

International Communication Gazette

<http://gaz.sagepub.com/>

Internet political discussions in the Arab world: A look at online forums from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan

Eisa Al Nashmi, Johanna Cleary, Juan-Carlos Molleda and Melinda McAdams

International Communication Gazette 2010 72: 719

DOI: 10.1177/1748048510380810

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://gaz.sagepub.com/content/72/8/719>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *International Communication Gazette* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/content/72/8/719.refs.html>

Internet political discussions in the Arab world: A look at online forums from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan

the International
Communication Gazette
72(8) 719–738

© The Author(s) 2010

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1748048510380810

gaz.sagepub.com



Eisa Al Nashmi
Johanna Cleary
Juan-Carlos Molleda
Melinda McAdams

University of Florida, USA

Abstract

This content analysis examines postings on four Internet political discussion forums based in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt. The study of Arabic-language sites concludes that the discussions cover a variety of topics and offer vibrant and complex conversations on political issues in the Arab world. Unlike in the US and European countries, the study found that social issues were not a big part of political debate in the Arab world. The study also found that discussions had varied political agendas influenced by many variables including geography, culture, history, demographics, major news events and political and economic structures. It indicated that the often one-dimensional portrayal of the Arab world in the western media is simplistic and frequently inaccurate.

Keywords

Arab world, forums, Internet, media, Middle East, online, politics

Corresponding author:

Eisa Al Nashmi, University of Florida, College of Journalism and Communications, Division of Graduate Studies
PO Box 118400, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA

Email: enashmi@ufl.edu

Introduction

The Arab world – 25 countries spanning two continents and including more than 325 million people – has figured prominently in events such as the September 11 attacks, the continuing Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the Iraq War. The media in the US have contributed to public resentment of this region through often negative coverage, and the western press has frequently failed to make sense of the area, simplifying it into one homogeneous and united region. In reality, the Arab world is a complicated aggregate of ethnicities, religions, cultures, political systems and socioeconomic conditions. It has a variety of rich cultures along with a complicated history and present.

Today, many people rely on the mass media for information about the world beyond what they personally know, and for that, the media are powerful in creating and promoting stereotypes about other countries and cultures. Louw (2004) said in evaluating local news, audiences can easily carry out their own reality checks by comparing the news with their experiences, but with respect to international news, such opportunities do not exist. Audiences become largely dependent on the news media, and have little choice but to accept and believe what is reported.

The Arab world is talked about in the western media on a daily basis, but often, coverage is negative. Among other things, the media frequently portray the Arab world as a threat to the West, with the best way to reduce that threat being to democratize the region (Fattah, 2006). But does this simplistic portrayal present an accurate picture of the Arab region? The best way to answer this question is by going right to the source: the Arab world. This study is one of very few that explores online media in the Arab world, and it does so by analyzing political discussions in Arabic-language online forums appearing in 2006 from four diverse countries: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. While there is need for both qualitative and quantitative studies of these forums, a quantitative approach was used because it allows for in-depth analysis over a large time period and offers the opportunity for generalizability of the results.

The content analysis evaluates the diversity within the region by identifying the political interests of Arab online users and their perceptions of the West and democracy. The Arab world is, without doubt, a politically and culturally oppressed society where governments exert some, if not complete, control over public expressions of political opinion. However, with the Internet flourishing in the region, many Arabs are now able to express their opinions more freely online (Shapiro, 2009). In view of the growing global interest in the future of the Arab world, it was inferred that studying political opinions of Arab Internet users via their self-expressions in online forums might yield valuable information about the region. Online forums were specifically used for this study because of their acceptance by the Arab online population. They are widely used for online discussions, and unlike blogs, forums have been present for a long time in the region. More importantly, forums were studied because very little research exists about them and their uses in the Middle East, despite the fact that they are prevalent among Arab Internet users (Abdulla, 2007). By conducting a content analysis of political discussions in Arabic in four online forums, this study showed that political debate was a priority for Arab online users and explored the diversity and tone of topics discussed in those forums.

Literature review

Orientalism

Edward Said (1979) states that from ancient times, works of literature, art and science have shown dichotomous themes in the depiction of eastern cultures by western societies. He argues that the 'Orient' – the East – has been depicted as radically different and inferior to the West or the 'Occident'. The process of 'dealing' with foreign people and cultures is what Said calls Orientalism: 'dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 1979: 3). Thus Orientalism includes all the writings, images and attitudes manufactured by the West to create a highly motivated, self-centered and unrealistic view of the Orient (Lockman, 2004).

Those distortions of the East, however, did travel and evolve over time. According to Lockman (2004: 8), 'some European scholars, writers and others appropriated certain images and notions about the East and Islam from what they had come to perceive as Europe's distinctive past, refashioned them in keeping with their own contemporary concerns, and propagated them as relevant to their own time'. Said says that over the past two centuries Orientalism has gone through many transformations or 'restructures'. Early French Orientalists like Sacy and Renan used fields like philology and anthology to study the East and come up with conclusions about the Orient; British Orientalists in the early 20th century based their study of the Orient on political and nationalistic motives; and American Orientalists in the late 20th century began employing social science theories in their study of the Orient. These changes in the field of Orientalism are what Said calls 'manifest Orientalism', but throughout these changes there are some attributes of the Orient that remain intact and unchanged. Said calls this 'latent Orientalism', which includes the stereotypes and generalizations used to describe the Orient for the past few centuries: lazy, backward, irrational, violent, etc. (Said, 1979).

Today, modern Arab stereotypes are seen more often with the advent of the entertainment industry. Shaheen (1983) found that none of the TV producers, writers and directors interviewed could recall any positive images of Arabs on TV. In another study of more than 200 episodes of about 100 television shows, Shaheen (1984) identified four stereotypes that dominated descriptions of Arabs: the oil-rich sheikh; the uncultured barbarian; the sex-maniac harem owner; and the Arab terrorist. Also, in talking about his book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001), where he analyzed nearly 1000 movies, Shaheen found that 'Hollywood went out of its way to turn Arab Muslims – Egyptians, Palestinians and other dark-complexioned baddies from Lebanon to Libya, from Syria to the Sudan – into the most maligned group in cinematic history' (Shaheen, 2003: 77).

This stereotypical view of Arabs can also be found in the news media. Louw (2004) acknowledges that journalists usually carry their cultural biases with them when they cover international news. He calls them 'Anglo values' and said 'those not adhering to Anglo-American models of societal organization become despicable or incomprehensible' (Louw, 2004: 155). Examples of the despicable societies include North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan and Syria. Louw (2004: 154) said 'Anglo journalists assume their

values to be universally valid and uncontested, partly because the new world order is de facto Anglo hegemony'. Said (1979) writes of the ethnocentrism where American reporters tend to value the American way of life over others, so a foreign correspondent would usually judge the country he or she is in against the American standard.

Moreover, the recent news media trend in using 'Middle Eastern', 'Islamic' or 'terrorism' experts as sources has opened doors for further emphasis on these negative depictions of the Arab world. Speaking of Middle Eastern and Islamic experts, Said (2001) said in a debate sponsored by the Middle East Studies of North America, that the media regularly call on a 'roster of experts', which includes people who do what they do consciously to maintain and encourage American hostility toward Middle Eastern cultures and the Islamic religion. However, rarely does this roster include Muslims and Arabs. Said elaborated on this issue during the debate:

[The] Middle East is misrepresented tendentiously... It is a deeply flawed, deeply antagonistic, deeply uniformed and uninforming view that regulates what is covered and what is not covered. But to a considerable degree it has worked – and this is the shameful part – because of the active collaboration of a whole cadre of scholars, experts and abettors drawn from the ranks of the Orientalists and special-interest lobbies. (Said, 2001: 296)

The objective of this study was to use quantitative research methods to go beyond pre-conceived images of the Arab world and offer evidence that goes past the anecdotal to provide a more realistic image of this complex region. By going right to the source – Arab Internet users – one can bypass the western press filter and see what Arabs from different countries think about their own governments and how they perceive the West.

Democratization effect of the Internet

In the past, information and communication technologies have proved to be effective in influencing political, cultural and economic change. The printing press was believed to have brought success and power to the Protestant Reformation, while the use of fax machines gathered the Chinese Tiananmen Square demonstrators and the 1991 Russian coup proponents. In the Middle East, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser used the radio to gain popular support and consent after the coup, and lectures on smuggled cassette tapes strengthened the popularity of the Iranian revolutionaries in the 1970s (Ghareeb, 2000). But has the Internet proved to be as effective as other information technologies in transforming societies?

'The Internet and globalization are acting like nutcrackers to open societies and empower Arab democrats with new tools', Thomas Friedman wrote in *The New York Times* (2000: A25). 'But don't kid yourself, anti-democratic countertrends are also flourishing, and there's no telling who will prevail.' Many people have supported this notion of the Internet being a global promoter of democracy, economic privatization and personal freedom. Gillmor (2004) wrote that the Internet is slowly empowering the 'grass-roots' over corporations, governments and the media.

For others such as Deborah Wheeler (2006), this optimistic assumption is hardly supported by empirical evidence. In her ethnographic study of Internet users in Kuwait, she

asserts that 'online behavior is in part shaped by off-line variables' (Wheeler, 2006: 189). These offline variables include political, cultural and religious factors a specific country encompasses.

Kalathil and Boas (2003) call the connection between technology development and democratization a 'conventional wisdom' that is usually backed up with anecdotal rather than academic research. In their study of eight authoritarian countries, they argue that the Internet is not a threat to authoritarian rulers. In fact, through censorship, control and intimidation, the Internet has been used to empower these regimes and reinforce their ideologies. Even though some uses do pose political challenges, these challenges are minor and far from undermining the regimes in power (Kalathil and Boas, 2003).

While Wheeler (2006) and Kalathil and Boas (2003) argue that the Internet is not a threat to authoritarian regimes, they still acknowledge the power of the Internet in politically challenging those regimes. But those studies were conducted at a time when the Internet was new in the region, and many things have changed since then. Recent statistics show Internet usage in the Middle East has increased by 1296.2 percent from 2000 to 2008, in which more than 23 percent of the total population go online (Internet World Stats, 2008). In reaction to recent negative coverage centered on the Middle East, more and more Arabs are expressing their views online. Political changes have also occurred: Iraqis have held a number of democratic elections, Syria pulled out of Lebanon and the Egyptian government showed leniency toward a pro-democracy group (*Geographical Dossier*, 2005). Elsewhere in the Middle East, Kuwaiti women voted in their first elections in 2006 and the new Saudi king is trying to reform his country, including recently appointing the first female minister in Saudi Arabia.

Countries in the study

Mamoun (2000: 378) said, 'When studying communication and technology in the Arab world, most scholars have focused on the technology and ignored the Arab countries, their histories, cultures, societies, and their human dimensions.' Economic, political and cultural differences in the region give each Arab country a unique identity, and it is almost unreasonable to group this diverse region into one homogeneous entity. Because of these societal differences, four diverse Arab countries were chosen for this research.

Kuwait is one of the smallest countries in the region – about the size of New Jersey – yet it is viewed as one of the most democratic (*The World Fact Book*, 2007c). Wheeler presents three factors explaining the lively Kuwaiti Internet atmosphere. With regards to economics, Kuwait has one of the highest per capita incomes, meaning that many people can afford computers and Internet subscriptions. Culturally, Kuwaitis like to show off their social status by being the first to own the latest trend: 'A "be the first on your block to have the latest technologies" attitude feeds Kuwaiti techno-culture and subsequently has made Kuwaitis anxious to get online' (Wheeler, 2006: 40). The government also supports a techno-savvy culture by allowing the sale of and access to high-tech devices.

Saudi Arabia is a hereditary monarchy where the king is the head of state and government (*The World Fact Book*, 2007d). Saudi Arabia was the last country in the Arabian

Peninsula to allow public access to the Internet (Kalathil and Boas, 2003). The Saudi government thought the Internet might have a long-term impact on the stability in the region, so they took a more cautious approach and decided to study the idea thoroughly before launching it. The government of Saudi Arabia is believed to have the strictest and most extensive Internet censorship practices in the world (Kalathil and Boas, 2003). Recent statistics, however, show that Saudi Arabia experienced a 11,466.7 percent growth in Internet users from 2000 to 2008 (Internet World Stats, 2008).

Home of the pyramids and the Nile River, Egypt stands out as a unique country in the Middle East. With a population of more than 70 million (*The World Fact Book*, 2007a), Egypt has gone through several political and economic transformations in the modern era. Egypt is supposedly a democracy where the executive and legislative bodies are democratically elected. But through rigged elections, media control and threatening the opposition, the National Democratic Party has been in power since the coup d'état in 1952 (Amin, 2003; Kalathil and Boas, 2003; Quick, 2003; US Department of State, 2006).

However, the Egyptian government has taken a relatively benevolent approach toward the Internet, creating 'a censorship-free zone' (Kalathil and Boas, 2003). The government has taken great initiative in promoting Internet use in Egypt by expanding access and training in rural areas. It has also made it clear that it has no intention of controlling or censoring content over the Internet. The *Cyprus Times* and the *Middle East Times* have both published their full content online in which articles censored from the print editions were available (Kalathil and Boas, 2003). But still, the government has been able to crack down on people who posted controversial material online.

Jordan is in a constant struggle to balance its diplomatic relations with the Arab countries surrounding it. Being a US and British ally since its inception and home for millions of Palestinian refugees, Jordan has drawn the criticism of Arabs for its image as a peace-keeper between the Arab states and Israel (*The World Fact Book*, 2007b). Wheeler (2006) explains that in Jordan, in which economic factors are the primary reasons behind low connectivity rates in the country, the average monthly salary of a government employee is equivalent to US\$70. She said an hour at an Internet cafe, the most common way to access the Internet in Jordan, would cost more than \$2: 'The same one-hour fee for Internet use could easily buy a family of five lunches at a falafel restaurant' (Wheeler, 2006: 37). According to Freedom House (2006), the Jordanian government is actively promoting Internet access and claims it has no intention to censor the web. But Freedom House (2006) states that the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists, a domestic media rights organization, concluded that 42.7 percent of media professionals believe Jordanian Internet sites were censored in 2005.

To further explore these diversities and their impact on online discussion forums in the Arab world, four research questions guide this study:

RQ1: How interested are Arab Internet users in politics?

RQ2: What do Arabs talk about in their online political discussions?

RQ3: Do political discussions online differ from one country to another in the Arab world?

RQ4: What was the tone of the online discussions?

Methodology

The research uses quantitative content analysis of political discussions from four Arab-language online forums. 'When they work, forums create a symbiotic relationship that enhances a site's profile and serves users by providing a place to debate, pontificate, socialize and express emotion', Palser (2002: 58) explains. In analyzing Arabs' responses to the September 11 attacks on Arab discussion boards, Abdulla (2007) found that 'since these forums are uncensored and are outside the realm of government supervision, they provided a good opportunity for Arabs and Muslims to voice their honest opinions, even if those opinions contradicted those of the governments'.

One of the most popular general Arabic-language forums from each country was identified. A popular forum is one that is widely known and frequently visited by the users of the country being studied. A general forum is one that is not slanted toward a specific area of interest or affiliated with any political or religious ideologies. A general forum also has a variety of categories open for discussion. Some of these categories include education, music, politics and entertainment. The unit of analysis of the study was each discussion posted on the political category of each online forum in 2006.

Population

The study specifically focused on general forums to determine the extent to which ordinary Arabs are interested in politics compared to other categories. The forums were all written in Arabic. Two steps were used for the selection. The first step was to identify forums from each country. Using Google, searches for forums from the four countries were conducted. The second step was to determine the most popular forum from each of the four lists. Informal interviews with four to five natives of the selected countries were held. The interviewees were asked to identify the most popular forum from the list provided. Hence, by looking at the total number of members and the number of posts in each forum, and also comparing each forum's traffic ranking from the Alexa database, the selection process was completed with the following forums chosen: Sahat KSA from Saudi Arabia;¹ Egypt Sons from Egypt;² Abu Mahjoob from Jordan;³ and Al Ommah from Kuwait.⁴ It must be noted, however, that an adequate general forum from Kuwait could not be identified, so a forum that is more geared toward political issues was selected.

Sample

The initial plan was to look at 250 discussions from each forum, totaling 1000 discussions posted in the year 2006. All of the discussions from 2006 were first listed and the sampling process was then conducted using a systematic approach with a random start. It was also decided that the topics in the sample must have at least two comments. This was because topics with one comment or no comments meant that they did not attract forum users and were considered insignificant to this study. The sample discussions were then saved as HTML document.

During the collection process the sample size decreased from 1000 to 960 because the Jordanian forum deleted its archive of the first few months of 2006, making the sample from the forum 212 instead of 250. Also, two discussions from the Kuwaiti and Saudi forum could not be located at the time of data collection.

Coding instrument construction, validity and analysis

The first research question was generated to see if political discussion is important to Arab online users, and if it is, where it stands when compared with other areas of discussion like religion, entertainment and sports. To answer that question, the number of discussions and comments in the political category was compared with the number of discussions in all other categories of each forum. Figure 1 shows the basic structure of the forums used and explains how these numbers were derived.

The objective of the second question was to discover what Arabs were talking about and what interests them politically. Each discussion was read and then coded for a number of topics categorized into four main groups: politics, social issues, religion and countries.

Discussions about government, elected officials, law, elections, ideology, war and the economy were part of the political group. The government variable dealt with discussions concerning the executive branch of any country (presidents and governments); the elected officials variable included discussions concentrating on the legislative branch and parliamentary issues; the law variable was coded as present in discussions about the judiciary branch of any mentioned country; the elections variable dealt with discussions focusing on any form of an election; the ideology variable was coded as present in discussions pertaining to the ideological differences and clashes between political parties or



Figure 1. The basic structure of the forums use. Note: The total number of discussions from each discussion board or category were recorded to see which categories were the most popular.

ideological groups like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood; and the economy variable included discussions concentrating on economic issues.

The social issues group included discussions about media, healthcare, education, minorities, women and crime. Discussions about Islam, Sunnis, Shiites, Shariah, Christianity and Judaism were part of the religion group. The Sunni and Shiites variables pertained to discussions about the two leading sects in the religion of Islam; the Shariah variable included discussions dealing with Islamic law; and Islam, Christianity and Judaism were coded as present in discussions talking specifically about the religions, and not adherents of the religion. For example, Judaism was not coded as present in discussions mentioning Israel or Israelis unless the discussion talked about the Jewish faith. The countries' group had 11 subcategories: local, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Iran, USA, Israel, all Arab, other Arab and other non-Arab. The local variable was coded as present when the discussion talked about any issue pertaining to the country of the forum.

The topic variables coded were determined using two criteria: relevance and occurrence. Some issues like government, Islam and local issues were believed to be relevant within the political and/or cultural sphere. Other issues like media and war were added to the list because of their frequent occurrences in posts, determined during the pilot study.

The third research question looks at the differences between the forums. Cross-tabulations with Pearson's chi-square coefficients were used to study the statistical significance of relationships and interactions between the forum and the topic variables.

The fourth research question looked at the tone of the original post. The main objective behind analyzing this aspect of a discussion was to see how Arabs react to global political events, and try to find out what they think of the West. Underlying questions included: Are the users a threat to the West, as many western media have insinuated? Or are they a threat to their governments and calling for democracy?

By reading the original posts in Arabic and analyzing the words used, the tone of each post was identified as positive, negative, neutral or mixed. It should be clarified that this part of the study analyzed the tone of the language used and did not pass judgment on the content. Any words of praise and encouragement were considered positive, and discussions that used words carrying a pessimistic connotation were coded as negative.

Inter-coder reliability analysis was used to test the consistency and relevance of the coding process. Ten percent of the sample was double coded by the main researcher and one Arabic-speaking doctoral student. Using Holsti's (1969) formula the inter-coder coefficient was .92, certifying a high level of agreement between the two coders and confirming the validity of the coding process.

Results

RQ1: How interested are Arab Internet users in politics?

Table 1 shows that in all four forums, the political category was within the top three categories for number of discussions. Out of the 25 categories in the Saudi forum, the political category had the highest number of threads followed by the open dialogue and Islamic categories. In the Egyptian forum, the political category had the second highest number of discussions. The Islamic category had the largest number of threads. The

Table 1. The top three discussion categories in each forum

	Saudi Arabia	Kuwait	Egypt	Jordan
1	Political (<i>N</i> = 7583, 31%)	Local politics (<i>N</i> = 1668)	Islamic (<i>N</i> = 8899, 15%)	General (<i>N</i> = 13,961, 30%)
2	Open dialogue (<i>N</i> = 5159, 21%)	International politics (<i>N</i> = 399)	Political (<i>N</i> = 5295, 9%)	Poetry (<i>N</i> = 6465, 14%)
3	Islamic (<i>N</i> = 2875, 12%)		General category (<i>N</i> = 4444, 8%)	Political (<i>N</i> = 3012, 7%)

political category in the Jordanian forum had the third largest number of discussions. It followed the general category and the poetry category. It should be noted that because of the prevalence of poetry in the Arab culture (Lundberg, 2009), it is not surprising to see poetry as a popular topic of discussion.

As stated earlier, an adequate general forum from Kuwait could not be identified, so a political forum from the country was selected. The forum had two main categories: local politics and international politics. Both categories were used in the study.

RQ2: What do Arabs talk about in their online political discussions?

Table 2 shows that discussions about government appeared in more than half of the sample, making it the most discussed topic overall. 'Ideology' came in second. Ideological or political groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood and Al Qaeda were frequently discussed and were all coded as ideology. 'War,' 'Islam' and 'elected officials' round off the top five most discussed topics. Social issues like 'education' (*N* = 35, 4 percent), 'crime' (*N* = 30, 3 percent), 'status of women' (*N* = 19, 2 percent) and 'health-care' (*N* = 15, 2 percent) were not talked about substantially. Other fairly common topics included 'media' (*N* = 97, 10 percent), 'economy' (*N* = 93, 10 percent) and 'elections' (*N* = 63, 7 percent).

Table 2 also shows that more than half of the topics concentrated on local issues. 'Israel,' 'Palestine,' and 'Lebanon' followed. 'USA' was fifth. 'Iraq' (*N* = 63, 7 percent) and 'Iran' (*N* = 59, 6 percent) were discussed the least.

Table 2. The five most discussed issues and countries across all forums

Rank	Topic discussed	Countries discussed
1	Government (<i>N</i> = 549, 57%)	Local (<i>N</i> = 467, 57%)
2	Ideology (<i>N</i> = 116, 12%)	Israel (<i>N</i> = 157, 16%)
3	War (<i>N</i> = 208, 21%)	Palestine (<i>N</i> = 136, 14%)
4	Islam (<i>N</i> = 116, 12%)	Lebanon (<i>N</i> = 133, 14%)
5	Elected officials (<i>N</i> = 111, 12%)	USA (<i>N</i> = 132, 14%)

Table 3. Political topics that showed significant correlations within the different forums

	Government		Officials		Elections		Ideology		War		Economy	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Saudi	145	26	6	5	4	6	59	24	36	17	30	32
Kuwait	111	20	75	68	38	60	58	23	28	14	39	42
Egypt	163	30	8	7	14	22	55	22	61	29	17	18
Jordan	130	24	22	20	7	11	76	31	83	40	7	8
	$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 24.32, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 121.65, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 44.75, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 14.45, p = .002)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 62.84, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 24.01, p = .000)$	

RQ3: Do political discussions online differ from one country to another in the Arab world?

Cross-tabulations with Pearson's chi-square coefficients were used to study the statistical significance of relationships and interactions between the forum and the topic variables. Many topics showed strong significance levels, and some of these significant correlations are explored below.

Table 3 highlights the six political topics that showed significant correlations within the different forums. Discussions about government were seen across all forums, but they were more frequent on the Egyptian and Saudi forums. The Kuwaiti forum overwhelmingly had the most discussions about elections and elected officials. Discussions about ideology appeared mostly in the Jordanian forum, and discussions about the economy were more frequent on the Kuwaiti and Saudi forums.

While social issues were not discussed as often as other issues, three of the eight social issues coded showed levels of significance within the four forums. Topics about the media and crime were more prevalent on the Saudi forum and the Kuwaiti forum whereas the Kuwaiti forum had the largest share of discussions about minorities.

For the seven religious issues coded, five showed levels of significance. Table 4 shows that most of the religious topics were seen on the Saudi forum. The Saudi forum had the largest number of discussions about Islam, Sunnis, Islamic scholars and Shiites. Table 4 also shows the Kuwaiti forum having the second highest number of discussions about Shiites. The Egyptian forum had the largest share of discussions about Christianity.

With respect to the countries discussed, more than half of the discussions from Egypt (54 percent) and Kuwait (74 percent) had to do with local issues. In Saudi Arabia, 48 percent of the discussions were about local issues, and Jordan had a totally reverse outcome with only 14 percent of the discussions being about local events. Table 5 shows the countries most discussed on the Jordanian forum were Israel, Lebanon, Palestine and 'all Arab'. Table 5 also shows that discussions about the USA were mostly seen on the

Table 4. Religious topics that showed significant correlations within the different forums

	Islam		Sunni		Shariah		Shiites		Christianity	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Saudi Arabia	67	58	12	50	11	58	25	45	5	33
Kuwait	3	3	5	21	1	5	17	30	1	7
Egypt	26	22	5	21	7	37	8	14	8	53
Jordan	20	17	2	8	0	0	6	11	1	7
	$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 81.37, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 8.11, p = .044)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 15.98, p = .001)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 15.11, p = .002)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 8.50, p = .037)$	

Table 5. Country variables that showed significant correlations within the different forums

	Palestine		Lebanon		Israel		USA		All Arab		Other Arab		Other non-Arab	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Saudi	15	11	19	14	28	18	44	33	21	21	41	51	35	44
Kuwait	3	2	40	30	10	6	14	11	4	4	13	16	10	13
Egypt	27	20	29	22	51	33	32	32	30	30	12	15	20	25
Jordan	93	67	45	34	68	43	42	24	45	45	15	19	14	18
	$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 201.61, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 19.82, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 73.76, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 19.38, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 48.98, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 28.90, p = .000)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 17.81, p = .000)$	

Saudi and Egyptian forums. The Saudi forum also had the largest share of discussions about 'other Arab' countries and 'other non-Arab' countries.

RQ4: What was the tone of the online discussions?

Most of the discussions analyzed either had a neutral ($N = 432$, 45 percent) or a negative tone ($N = 389$, 41 percent). Topics with a positive tone comprised only 9 percent ($N = 88$) of the total sample and 5 percent ($N = 51$) of the topics had a mixed tone.

Cross-tabulations with Pearson's chi-square coefficients were used to study the statistical significance of relationships and interactions between the topics on all forums and the tone of discussions. Seven topics were found to be statistically significant: 'government', 'war', 'Islam', 'Sunni', 'Shiites', 'USA' and 'all Arab'.

Table 6 shows most of the discussions about government, war and Islam had a negative tone and most of the discussions about Sunnis had a neutral tone. Table 6 also shows that more than half of the discussions about Shiites, the USA and 'all Arab' countries carried a negative tone.

Table 6. Topics showing significance levels with tone across all forums

	Government		War		Islam		Sunni		Shiites		USA		All Arab	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Positive	39	7	22	11	9	8	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	4
Negative	269	49	99	48	50	43	8	33	32	57	76	58	54	54
Neutral	205	37	70	34	44	38	12	50	18	32	47	36	25	25
Mixed	36	6	17	8	13	11	4	17	6	11	7	5	17	17
	$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 17.449, p = .001)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 8.154, p = .043)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 9.238, p = .026)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 9.520, p = .023)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 11.696, p = .008)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 16.066, p = .001)$		$(\chi^2 = (3, N = 960) = 40.599, p = .000)$	

Discussion and conclusion

Arab Internet users are interested in politics as indicated by the fact that political topics ranked among the top three most discussed categories on all the forums studied. Regardless of the topics, it was evident that Arabs saw the Internet as an open opportunity for political expression. Analyzing only a partial sample from the four forums showed that almost every news event in 2006 – from the many conflicts and wars in the Middle East to the Republican loss of a majority in the US Congress – was discussed. Arab Internet users were not shy or reluctant to engage in any sort of political debate.

While ‘government’ was coded in more than half of the sample, the second and third most coded topics were ‘ideology’ and ‘war’. ‘Islam’ and ‘elected officials’ followed. Given the wide-reaching nature of ‘government’, it was not very surprising to see that category as the most coded issue. While government-related issues were popular in all the forums, that was not the case with the rest of the topics. ‘Islam’, for example, was discussed most in the Saudi forum, and ‘ideology’ appeared on the Jordanian forum the most. An example of a discussion focused on ideology is one in the Jordanian forum appearing on 11 December 2006, where the author posts a story concerning an incident during the 2006 clash in which four children were killed. The author then states ‘are we waiting until the Palestinian people erase each other out. .. everything that is happening now is nothing but a benefit for the Israelis’.

Topics that were rarely discussed were mainly those concerned with issues having social implications such as education, the status of women, healthcare and minorities. A reason behind this finding could simply be a lack of interest, but a more realistic explanation is that, contrary to US political debate, these topics do not usually fall within the Arab political realm. Also, there are separate categories in all of the forums for some of the topics listed above. The Saudi forum, for example, has a separate women’s category that has the fourth highest number of threads. So forum users usually discuss issues like the status of women in the categories specified for those topics rather than in the political category.

The topics discussed on each forum showcase the variations within each country. Of the seven political topics coded for this study, the Kuwaiti forum overwhelmingly had the most number of discussions about elected officials, elections and the economy. Issues

concerned with the National Assembly (the legislative branch) and its members were widely discussed. Kuwait has a democratically elected parliament and has arguably the freest press in the Arab world. Elected officials are very important to the Kuwaiti public because, unlike elected officials in other Arab countries, they actually do have legislative power to undermine the sitting government.

There is, however, another reason behind this large difference in the number of times 'elected officials' was coded for Kuwait versus the number of times it was coded for all of the other forums combined. Politically speaking, 2006 was a critical year for Kuwait. There was a huge debate in the Assembly between the sitting government with its supportive elected officials and the opposition parliament members on the issue of voting districts. The debate could not be resolved, so the emir dissolved parliament and called elections in the summer of 2006. That was reflected in the number of discussions on related topics.

Kuwait also led the forums in discussions about the 'economy' because some elected officials wanted to pass legislation that would pay off certain individual Kuwaiti debts. Their justification was that the government donates millions of dollars overseas, so it is about time for the government to support its people by paying off the country's debts. There was a huge debate on this issue all around Kuwait, making it one of the hot topics in 2006 (Kuwait News Agency, 2006).

As the only country abiding by the Sunni Islamic Shariah and as the guardian of the holy cities to which millions of Muslim pilgrims travel each year for Hajj, religion is a large part of day-to-day conversations among Saudis. The Saudi forum had the highest number of discussions on topics about Islam, Sunni, Shiites and Shariah. Saudi Arabia also had the largest share of discussions on topics about the media, and 'other non-Arab not including Iran, Israel and the United States'. The link between 'Islam', 'media' and 'other non-Arab' could be explained by the discussions about the derogatory depiction of Prophet Mohammad in 12 cartoons appearing in a Danish newspaper early in 2006. While this issue was touched upon in all forums, the Saudis clearly showed more concern, and had the most threads about it.

Topics about Sunnis and Shiites usually appeared in discussions about the unstable situation in Iraq. Also common in the Shiite/Sunni debate were topics about Iran's role in supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon. It was not surprising to see Saudi Arabia leading the countries in the number of topics about Shiites and Sunnis because Saudi Arabia is where Islam was born, and for that reason the country views itself as the protector of orthodox Sunni Islam.

One interesting result can be seen in the local issues category, where more than half of the discussions in the Kuwaiti and Egyptian forums had something to do with local issues. The Saudi Arabian forum also had a high percentage of discussions about local issues. The Jordanian forum, however, had a totally opposite outcome, with a small percentage (14 percent) of the discussions concentrating on local issues. Jordan has become home to millions of Palestinian refugees since the inception of the state of Israel in 1948. Even though there is a category in the forum specifically for Palestinian issues, the majority of the discussions in the political category were about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The forum was used many times to disseminate the latest news surrounding the

conflict. It was also used as a means to verify or dispel any rumors or conspiracies constantly emerging as a result of this conflict.

Two main events were frequently discussed throughout the sample. The first was Hezbollah's clash with Israel (Al Jazeera, 2006b). The other was the quarrel between the two Palestinian groups: Hamas, an Islamist party that rejects any ties with Israel, and Fatah, the long-dominant party that would rather negotiate with Israel than fight them (Al Jazeera, 2006a).

'Ideology' ranked very high in the Jordanian forum because groups such as Hamas, Fatah and Hezbollah were coded as ideology. It is also obvious that Jordanians led with the highest incidence of topics about 'war', 'Israel', 'Palestine' and 'Lebanon' because of their unique interests and involvement in the conflict. As for 'all Arab', there was a common theme in blaming the Arab world and its governments for not standing up for the Palestinian cause. This theme developed even more when Arab governments condemned Hezbollah's acts after it kidnapped two Israeli soldiers.

The Egyptian forum was the most difficult to analyze because the topics discussed were widely divergent. Egypt had the highest number of discussions about 'government' and 'Christianity'. One common theme in the Egyptian forum was the continuous criticism of President Hosni Mubarak. The most popular category in the Egyptian forum was the Islamic one, which may signify that the main readers of this forum are conservative. The forum users, who appear to be strong supporters of opposition Islamic parties, expressed constant frustrations over Mubarak and his government. In any negativity surrounding issues like education, healthcare, crime or the economy, the president was usually the first blamed. The president also came under harsh criticism when he publicly denounced Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers.

Egypt had the most mentions of topics related to 'Christianity'. Out of the four countries, Egypt has the biggest percentage of Christian population (10 percent) (*The World Fact Book*, 2007a), so it is plausible to conclude that this was the reason behind the Egyptian forum having the most number of threads about Christianity. Another interesting result from the Egyptian forum is that it had the second highest number of discussions on 'war', 'Israel', 'Palestine' and 'all Arab'. On those four issues, Jordan had the most discussions. Egyptian forum users showed strong concerns for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict – something not seen as much in the Kuwaiti and Saudi forums. It can be explained in both a geographic and a political sense. Both countries, Egypt and Jordan, share a border with Israel, which makes the Israeli–Palestinian conflict closer to home. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, however, are farther to the east. Also, Egypt has had its own set of conflicts and wars with the Israelis over the years.

One of the main objectives of this study was to see what Arabs think of democracy and the West, and whether or not they want to see changes in the politics of their countries. This objective was reached through the observations of tone and language used in the discussions.

Of the total 960 discussions, more than 80 percent of the topics analyzed were coded as having either a negative or a neutral tone. Arabs were critical of almost everything – people, politicians, countries and governments – but that criticism was based on the diverse views of the news events of the time. Some discussions contained harsh, demeaning and violent language, and they were mostly aimed at the USA, Israel and the Arab

world as a whole. An example of such can be seen in a discussion from the Jordanian forum appearing on 16 August 2006, where the author talks about prison abuse of Palestinian women in Israel. After presenting examples of such abuses, the author then calls the Arab world out for not standing up for their women. The author writes, 'God damn those people who leave their women in the hands of those damned Jews.' Another example is also from the Jordanian forum, where the author presents gruesome pictures of dead Palestinian children, and then posts a question, 'do you blame us for hating America?' The Arab world has been, and still is, in conflict with the USA and Israel, so it is obvious why discussions about those two countries were mostly negative.

A large portion of the topics carried a neutral tone. Most of these neutral topics were either news articles or questions. It can be explained that Arabs may view forums as a news-gathering medium. In closed societies with restrained presses, there are not many options for seeking accurate, up-to-date and balanced news. Arabs therefore see an alternative in the many independent online news sites and newspapers. Also, as a result of not having a free press, rumors begin, and one way to spread and/or validate those rumors is through the use of online media or forums.

Topics across all forums that showed significance levels with tone were 'government', 'war', 'Islam', 'Sunni', 'Shiites', 'USA' and 'all Arab'. Discussions circulating around Islam in the political category were usually associated with other issues. One example of how discussions about Islam were coded as negative was in a discussion appearing in the Saudi forum on 1 February 2006, titled 'They will burn the Korans'. The author talks about an event where people in Denmark would be demonstrating while burning the Koran in retaliation for the Muslim rage over the cartoons. In the end the author adds, 'this filthy country, with less than 5 million people, is battling a nation and a culture with more than one billion people. .. lets [*sic*] continue the boycott'. Another example concerning the Sunni/Shiite debate was found in the Saudi forum where the author presents a *fatwa* – a religious decision or order made by a high-ranked Islamic scholar – from a prominent Saudi scholar (Sunni) about supporting Hezbollah (Shiites) in their conflict with Israel. In this *fatwa*, the scholar rejects supporting Hezbollah because he believes that Shiism is not the right path to Islam and presents many arguments against the Shiite sect.

More than half of the discussions about 'USA' (57.6 percent) had a negative tone. The United States was usually blamed for standing with Israel against the Palestinians, for being anti-Islam and for starting a war in Iraq, in which thousands of civilians had died. More than half of the discussions about 'all Arab' also carried a negative tone. There has always been a common theme of blaming Arab governments for not standing up for the Palestinian cause. This theme developed even more when Arab governments condemned Hezbollah's acts after it kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. This incident caused forum users, especially from Egypt and Jordan, to express their animosity toward the Arab governments. An example can be seen in a discussion appearing on 29 July 2006 titled 'Mubarak's remarks: a call for defeat', where the author lists a number of news stories presenting Mubarak's views on Hezbollah's clash with Israel and Egypt's role in that conflict. In the end, the author pictures Mubarak and the rest of the Arab leaders as defeatists and warns them that now Lebanon is the target of the Israeli military. The author concludes that if no strong position is taken, the rest of the Arab world will be in more trouble than it is now.

As one of the first quantitative studies to explore Internet uses in the Arab world, this research found that those posting on the discussion forums came from unique Arab countries with unique political agendas influenced by many environmental or contextual factors like geography, culture, history, demographics, major news events and political and economic structures. This conclusion also supports Deborah Wheeler's (2006: 189) assertion that 'online behavior is in part shaped by off-line variables'. Most importantly, the study shows that interest in politics is alive and vibrant in the Arab world, but that it is a complex interest and far from one-dimensional as is so often depicted in the western media.

Through the analysis of the tones used in the political discussions, it was evident that Arabs expressed some levels of negativity toward their local governments. Some users called for reform and change in the political systems, but rarely do they go to the extreme and call for a revolution or an overthrow of the current government. An example of one that does is a discussion from the Egyptian forum appearing on 20 July 2006, in which the author writes directly to the Egyptian people asking them how much longer they are willing to endure the rule of Mubarak who is acting as a puppet to the USA and Israel. Furthermore, the author calls for a new leader, one similar to Jamal Abdul-Nasser, who, according to the author, will stand up for the rights of the people. The author speaks to the Egyptian people: 'How can you accept this disgrace and disregard that Mubarak has put on to you? What are you waiting for? Why are you being so quiet? A tornado is coming, that of Bush, Blair and the Zionists to wipe away the rest of the Arab world.' This study also confirms Kalathil and Boas's (2003) conclusion that the Internet, at least in the short run, does not pose a threat to Arab governments.

In talking about the media's coverage of Islam in a post-September 11 article, Said (2002: 70) wrote: 'Islam is a world of many histories, many peoples, many languages, traditions, schools of interpretation, proliferating developments, disputations, cultures and countries.' There is no such thing as a monolithic entity called Islam – we should rather talk about the 'Islams of Islam'. With Islam being spread to hundreds of different regions and cultures, Said (2002: 70) wrote: 'the most ironic thing of all is that only fundamentalists and anti-fundamentalists agree that what they are discussing is the single object they both call Islam'. As this study showed, the same can be said about the Arab world in that there is no true monolithic entity that represents the region. Rather, it is an area filled with vast differences, complexities and conflict.

Limitations

Critics of online media believe the anonymity of online users discredits research about Internet content (Johnson and Kaye, 2004). In this study, most, if not all, of the forum users assumed aliases. But this does not undermine the results of this study. In fact, it is possible that the act of using aliases rather than real names allows people in politically oppressed societies like those in the Arab world to take advantage of the anonymity the Internet provides. Thus, they could be expressing their opinions freely in a public arena. Arguably, those who put their time and effort into reading and writing on the web are some of the most involved people in the region. Because of the accessibility and the knowledge factors needed to go online, it could be argued that the forum users studied

represent a more educated, younger and financially more advantaged sector of each country's population (Shapiro, 2009).

While the initial strategy was to study the most prominent general forums in each country, such a forum, as already mentioned, could not be identified for Kuwait. Instead, a political forum, Al Ommah, was used. This decision may have skewed results from the Kuwaiti forum. Another limitation was realized during the data collection process. It was expected that anything online would remain online for a long time. However, experience showed that anything online can be kept online as long as the owner of the site wants it to be. The Jordanian forum unexpectedly deleted its archived political discussions for the months of January and February 2006. As a result, the sample size from Jordan was reduced from 250 to 212. The missing samples were based on a time frame that could have generated more significant results.

Suggestions for further study

The large sample used in this study, and the large number of significant results generated, has opened doors for a variety of future studies that could add new knowledge to the field of mass communication. It would be useful to replicate the study for another year – 2010, for example. Comparing both years in a longitudinal study could generate interesting results. Another is to add more countries to strengthen the conclusion of this study. It would also be worthwhile to conduct qualitative analysis including textual analysis on key variables in the study such as 'government' or 'local issues' to provide even more illumination on political discussions in the Arab world. Another form of qualitative analysis that could be used is to interview local political experts from each country to find out whether they believe the Internet will bring about political change in the future.

This study concluded that every Arab country had a unique political agenda affected by a set of independent variables like geography, demographics, history and political and economic structures. It would be interesting to further explore these independent variables to see which ones have greater impact on Arab political opinion.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. Sahat KSA; at: sahatksa.com/forum/index.php.
2. Egypt Sons; at: www.egyptsons.com/misr/.
3. Abu Mahjoob; at: www.mahjoob.com/ar/forums/index.php.
4. Al Ommah; at: www.alommah.org/forum/.

References

- Abdulla R (2007) Islam, Jihad, and terrorism in post-9/11 Arabic discussion boards. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(3). Available at: jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue3/abdulla.html.

- Al Jazeera. (2006a) Hamas, Fatah supporters clash in Gaza. April. Available at: english.aljazeera.net/archive/2006/04/2008410122033899575.html.
- Al Jazeera. (2006b) Hamas rejects Abbas security plan. April. Available at: english.aljazeera.net/English/archive/archive?ArchiveId=21807.
- Amin H (2003) Status of media in Egypt, *Encyclopedia of International Media and Communications* 1: 479–487.
- Fattah HM (2006) Democracy in the Arab world: A US goal, falters. *The New York Times*, 10 April. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2006/04/10/world/middleeast/10democracy.html
- Freedom House. (2006) *Freedom of the Press in the Middle East*. Available at: freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2006.
- Friedman T (2000) Censors beware. *The New York Times*, 25 July, p. A25.
- Geographical Dossier/Democracy* (2005) A clash of cultures: While recent events suggest a shift towards freer forms of governance in the Middle East, the prospects for democracy in the region appear bleak. 77(7): 40–42.
- Ghareeb E (2000) New media and the information revolution in the Arab world: An assessment. *The Middle East Journal* 54(3): 395–418.
- Gillmor D (2004) *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People for the People*. North Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.
- Holsti O (1969) *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Internet World Stats. (2008) Internet usage in the Middle East. *Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics*. Available at: www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm
- Johnson T and Kaye B (2004) Wag the blog: How reliance on traditional media and the internet influence credibility perceptions of weblogs among blog users. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 81: 622–642.
- Kalathil S and Boas TC (2003) *Open Networks Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Kuwait News Agency. (2006) Kuwaiti parliament to discuss citizens' debts relief Monday. 26 November. Available at: www.kuna.net.kw/newsagenciespublicsite/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1691197&Language=en&searchtext=debts
- Lockman Z (2004) *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Louw PE (2004) Journalists reporting from foreign places. In: De Beer AS and Merrill JC (eds) *Global Journalism: Topical Issues and Media Systems*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 151–177.
- Lundberg J (2009) Poetry is thriving in the Arab world. *The Huffington Post*, 15 March. Available at: www.huffingtonpost.com/john-lundberg/poetry-is-thriving-in-the_b_174746.html
- Mamoun F (2000) Information technology, trust, and social change in the Arab world. *The Middle East Journal* 54(3): 378–394.
- Palser B (2002) Not for everyone: Online forums are not the best aspect of the web. *American Journalism Review* 24(1): 58.
- Quick AC (2003) *World Press Encyclopedia: A Survey of Press Systems Worldwide*. Detroit, MI: Thomas Gale.
- Said E (1979) *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Said E (2001) *Power, Politics and Culture*. New York: Pantheon Books.

- Said E (2002) Impossible histories: Why the many Islams cannot be simplified. *Harper's Magazine* July: 69–74.
- Shaheen JG (1983) The Arab image in American mass media. In: Ghareeb E (ed.) *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media*. Washington, DC: American-Arab Affairs Council, 327–336.
- Shaheen JG (1984) *The TV Arab*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press.
- Shaheen JG (2003) Unkindest cuts. *Index on Censorship* 3: 76–81.
- Shaheen JG (2001) *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. New York: Olive Branch Press.
- Shapiro SM (2009) Revolution, Facebook-style. *New York Times Magazine*, 22 January. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html
- The World Fact Book* (2007a) Egypt. Available at: www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/eg.html
- The World Fact Book* (2007b) Jordan. Available at: www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/jo.html
- The World Fact Book* (2007c) Kuwait. Available at: www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ku.html
- The World Fact Book* (2007d) Saudi Arabia. Available at: www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sa.html
- US Department of State. (2006) Background notes. Available at: www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/
- Wheeler DL (2006) *The Internet in the Middle East: Global Expectations and Local Imaginations in Kuwait*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Fonte: The International Communication Gazette, v. 72, n. 8, p. 719–738, 2010. [Base de Dados]. Disponível em: <www.sagepub.com>. Acesso em: 16 dez. 2010.