

The role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi /Salah Al-Din Governorate

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Abstract

The research aimed to study the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district/Salah al-Din governorate. The research was based on the descriptive approach, and was applied to a sample of (458) women (according to the records of the Agriculture Division in the sub-district). For the purpose of verifying the stability and validity of the research tool, an exploratory sample of (20) women from outside the study sample was selected. After that, the final research sample was selected in a simple random manner and by (23%) of the study population, so that the number of respondents subject to the research procedures reached (105) women. Using a questionnaire form prepared according to scientific foundations consisting of five main areas: (educational and cultural empowerment, empowerment in building social relations, economic empowerment, civic and political empowerment, and empowerment in the face of social customs and traditions). The process of preparing this scale has gone through a number of successive methodological stages to ensure its construction in a scientifically accurate manner and its suitability for the objectives of the study. The results showed that the lowest score for the role reached (50), while the highest score reached (150), with an arithmetic average of (109.42), and a standard deviation of (33.18). The respondents were divided into three categories (small role, A medium role, a large role) using the law of the range and the length of the category that the largest percentage of respondents came within the medium role category, as their number reached (75) respondents and a percentage of (71.42%) of the total sample, followed by the two categories of the small role and the large role in second place and the same number, as the number of each of them reached (15) respondents and a percentage of (14.29%) for each category. Accordingly, the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district can be described as a medium role, which indicates that these sites play a tangible function in supporting the empowerment of rural women, especially in the areas of access. This role, although positive, still needs to be further strengthened and developed to reach a high level, due to the existence of some determinants that limit the optimal use of social networking sites.

Introduction and Study Problem

The contemporary world is witnessing rapid transformations in the field of technology and communication, especially with the wide spread of the Internet and modern media and communication, which

began since the sixties of the last century with the advent of electronic publishing, and developed significantly with the beginning of the third millennium [3] . The Internet represented a qualitative leap in human history, as it contributed to profound intellectual, cultural, social and

economic changes, and became a global communication network that contributes to the exchange of experiences and information, supports distance education, and provides access to databases and various scientific sources, until it was described as a "library without walls" [5]. **Digital development has also contributed to reshaping patterns of social interaction and building relationships, which has created virtual environments parallel to traditional social reality, and has had a direct impact in shaping trends, values and behaviors** [9]. In light of this development, social networking sites have emerged as one of the most prominent and influential applications of the Internet, as they provide an interactive space that allows individuals to express their views, exchange experiences, participate in public issues, and build social networks across geographical borders. **Kaplan & Haenlein has defined them as a set of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content** [15]. The countryside is of great importance in many countries of the world, because of its natural and human resources that constitute high proportions of national wealth, as well as being the main source of agricultural plant and animal production, as the development of agriculture and the achievement of national food security are closely linked to the development of the rural population as the main workforce in this sector [6]. The **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) confirms that the empowerment of rural women directly contributes to improving agricultural productivity, enhancing food security and reducing the gender development gap** [11]. Rural women also play a prominent role in achieving food security at the household and community levels, as they participate in field crop cultivation, animal husbandry and other agricultural work [8]. Women's attendance at

agricultural extension meetings and the use of explanatory means enhances their skills and experience, and it has been proven that they are more likely to learn skills compared to urban women by 10.5%. [11]. **Agricultural extension is one of the most important institutional tools supporting the development of rural women, as it provides technical and administrative information that contributes to raising their productive efficiency and improving their standard of living** [18]. hence the importance of providing rural women with appropriate technology, raising their level of performance in agricultural and livestock work by providing technical information and extension activities and enhancing communication between individuals and social institutions [2]. In this context, social networking sites have become a contemporary tool that can contribute to supporting the empowerment of rural women in its various dimensions. These platforms have provided opportunities to express and engage in community initiatives, market local products, acquire knowledge, and interact with community issues. This has contributed to opening new horizons for rural women and reducing some traditional social restrictions. **Some studies also indicate that the use of digital platforms contributes to enhancing the social capital of women by expanding support and communication networks outside the narrow local framework** [10]. Despite this potential, there are still scientific questions about the effectiveness of the role played by social networking sites in achieving real and sustainable empowerment of rural women, and about the nature of the areas in which this role is more clearly reflected, as well as the challenges that may limit the full utilization of these digital platforms in the rural environment. **The digital divide in terms of skills and access to the Internet may also constitute an obstacle to equal**

access to these means, especially among women in rural areas [13]. and the importance of addressing this problem more deeply is evident in light of what the literature indicates that the digital gender gap still exists, especially in rural areas, where women face challenges related to access to technology, poor digital skills, and social and cultural constraints that limit their full benefit from modern means of communication. A study [13]. confirmed that inequality in access to information and communication technologies contributes to the entrenchment of social and economic disparities between men and women, and limits opportunities for women's empowerment and active participation in development processes. The importance of studying this topic is reinforced by the Arabic literature, as the study [1]. concluded that social media is an effective tool in promoting the participation of Arab women in the social and political fields, but the degree of benefit from it varies according to the social environment and the level of digital awareness and community support. The study also indicated that cultural restrictions and traditional structures may limit the full employment of these means, especially in less open environments, which indicates the need to study this role in rural contexts, about the nature of the actual impact of these platforms on the empowerment of rural women. Therefore, ignoring the study of the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women may mean the continuation of this gap, and the loss of the opportunity to employ digital tools capable of bringing about a qualitative transformation in their social and economic conditions. In this sense, the problem of the study stems from the need to investigate the actual role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district/Salah al-Din governorate, by answering the following questions:

- 1- What is the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district in general?
- 2- What is the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district in each field of study?
- 3- What is the relationship between the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi and each of the studied independent variables?

Study objectives

The study aims to achieve the following:

First Objective: Identifying the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district/Salah Al-Din Governorate in general.

Second Objective: Identify the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi /Salahuddin Governorate in each of the following fields of study: (educational and cultural empowerment, empowerment in building social relations, economic empowerment, civic and political empowerment, and empowerment in the face of social customs and traditions).

Materials and methods

Study Methodology

This study was based on the descriptive approach: it is an appropriate approach to obtain accurate data on skills and knowledge in a limited period of time. This data is then systematically classified and processed with careful analysis to reveal the correlations between them. This approach contributes to the extraction of intrinsic connotations that help in a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon and also allows access to reliable results

that can be generalized, which enhances the accuracy of the recommendations drawn. This method is necessary to develop effective strategies that contribute to improving the research and applied reality (Al-Asadi, 2008: 51).

- Study area

The Ishaqi sub-district of Salah al-Din Governorate was chosen as an area to conduct the study. The geographical borders of the study area are from the north, Samarra district, from the south, Balad district, from the west, Lake Tharthar, and from the east, the Tigris River. The area of the study area is (483.33) km². It consists of (3) districts and includes about (35) villages and (165) communities. Ishaqi sub-district was chosen due to the large number of villages in which rural women work in agriculture and the lack of a study on the role of social media sites in empowering rural women in the research area, according to the researcher's knowledge.

- The study community and sample: The study community included all rural women in Ishaqi sub-district in Salah al-Din governorate, who own agricultural contracts, the number of which is (458) women (according to the records of the Agriculture Division in the sub-district). For the purpose of verifying the stability and validity of the research tool, a survey sample consisting of (20) women from outside the study sample was selected. After that, the final research sample was selected in a simple random manner and by (23%) of the study population, so that the number of respondents subject to the research procedures reached (105) women .

Preparing and introducing the survey form

The questionnaire was prepared in its initial form based on reviewing the relevant scientific sources and the results of previous studies, as well as using the

views of a number of experts and specialists in the field of research. The paragraphs of the questionnaire were drafted in line with the problem of the study, in light of its objectives and in line with the nature of the data to be collected and in a way that contributes to achieving the objectives of the study. The

The dependent variable / measuring the level of the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women:

The level of the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district/Salah al-Din governorate was measured through (50) paragraphs, each paragraph of which was designed to reflect a specific aspect of the empowerment areas adopted in the study. The paragraphs were distributed into five main areas by (10) paragraphs for each area. The questionnaire form adopted three alternatives to the answer: (large, medium , small) and the weights were given (3, 2, 1) respectively. Accordingly, the total score of the scale ranged between (50–150)

3 – 10: Statistical means:

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the data obtained from the questionnaire were organized, classified, classified and then analyzed statistically in order to reach accurate and objective results and presented in the final form that serves the purposes of the study, which are as follows:

1- Range: Use not to extract the length of the category and divide the independent variables into categories

(Flefel ,25:2013), use the following law:

Range = largest value – smallest value

2- Category length: Use to extract the length between one category and another by dividing the range by the number of required categories [4] and its law:

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Length of class $L = \frac{R}{K}$ (with the resulting rounding to the nearest integer)

3- Frequency distribution and percentages: It was used to determine the percentage of each of the categories of the variable covered in the study, using the following law.

Percentage = (Part) / (Whole) × 100

Whereas:

Part: The value to be determined.

All: The total sum of the values.

4- Arithmetic average (\bar{X}) was used to describe the numerical values of each variable and its law: [17].

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum xi}{n}$$

Whereas:

Arithmetic mean = \bar{X}

Number of respondents = n

Numeric values

5- Standard deviation (S.d): It was used to find out the extent of data dispersion from its mean of the variables included in the study: (Muhammad, 2007, 51) and its law.

$$S.d = \sqrt{\frac{\sum xi^2 - \frac{(\sum xi)^2}{n}}{n-1}}$$

Whereas:

$\sum xi^2$ = sum of squares of values

n = Number of respondents

6- The simple correlation coefficient (Pearson: Pearson): It was used to find the correlation between the level of the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women and each of the quantitative independent variables (Al-Baldawi, 2009, 193) and its following law:

Athan:

r = Correlation coefficient

$\sum Xi$ = values of the independent variable

$\sum Yi$ = Motivation Level Values

n = Number of respondents

7- Rank correlation coefficient (for Spearman r_s): used to measure the correlation between the descriptive independent variables and the level of the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women [16]. and his law

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \sum di^2}{n(n^2-1)}$$

= Spearman correlation coefficient r_s

= Square of Differences Between Ranks di^2

Number of respondents

8- Test (t): It was used to test the significance of the correlation between the level of the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women and the studied independent variables and by comparing them with the tabular values (t). [1] and its following law:

$$t = r \sqrt{\frac{n-2}{1-r^2}}$$

I will win for him, if I can.

t : Calculated t-value

Correlation coefficient (Maths.)

n: Number of respondents

9- Tabular t-value: at the level of 0.05 = (1.671) and at the level of 0.01 = (2.390)
Results and discussion

1- First Objective Identifying the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district/Salah Al-Din Governorate in general :

The results showed that the lowest score for the role was (50), while the highest score was (150), with an arithmetic mean of (109.42), and a standard deviation of (33.18). The respondents were divided into three categories (small role, medium role, and large role) using the law of the range and the length of the category, as shown in a table, as shown in Table (1):

Table(1) Categories of the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in general

Role Categories	Nos	%	Average Role	X̄	s d
Small role (50-83)	15	14.29	76	109.42	33.18
Intermediate role (84-117)	75	71.42	110		
Big role (118- over)	15	14.29	.138		
Total	105	100 %			

The results in Table (1) show that the largest percentage of respondents fell within the medium role category, numbering (75) respondents, representing (71.42%) of the total sample. This was followed by the small and large role categories, each with (15) respondents, representing (14.29%). Therefore, the role of social media in empowering rural women in the Al-Ishaqi district can be described as medium, indicating that these platforms play a tangible role in supporting the empowerment of rural women, particularly in the areas of access to information, enhancing social

2- Second Objective: Identify the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi /Salah Al-Din Governorate in each of the following fields of study: (educational and cultural

First : Educational and Cultural Empowerment

The results showed that the lowest score for the role of social networking sites in empowering rural women in the field of educational and cultural empowerment was (10), while the highest score was (50), with an arithmetic average of (22.31), and

communication, and building awareness, expression, and participation. However, despite its positive impact, this role still needs further strengthening and development to reach a higher level. This is attributed to certain limitations that restrict the optimal use of social media, such as the varying digital skills among rural women, the limited number of training and awareness programs aimed at their digital empowerment, and some social constraints that may affect the level of interaction and effective use of these platforms.

empowerment, empowerment in building social relations, economic empowerment, civic and political empowerment, empowerment in the face of social customs and traditions):

a standard deviation of (4.98). The respondents were divided into three categories (small role, medium role, and large role) using the law of range and category length, as shown in Table (2):

Table(2) Categories of the field of educational and cultural empowerment

Role Categories	Nos	%	Average Role	X ⁻	s d
Small role (10-16)	19	18.09	14.43	22.31	4.98
Intermediate role (17-23)	50	47.61	20.98		
Large role (24 - 30)	36	34.28	28.33		
Total	105	100 %			

The results in Table (2) show that the largest percentage of respondents fell within the medium role category, numbering (50) respondents, representing (47.61%) of the total sample. This was followed by the large role category with (36) respondents, representing (34.28%), while the small role category came in last with (19) respondents, representing (18.09%). Therefore, the role of social media in the field of educational and cultural empowerment can be described as a medium role tending towards an upward trend. This reflects the tangible contribution of these platforms to developing the knowledge and skills of rural women. The data in this area showed that social media contributed to respondents obtaining new agricultural information, accessing agricultural videos, applying scientific recommendations, increasing health awareness, learning

about modern agricultural technologies, and accessing information related to the agricultural environment and its impact on production, as well as participating in women's cultural activities. Furthermore, the high percentage of the large role category, exceeding one-third of the sample, indicates the existence of a segment of women who were able to effectively utilize these platforms to develop their cultural and agricultural knowledge and enhance their skills. Despite their confidence in their abilities, the concentration of the largest percentage within the middle category indicates that this role, despite its positive nature, still needs further support through enhancing agricultural and awareness-raising content directed at rural women and developing their digital skills. This contributes to raising the level of educational and cultural empowerment to higher levels .

Second : Empowerment in building social relations:

The results showed that the lowest degree of the role of social networking sites in the field of empowerment in building social relations reached (10), while the highest degree reached (30), with an arithmetic average of (23.08),

and a standard deviation of (5.48). The respondents were divided into three categories (small role, medium role, and large role) using the law of range and category length, as shown in Table (3):

Table(3) Categories of the field of empowerment in building social relations

Role Categories	number	%	Average Role	\bar{X}	s d
Small role (10-16)	11	10.48	14.99	23.08	5.48
Intermediate role (17-23)	60	57.14	21.9		
Large role (24 - 30)	34	32.38	27.81		
Total	105	100 %			

Third: Economic empowerment

The results showed that the lowest score for the role of social networking sites in the field of economic empowerment reached (10), while the highest score reached (30), with an arithmetic average of (20.40), and a

standard deviation of (3.16). The respondents were divided into three categories (small role, medium role, and large role) using the law of the range and the length of the category and as shown in Table (4):

Table(4) Categories of the field of economic empowerment

Role Categories	Nos	%	Average Role	\bar{X}	s d
Small role (10-16)	37	35.23	14.34	20.40	3.16
Intermediate role (17-23)	50	47.62	21.88		
Large role (24 - 30)	18	17.15	28.76		
Total	105	100 %			

It is clear from the results in Table (4) that the largest percentage of respondents fell within the medium role category, with (50) respondents, representing (47.62%) of the total sample. This was followed by the small role category with (37) respondents, representing (35.23%), while the large role category came in last place with (18) respondents, representing (17.15%). Based on this, the role of social media in the field of economic empowerment can be

described as a medium role. This reflects the limited but tangible contribution of these sites to supporting the economic aspects of rural women. The items in the field showed that social media contributed to identifying the prices of crops and agricultural products, following the experiences of other rural women in production projects, and promoting handicrafts, homemade products, and other items. However, the role remaining at the medium level may be

attributed to the fact that economic benefit from social media requires the availability of a small amount of capital, experience in e-marketing, and the ability to access markets. These are factors that may not be available to all rural women, in addition to the limited

Fourth : Civil and Political Empowerment

The results showed that the lowest score for the role of social networking sites in the field of civil and political empowerment was (10), while the highest score was (30), with an arithmetic mean of (20.29) and a

digital infrastructure and weak trust in online commercial transactions in the rural environment. The use of these platforms often limits its impact to the cognitive aspect rather than the actual productive aspect.

standard deviation of (5.22). The respondents were divided into three categories (small role, medium role, and large role) using the law of range and category length, as shown in Table (5):

Table(5) Categories of the field of civil and political empowerment

Role Categories	number	%	Average Role	X ⁻	s d
Small role (10-16)	18	17.14	13.32	20.29	5.22
Intermediate role (17-23)	69	65.71	20.23		
Large role (24 - 30)	18	17.14	27.52		
Total	105	100 %			

It is clear from the results in Table (5) that the largest percentage of respondents fell within the medium role category, with (69) respondents, representing (65.71%) of the total sample. The small and large role categories were equal, with (18) respondents each, representing (17.14%) for each category. Based on this, the role of social media in the field of civic and political empowerment can be described as a medium role. This reflects the reasonable contribution of these platforms to enhancing rural women's awareness of their civic rights and their engagement with public issues, such as accessing local news, learning about laws and regulations related to women, and following

community activities and volunteer initiatives. However, the role remaining at the medium level may be attributed to the nature of the rural environment, which is still characterized by a degree of reservation towards political participation, as well as the limited participation of women in party activities or local councils. Furthermore, the use of social media is often limited to following and learning more than actual participation in discussions or civic initiatives. Additionally, some customs and traditions may limit women's direct involvement in public affairs. The civic and political impact of social media is more educational than practical, behavioral.

Fifth : Empowerment in the face of social customs and traditions

The results showed that the lowest score for the role of social networking sites in the field of empowerment in the face of social customs and traditions was (10), while the highest score was (30), with an arithmetic

average of (23.20), and a standard deviation of (5.08). The respondents were divided into three categories (small role, medium role, and large role) using the law of range and category length, as shown in Table (6):

Table(6) Categories of the field of empowerment in the face of social customs and traditions

Role Categories	Nos	%	Average Role	X ⁻	s d
Small role (10-16)	13	12.38	15.30	23.20	5.08
Intermediate role (17-23)	61	58.09	22.20		
Large role (24 - 30)	31	29.52	28.50		
Total	105	100 %			

The results in Table (6) show that the largest percentage of respondents fell within the medium role category, numbering (61) respondents, representing (58.09%) of the total sample. This was followed by the large role category with (31) respondents, representing (29.52%), while the small role category came in last place with (13) respondents, representing (12.38%). Based on this, the role of social media in empowerment in the face of social customs and traditions can be described as a medium role tending towards an upward trend. This reflects the clear contribution of these platforms in enhancing rural women's awareness of some social issues related to women's

rights, such as the importance of education and work, the rejection of some negative social practices, and learning about the experiences of women who were able to overcome traditional restrictions. However, the role remaining at the medium level may be attributed to the strength and deep-rootedness of some customs and traditions in the rural environment, which are difficult to change quickly despite increased awareness of them. Furthermore, social pressures and fear of criticism may push some women to adopt more conservative stances in reality compared to what they follow through digital platforms..

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions:

- 1- The results showed that the majority of the respondents in the category of the average role of social networking sites in empowering rural women. We conclude from this that the level of contribution of social networking sites in empowering rural women in Ishaqi sub-district is of an average nature, reflecting the actual impact of these sites in various areas of empowerment without reaching the high level.
- 2- The results showed that the role of social networking sites came within the average level in all fields of study with a relative difference between them. We conclude from this that the impact of these sites is characterized by inclusiveness across the various fields of empowerment, but it is more evident in the social and cultural aspects compared to the economic, civil and political aspects
- 3- The results of the ranking of the fields of study in descending order showed that the field of empowerment in the face of social customs and traditions came first, followed by empowerment in building social relations, and then educational and cultural empowerment, while economic, civil and political empowerment came in the last ranks. We conclude from this that the contribution of social networking sites to the empowerment of rural women is more concentrated in social and cultural aspects compared to economic, civil and political aspects, with a relative

difference in the strength of the impact between the fields.

Recommendations

In light of the results of the study and the conclusions, the researcher recommends the following : 1-The need for the local government in Salah al-Din governorate to strengthen the digital infrastructure in rural areas, and to support literacy programs for rural women within development plans in a way that contributes to raising the level of empowerment through digital platforms.

2-The researcher recommends agricultural extension centers in Salah al-Din governorate to establish and manage official social media platforms that provide simplified and interactive agricultural guidance content aimed at rural women, focusing on the transfer of modern technologies and scientific recommendations in an applied manner.

3- Emphasizing the importance of the role of civil society organizations working in the field of women's empowerment in Salah Al-Din Governorate in implementing applied training programs in e-marketing and micro-enterprise management, to enable women to invest in digital platforms economically.

4- Recommending the Directorate of Labor and Social Affairs in Salah Al-Din Governorate to integrate digital skills development and entrepreneurship programs into programs to support rural women in a way that enhances their participation in productive activities.

5-The need for the Directorate of Education and educational institutions in Salah al-Din Governorate to organize educational programs that promote digital and cultural awareness among rural

women, and support the meaningful use of social networking sites.

6- Calling on local community leaders in Ishaqi sub-district to support positive trends towards the participation of rural women in social and economic activities through digital platforms, thus contributing to creating a more receptive social environment for their developmental role.

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