and support Soulaliyyate women.

1.1. Instigating constitutional reforms

Indeed, women's participation in the Moroccan Spring took two main forms. Some joined the Feb20MVT as free, independent and non-affiliated members, while others joined the movement as active members who have accumulated a certain experience of activism in different women's section of the Moroccan political parties or within Moroccan women's movement organizations. Still, both groups had one common objective; boosting rights and liberties of all Moroccans.

As both individuals and groups, Moroccan women have been involved in every aspect of these Feb 20 movement uprisings. They have contributed to create Facebook group pages, contributed to the rise and flourishing of virtual activism through posting their opinions and views on Facebook and twitter pages and blogs, they have also prepared and initiated the demonstrations of the movement (Four of the 14 activists featured in the Feb20 MVT's announcing its creation are young women, asking not for gender equality, but for a representative democracy), encouraged and urged the citizen to take part in the protest, kept informing when and where the meetings and rallies would take place, wrote slogans, shouted in the rallies and marched alongside men, took the front lines to confront the security forces and many of the times served as spokespersons of the movement.

Actually, following these activists on the ground and through social media has shown that these women are young in their age, belong to different social strata, modern in their visibility and come mainly from urban areas. Also, most of them are educated women who are either financially independent or still unemployed graduates. Finally, some of these women hold different ideologies and political orientation while others engage for the first time in their life in a political activism or social protest (Yachoulti 2015). Still, what is worth mentioning in this regard is the fact that though they have engaged in this movement with the purpose of advancing rights and liberties of all Moroccans, many of these young women activists have received threats and opposition because of their activism. Some bitterly said or reported on their Facebook pages or blogs that they received threatening messages via Facebook and phone calls. Others reported that they were warned by their families not to participate in the protest as they would be jailed and beaten by the police. However, despite all this, they continued protesting and being part of the movement core. In their belief, as many expressed during some friendly meetings, any reform or change of the political system would undoubtedly in its turn bring change to their status(Yachoulti 2015).

Indeed, the Moroccan women's active role in Moroccan Arab Spring and their use of social media have secured them gains that are a few in number but significant in terms of content. As a response to the uprisings in general and the active role of Moroccan women in the different stages and section of the Feb20Mvt, King Mohammed VI called upon five women to take part in the Consultative Commission to review the constitution and deliver recommendations for democratic reform. These women are Amina Bouayach, Rajae Mekkaoui, Nadia Bernoussi, Amina Messoudi, and Zineb Talbi. Further, in October 2011, following the reform of the constitution, two laws were adopted with respect to provisions for the participation of women in political life. The first one (Law No. 27-11 adapted in the Chamber of Representatives) establishes a quota of 60 seats reserved for women out of a total of 395 seats, representing 15%. The second (Law No. 29-11 on political parties) stipulates that "all political parties work to achieve a proportion of one-third of women in their governing bodies" (Art. 26). However, the law does not make such a representation obligatory. (Yachoulti 2015). Also, the newly approved constitution incorporates many significant changes concerning Moroccan women. A new section entitled "Fundamental Freedoms and Rights" includes Article 19 which makes both men and women equal citizens before the law (freedom and equality of all citizens and their participation in the political, economic, cultural, and social spheres). In this regard, the state commits itself to working toward the realization of parity and creating an authority for equality and the fight against all forms of discrimination for the purpose of achieving equality between men and women. Article 21 prohibits sexism. Articles 32 and 34 state clearly the rights of women, children, and the disabled. Further down in the constitutional text, we find that Article 59 safeguards these rights and liberties during states of emergency and Article 175 states that these rights cannot be retracted in future constitutional revisions. At first view, one would think that these gains

are limited in number but more scrutiny reveals that the gains not only constitute a significant milestone in the trajectory of gender equality in Morocco, but they also provide an unprecedented official framework for Moroccan women to take future action.

1.2. Criminalizing violence against women

The second example in which women's movement took efficient actions and used social media to advance and defend women's right is the issue of violence. Indeed, the absence of laws that address gender violence including domestic violence and rape in Morocco pushed women's rights organizations to organize a series of protests and events called the — 'Spring of dignity' after the Amina Filali case. Amina Filali, a 16-year-old rape victim, committed suicide in 2012 after being forced to marry her rapist¹. The incident was seized by women activists not only to highlight the lack of laws that protect victims of sexual assault and gender violence, but also to remind the decision makers and the Moroccan public at large of the failure of the law to uphold the *Moudawana*.

Moroccan women's organizations, including *L'Union de l'Action Féminine* (UAF) and *L'Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc-ADFM* supported the call for an end to violence against women and for legislation that would protect women who were assaulted and prosecute the men who assaulted them. Women's movement protests that included organized demonstrations, sit-ins, television, radio and social media campaigns, and press conferences served to educate and raise citizens' social awareness of gender violence as well as lobby for legal reforms. Added to this, the movement published "dozens of articles in newspapers, blogs, forums, and pages such as Webzine, which detailed feminists' outrage at the government's silence, the case became international and a Twitter account was opened on 17 March dedicated to Amina's memory (@RipAmina)" (Sadiqi, 2015). Further, "a petition on the international activism site Avaaz gathered more than 50,000 signatures" (Ibid). As a result "The government finally acknowledged the rape of Amina and Article 475 was amended to the effect that a rapist can no longer escape punishment by marrying his victim and faces a 30-year term of imprisonment" (Ibid). Interestingly, the activism led by women's groups to push the government applies the provisions of the constitution and to stop violence against women has brought some young, new women into the movement (Ibid).

Another case happened in the city of Casablanca. It is about a Moroccan girl being harassed by attackers who tear off her clothes abroad public bus. They also made a video of her experiencing this brutal behavior and shared it on social media. This video created a huge debate among followers and civil society activists who have brought to light the harassment and assaults of women every day on the street. The last example in this respect is that of the female teacher who was attacked by her student in Casablanca. Actually, the videos and photos of the incident have sparked intense debate on social media networks. They created a huge debate demanding better protection from violence against women in the workplace in general and schools in particular.

1.3. Supporting Soulaliyyate women

The third efficient example of using social media to achieve more rights for all categories of Moroccan women is women movement's support to Soulaliyyate women. The term Soulaliyyates "refers to "tribal" women, from both Arabic and Tamazight speaking collectivities that are demanding an equal share compared to men, when their land is privatized or divided" Zakia 2016). In Morocco, the land system is divided into five types or categories. These include *melk* or titled land (they are privately owned by people) ;*Habous* or religious land endowments (they can be leased but not sold) ; *Guich* land (they are granted to members of the military by the monarchy) ;state owned land; and *soulaliyyate or jema'a* (they

are collective tribal land held in trust by the state). This last type which is categorized as *al-aradi al-sulaliyya*, points to a dominant mode of land tenure in which members of an “ethnic” collectivity hold communal rights on the land they inhabit and/or exploit. According to Zakia Salime (2016) “Although communal land could in the past neither be seized nor sold, it could be transferred from fathers to sons over the age of sixteen”. (p.35) She argues that “According to hegemonic understanding of ‘urf’ (customary law), women can only benefit through male relatives. Unmarried women, widows, divorcees — and those with no sons — often face expropriation and become destitute. Many end up living in slums surrounding their communal land”(Ibid.)

Soulaliyates’ fight against exclusion, injustice and discrimination started in the mid-2000s namely when Rkia Bellot - a Soulaliyate from Kenitra-was passed over for land use rights. Her eight brothers exempted her from inheritance claiming that women don’t inherit land in *urf law* (tribal law). Rkia felt exclusion and injustice and, therefore, started a struggle on her own to change tribal laws and win compensation for Soulaliyate women

The ADFM adopted Bellot’s cause in 2007 and later on included other Soulaliyates from Kenitra. ADFM began its journey of helping these Soulaliyates by training them in civic leadership and public speaking. Also, being aware of the illiteracy and deteriorating conditions of these Soulaliyates and in order to push and encourage them to participate in sit-ins and demonstrations in front of Parliament in Rabat, ADFM helped them financially by covering the cost of transportation. Further, as the Soulaliyate land problem is a national one and restricted to women in Kenitra, ADFM expanded its efforts to include Soulaliyate women from all areas of Morocco. It also launched an online petition for a nationwide law to guarantee that Soulaliyate women have inheritance rights to communal land. The law would allow Soulaliyate women who live on communal lands, to have equal access to communal property, farm the land or use it for private means, and to receive fair compensation when communal lands are sold. Interestingly, despite its unconditional support to these women, ADFM strategically and intentionally avoided speaking and doing all the work for these women. For this reason, in each village, ADFM has identified one Soulaliyate woman to act as a liaison between the ADFM and local Soulaliyate women, and left most of the organizing to the local leader.

To further enhance its advocacy strategy to support the claims of Soulaliyate women, ADFM campaigns and national seminars in many parts of Morocco in partnership with other civil society groups to sensitize and make all parts of Moroccan society aware of the problem of Soulaliyate women

Faced by the women’s movement persistent and growing mobilization, the Ministry of the interior issued a third circular in March 2012 (the first was in 2009 and the second was in 2010) ordering local administrations and tribal leaders to recognize the right of Soulaliyates or have their share of the money when communal land is sold. This decision is the culmination of many steps and actions with relevant officials; it also repairs the sense of injustice felt by thousands of women who have tirelessly condemned the archaic law that deprived them of their lands. Zakia Salime (2016) argues that although “these circulars are not to be taken for laws; they still gave the Soulaliyyates enough leverage for their demands”. (P. 38) Like Amina Filali’s case, Soulaliyyate women gained international support and recognition. On a recent visit to Morocco, Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of the UN Women’s Program, delivered a special address to the Soulaliyate women. She said “You, the Soulaliyates, succeeded in mobilizing the media and public opinion against the violation of your rights. I congratulate you for obtaining official recognition of women’s rights” (Cited in Global PostJuly18, 2012).

Analysis and Discussion

It is blatant that social media have managed to give voice to the most marginalized portions of society, notably women. Social media have played an important role in facilitating the enforcement of women's issues into the public agenda. That said, social media are at the forefront in disseminating information regarding different issues as mentioned earlier, which include sexual harassment, early marriage, violence against women, girls' education to name but a few. Different stories in relation to Feb 20 Mvt, to violence against women and soulaliyates rights story were dispatched on social media, a fact which created a huge debate both virtually and on the ground. Many activists voiced their rejection and condemned what happened to these women and called for laws and strict measures to secure their rights and dignity in the public arena. Indeed, Moroccan women's use of social media to defend special cases and secure specific rights has led to both constitutional and legal reforms.

Concerning constitutional reforms, Moroccan women's participation in the Feb20 Mvt has secured them significant constitutional gains. Thanks to the new constitution women are guaranteed "civic and social" equality with men. Previously, only "political" equality was guaranteed, though the 1996 constitution grants all citizens equality in terms of rights and before the law. Added to this, in the new constitution, the state commits itself to working toward the realization of parity and creating an authority for equality and the fight against all forms of discrimination. The purpose is achieving equality between men and women. As already declared, at first view, one would think that these gains are limited in number given the huge discrepancies Moroccan women still suffer from in Morocco but more scrutiny reveals that the gains not only constitute a significant milestone in the trajectory of gender equality in Morocco, but they also provide an unprecedented official framework for Moroccan women to take future action.

As for the legal reforms, five years later, in September 2018, a new law criminalizing all forms of violence against women came into effect after the bill had been approved in the parliament seven months before. The new law offers a variety of protections for women who report harassment or violence in Morocco, bans forced marriage and imposes tougher penalties on perpetrators and fines from 2000 to 10, 000 Moroccan Dirhams. This new law is regarded to be an advanced step for women in Morocco since it allows them legal protection from violent acts that constitute forms of sexual harassment, aggression, sexual exploitation or mistreatment. It also allows victims of violence to be offered support. As to Soulaliyate women, despite the absence of a clear law that protects their right, the Ministerial circular issued a third circular in March 2012 as the first step to get their full right to have their share of the money when communal land is sold.

Indeed, social media have become the mirror of women's issues in Morocco. They have successfully helped in rapidly displaying the news and updates about women victims of violence and the soulaliyates. Their influential power helped in boosting the debate and constructing a new way of viewing and dealing with women's issues beyond stereotypes and stigmatization. On the one hand, women's active participation in Feb 20Mvt both virtually and on the ground allowed them change the traditional discourse and prejudices about women and their roles in society. On the other hand, they have allowed the feminists and social activists create a counter resistant discourse to challenge the mainstream media and advocate for women's rights and agency in a more independent and modern context. As a result, women are no more subordinate and passive citizens. They become able to trespass their private sphere to the public one.

Cyber cafés, as popular meeting places, turn to be functional in the sense that they allow women's accessibility to the public sphere. They have created an environment of

exchange. Because it is a space for free expression, today everyone can become his/her own media or create his/her own social networks like the influences that are becoming more and more important to women.

Literary, in every city, one would assume the availability of groups or women's groups that have recognized the importance of social media in addressing women's issues. Through social media, everything is discovered, all women's issues are being discussed and more rights are being taken. In other words, women's groups have recognized that their activism is more acknowledged if it is disseminated via virtual platforms. Therefore, women's groups are continuously using social media to reach their ends, making it possible to campaign for women's issues such as more representation of women in the political arena, promotion of women's rights in the constitutional law of 2011, reforming of laws to reduce gender inequalities, and advocacy for more equal rights for women. In a nutshell, social media have helped in providing information on women's rights as well in gaining right in the name of gender equality and democracy promotion

Conclusions and Recommendations

As a way of conclusion, no one can deny the fact that social media and networking have become a tool for communication that transcends geography. The growth in the use of the social platforms represents a shift in the trend of dealing with the information. Therefore, it plays a pertinent role in mobilizing and shaping the opinions of its users as quickly as possible in comparison with the mainstream media tools. This means that social media have a great potential in influencing how news are transmitted across the region.

Access to social media to send and receive information is vital for women's empowerment. For instance the findings showed that all activists are now using social media because of their efficiency and ability to reach the maximum of people in a very short period. A case in point is Moroccan women's use of social media to influence and instigate constitutional reforms, criminalize violence against women and defend Soulatiyates' rights. Thus, social media are viewed as a tool changing the gender inequalities in Morocco.

To pursue the process of women's empowerment, there is an urgent need to address the following recommendations in order to achieve pertinent networking between each other to promote the rights of women. They include the following:

- Creation of an internet based platform presenting information and communication on women's issues across the country in various facets of their lives (i.e., political, economic, cultural, social and environmental.)
- The establishment and development of partnerships between different actors in order to use ICT for the benefit of women and their social, economic and political empowerment.
- The organization of academic conferences in order to highlight the importance of social media in promoting women's issues.
- The organization of awareness programs targeting women all over the country to train them and disseminate information using websites and social networks.

Notes

¹-Indeed the controversial Article475 of the Moroccan penal code states that a man who rapes a minor can escape punishment for rape if he marries the victim. This clause is usually interpreted as a way to compromise between the victim and the perpetrator to make the victim girls "corrupted" by rape avoids public shame and being ostracization from society.

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