Chapter 33
Bahraini Women in PR Managerial Positions:
Challenges and Empowerment Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the gap in the literature on the experience of women who are holding managerial positions in public relations in the non-Western society of Bahrain. This research attempts to provide a unique contribution to PR scholarship by using a qualitative approach to study the experience of Bahraini female leaders working in public relations. The chapter introduces the progression enjoyed by women in the kingdom of Bahrain today, in parallel to the social, cultural, and political developments enjoyed by this country. The appointment of women to managerial positions in Bahrain over the past years has ushered in a significant departure from the traditionally exclusive, male-dominated decision-making arena. The research suggests combined liberal and radical feminist strategies to improve the role of female managers in public relations in the cultural context of Bahrain. Moreover, new legislative and educational development facilitates promising opportunities for the progress of female PR practitioners in managerial positions in Bahrain.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges facing organisations in the age of globalisation, especially in the Arab region, is the role of women in managerial positions. Although women has succeeded to play managerial roles in different sectors in Bahrain, there is a considerable gap in the literature on the experience of women who are holding managerial positions in public relations in the non-western society of Bahrain. Although previous research has studied the role women played in public relations, these studies were limited

to quantitative approach and to the Western context. Moreover, there is need for profound studies on women's experiences in management roles without comparing them to men (Alvesson & Billing; 2000; Kark, 2004), moving research on women in management globally (Schein, 2001), Arab women's implicit leadership theories, and the leadership experience of women in the Gulf (Neal, Finlay & Tansey 2005; Al-Lamky, 2007). Thus, this research attempts to provide a unique contribution to PR and management scholarship by using a qualitative approach to study the experience of Bahraini female managers working in public relations.

The appointment of women to managerial positions in Bahrain over the past years has ushered in a significant departure from the traditionally exclusive male dominated decision-making arena, and suggests an end to an era of absolute patriarchal dominance in management positions. In light of this potential opportunity to reach positions of power and influence, it is crucial to investigate the experience of women who have achieved PR managerial positions in Bahrain. The contribution of this chapter is that it provides original qualitative data on gender and management in public relations in the cultural context of Bahrain. Therefore, it is helpful in the next section to offer a background of Kingdom of Bahrain to achieve better understanding of Bahraini woman in this culture.

2. BACKGROUND OF KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

The Kingdom of Bahrain is one of the Arabian Gulf States, off the coast of Saudi Arabia and to the immediate north-west of Qatar. Bahrain is an archipelago composed of 33 islands. According to the e-government portal (2017), the total area of Bahrain in 2017 is about 770.850 square kilometers and the total population is 1.314.562 people: 630,744 of them are Bahraini and 683,818 are non-Bahraini. The Kingdom of Bahrain is a traditional tribal Islamic society that has witnessed rapid development due to its possession of oil. It shares many norms with the rest of the Arabian Gulf States like religion, culture, and language, which differentiates it from societies in other parts of the world (Dechant & Allamky, 2005). Arabic is the official language of Bahrain, but English is widely spoken.

Bahrain is also experiencing different stages of development like urbanisation and increased contact with foreigners in educational, political, and economic aspects. Although Bahrain has been influenced by globalisation and people have been affected by the modern lifestyle, they are still close to their traditions and cultural identity derived from Islamic culture as Bahrain's population is 85% Muslim. As a Muslim country, social relationships and heritage affect the practice of PR in Bahrain (Al-Kandari & Gaither, 2011). The social status of Bahraini women is defined by Islamic law, but people in the Arab Gulf are more restricted to their cultural traditions. Sometimes there is a confusing mixture between Islamic values that give women the right to work and represent themselves in public and the society's restricted traditions that associate women with restricted roles in society (AlSaqer, 2008).

Under the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the Kingdom of Bahrain has expanded its economy away from oil and gas reserves and encouraged foreign investment through trade liberalisation strategies (Metcalfe, 2006, 2007). Bahrain is regarded as the world leader of Islamic banking and is implementing an expansion strategy to become an international centre in banking and finance with strong connections with the world, through its current harbour development in the capital Manama (Al-Alawi, 2016).

The Bahrain National Charter (2001) represents the current legislative structure that gives women the rights of empowerment and ensures their protection against discrimination in the economic and political

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