

Building Social Capital for Social Inclusion: The Use of Social Networks in Government

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Abstract : In the recent past, public participation in governments has been declined to a great extent, as citizens have been isolated from community life and their ability to articulate demands for good government has been noticeably decreased. However, the Internet has introduced new forms of interaction that could enhance different types of relationships, including government-public relationship. In fact, technology-enabled government has become a catalyst for enabling social inclusion. This exploratory study seeks to investigate public perceptions in Kuwait regarding the use of social media networks in government where social capital is built to achieve social inclusion. Social capital has been defined as social networks and connections amongst individuals, that are based on shared trust, ideas and norms, enable participants of a network to act effectively to pursue a shared objective. The quantitative method was used to generate empirical evidence. A questionnaire was designed to address the research objective and reflect the identified constructs: social capital dimensions (bridging, bonding and maintaining social capital), social inclusion, and social equality. In this pilot study, data was collected from a random sample of 61 subjects. The results indicate that all participants have a positive attitude towards the dimensions of social capital (bridging, bonding and maintaining), social inclusion and social equality constructs. Tests of identified constructs against demographic characteristics indicate that there are significant differences between male and female as they perceived bonding and maintaining social capital, social inclusion and social equality whereas no difference was identified in their perceptions of bridging social capital. Also, those who are aged 26-30 perceived bonding and maintaining social capital, social inclusion and social equality negatively compared to those aged 20-25, 31-35, and 40-above whose perceptions were positive. With regard to education, the results also show that those holding high school, university degree and diploma perceived maintaining social capital positively higher than with those who hold graduate degrees. Moreover, a regression model is proposed to study the effect of bridging, bonding, and maintaining social capital on social inclusion via social equality as a mediator. This exploratory study is necessary for testing the validity and reliability of the questionnaire which will be used in the main study that aims to investigate the perceptions of individuals towards building social capital to achieve social inclusion.

Keywords : government, social capital, social inclusion, social networks

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