The Role of ICT in Empowering Women in Arab Countries

A Literature Review
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Agenda

• Scope
• Social Status of women in Arab Societies
• Background on Arab countries (Arab women, labor participation, and education)
• The Conceptual framework (The gender divide, Arab women empowerment and the digital divide)
• Main findings from the literature review
• Conclusion and suggestions for future research
Scope

- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have contributed greatly in the development of modern society.
- However, Women have benefited much less from these advantages compared to men, as indicated by research from USA and EU.
- There are certain indicators or factors that could help explain the gender divide when it comes to ICT usage and adoption.
- The present literature review considers this problem and is regarded as an introduction to apply empirical analysis to the role of ICT in empowering women in Arab countries.
Social Status of Women in Arab societies

• Women are treated subordinate to men

• In many Arab countries, women and girls are denied access to Internet Cafes and clubs.

• Traditions greatly undermine the role of women in Arab societies.
Arab women, Labor Participation and Education 1/2

• Arab World has the lowest women participation in Labor force. In Egypt, this participation has increased from 21.8% in 2002 to 22.3% in 2006.

• On sectoral level, in 2006, 18.5% of working women were employed in the education sector, consisting 40% of the total employees in this sector in Egypt.
Arab women, Labor Participation and Education 2/2

• Women literacy levels have improved three fold, since the expansion of education across the Arab world in the 1970s.
• Female working force has been expanding in the Arab world over the last three decades.
• However, political participation remains very limited.
The Gender Divide 1/2

• According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2008, the Gender Gap is measured by 4 indicators: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment and health and survival. This constitutes the gender gap index.

• Kuwait ranks as one of the top performers in closing the gender gap, while Yemen occupies the last place.

• Unfortunately the results of this report indicate that the Middle East and North Africa region occupy the last place compared to the rest of the world’s regions, having closed approximately 58% of its gender gap.
Finally, the World Bank demonstrates that substantial investments have dramatically reduced the gender gap in education and health,

However, the gender gap in economic opportunity remains the widest in the world, with only about one third of women participating in the workforce.
Arab women empowerment and the digital divide 1/2

• Zubai (2003) attributed the wide gender digital divide in the Arab countries to the “7Cs”. Cost, capacity, content, creativity, culture, conflict and censorship.

• Zubai (2003) suggested overcoming these challenges of 7Cs by focusing more on effective use of ICT.

• There are 7 pillars for the effective use of ICT for women, which include, for example, the suitable telecommunications infrastructure for women, the appropriate devices to conduct certain jobs, the software, IT support and service support required, the effective content designed to serve the needs of the Arab women.
Arab women empowerment and the digital divide 2/2

• In another paper, information revolution was regarded as a way to provide possibilities to confront difficult problems of poverty, inequality to achieve gains in human and economic development.

• It was suggested that policies would protect and promote the rights of women to participate in development.

• Finally the paper concludes that women have to take on the responsibility of defining the dimensions of good life and that they play a more proactive role in today’s information society.
Main findings from the literature review:

- The early teenage years form an important phase that reflects how these young people perceive other important contacts with friends, and neighbors views about them. (Sainz & Lopez 2009)

- Girls tend to consider computers and technology as incompatible with social skills, which are supposed to be an important requirement for women to achieve professional and personal development.

Some models used to explain this trend:

1. The Model of Task achievement (Sainz & Lopez 2009)
2. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis & Bagozzi ‘89)
3. Utility in the acceptance model (Verdegem & Verhoest 2009)
4. The heterogeneity models (Rosenberg 1972)
Other significant factors that influence computer attitude 1/2

- The nature of the occupation of the mother is an important factor in ICT adoption in general. (Rosenberg 1972)
- The geographical location and place of origin form another factor that is important, as social relationships play an important role in rural environments. (Sainz 2009)
- The social class that is most probably related to income level is another important factor (OECD 2005)
- The gender factor, which implies that men having more access and using ICT more than women. (Verdegem&Verhoest 2009)
- The age factor implies that the increased age is associated with lower levels of access, limited modes of use and patterns of connecting. (V&V)
- The education factor implies that the lower levels of education correspond to divides related to access and use of ICT. (V&V)
- The family structure factor, which implies that the presence of school age children tends to increase contacts with ICT.
- Race, urban / rural location, cultural participation etc.
Other significant factors that influence computer attitude 2/2

• ICT adoption is divided into ICT adoption in the workplace and at home. ICT diffusion is easily explained in the workplace.

• On the other hand, few studies examine ICT adoption at home and explain that the key determinants to ICT diffusion at home appear to be influenced by other factors such as family structure (material status, presence of children, age of household head).
Conclusion and Suggestions for future research

• The contribution of this research is manifested in the review of the literature concerning the different factors that impact women’s ICT adoption especially in the Arab countries.

• As extension to this study, I suggest to conduct an empirical study using parametric techniques, to determine exactly which of these factors impact women’s adoption of ICT in one of the Arab countries, namely Egypt.

• This will help to suggest the most effective policy to promote the role of ICT in empowering women in Arab countries.
Thank you