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Stance-taking and Language Choice in #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen: Critical Discourse Analysis of Campaigning Discourse on Twitter

by

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Abstract

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Twitter, with its affordances, offers a rich site to investigate linguistic practices and the sociocultural meanings they carry in the noisy, multilingual and multi-voiced context of social media. The current study aimed to explore how Twitter users use discursive strategies and language choice to express their stances towards the guardianship system in Twitter campaigning hashtag *#StopEnslaveSaudiWomen.* The study deployed quantitative and qualitative methods in collecting and analysing the tweets while relying on different theories such as stance, language choice, and CMDA models that are integrated within the wider framework of critical discourse analysis. With the support of MAXQDA, 3,162 tweets were analysed following Fairclough's three dimensional-model.

Twitter users employed various discursive strategies in constructing their stances towards the guardianship system relying on different modes supported by Twitter such as pictures, emojis, videos as well as multilingual texts. The constructed stances were varied in being conservative, liberal, moderate, radical, and traditional representing a range of views on political, religious, social topics. The tweets revealed key themes/ topics that were employed differently by particular groups in English and/ or in Arabic (e.g., the driving ban) to align/ disalign with different groups; and to legitimise, delegitimise their stances and stances of other. Audience was also found to be a significant factor in language choice when taking a stance. The study has contributed to a better understanding of discursive strategies and language choice and how they are reconfigured and interrelated in the online context.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Bdreah Mubarak F Alswais

Title of thesis: Stance-taking and Language Choice in #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen: Critical Discourse Analysis of Campaigning Discourse on Twitter

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: .....

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter aims at introducing the topic of the current research to better understand the research problem (which is discussed in further details in chapter 2). The chapter then starts with a background of the study offering summary of the guardianship system followed by an overview of the Twitter campaigning hashtag *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen.* After that, I briefly show recent changes to the guardianship system after the appointment of Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman inn 2017. Then, I show why it is important to conduct this study and the rationale behind it. Then, I provide objectives and research questions intended to be investigated in this study. Finally, I present a brief outline of the structure of the current thesis.

1.1. Background of the Study

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab and Islamic country situated in the Middle East and is often referred to as the heart of the Arabian Peninsula due to its central location and significance in the region. The Kingdom has long established its importance in the area and the world due to is large geographical size, political influence, economic power and religious position. It has a long history that is deeply rooted in religion and traditions which have significantly played a key role in shaping the identity of Saudi Arabia as will be explained further in chapter 2, section 2.1. It is a place where the tribal norms and religious teachings can intersect on different levels and influence various aspects of life in Saudi Arabi such as education system, daily practices, sociocultural norms, and legal system.

Women's rights in Saudi Arabia, a main focus of this study, is one area that has long been affected by a combination of tribal customs, sociocultural traditions, and religion. Historically, these factors have shaped the rights, roles, and responsibilities of women in Saudi Arabia. One form through which we could see such an influence, is the guardianship system. The guardianship system is a system that requires women in Saudi Arabia to obtain a permission from a male guardian (*wali or mahram*: usually a father, husband, brother or a son) to access the healthcare system, attend higher education, issue formal documents (e.g., an identification card, a passport), get married, travel abroad and to be released from prison.

The guardianship system was enforced through religious expectations and societal norms rather than strictly codified laws. The absence of legal written grounding of this system in Saudi Arabia might have encouraged many male guardians and different establishments to exploit their power to deprive women of their basic rights (Al-Sudairy, 2017, p.124). The guardianship system is deeply ingrained in religious interpretations and in societal norms and it is often perceived as representing core values in many Islamic and Arab countries. The system has been traditionally revolved around the idea of protection that the male guardian is responsible to take care of women's matters and provide for the family. In this sense, the guardianship system is often viewed as a form of protection that reflects

welfare, authenticity, honour, and respect that shape many familial social practices. The assigned societal roles to men such as the protector, the provider, the leader might have contributed to placing men in a position of power and authority over women. It is arguable that the guardianship system had been applied in ways that constrained freedom of movement, educational opportunities and the right to work for many women in Saudi Arabia (Hamdan, 2005).

The guardianship system has been criticised for its discrimination against women in Saudi Arabia and hindering their progress. This system has been a topic of discussion and debate attracting the attention of scholars, international organisations, ordinary people, journalists, and activists both locally and globally. Human Rights Watch has raised concerns regarding the guardianship system on different occasions and called for a full abolition of the system to allow women to enjoy their rights equal to their men counterparts. In addition, Saudi activists had challenged the conservative societal norms in their call to end the guardianship system. Scholars in Saudi Arabia and the wider Muslim community also have long debated the guardianship system often influenced by various ideologies. Some have adopted stricter stances in interpreting religious texts viewing the guardianship system as a religious duty and Muslims should embrace it. On the other hand, other scholars have relied on more relaxed approach in interpreting those texts viewing the system as a cultural practice that needs reviewing and reformations.

The discussions and debates related to women's rights and the guardianship system have often taken place online. The lack of organised non-governmental structures to advocate for women's rights and other political issues have often discouraged public campaigns. Moreover, campaigning is usually not encouraged from a social perspective being viewed as an act of disruption, and disrespectful to societal order. The Saudi society is built on social and religious values such as social cohesion, respect for traditional hierarchies and obedience to the ruler's orders to maintain national homogeneity and political as well as economic stability. With such discouragement for public campaigning, social media has become an alternative space for activism where people can engage in public discourse and express their stances and voice their opinions in ways that are not normally available in the 'offline' context. Twitter, which is a main focus in the current study, has been utilised for campaigning due to its fast-paced nature and its various features such as public visibility, supporting the use of different languages, immediate feedback mechanisms and brevity with limited character count. Twitter's design and culture can be encouraging for heated and controversial topics.

Hashtagging is one key feature on Twitter that allows its users to participate in broader conversations around shared topics. It is a powerful tool for activism, communication, marketing, community building across a large scale of audience worldwide. The guardianship system is a topic that has long been debated on Twitter that caught the attention of many individuals as well as organisations nationally and worldwide. Many hashtags in English and Arabic were launched in support of the campaign of abolishing the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia. The current study investigates *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen* that was launched in 2016 after the Human Rights Watch (HRW)

published a report titled "Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System"[1] criticising the guardianship system for being an obstacle to women's rights in the Kingdom. The report called for reformation and for further campaigning. In the following I briefly provide an overview of the hashtag.

1.2. #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen

After the publication of the report on the guardianship system by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) in July 2016, many hashtags were launched in support of the campaign. HWR first initiated the hashtag of *#TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship* highlighting the guardianship system and its violation of basic human rights such as autonomy and freedom of mobility. Other hashtags in English and in Arabic soon emerged on Twitter to support the call to reform and end the guardianship system. For example, *#سعوديات_نطالب_بإسقاط_الولايه #Saudyat_nitalb_bi'esqat_alwilaya* 'Saudi women demand to end the guardianship system', *#IAmMyOwnGuardian,* and *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen,* which is the main hashtag under study.

The Twitter hashtag went viral and received national and international attention, drawing on different stories of Saudi women's suffering as a result of the guardianship system. The hashtag was active for a couple of years after 2016. The campaigners used numbers next to the hashtag name indicating the number of days the hashtag has been active for. For example, *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen1, #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen2, #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen3 and so on.* Stories using the hashtag included those detailing challenges and difficulties these women faced in terms of travelling, mobility, and in autonomy in making decisions. The initiation of the hashtag was within the context of a flourishing Saudi feminist movement against the discriminatory acts towards women, including the guardianship system. At the same time, other actions emphasising the harmful aspects of the guardianship system and demanding the Saudi government end it were taking place. For example, Saudi women sent telegrams to the King, and about 15,000 women signed an online petition to end the guardianship system (Alsahi, 2018).

The hashtag attracted considerable opposition as well as support among different groups of people both nationally and globally. It caught the attention of many activists, journalist, institutions, writers, and organisations. Many groups adopted a liberal progressive stance in their demands and called for the abolition of the guardianship system given the ongoing reforms in Saudi Arabia. However, other groups used both similar and/or different justifications when opposing either the reforms or the end of the guardianship system. One of the justifications used by the opposing groups was their view that the hashtag was a form of 'feminism'. For many Saudi and Muslim societies, feminism has always

[1] More information available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/17/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system#:~:text=As%20dozens%20of%20Saudi%20women,make%20key%20decisions%20for%20themselves

had negative connotations. In their view, it is a borrowed term representing Western values, which have traditionally been associated with sexual freedom and Western hegemony (Al Fassi, 2016, p.188). Hence, any practice of feminist activism could be seen as a threat to Islamic values and "perceived as being anti-Islam and against the Saudi culture" (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019, p.16).

The current study, however, acknowledges the discriminatory practices inherent in the guardianship system and investigates the stances of different groups on this system. The debate around the guardianship system in Saudi society has reflected different ideologies and positions. Some groups have adopted a traditional stance yet accepted and supported the reforms made by the government. Other groups, however, have adopted an enlightened and progressive stance, demanded further reforms and participated in organising campaigns. Others have taken a radical Islamic stance and resisted any change or amendment to the guardianship system. The *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen* hashtag is investigated in the current study to show how these ideologies and stances are constructed online.

The use of the word 'enslaving' in the hashtag is not accurate in describing the legal and modern context of Saudi Arabia today. Nevertheless, historically, some women in Saudi Arabia had suffered discrimination under the umbrella of the guardianship system. The guardianship system ensured that men have power over women, since a male guardian could control the woman's movement and autonomy. Hence, the use of 'enslaving' could be understood to depict the powerlessness of Saudi women under the guardianship system. However, it must be noted that campaigning hashtags on Twitter can sometimes be used by different groups to highlight specific issues in which they use exaggerated and aggravated language. While such language can draw attention and rallying support, it can be an effective tool for spreading misinformation and hate speech, intensifying conflict, as well as attacking individuals, groups, countries (Enarsson and Lindgren 2019; Al-Rawi, 2022). The use of a vigorous word like 'enslaving' then might had been used for such purposes to provoke a strong reaction towards the guardianship system, and/ or to attack Saudi Arabia policies.

This study investigates the #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen hashtag to gain an insight into how Twitter users express their views strategically and creatively in the online campaigning discourse. The hashtag had been in use for several years and many Twitter users had tweeted to condemn or support the guardianship system. Thus, Twitter provides an alternative space for Saudi women to express their stances and debate issues, which would not normally be possible "offline". Women have used Twitter to publicly highlight the disadvantages of their situation and voice their feelings, challenges and concerns. Females constitute around 51% of Twitter users in Saudi Arabia (The Social Clinic, 2015). Saudi women use Twitter as it offers direct public contact with governmental sectors and decision makers in Saudi Arabia, thus linking the "powerless and power" (Alsudairy, 2020, p. 22). Anonymity is also key for Saudi women due to the typically negative patriarchal perspectives towards women liberation movements. In this way, women can express their views and engage in online campaigns

without being labelled or harassed. However, recently, many women have chosen to use their real names and identities. This may be due to the country's effort to reduce the power of religious authorities and empower Saudi women. Importantly, as Schanzer and Miller reported, "the Saudi religious establishment is less overtly radical than in the past" (2012, p.5). This, together with recent socio-political reforms, may have contributed to a reduction in conservative views towards women. Indeed, the Saudi Arabian government has recently passed new legislation to control threats towards or bullying of women online, and this, together with Twitter's stated aim to prohibit any hateful conduct or abuse directed at women may be encouraging them to use their names.

It must be noted that, during the time of writing this research, many changes were observed related to main topics deployed in this study. For example, in July 2023, Twitter was officially rebranded as X by Elon Musk with the aim to expand the platform's uses to include financial services, banking, shopping. The popular blue bird logo associated with Twitter has now been changed to the letter X. Moreover, updated terms have appeared to replace old ones such as tweet: replaced by post, retweet: replaced by repost. However, the functionality of these terms remains the same despite the renaming. In the current study, I continue to use the term Twitter to refer to the platform and related old terms such as tweet, retweet due to convenience and practicality as these were the terms used when I first started writing this research.

Other changes are related to the guardianship system, the Saudi government has introduced significant changes to women's rights and the guardianship system such as allowing women to travel without a male guardian consent. These changes were largely promoted by Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman and Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia in 2016 has launched a programme "Saudi Vision 2030" that aims to develop the country economically and at the same time to preserve and promote the sociocultural values of the Islamic Saudi identity (https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/vision-2030/). The new reformations emphasise Saudi Arabia's continuous efforts in empowering the Saudi women and reflects its policy in treating both genders equally as complementary to each other. In the current study, I have highlighted these changes towards empowering the Saudi women whenever appropriate. In the following I briefly shed light on some of these reforms that have been taking place since 2017.

1.3. Reformations Since 2017

1. Women's Travelling

Previously, travelling abroad for Saudi women was a challenge both legally and socially, mainly due to the guardianship system (*wilaya*). To travel outside the Kingdom, women were required to obtain explicit approval from their male guardian (typically a father, husband, brother, or a son) which was usually issued by *the General Directorate of Passports* (*Jawazat*) and, in more recent times, via online governmental platforms (*Absher* application). The document of approval usually stated the list

of countries a woman was allowed to travel to as approved by her guardian. Moreover, the approval would specify the period she was allowed to travel within, and if the date passed the women was not permitted to travel.

The issue of women's right to travel has long been disputed both in Saudi Arabia and internationally. It is a complex issue that is deeply rooted in religious and social traditions in Saudi Arabia. Some scholars adopted a radical stance on women travelling, fiercely opposing traveling alone both inside and outside the country. Their justification was their conservative interpretations of religious texts, which they supported with emotional of how the restrictions on female travel was a form of protection and a way of preserving the family. Advocates of the restrictions feared that allowing women to travel without their guardian's permission could result in weakening family bonds and moral decay that would eventually have a deleterious influence on society.

This practice was also reinforced by the social norms in which traditional family structures played a critical role in forming social expectations surrounding women. Traditionally, males were expected to accompany women when travelling whether within Saudi Arabia or abroad. Many families, however, resisted this practice and women were often allowed to travel simply with their male guardians' permission. Yet for others, it hindered their freedom of movement, ability to work, and educational opportunities.

The ban on women's travel abroad was opposed by many activists who pressed the authorities to reform it. They viewed it as a radical practice, incompatible with the development Saudi Arabia had begun to witness in the 21st century. In addition, Saudi Arabia faced international criticism of their travelling policy, with detractors claiming it was a violation of human rights. Finally, on 20th August 2019, the guardianship system was amended when the Council of Ministers approved a new system allowing Saudi women to apply passports by themselves, as shown below in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The new system allows women over 21 to travel abroad without having a male guardian's permission. They also can independently apply passports for themselves and their children. The new legalisation was accompanied by other laws to ensure women's empowerment and safety under the new reforms.

Figure 1 The new legalisations as issued by the Council of Ministers in August 2019 (Centre for Governmental Communication, 2019)

Translation: the Council of Ministers approves new legalisation that allows Saudi female citizens to apply for passports by themselves.

In its last session, The Saudi Council of Ministers approved a new regulation that allows Saudi female citizens to apply for their own passports like all citizens.

The new system also grants female Saudi citizens aged 21 and above the right to travel freely. The new system is to come into effect by the end of August 2019.

The new system extends the series of reforms and initiatives seeking to amend and develop the governmental laws and systems in line with the needs of society.

The Kingdom has witnessed the recent decisions allowing women to drive and giving them the right to establish and manage businesses. In addition, the Kingdom has approved a system to prevent intimidation and harassment in public places.

The new regulations enhance women's opportunities to hold senior positions in the government, including the position of Deputy Minister or ambassador.

This comes under the Kingdom's efforts to empower women and reinforce their rights like their male brothers.

Figure 2 A tweet on the Jawazat Twitter account announcing the lifting of the travelling abroad ban on women

Translation: In an implementation of the Royal Decree No. M/ 134 dated 27/11/1440 H, the General Directorate of Passports (Jawazat) has begun receiving applications from women aged 21 years and above to issue or renew passports and travel abroad without the need for a permit.

2. *Women's Driving*

The ban on women driving was in place for decades in Saudi Arabia. Similar to the guardianship system, the driving ban was justified based on religious and cultural reasons. Many conservative religious scholars argued that allowing women to drive would negatively affect the family and society's values. In one extreme view, Saleh Al-loheidan, a Saudi cleric, preacher, and member of the Council of Senior Scholars expressed a radical stance on women driving. In an interview with a Saudi newspaper, *Sabaq*, he reported that driving was dangerous for women as it could affect their ovaries and was later interviewed on TV in relation to what he said[2]. Although some supported his stance, Al-loheidan's words were viciously mocked on social media.

The opposing view of the ban on women driving was not necessarily expressed but rather practised. Interestingly, women were seen in public driving their cars in rural, remote areas and villages. One reason for this was the necessity and practicality, as many needed to manage their farms and animals without having to constantly rely on men. Other reasons might be due to the remoteness of these areas

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTWIwedDPoQ

and being away from the scrutiny seen in urban areas.

The long debate about women driving revealed a variety of opinions that had been shaped by cultural, political, religious and economic factors. The stances ranged from radical opposition to strong support of the driving ban being lifted. However, more progressive stances on women driving were adopted in the wake of reforms made by Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman. On 26th September 2017, King Salman announced that the ban on women driving would be lifted and licences were set to be issued from 24th June 2018, a screenshot of the announcement is attached below in Figure 3. The political decision took into consideration the strong opposition by some groups, and therefore the reforms were gradually applied. For example, the establishment of driving schools and the issuing of licences were announced before the ban was lifted completely.

Many clerics and religious scholars supported the decision to overturn the driving ban following the announcement by the King, perhaps due to the fact that following the ruler is encouraged in the religious traditions to ensure the unity of the country. The majority of the members of the Council of Senior Scholars supported the lifting of the driving ban, as illustrated in Figure 4 below, who portrayed it as being consistent with religious and social values. Moreover, it was politically represented as a necessary step to modernise the country and include women further in the public sphere, thus benefitting the whole of society and the country.

Figure 3 A tweet from the Saudi General Department of Traffic's (Murur) Twitter account announcing the lifting of the ban on women driving.

Translation: In an implementation of the Royal Decree No. 905 dated on the sixth of Muharram 1439 H [corresponding to 26th September 2017], as of this day, Sunday, the tenth of Shawal 1439 H [corresponding to 24th June 2018], women with an appropriate driving licence are permitted to drive vehicles on the roads. Wishing everyone a safe journey.

Figure 4 A tweet from the Saudi Ministry of Interior's Twitter account reporting the Council of the Senior Scholars' stance on lifting the ban on women driving.

Translation: The majority of the members of the Council of Senior Scholars do not see any objection to allowing women drive vehicles in light of the necessary legal and systematic guarantees.

3. Access to Entertainment and Sports

The reopening of cinemas and theatres in Saudi Arabia in 2018 marked a significant shift in the history of Saudi Arabia. It was part of Muhammed bin Salman's plan to develop the country by offering various opportunities to Saudi citizens in different areas. It must be noted that cinemas existed during the 1960's and 1970's in major cities like Riyadh and Dammam. Their existence, however, was limited to companies and compounds like Aramco. The religious wave that hit Saudi Arabia in the early 1980s following the Iranian Revolution and the Siege of Makkah in 1979 contributed to the decision to ban cinemas and the introduction of restrictions on other forms of entertainment such as listening to music. Saudi citizens found ways around the bans and restrictions by visiting neighbouring countries and cities, including Bahrain and Dubai, where they could enjoy watching a movie. Since 2018, cinemas and theatres have continued to open across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi Arabia has begun hosting and organising national and international film festivals such as the Red Sea International Film Festival[3]. The Saudi government also supports and encourages Saudi actors and actresses in the film industry. Saudi citizens can now enjoy movies that feature Saudi actresses and actors rather than relying on non-Saudis from neighbouring countries to represent Saudi people.

In the same year, and for the first time, women in Saudi Arabia were permitted to attend various sporting events either alone or with their families. Women can now attend football matches in stadiums to support their local team and/or the Saudi national team, which was strictly prohibited

[3] https://redseafilmfest.com/en/

prior to 2018. This decision has opened up many opportunities for Saudi female citizens to engage in sports both professionally and recreationally. It is now common to see Saudi females working as organisers, guards, referees, photographers and journalists in the sports field, which had previously been limited to male citizens. The city of Jeddah was the first to witness female attendees at a football match in the history of Saudi Arabia[4]. Jeddah was specifically chosen as it is less conservative regarding gender mixing and women covering. Following this, women in other cities were allowed to attend different sporting events. In addition, the recent deals with popular international players have contributed to normalising the presence of females in public life. Many of these players' wives have attended the sporting events uncovered and have been seen next to Saudi females either fully covered or uncovered.

Other key reforms have included the amendment of the Civil Status Law to give mothers of newborns the right to report their baby's birth or death, a right that had previously been restricted to the father or male relatives. Moreover, women in Saudi Arabia can now register their marriage or divorce, which also had been permitted by men in the past. Another remarkable reform in Saudi Arabia was to allow women to perform religious practices such as Umrah and Hajj without the need of a male guardian (*Mahram*). The significance of this reform is indicative of the recent relaxation of the guardianship system and the fact women have more freedom of movement and autonomy.

The above discussion has triggered me to investigate the complex stances people adopt towards the guardianship system and to investigate meanings and ideologies these stances carry. In the following section I provide an overview of the study's rationale followed by research objectives and questions.

1.4. Rationale

Social media applications are widely used today due to their global reach, easy access, and technological features. These features allow participants to connect, interact, collaborate, produce, and share content through different forms of social network sites (SNSs) (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Zappavigna 2012; Leppänen et al. 2014; Page et al. 2014) "in a participatory environment" where participants can be heard and seen (Langlois et al. 2009). Twitter is one of the most growing SNSs that has been used widely worldwide that has served as a significant digital platform for socio-political campaigning in expressing opinions, reaching people, and responding to public reactions (Vergeer and Hermans 2013; Chiluwa and Ifukor 2015). Researchers are paying more attention to campaigning discourse on Twitter due to its nature that can offer variable and dynamic discourse and at the same time can provide a great deal of publicly and freely accessible, naturally occurring data that can be

[4] https://aawsat.com/home/article/1141391/بالصور-أول-حضور-نسائي-للمباريات-في-الملاعب-السعودية

downloaded easily.

Studies on online campaigning discourse have initially focused on political context showing how Twitter is used by politicians to serve particular agenda or to appeal for support during significant events such as elections (e.g. Jackson 2006; Vaccari 2008; Vergeer and Hermans 2013; Kreiss 2016). Other scholars have examined the role of affective stance in the representation of social actors by applying critical discourse analysis and appraisal framework (e.g. Chiluwa and Ifukor 2015). Previous studies have shown that social affiliation on Twitter can predict various linguistic patterns (e.g. Bamman et al. 2014). This could be facilitated by the features Twitter offers in terms of different languages available to its users to deploy and modify according to their needs. Twitter, then, could be considered as a potential site to witness emerging and variable multilingual practices (e.g. Poell and Darmoni 2012; Bastos et al. 2013). These multilingual practices vary across different contexts and carry social and cultural indexes that may evoke various facets of identity.

In the Arab world, in particular, there has been a growing body of research focusing on the use of Twitter in organising social and political campaigns (Howard and Hussain 2013; Chaudhry 2014; Castells 2015). In the Saudi context, Twitter campaigning discourse has been studied in relation to other topics such as gender, framing, intertextuality (e.g. Almahmoud 2015; Alharbi 2016; Altoaimy 2017). In line with these studies, the present study extends the focus on other women's' rights campaigning hashtags in Saudi Arabia, in particular, the hashtags related to end the guardianship system. It adopts discourse analysis approaches to investigate how Twitter users use linguistic resources available to them creatively in expressing their stances towards the call to end the guardianship system and relate it to the wider sociocultural context.

Many researchers on the online context claims that researchers should further move toward incorporating analysis of diffident modes used in the socio-linguistic practices of computer-mediated-communication (CMD) (Herring 2004; Androutsopoulos 2013). In the current study, while the focus mainly is on texts, at the same time I am paying attention to other modes such as videos, links, pictures, and images which might increase our understanding of the social and linguistic practices in the online campaigning context. Moreover, I am aiming to provide a multi-layered explanation of the complex Saudi community in which social values are greatly intersected with religion. Most studies have been conducted in relation to English Western culture with a little done in relation to Arabic language and the Saudi context.

In the current study, I intend to look at how participants in the hashtag of #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen employ multilingual varieties (English/Arabic) to take a stance and by doing so representing themselves and others positively and/ or negatively. In other words, I aim to investigate multilingual practices of language choice as a strategy that index sociocultural meanings revealing underlying ideologies and eventually projecting different representations of self and other. Therefore, I refer to theories of stance, language choice, discursive strategies within the wider

framework of critical discourse analysis that can further our understanding on how they are interrelated and reconfigured in the noisy, multilingual, and multi-voiced context of social media where users can deploy a wide range of resources and engage with different audiences at the same time.

1.5. Objectives and Research Questions

In all societies, different groups of people have historically drawn from a range of tools and strategies to define, impose, challenge and/or resist the cultural/socio-political norms that 'should' be respected and oriented to by entire (national/religious) populations. The social power and dominance that are required to do so can be enacted, produced, resisted, normalised, confirmed, and legitimised through language use in a variety of modes in socio-political context(s) (van Dijk 2015). In order to understand (how) this negotiation of cultural norms and political positions can take place in online/social-media communication, the current study aims to investigate different stances people are taking towards the guardianship system in Twitter socio-political campaigning hashtag.

Broadly speaking, the current study aims to explore how people use language to resist power and/or social change in Twitter socio-political campaigning hashtags. Saudi women were restricted by the guardianship system where male dominance is the norm justified by religious and cultural values. At the time this study was being carried out, this situation was going under reform, and many people were asking the powerholders in Saudi Arabia to put an end to it. However, others resist this change for various reasons. In this study, I examine how opposing and supporting groups are constructed around stances that rely on language choice as a main strategy to express, legitimise, or delegitimise them. Thus, it addresses the following questions:

1. How do Twitter users use different discursive resources to construct stances towards the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia?

a) What discursive strategies are used in online discourses? And what is the nature of the resulting stances that are constructed?

b) What role do multilingual resources such as language choice play in constructing these stances?

c) Why do Twitter users choose English, Arabic or both in constructing their stances? What indexes and meanings and ideologies are represented in these stances?

d) How do specific discursive strategies contribute to the creation of in-group and out-group representations of self and other in online discourses?

1.6. Structure of the thesis

In this section, I offer an outline of the current thesis with a summary of each chapter. The thesis is comprised of five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of the current study which is the guardianship system, and it generally provides an overview of the Twitter campaigning hashtag *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen.* Moreover, this chapter introduces recent reforms to the guardianship system after the appointment of Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman. Then, I explain the rationale behind this study to establish a gap in the existing literature while providing the related objectives and research questions. Finally, this chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis organisation and structure.

Chapter 2 offers the background necessary for better understanding the research questions and aims. The chapter starts with a background of Saudi Arabia in which the guardianship was applied. I also discuss some of the most significant radical socio-political movements (e.g., *Al-Sahwa*: *الصحوة*) that have contributed to the current situation of Saudi Arabia in relation to women's rights. After that I explain the linguistic context of Saudi Arabia including Arabic and English as this study examines language choice practices. This is followed by a discussion on the Saudi women's status in relation to religious, political, economic, and social contexts, and in relation to the guardianship system. The chapter then provides a discussion on campaigning for women's rights in Saudi Arabia in the online and offline contexts. Next, I briefly provide a background about the use of Media and Twitter in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 3 comprises a review of literature on stance-taking in relation to language choice practices in a campaigning hashtag on Twitter. In the beginning, I show how Twitter could be a potential platform for multilingual practices and representation of self and other. Then, I discuss stance as a complex concept and how it has been approached online. After that I provide an overview on traditional and non-traditional views on bi/multilingualism and related phenomena such as language choice and translanguaging. Finally, I shed light on self and other representation in relation to language, stance, and identity and how they will be deployed in the current study.

Chapter 4 aims to offer methods of data collection and analysis, and the decisions made during these processes. In the beginning, I provide a general discussion of the research philosophy and the paradigm within which this research is designed. The chapter then provides a summary of the quantitative and qualitative methods applied. Afterwards, I provide the data collection section with an explanation of the steps taken prepare the data for analysis. Then, the adopted analytical and theoretical framework will be explained. The chapter then concludes by raising any ethical concerns that may appear throughout the research.

Chapter 5 presents the results of this research in two sections to answer the research questions that guided this study. The first section presents a quantitative analysis of the data findings supported by tables and figures necessary to identity patterns of language choice and discursive strategies in relation to stance. In the second section I provide an interpretative qualitative analysis of the resulted patterns of the language choice and discursive strategies in relation to the research questions and in relation to previous studies. These interpretations are explained in relation to the wider historical and socio-political contexts and to the sociocultural meanings and ideologies.

Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter that provides a comprehensive summary of the key findings and insights obtained from the data. Moreover, it highlights the limitation of this study and suggest recommendation for futures studies.

Chapter 2 Context of the Study

This chapter aims to provide the context necessary to better understand the research topic and aims. The chapter begins with a background of Saudi Arabia, presenting the most influential radical movements such as the awakening movement (*Al-Sahwa: الصحوة*), as well as other political and economic events that have contributed to the current situation in Saudi Arabia including the status of Saudi women. I then provide insight into the linguistic context of Saudi Arabia, including both Arabic and English and how they are perceived and practised in the Kingdom. I then move on to discuss Saudi women's status and how it is shifting due to religious, political, economic, and social factors. I also shed light on the guardianship system and how it has been practiced, maintained, challenged, and resisted. The following section offers a discussion on campaigning for women's rights in Saudi Arabia, its challenges, and the need to move to online campaigning instead of offline campaigning. After that, I briefly provide a background about the use of the media and Twitter in Saudi Arabia, a conservative religious country.

2.1 Background of Saudi Arabia

The current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the third form of a Saudi State since its unification in 1932 by King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al Saud after a sequence of battles starting in1902. King Abdulaziz succeeded in securing tribal alliances in the Arab Peninsula and consolidated the nation. The King also made efforts to establish a new modern country with a religious foundation. The country then took its initial steps to lay the foundation for organised education and healthcare systems, for example, by building schools and establishing small clinics and dispensaries in major cities. In addition, in its efforts to join the modern world, Saudi Arabia was a founding member of the United Nations in June 1945 (the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, where the King is the head of state and government, and the commander in chief of the Saudi military. The King should be a descendant of King Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud (the founder of the country). The appointed King is the most righteous of the descendants who shall receive allegiance as per the *Holy Quran* and Prophet Muhammed's teachings (*the Sunnah*)[5]. The Basic Law of Governance, which was issued in 1992, states that the King should follow and apply Islamic law (*Sharia*) according to Saudi Arabia's Unified National Platform[6] (2023). The King appoints a Crown Prince, who is second in line, to assist him in leading the country. The King leads the country's general policy, supervises the execution of regulations, and supports cooperation between different

[5] Sunnah refers to teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammed peace be upon him

[6] The Unified National Platform is an online source for government services and information (المنصة الوطنية الموحدة)

government bodies in achieving their responsibilities. Moreover, the King is advised by the *Shura* Council, which is the legislative formal body in Saudi Arabia. It consists of 150 members from different fields who are appointed by the King for a four-year term, which can be renewed to propose new laws or amend existing systems (The *Shura* Council website, 2023). In addition, the Cabinet, which is the Council of Ministers, helps the King in governing the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia is located in the southwest of Asia bordered by Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan in the north, Yemen and Oman in the south, the Arabian Gulf in the east, and the Red Sea in the west. It occupies about 2,000,000 square kilometres, consisting of about four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula. It is the largest country in the Middle East, the second largest country in the Arab world and the second largest OPEC [7]member country. In 2021, the estimated population was over 32 million, with 36.4% non-Saudi and 63.6% Saudi citizens (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2021). Females account for 43.2% of the population, while males make up 56.8%. In addition, approximately 63% of the population is under the age of 30 (ibid). Saudi Arabia has the largest sand deserts (Al Rub'a Al Khali: The Empty Quarter), with an estimated area of 640,000 square kilometres of desert in the south-eastern region of Saudi Arabia (ibid).

Saudi Arabia is the largest, global oil and natural gas producer (AL-Kandri and Dashti, 2015) and one of the most powerful countries in terms of economy and wealth. Saudi citizens benefit as health care and education at public schools are free for them, and university students receive financial grants every month to encourage education in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, a report by Saudi Press Agency outlines that Saudi Arabia is the only Arab member of the Group of Twenty[8] and was ranked as the most developing economy in 2022 and in 2023 (Saudi Press Agency, 2023). In November 2023, the General Assembly of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) elected Saudi Arabia to host the EXPO[9] 2030 world fair (The Bureau International de Expositions (BIE) website, 2023).

Due to its large area, Saudi Arabia has a distinct topography of deserts, mountains, valleys, hills, which are seen in the different administrative regions of the Kingdom. The King issued a Royal Decree in 1412H[10]/ 1992G for Saudi Arabia to be divided into thirteen administrative regions. They are Al-Riyadh, Makkah, Al-Madinah, Al-Qaseem, Eastern Region, Asser, Tabouk, Hayel, Northern Borders, Jazan, Najran, Al-Baha, and Al-Jouf (see Figure 5 below). Each region is divided into several governates which are divided into centres that are administratively linked to the governate itself (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2021).

[7] Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

[8] The Group of 20 is the main forum for issues related to international economy, financial stability, sustainable development, climate change according to the G20 website (2023)

[9] Expo is an international event where countries of the world share innovation, promote progress, and encourage economic cooperation (The Bureau International de Expositions (BIE) (2023)

[10] Hijri calendar: it is an Islamic calendar based on the lunar cycle, used by Muslims worldwide to determine the dates of religious occasions and events

Figure 5 Saudi Arabia map (Statue of the General Authority for Surveys and Geospatial Information, 2023)

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab and Islamic country. Islam is its religion, and its constitution is the *Holy Quran* and the *Sunnah*. Like other Arab and Islamic countries, Saudi Arabia is known for its conservative[11] religious culture. It has the greatest religious power and authority in the Muslim world, being the birthplace of Islam and being home to the two holy cities of Makkah and Al-Madinah. Every year Saudi Arabia hosts around two million Muslims from all around the world who come to perform their pilgrimage (*Haj*) and practice their religious duties. From its early days, religious traditions have maintained their power over Saudi society. This can be traced back to 1744 when the Al-Saud family (the royal family) and Mohammed ibn Abd Al-Wahhab[12] allied to unify the disparate tribal regions in the Arabian Peninsula under Islamic (*Sharia*) law (Grishin and Othman, 2020). This political and religious alliance supported by tribal leaders has largely promoted a homogenous national and conservative identity of the country.

Saudi society is built on religious and tribal affiliations, as Islamic laws are intersected with tribal traditions and customs which coexist to varying degrees across different cities. Despite the assumed homogenous identity of the Kingdom, there are some varying differences across the different regions. For example, the main cities are generally seen to be less conservative than smaller towns. However, Riyadh is seen to be more conservative than coastal cities such as Jeddah, which are

[11] Conservative in this study is used to refer to adherence to preserving traditional religious and social beliefs and values that may reject and/or disalign with new ideas or changes (adapted from Hammad and Shah, 2018)

[12] Muslim scholar who has influenced the shape of religion in Saudi Arabia through his call to follow the literal interpretations of religious texts and the practices of prophet Muhammed's companions (Al-Salaf) (Pompea, 2002)

regarded as being less conservative (Alhareth, Alhareth and Al Dighrir, 2015). This may be due to Jeddah being the gateway for Muslim pilgrims from different parts of the world to Makkah, which has created a culturally and ethnically diverse community (Youssef and Taibah, 2011).

Saudi citizens have long embraced the cultural attributes and religious values of Saudi society which has been impacted by extremist political and religious movements. The religious significance of Saudi Arabia to Muslims has encouraged radical movements to spread extreme ideologies among Muslims such as Sururism, the Muslim Brotherhood, and other groups. One of the most influential movements that contributed to the strict conservative Islamic identity of Saudi Arabia was the awakening movement that had thrived in the 1980s and 1990s (*Al-Sahwa: الصحوة*). *Al-Sahwa* was a radical religious and political movement that started in Egypt as an intellectual-religious movement to renew Islamic discourse in the Arab and Muslim world (Alhazmi, 2022). With the rise of the Arab nationalism in Egypt during the period of President Jamal Abdel Nasser, the movement's leaders moved to work in Saudi Arabia in different sectors such as education. The movement flourished in the 1980's and 1990's after the siege of Makkah in November 1979. Furthermore, the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the removal of the Shah to establish the Islamic government in Iran also affected Saudi Arabia. The rise of Al-Khomeini inspired a resistance group in Saudi Arabia which protested against the Saudi government and claimed that the Saudi royal family was corrupt and imitating the West, therefore contradicting the Islamic teachings. This resulted in the siege of the Holy Mosque in Makkah under the leadership of Juhayman Al-Otaibi who was a Saudi soldier. The BBC reported that the Saudi military then interfered and freed the Mosque from Juhayman and his followers after two weeks of fighting (BBC, 2019). Although Juhayman was killed during the fight, his ideas have lived on for generations in the Kingdom.

Al-Sahwa was a movement that radically changed the course of the Saudi history, and many studies have emphasised this (e.g., Al-Rasheed, 2013; Alhazmi, 2022). *Al-Sahwa* and its consequences have influenced different aspects of Saudi society such as tourism, education, lifestyle, and women rights which I discuss in more detail in section 1.3. During *Al Sahwa*, Saudi society became more complex, with the country eager to maintain its homogeneous religious and social identity while at the same time enjoying the economic benefits resulting from the country's oil production. In addition, the linguistic context has contributed to the homogeneity of Saudi Arabia, as well as to the political, religious, and tribal allegiance, which I discuss in the following section.

2.2 Linguistic Context in Saudi Arabia

One of the factors that has reinforced the homogeneity of the Kingdom is the country's linguistic identity. Arabic is the national and official language in Saudi Arabia according to the basic law of governance. Abdeali (2004) stated that Arabic can be classified into three types:

1. Classical written Arabic, which can be defined as the language found in the *Holy Quran* and the language of early Arabic literature and is still largely used in Arabic literature today.

2. Modern Standard Arabic (also known as *Fus-ha*), which can refer to the modern form of classical Arabic, as it combines Arabic words from different Arabic dialects and modern terms related to technology for example.

3. Spoken Arabic, which can refer to Arabic varieties across the Arabic world that have been influenced by colonial languages or/ and by local languages (prior to Arabic introduction).

Modern Standard Arabic is mostly found in the media such as in radio and TV broadcasts, newspapers, formal discussions and presentations, books, literature, and in schools and mosques. However, there is an emerging movement in Saudi Arabia to encourage the use of Saudi Arabic dialects along with the standard Arabic. One reason might be due to the country's willingness to maintain the diversity of Saudi society in terms of its linguistic practices and identity to prevent discrimination among different tribes. Saudi Arabian dialects are the closest to Classical Arabic in terms of their structures and sounds (Prochazka, 1988). There are various dialects which are divided into sub-varieties in Saudi Arabia. For example, Najdi (from the Central region) that has subvarieties such as Southern Najdi, Central Najdi, Northern Najdi. Moreover, the Najdi dialect, which is the official dialect of the Saudi royal family (Omar, 1975), has gained a prestigious position in society. In addition, Najdi has not been significantly influenced by any other non-Arabic language (Ingham, 1994), which might have contributed to its prestigiousness as being 'pure' Arabic. Another dialect is the Hijazi (in the Western region) which has been influenced by other Arabic dialects (e.g., Egyptian, Sudanese, Jordanian) due to its location (Omar, 1975). Other dialects include Gulf (in the Eastern region) which has been influenced by the Gulf countries (e.g., Bahrain, Qatar) and Janoubi, which is spoken in the Southern region, and has many variations such as Rijal Alma'. In addition, there are other minority languages spoken in Saudi Arabia such as Mehri. Al-Haidari (2012) reported that the estimated number of speakers of Mehri had reached 20,000 in the Eastern region and near the Empty Quarter in the Southern region of Saudi Arabia.

The Ministry of Culture in Saudi Arabia recently published the first three books on the subject of linguistic diversity and the danger of some languages (e.g., Mehri) becoming extinct in Saudi Arabia. This is in line with one of the goals of Vision 2030 to promote cultural diversity in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of such initiatives is to explore other aspects of Saudi culture in addition to the Najdi culture, which has been long maintained due to the fact the royal family originates and resides in Najd (where the capital city Riyadh is located). Moreover, these initiatives aim to represent Saudi Arabia as an open multicultural country to attract tourists, as well as other international, economic and political cooperation.

The Arabic language is highly valued and is a source of pride in Saudi Arabia, as it is associated with the *Holy Quran*. Many Muslims believe that the *Holy Quran* is the word of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him (PBUH)). Islam shares a deep connection with the Arabic language, and thus Arabic holds religious and cultural significance among Muslims around the world. To clarify, religious ceremonies, rituals and prayers are often conducted in Arabic, contributing to its significance among Muslims. Saudi Arabia is continually making efforts to preserve the dominance of Arabic in across educational, economic, medical, social, and political fields.

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic society, with religion influencing almost every aspect of people's lives. Systems and rules are derived from the *Holy Quran* and teachings of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). In addition, one of the primary goals of the education system is to promote the Islamic faith to students, ensuring they believe in Allah and Muhammed being the final messenger of Allah. Moreover, religious clerics (*Ulama'a:* العلماء) who traditionally followed stricter interpretations of religious texts were highly appreciated and respected in the Saudi society. This perception might have been related to their pervasive presence in almost every domain, including education, the media and their integration with the royal family and the political leaders. Hence, it is common to observe the influence of religion on daily activities, as well as in linguistic practices. For example, it is common to hear or read religious phrases and terms explicitly or implicitly used during ordinary conversations such as '*in sha Allah*', which means 'God willing' when referring to future events, and '*jazak Allah khair*' as an expression of gratitude to mean 'May God reward you with goodness'.

Due to the religious and cultural significance of Arabic in Saudi Arabia, the coexistence of other languages has been a challenge. The first example of this was Turkish, which was the first foreign language taught in schools in the Kingdom (Elyas, Alzahrani and Widodo, 2020). The public in Saudi Arabia rejected these schools, as they were regarded as being operated by the invader i.e., the Ottoman Empire (Al-Ghamdi and Al-Saadat, 2002). Although Saudi Arabia was never colonised, it was put under pressure by the Ottoman Empire's administration in the region and there were regular conflicts with King Abdulaziz, who was trying to unify the country (Almana, 1982). At the same time, Britians were showing economic and political interests in the region and observed the situation to end the Ottoman Empire's dominance during World War I. With the decline of the Ottoman Empire, it became unnecessary to learn Turkish. This example highlights how language has always been associated with political and sociocultural values.

In the twentieth century, the negative attitude towards foreign language in Saudi Arabia started to shift with the development of this century and its requirements. In 1936, the first school to teach English and prepare Saudi citizens to travel abroad to pursue their education was built in Makkah (Al-Ghamdi and Al-Saadat, 2002). English, along with French, language teaching was introduced in both intermediate and secondary schools in 1958 (Al-Abdulkader, 1978). Later, in 1969, French was removed from the curriculum at the intermediate level while continued to be taught at the secondary

level (ibid). Consequently, this led to English to being regarded as more important than French in Saudi Arabia. However, this increasing importance of English has challenged the highly religious and cultural significance of Arabic. English is considered as a symbol of the western culture, and "loaded with political, religious, social, and economic overtones and is a topic of heated debate" (Mahboob and Elysa, 2014, p.128). While the government has encouraged the teaching and learning of English, there is a fear that this might influence the deeply rooted religious and cultural values associated with the Arabic language. Saudi people are profoundly religious, and Islam has a powerful influence on their hearts and minds (Al-Abed Al-Haq and Smadi, 1996) and hence any radical change that might challenge this feeling might be resisted. For example, previously, a member of the *Shura* in the Councils' Education Committee was against the teaching of English in primary schools as he argued this would be a waste of money and human resources, and he asserted that English should only be taught in secondary schools to achieve better results (Al-Tamimi, 2011).

English, however, is neither motivated by colonisation or immigration, as has been the case in many studies on language contact phenomena. Teaching and using English is inevitable in Saudi Arabia as it has a significant role in business, tourism, politics, and education (Elyas, Alzahrani and Widodo, 2020). According to OPEC website (2022), since oil was first struck in Saudi Arabia in 1938 by Saudis and Americans, Saudi Arabia has largely relied on foreign companies to develop its petroleum industry. One of the first major companies to be established was the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) which was partially owned by the United States of America and Saudi Arabia, however, it is now wholly owned by Saudi Arabia. The founding of this company in 1933 has had a great impact on the Saudi economy. In the early years, its operation depended primarily on foreigners who spoke English and hence English was promoted in Saudi Arabia for this reason. The use of English continued its pervasiveness due to economic needs. In 1978, about 90% of expatriates working in different domains such as restaurants, shopping malls, and hospitals came from non-Arabic countries which significantly reinforced the use of English as a language for communication (Al-Barik, 2007). In recognition of the perceived economic and communicative values associated with the English language, the Saudi government has encouraged the teaching of English to provide Saudi citizens with the necessary skills to communicate with those expatriates.

Today, English is taught as a second language at all levels as a core subject in public and private schools across Saudi Arabia. The objective of English instruction is explicitly stated in the official regulations of the Saudi Ministry of Education, i.e., to prepare the student to understand English and enable him/her to communicate in both spoken and written language in a satisfactory way. The design of the English language curriculum is characterised by the fact it contains religious, cultural, and national topics (Shah and Elyas, 2019) in order to maintain the religious and cultural identity of Saudi society. For example, it includes the use of Arabic names in conversation and speaking lessons. In addition to English, other languages have recently gained importance in Saudi Arabia due to political

and economic reasons. Given the fact Chinese is increasingly holding a cultural, economic and political significance, Saudi Arabia recently introduced Chinese to the education system, specifically in the form of courses provided at universities and schools.

Learning English and Chinese in not only motivated by economic and/ or political reasons, but also religious reasons. Islamic teachings encourage education and knowledge. The very first revelation to Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) explicitly emphasised the importance of reading and knowledge. The first verse *(ayah: آية)* to be revealed included 'read' *(iqra'a)* in the imperative form, which was an explicit instruction for Muslims to read and gain knowledge. Knowledge and reading in Islam are encouraged and seen as ways to appreciate God, differentiate between right and wrong, and to positively contribute to the development of a society. Learning other languages is emphasised in some religious texts, with quotes such as *"whoever learns the language of a people is safe from their deception"*. Thus, teaching and learning foreign languages in Saudi Arabia are motivated by religious, cultural, political, and economic motivations.

It is noted that the Saudi society has a homogenous cultural identity not only because Arabic is the only official language, but in terms of traditions, Islamic values, and in tribal allegiances (Al-Seghayer, 2014). In the next section, I shed light on some tribal and religious values related to women's status in Saudi Arabia, which is the focus in this study.

2.3 Women's Status in Saudi Arabia

Throughout modern history, the tribal traditions and religious values have long existed side by side in Saudi Arabia and have influenced Saudi society, resulting in a homogenous social identity. Through the lens of religion and tribe, family ties and tribal unity have been emphasised and integrated to be appreciated values in the Saudi community. Family is highly valued, and women are considered the "guardians of the family, society, and the state's honour" (Al Fassi, 2020, p.222). They are the central pillars of the family despite being under a patriarchal system where men have authority over women (Al-Rasheed, 2013). In this sense, women are conceptualised as the weaker gender in need of protection and viewed as a representative of the family's and the tribe's honour. To ensure this honour is preserved, Saudi women are required to cover themselves to maintain their precious chastity. It is common to observe women being compared to objects such as jewels to imply their preciousness and beauty. For instance, many conservative religious scholars use the term 'gem' to describe the Saudi woman, implying she is a precious thing that needs a protection (Al-Sudairy, 2017, p.89). This has been enforced by the religious perception of women as a source of temptation (*fitna:* فتنة), meaning women should be covered in order that men are not seduced by them.

Men, on the other hand, are viewed as the superior gender and as the decision-makers who are responsible for the protection of women and for providing for them. Thus, men have positions of prestige and power and the right to "define women's rights in the community" (Kalabamu, 2006, p.1). Thus, a father's authority can be seen as an act of respect, filial piety, and protection and not necessarily as a form of oppression. Regardless of status or education, these views are upheld, and it may be considered a sin if a woman decides to do something without her father's approval. Men's authority has taken many forms throughout the years in Saudi Arabia. The guardianship system was one through which men's authority prevailed to ensure women's protection and care. In the following section, I highlight the application of the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia, before describing the reformations after the appointment of the Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman in 2016.

2.3.1 The Guardianship System

The guardianship system in Saudi Arabia is a system that requires women to obtain a male guardian's approval before making particular decisions. The order of those who can act as a woman's male guardian, often starts with her father and moves to various male paternal relatives such as her grandfather, brothers, uncles, and sons. Approval from a male guardian is necessary for women in Saudi Arabia who wish to attend higher education, access the healthcare system, obtain official documents such as a passport and/or identification card, travel abroad, be released from prison, and get married. The concept of the guardianship system is vague, and it has no written legal grounding in Saudi Arabia. The absence of any legal status of this system could be considered an advantage that ensures women are not confined in Saudi Arabia. However, over the years, many institutions and male guardians have exploited this advantage by applying the system based on their own ideologies.

Saudi Family Law[13] does not clearly link the guardianship system to women's right to travel, work, make legal decisions, access healthcare or any other services. However, Article 17 clearly states the following, according to Saudi Family Law:

> *1. Guardianship in a marriage shall be in the following order: the father, the father's trustee, the paternal grandfathers in ascending order, the son, the son's male patrilineal descendants, the full brother, agnate brother, the sons of the full brother in descending order, the sons of the agnate brother in descending order, the full paternal uncle, the half-brother uncle, and their sons respectively in descending order, the closest relatives in order of inheritance, and finally the judge.*
>
> *2. If guardians are of equal degree, the one designated by the woman shall serve as guardian in the marriage contract. If she does not designate a guardian, the marriage may*

[13] https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/4d72d829-947b-45d5-b9b5-ae5800d6bac2/1?csrt=6997136993954381071

be concluded by any of them.

3. A guardian, including the father, may not conclude the marriage contract of a woman under his guardianship without her consent; the marriage contract must indicate her consent.

Thus, according to Saudi Family Law, the guardianship system is more related to marriage and does not relate to other rights like work or education. Many are not aware that the guardianship system has no legal written grounding in Saudi Arabia and hence male guardians and different institutions can potentially exploit their power to prevent women's access to their rights (Al-Sudairy, 2017, p.124). The guardianship system is a social convention that continues to be implemented in many institutions, such as schools, hospitals and airports, that require a male guardian's permission.

The foundation of the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia is not adequately documented in the literature. However, it is believed to be enforced in the country through the power of religion and strict interpretations of religious texts. Saudi Arabia follows the Hanbali School of thought in its different social and cultural practices such as marriage, women's rights, education and so on. The Hanbali teachings emphasise the role of the male guardian in marriage and travelling (Al Zuhayli,1999). Regardless, the guardianship system has extended its domination in Saudi Arabia to include women's education and access to different services. Many researchers attribute the expansion of the guardianship system to the religious waves that hit Saudi Arabia throughout the years, especially *Al-Sahwa*, which deeply affected Saudi society. The guardianship system has long been debated and questioned among religious scholars in other Muslim countries, with some scholars suggesting that it needs to be reformed. Some scholars have adopted the view that it has no grounding in the religious texts or in the *Holy Quran*, and that is originated from pre-Islamic traditions. Others, however, have supported the stance that it was derived from the *Holy Quran* to protect rights of men and women. Other scholars believe a male guardian's role should be limited to only approving a marriage.

Al Fassi (2020) reported that many religious scholars have relied upon false interpretations of religious texts to legitimise the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia and grant power to male guardians. The legitimisation usually relies on misinterpretations of religious texts that have been taken out of their authentic context. Many religious scholars have also stressed the criticality of interpretations and that interpretations should draw on authentic religious texts to dispel any claims of illegitimacy. One of the Quranic verses that has long been disputed is Verse 34 of *An-Nisa* Chapter. The *Holy Quran* states that:

"الرجال قوامون على النساء بما فضل الله بعضهم على بعض وبما أنفقوا من أموالهم" (سورة النساء:٣٤)

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support from their means" (An-Nisa chapter: verse

34) (English Translation: Yusuf Ali[14]).

The above *'ayah'* (verse) has been interpreted in multiple ways by different Islamic religious scholars. The absolute privilege and power of men over women is one of the literal interpretations that has been long exploited in Islamic societies, including Saudi society, particularly during *Al-Sahwa*. Other interpretations have claimed the superiority of men over women in the above verse is more related to the *Qiwama*: قوامة (control over women, as well as their maintenance, protection, care by men) and not necessarily to *Wilaya*: ولاية (the guardianship) (Al Fassi, 2020). In this sense, traditionally, the man (a father, husband, son) should be the protector of the woman and the caretaker of her affairs, including paying her expenses. However, other interpretations of the same religious texts have been ignored. These interpretations emphasise that values of equality and gender roles and must be read implicitly in relation to the context in which these verses first appeared (Fontanari et al., 2020).

The false interpretations of religious texts associated with women were exploited by radical movements such as *Al-Sahwa,* and resulted in the formation of negative attitudes towards women. The extremist discourse of religious scholars during *Al-Sahwa* also contributed to the creation of a number of sociocultural norms in Saudi society that remain such as sex segregation in educational institutions, mosques, workplaces and other public places in Saudi Arabia. Other customs have prevailed such as preventing women from appearing on TV. In addition, *Al-Sahwa* called for adherence to strict Islamic practices such as the prohibition of music, women to be covered in a long black dress (*abaya*)[15] and the maintenance of a homogenous society with a visible Islamic identity (Pompea, 2002). Hence, women's dress, work, speech, movement, behaviours were religiously censored, as they were linked to their family's honour and reputation (Alhazmi, 2022).

The radical movement of *Al-Sahwa* helped in promoting 'expected' women's social roles in Saudi Arabia through speeches in schools and mosques. *Al-Sahwa* maintained power over society in Saudi Arabia by creating a conservative and fearful community. Religious scholars terrified the Saudi community, targeting women in particular, through the use of religious texts and interpretations that supported their stance and desire to create a supposed 'pious' nation. Any act of violation to the expected roles by Muslim Saudi women might have been seen as a sin within *Al-Sahwa* discourse. For instance, the mixing between men and women in the workplace was viewed as an evil step that could lead to an immoral and misguided society, thus destroying Muslim values.

[14] Available at: https://quran.com/4:34?font=v1&translations=149%2C136%2C167%2C203%2C20%2C131%2C84%2C17%2C85%2C95%2C207%2C19%2C22%2C206%2C31

[15] A traditional dress that covers the whole body. Seen as a symbol of cultural and religious identity, it is usually black and worn with a Niqab/Burqa'a – a garment that covers the entire face except the eyes. Recently, it has been noted that women are wearing other colours beside black and are altering its design to make it more convenient for movement and fashion. It has also been observed that the Niqab/ Burqa'a is less common than it was before 2017 due to political and economic changes in Saudi Arabia.

Most importantly, the guardianship system was also encouraged by many women regardless of their education level or their status. '*Multazimat*' (religiously committed females) is a term that emerged to refer to devout women who are religiously educated and who claim to be the guardians and defenders of the Islamic nation (Al-Rasheed, 2013). *Multazimat* spread their ideologies through different avenues, but specifically through their work in the education sector. Furthermore, many other women encouraged male dominance, and any reform of this might have been seen as an interference in "a divine design for the universe" (ibid, p.245).

The guardianship system is supposed to ensure that women are protected and continue to observe traditional female roles. Naturally, this system undermines women's status and treats them as vulnerable, but it is traditionally legitimised as a form of protection and way to honour women. Endorsed by certain conservative religious scholars within *Al-Sahwa* movement, the guardianship system has been exploited by male guardians in many cases. In addition, it could be argued then the guardianship system has served to hinder any progress towards gaining more rights for women. These scholars have referred to any progress towards women's rights as a 'westernisation' aimed at turning Saudi women into infidels, threatening the Islamic and social values of Saudi society.

The right to education for women has long been resisted in Saudi society due to the social and assumed religious stance. Prior to the 1960s, Saudi women's access to education was limited to *Kuttab* classes, in which girls were given basic lessons in literacy and maths combined with the teaching of the *Holy Quran* (Al-Rasheed, 2013). *Kuttab* classes were criticised by some writers (e.g., Sibai) for being unsystematic and for promoting the traditional ideologies surrounding women and their expected roles in society (ibid). In their support of women's education, some of these writers relied on religious justifications, citing historical stories of Muslim women who had participated in various activities outside the home, including roles in wars. At the same time, these writers emphasised how Islam appreciates and encourages education and learning. The *Holy Quran* and the teachings of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) have stressed the value of knowledge and studying. An example of *Hadith*[16] is given below.

"ومن سلك طريقًا يلتمس فيه علما سهل الله له به طريقًا إلى الجنة" (رواه مسلم)

"Allah makes the way to Jannah [Heaven] easy for him who treads the path in search of knowledge"[17]*. (narrated by Muslim)*

Despite the social and religious opposition to formal education for girls, the Saudi government formally established the first public school for girls in the 1960s (Khutani, 2013), although some private girls' schools have existed since the 1940s (Alsweel, 2017). The Saudi government established girls' schools to meet the needs of the new era as part of the modernisation process. However, the girls'

[16] *Hadith* refers to the collected sayings of the Prophet Muhammed, along with the *Holy Quran*, serve as essential sources of guidance in Islam

[17] https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1381

schools were led by religious scholars to ensure that the education system was applied within the framework of Islamic conventions (Al-Rasheed, 2013). In this sense, women's traditional roles were reinforced in schools to ensure the family's piety and honour were maintained. The school curriculum at that time emphasised that education should prepare girls for jobs suitable for their 'nature' and their roles as mothers and wives. Jobs considered appropriate for women included nurses, teachers, and doctors although teaching was emphasised as the preferred profession and it ensured segregation from men.

Religious scholars played an influential role in constructing the traditional ideologies relating to women in Saudi Arabia. They maintained power and supremacy and gained much respect in Saudi society. One element that indicating their power is that they were responsible for issuing *Fatwa. Fatwa* is a religious edict or ruling to guide Muslims on various matters in life. Religious scholars rely on the *Quran*, *the Sunnah* as well as on other resources such as analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) and consensus (*Ijma'a*) to identify what is permissible and what is prohibited within the framework of Islamic law (Sharia). Many women would seek *Fatwa* to guide them in most aspects of their lives such as with family issues, work, religious practices, ways of dressing, among other matters of daily life. It is important to note that *Fatwa* can vary among different schools of thought and among different religious scholars across different Muslim communities. Some schools would follow stricter interpretations or misinterpret religious texts, while others would follow more relaxed and flexible interpretations of the same religious texts. The differences in *Fatwa* can be attributed to the existence of different schools of thought within the many sects that exist. For example, *Sunnah* in Islam is divided into four main schools of thoughts, namely *Maliki, Hanbali, Shafi'i,* and *Hanafi*. In addition, individual perspectives of religious scholars and the sociocultural context can play a role in the interpretations of religious texts and in issuing *Fatwa*. Some scholars consider the cultural and historical context of the original religious texts and provide *Fatwa* to suit the contemporary settings while at the same time adhering to the core principles of *Sharia*. During *Al-Sahwa*, however, many scholars adopted extreme views of Islam and promoted their ideologies through their positions in the government and through the *Fatwa* they issued, including *Fatwas* related to women. They played a virtuous guardian role, forcing extreme regulations on woman as the guardian of the family and society's honour. To ensure the maintenance of this honour, they promoted the guardianship system and promoted it as the righteous path for Muslim women. As a result, women were obligated to cover their bodies and faces, often in black cloth, work in particular fields, and seek their male guardian's approval for various aspects of life such as travelling.

The extremist ideologies were fostered not only through *Fatwas* and the guardianship system, but also through the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in Saudi Arabia (*هيئة الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر*). The committee was mainly established to implement Islamic doctrine of *Hisbah*, which translates as 'enjoining good and forbidding wrong'. The establishment of the

Committee was largely based on verses of the *Holy Quran* and the Hadiths, including the examples I cite below:

"ولتكن منكم أمة يدعون إلى الخير ويأمرون بالمعروف وينهون عن المنكر وأولئك هم المفلحون"(سورة آل عمران آية ١٠٤).

"Let there be a group among you who call 'others' to goodness, encourage what is good, and forbid what is evil – it is they who will be successful". (Al Imran Chapter, verse 104)[18].

"من رأى منكم منكراً فليغيره بيده، فإن لم يستطع فبلسانه، فإن لم يستطع فبقلبه، وذلك أضعف الإيمان"(رواه مسلم)

"I heard the Messenger of Allah say, "Whosever of you see an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with heart – and that is the weakest of faith."[19] *(narrated by Muslim)*

The Committee was established to carry out the duty of enjoining virtue and preventing vice in Saudi society. However, some members of the Committee exploited their power when exercising their duties and conducting the assumed 'Islamic' behaviours and norms. In the 1980s, they gained power as a result of *Al-Sahwa* and they would monitor people's adherences to practices such as praying, closing shops at prayer times, the dress code, ensuring men and women were not seen together and so on. Regarding women, they scrutinised their appearance and their movements to ensure that they conformed to the pious image of a Muslim woman they wished women to assume. Their extremist stance towards women was justified under the auspices of religion and to preserve society. However, some members of the Committee adopted more tolerant stances regarding women in Saudi Arabia. For example, in 2014, when Ahmad bin Qassim Al-Ghamdi (a religious scholar and former head of the Committee for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Makkah) was asked on Twitter if a Muslim woman could post a picture of her face on social media, he replied that it was permissible and that a Muslim woman is not required to cover her face. The tweet went viral and received more than 10,000 comments including those supporting his view, as well as death threats from those who opposed his stance (Sreberny, 2015). He confirmed his stance later when he appeared on TV with his wife who appeared without her face veiled after some Twitter users had challenged him to show his wife's face.

The belief that a woman is considered a symbol of honour that should be preserved and protected is rooted in both religious and cultural ideologies. Any threat to this honour, such as a woman revealing her face, is considered by some to affect a man's honour and image in his community. Hence, a man should maintain this honour by applying restrictive rules to women in his life preventing other men from seeing their faces. However, Al-Ghamdi's views and behaviour rely on more relaxed interpretations of religious texts which are obvious in his stance towards women's dress code, right to travel, as well as other aspects such as music.

[18] Available at: https://quran.com/3
[19] Available at: https://sunnah.com/nawawi40:34

In addition to the debate sparked by Al-Ghamdi's tweet, the Committee and its practices have long been debated among Saudi society and in different media outlets. During *Al-Sahwa,* they had the power to detain, arrest, and interrogate anyone suspected of violating Sharia. There were calls to review their regulations and to limit their authority, as many tragic incidents occurred. These incidents were widely publicised, and the image of the religious scholars was affected negatively. In 2012, *Okaz* newspaper reported that the Committee had chased a Saudi citizen and his family in an incident. Sadly, the man (Abdulrahman Ahmad Nasser Al-Ghamdi) was killed, and his wife and their two kids were seriously injured after their car fell of a bridge[20]. While investigations and penalties were applied, the Committee continued its practices until recently.

With the shifting socio-political context in Saudi Arabia, it was evident that the power and respect for religious scholars and their views was also shifting. Since the appointment of Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman in 2017, religious authority has been curtailed in the Kingdom. The Saudi Council of Ministers issued a statement about a Royal Decree to restrict the jurisdiction of the Committee for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The recently edited Saudi Governance Law states the following[21]:

Article 6

The Committee, according to this regulation, is competent to carry out enjoining virtue and preventing vice with kindness and leniency following the teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and his rightly-guided successors aim at legitimate purposes and contributing with the competent institutions in combating drugs and explaining their damage on families and on society.

Consequently, the Committee no longer has the authority of arresting, interrogating, investigating any incident should be left to the relevant official authorities such as the police. In addition, social and cultural changes that have also challenged the influence of religious authorities. These reforms were largely driven by Vision 2030, an initiative devised by Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman that aims to develop the country, expand its economy and present a more tolerant image of the Kingdom. As a result, a number of other changes have been made such as the introduction of public entertainment, including music concerts and festivals, across the country. Other major reforms have included removing the ban on cinemas in 2018 and organising international film festivals, opening cultural and historical sites, such as Al-Ula, which were previously inaccessible to the public due to religious and social reasons. Moreover, there have been fewer restrictions on sex segregation and men and women can now be seen together attending these events. In addition, women have enjoyed these changes, as more flexibility has been observed in terms of the dress code, movement and other rights.

[20]Available at: https://www.okaz.com.sa/article/490655

[21]Available at: https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/d7ab6b0a-b50b-4be5-9284-a9a700f209d4/1#:~:text=مست%20جهاز%20المنكر%20عن%20والنهي%20بالمعروف%20الأمر%20لهيئة%20العامة%20الرئاسة%20قل,للأمر%20بالمعروف%20والنهي%20عن%20المنكر.

These changes signify a shift towards a more open Saudi society that has adopted a less conservative stance towards women, which I will discuss in the following section.

The change was first felt in 2004, with the establishment of King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue (changed to King Abdulaziz Centre for Cultural Communication in November 2023[22]). The centre is a non-governmental organisation located in Riyadh, with branches in Najran[23] and in the Eastern region of the Kingdom. The appointed members include women and men representing different ideologies, intellectual tendencies, beliefs, and stances such as *Shia'a*[24]*, Sunnah*, conservatives, and liberals, which was unusual for Saudi Arabia at that time. The centre aims at preserving a homogenous, national unity and tackling social and religious issues post 9/11 and after a sequence of terrorist bombings in Riyadh in 2003. The centre aims specifically at achieving the following[25]:

- *Establish a culture of dialogue and spread it among members of society in all their categories in order to achieve what is in the public's interest and preserve national unity.*
- *Discuss national issues such as social, cultural, political, economic, educational, etc., and present them through channels of intellectual dialogue and its mechanisms.*
- *Encourage community members and civil society institutions to contribute and participate.*
- *Contribute to the formulation of correct Islamic speech based on moderation.*
- *Contribute to providing an appropriate environment to spread a culture of dialogue within the community.*
- *Develop strategic visions for topics of national dialogue*

Saudi Arabia continued the reformations aimed at the national unity of its citizens and at modernising the Kingdom. Further changes came with the appointment of King Abdullah[26] in 2005 as his era witnessed initiatives related to healthcare, infrastructure, and education. Most importantly, more opportunities were granted for women such as the formal launch of scholarships abroad for them. More importantly, a more tolerant religious stance was encouraged during his time through the debating of social issues at King Abdulaziz Centre for Cultural Communication. In addition, King Abdullah implemented several reforms regarding women in Saudi Arabia in different aspects such as education, employment, and women's participation in the political field. Opportunities for women have gradually continued to open up in the Kingdom, aligning with the shifting sociocultural and political context. King Salman bin Abdulaziz (the current King) has continued the efforts to empower women in Saudi Arabia. For example, Saudi Arabia has recently called for a more liberal interpretation

[22] https://www.kacnd.org/en
[23] Najran is a city in the Southwestern region of Saudi Arabia near the boarders with Yemen.
[24] Shia'a and Sunnah are the two main schools of Islam with many different sects and interpretations, Shia'a in Saudi Arabia are mostly located in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia and in Najran.
[25] Available at: https://www.kaccc.org.sa/en/Details/index/19
[26] King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz was the King and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia from 2005 till his death in 2015.

of religious texts to suit the evolving nature of society and the modern-day needs, including issues related to women. King Salman bin Abdulaziz has repeatedly stated that all citizens are equal in terms of their obligations and rights, and the Kingdom's policy aims to achieve national unity within the frame of *Sharia*. This was clearly stated in his speech at King Abdulaziz Centre for Cultural Communication, as quoted below from https://www.kaccc.org.sa/en/Details/index/17:

> *'We are a Muslim society united by holding fast to the bond of Allah and adhering to his book and the Sunnah of his Prophet, peace be upon him, doctrine, Sharia, and approach. Islamic Sharia is based on right, justice, tolerance, and rejection of the causes of division. Therefore, everyone recognizes the importance of national unity and the rejection of all causes of discord and division, and prejudice to national cohesion. Citizens are equal before rights, obligations, and duties, and we all have to preserve this unity, and to confront all calls for evil and sedition, regardless of the source of these calls and the means of their dissemination, and the media has a great responsibility in this aspect.'*

Despite the progress and the on-going discussions related to the conservative stance of the Kingdom towards various issues, including women's rights, the guardianship system has largely stayed intact. Recently, the country's efforts to bring to an end the *Al-Sahwa* era have resulted in positive changes to Saudi woman's status. Muhammed bin Salman has repeatedly acknowledged the negative effect of *Al-Sahwa* on Saudi society and his willingness to reform the country and empower Saudi women. In an interview with Norah O'Donnell in 2018[27], he said that prior to the *Al-Sahwa* movement, Saudi people "were living a very normal life like the rest of the Gulf countries, women were driving cars, there were movie theatres in Saudi Arabia, women worked everywhere, we were just normal people developing like any other country in the world until the events of 1979." Thus, it is evident then that the political power in Saudi Arabia has played a significant role in shifting religious stances. The Kingdom appeased the radical religious scholars after the Makkah siege, which led to them clamping down on Saudi society, particularly on women. However, the Kingdom's recent efforts show a more tolerant stance and a desire to empower women, for example by lifting the driving ban, easing restrictions on movement and travel, providing more opportunities for work and study. I discuss this in more detail in the following section.

The Kingdom has made significant steps to empower Saudi women, offering equal opportunities for both genders. In the last seven years, Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant changes when a national overhaul was announced in the form of Saudi Vision 2030. Vision 2030 explicitly states that "Saudi women are yet another great asset. We will continue to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities, enable them to strength their future, and contribute to the development of our security and economy". Programmes have been launched to support Saudi woman in education, economically, with travel and in marriage, etc. Moreover, other programmes have been initiated to

[27] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjFbANmdrso

support women in cases of divorce or the death of her husband to provide them with legal, psychological, financial, counselling, and housing services.

Saudi Arabia has launched many initiatives and training programmes to increase women's participation in various sectors and expand their work opportunities. Article 3 of the Saudi Labour Law[28] states that "work is a citizen's right, and no one else may exercise it except after meeting the requirements set forth in this law. Citizens shall have equal right to work without any discrimination on the basis of sex, disability, age or any other form of discrimination, whether in the performance of work, at the time of recruitment, or when announcing it". In its efforts to avoid any act of discrimination against women, Saudi Arabia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is an international human rights treaty created by the United Nations to promote women's rights and prevent any practice of discrimination against them (Human Rights Watch Reports, 2008).

One of the programmes that has been initiated by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development is the *Qiyadyat*[29] (female leaders) Platform which is an interactive national platform that allows searches of and access to a database of female leaders in civil society institutions, as well as in other public and private sectors. Another programme is *Tamheer*[30] (sharpening skills), which is a training programme to develop the skills of the national workforce, provide them with the required experience, and help them find jobs in the workplace. Moreover, *Wusool*[31] (arriving) is another programme that was introduced by the same ministry to support female employees with transport such as by offering an 80% discount on every round trip to their workplace using taxi services run by licenced companies to ensure the highest level of safety and security for working women. In addition, on 26th September 2017, King Salman announced that the ban on women driving would be lifted and licenses were set to be issued from 24th June 2018.

The World Bank issued a report on Women, Business, and the Law that shows that Saudi Arabia's index for improvement has increased from 70.6 points in 2019/2020 to 80 points in 2022. This large increase is due to Saudi Arabia's efforts in empowering women in different fields. For example, the economic participation rate for females rose from 17.7% in 2016 to 23.2% in 2019 (Statista, 2020). According to the Saudi Annual Budget Statement, the percentage of Saudi women active in the labour market increased from 32.4% in the beginning of the second quarter of 2021 to 35.6% in the end of the same quarter (Ministry of Finance, 2021). Moreover, women participation rate in the civil service

[28] Labour Law, Saudi Arabia, available at: https://laboreducation.mlsd.gov.sa/sites/default/files/2022-01/Labor.pdf

[29] Qiyadyat Platform, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, Saudi Arabia, available at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/ministry-services/services/833110

[30] Tamheer Training, Human Resources Development Fund, Saudi Arabia, available at: https://eservices.taqat.sa/Eservices/ProgramDetails.aspx?Id=5

[31] Wusool programme, Human Resources Development Fund, Saudi Arabia, available at: https://hrdf.org.sa/program/برنامج-وصول-أفراد

increased from 39.8% in 2017 to 41.15% in 2021, and women's participation in the economic field increased to 33.5%. In addition, the unemployment rate for Saudi women dropped from 22.3% in 2021 to 19.3% in 2022. However, there is a huge difference between the unemployment rate for men and women in Saudi Arabia. In the second quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate for women reached 22.3%, while the unemployment's rate for men was only 6.1% (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2021).

Nevertheless, it is noted that Saudi women account for approximately 59% of employees compared to 41% of men in innovative establishments[32] (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2023). Moreover, women and men now receive equal pay in Saudi Arabia. Recently, legalisation has come into effect that means employers have to pay a fine in cases of discrimination in wages between women and men. In addition, statistics from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development[33] show that women in management positions had reached 30% in the private and public domains by 2020. Moreover, the percentage of women in the digital field has increased from 7% to 33%, surpassing the same figures for women in the Group of Twenty and the European Union (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2023).

The Kingdom's policies aimed at empowering Saudi women have contributed to a rise in the percentage of women's participation not only in the labour market, but also in various fields such as sports, financial domains, human resources, social development, trade, technology, justice, employment, and leadership positions. In the political field, Saudi women have also started to officially become involved in political roles. That is, since 2013 they have been able to take part in the Consultative Assembly (*Majlis Al-Shura*), and in 2015 they gained the right to vote and be elected in municipal elections (Al Fassi, 2020). However, women's participation in the municipals councils is still very low compared to men, with women accounting for only 1% of the members making up 284 municipal councils in 2018. The number of female candidates was low, only accounting for 14% of the total candidature (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2019). In recent years, five Saudi female ambassadors have been appointed to different countries around the world. In 2019, Princess Reema bin Bandar Al Saud became the first Saudi female when a Royal Decree was issued to appoint her as ambassador to the United States of America. In addition, two significant government positions were appointed to females in 2022 when Shihana Alazzaz was named as the first female Deputy Secretary General of the Saudi Cabinet and Princess Haifa bint Muhammed as the first female Deputy Tourism Minster.

[32] Any establishment that "produce a product, an operation, or a new improved organisation or marketing method that is largely different from previous products or operations at the establishment, and that is provided to potential users in the production process" (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2023).
[33] Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, Saudi Arabia, available at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/womens-empowerment

In addition, there have been efforts to increase the participation of Saudi women in the justice sector, with the Ministry of Justice recently recruiting women in positions that had previously been limited to men. For example, they appointed more than 3,538 women, 110 of whom were selected to become supervisors setting a precedent in for appointing females for the Saudi justice domain (Ministry of Finance, 2023). Also, the number of Saudi female lawyers with a licence had reached 2,136 by 2023 while the number of female trainees has reached 3,165 (ibid). Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice has recently permitted women to register as conciliators, to work as legal representatives, and the right to obtain notarisation licences.

In the education field, the Ministry of Education offers equal opportunities for both females and males in Saudi Arabia. The percentage of female and male students in various academic degrees is almost identical. In higher education, however, statistics showed that there are more Saudi female graduates than male graduates in 2018 (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2019). Nevertheless, the number of female PhD graduates was less than those of males, with females accounting for only 23.6% in 2018. In the same year, 37,600 Saudi students graduated with a bachelor's degree in science, technology, engineering, and/or mathematics (STEM), with the overall number of Saudi female STEM graduates (58%) exceeding that of male students. Nonetheless, it must be noted that there were a higher percentage of male students studying Architecture, Construction and Engineering. To improve opportunities for Saudi women, the Kingdom is continuously making efforts to facilitate opportunities for them (ibid). The Saudi government encourages and provides grants for female students to study abroad (Alhareth, Alhareth and Al Dighrir, 2015). This began in 2005 when King Abdullah officially launched the External Scholarships Programme to send Saudi citizens to obtain university degrees that met the needs of the Saudi labour market. Subsequently, reviewed phases of the programme were launched in 2011, 2015, and 2019. Although the number of new female and male students abroad was almost equal in 2018 there was a large difference between the number of female and male students enrolled in higher education and those who had graduated. To clarify, the percentage of enrolled male undergraduate students abroad accounted for 69.4% compared to 30.6% females, and the proportion of female undergraduates was only 29.4% compared to male undergraduates (70.6%). However, the enrolment of females on master's and PhD programmes abroad was almost as high as the male counterparts (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2019).

Other sectors that have witnessed a change regarding women's involvement in Saudi Arabia include the military and sport. Saudi women now have the right to carry out security duties for the General Directorate of Public Security, including for the General Department of Forensic Evidence, police work, and for the Special Forces for the Security of the Two Holy Mosques (Ministry of Finance, 2021). Regarding the sports sector, in 2017 the Ministry of Education approved the practice of sports in girls' schools in Saudi Arabia, which had previously only been permitted in boys' schools. In the same year, women in Saudi Arabia were allowed to attend football matches for the first time. Following this,

women's gyms and sport centres were first licensed in 2018, with the percentage of these accounting for 37% of the total licensed gyms in Saudi Arabia by 2024. In addition, the Sports Federation has launched various initiatives to encourage women in Saudi Arabia to join sports teams. This includes establishing sport female teams, which reached 25 teams by 2020. Furthermore, the number of registered female players increased by 57% between 2019 and 2020. The Councils of Sports Federations are now required by law to include females in their federations. In recent years, leagues have been launched for different sports such as football and basketball, which are broadcasted on national TV (ibid). In addition to the sport sector, empowering Saudi women have also included other domains, for example, Saudi women now have the right to refuse and sign permission for their own surgical procedures without the need for their guardian's consent.

More importantly, in 2017, King Salman issued a Royal Decree to announce that women in Saudi Arabia would no longer need a male guardian's permission to access public services unless there is a legal basis for the request according to *Sharia.* This Royal Decree is a sign of a turning point in the Saudi history. After issuing the decree and since the appointment of Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman in June 2017, Saudi Arabia has witnessed major changes in regard to the guardianship system and to women's rights. The Crown Prince has called for a more tolerant conservative stance on women's rights among other matters in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government has introduced significant changes to women's rights and the guardianship system such as lifting the driving ban, allowing women to travel without a male guardian consent (see chapter 1 section 1.3. for more details).

The changes and reforms are symbolic and reflect the country's efforts to include women in public life, allow them to play various roles that were previously dominated by men, and give them rights equal to men. Despite these reforms, the debate and resistance are likely to persist due to deeply rooted social norms that will take many years to overhaul on different levels such as in education, in the media, and further reviews of Family Law and Civil Status Law.

Throughout the years, many amendments to the law have been made regarding women's rights, including the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia. Despite the reformations, the guardianship system is still in effect in marriage and a guardian's consent is a condition for a marriage to be approved. However, the Unified National Platform states that forcing a woman into marriage without her consent is prohibited according to *Sharia*. The regulations state that whoever practices this kind of act will be imprisoned and bail should be paid (The Unified National Platform, 2023). Moreover, a woman has the right to go to the Personal Status Court if her guardian prevents her from getting married. It is important to say that despite the law support in a woman's right to marry any man she chooses, many women may be discouraged from going to the court due to the social stigma. In the case of divorce, a woman can go to the court to dissolve the marriage on established grounds, while a man can divorce his wife verbally without the need to go to court. Female Saudi activists have long campaigned to codify the Personal Status Law to end discrimination against women. Recently, Article

127 of the Personal Status Law was amended to state that a woman can have custody of her children in cases of divorce without the need to go to court. Although the Saudi government recently established new legalisation regarding women's rights, fully supported by the new Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman, Saudi women still suffer from deeply rooted societal patriarchal norms.

Despite the Kingdom's efforts to empower Saudi women in different fields and allowing them to live their life, their family and tribe can hinder any progress. It must be noted that family and tribe traditions play a significant role in Saudi society and, hence, some families expect women to continue to fulfil the traditional roles of being a mother and a wife. Women are expected to follow these norms, and they may suffer from social stigma if they do not adhere to social expectations. Yet, despite the social conservatism, Saudi Arabia is continuing its serious efforts to improve women's status and in this it relies greatly on more enlightened and righteous religious interpretations of religious texts. Less strict interpretations of Islamic religious texts have appeared in different Arab and Muslin countries since the beginning of 1990s to challenge gender inequality. However, Saudi Arabia has not witnessed such changes until recently and, accordingly, Saudi women have suffered from exclusion and injustice (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

It is noted that the status of Saudi women has been changing, primarily for political, economic, and religious reasons. This can be traced back to a number of events that have affected the Saudi society and women rights. One of the first was the American presence in the Kingdom, which started in 1933 when Aramco was established. This was perhaps the first step to changing Saudi men's views on women's rights. Many Americans brought their families to Saudi Arabia and the estimated percentage of foreign migrant workers in oil companies reached 43% in the middle of 1970 (Yamani, 1996, p.265). To ensure the best conditions for these workers, their houses, schools, shops, and other facilities were built to meet Western standards. American women were seen driving cars and unveiled but Saudi women were not allowed to do so. Saudi women then challenged this and asked the authorities for their rights, but these calls were snuffed out as the Kingdom become more conservative as a result of the siege of Makkah and the *Al-Sahwa* movement. The American presence increased in Saudi Arabia during and after the second Gulf War in 1990. Americans were called in to support Saudi Arabia and other countries to free Kuwait. During this period, American women participating in the war and the Kuwaiti women who fled their country to Saudi Arabia were seen exercising their rights such as driving cars and being uncovered. However, the presence of Americans and foreigners in Saudi Arabia did not lead to major changes in women's rights and the struggle has continued.

The topic of women's rights in Saudi Arabia is complex due to deeply rooted societal patriarchal norms, traditions, and religious values. Saudi women have long struggled to gain their rights and to challenge various issues such as the guardianship system, polygamy, other less formal marriage arrangements, employment, the custody of children after divorce, and driving (Al-Rasheed, 2013). The ban on women driving is one of the issues that has long been debated among ordinary people, religious

scholars and media outlets in Saudi Arabia. Like the guardianship system, there was no actual written law that states women are not allowed to drive (Baeshen, 2017), thus highlighting the power of the deep social conventions in Saudi Arabia. Encouraged by new socio-political changes in the country in general and regarding women in particular, many voices have been demanding an end to the guardianship system officially. In the following section I shed some light on the campaigning for women's rights that has taken place in Saudi Arabia.

2.3.2 Campaigns for Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, protests and campaigns regarding women's rights have had a long history, both on and offline. One the first documented campaigns was on the 6th November in 1990 when 47 women drove cars in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia to protest the driving ban (Aljarallah, 2017). These women were socially condemned, criticised, and detained by the authorities (Al-Sudairy, 2017). They suffered the consequences, as they were arrested, fired from their jobs, and banned from travelling abroad. In addition, these women were socially stigmatised, and they were criticised in mosques and other public places. They then appealed to the King (King Fahad[34]) to end their struggle and after more than two years they were granted their rights back. Thus, it could be argued that campaigning and protesting are not encouraged in Saudi Arabia either socially or politically. Moreover, the limited existence of non-governmental organisations that can freely address various issues related to women's rights have contributed to the lack of campaigns and protests in Saudi Arabia (Alsahi, 2018). Lastly, the absence of organised structures and representation have encouraged people in Saudi Arabia to adopt traditional media and social media as alternative platforms in their campaigns to debate women's rights and to criticise other social issues.

Traditional media and social media have helped to make criticisms of society more visible in Saudi Arabia. Writers, teachers, lawyers and religious men have utilised the media to express their thoughts and viewpoints, attracting local, national and global attention. For example, *Selfi* is a popular TV show, started in 2015 and is often broadcast during Ramadan, focuses on criticising local issues, corruption, women's rights and calling for reformations. One episode called *I am an adult (ana rashida: أنا راشدة)* broadcasted in 2017 was about the struggle of a Saudi girl who wanted to pursue her further education abroad, however, she faced opposition from her brother as her male guardian after the death of her father who had been her first guardian. The show tackled the struggle faced by many Saudi woman who needed their male guardian's permission in almost every aspect of her life. In short, there were women who were at the mercy of their guardian, who had the power to prevent her from asserting her rights within the guardianship framework. This controversial show refuted the religious

[34] King Fahad bin Abdulaziz was the King and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia from 1982 till his death in 2005, during which the *Al-Sahwa* movement flourished.

assumptions that have long been used to justify discrimination against women in Saudi Arabia, challenging conservative and radical views in society. Consequently, people adopted different viewpoints of the show and the actors. The progressive view supported the show and encouraged the debate of taboo topics on television. They viewed it as an opportunity for further overhauls in the Kingdom. On the other hand, concerns were raised among conservatives, who viewed the show as a threat to social and Islamic values that should be maintained in the Saudi society (Al-Harby, 2017). The episode came a few months after King Salman issued a Royal Decree that said women in Saudi Arabia should not be required to obtain a male guardian's consent to access different services unless there is a legal basis for the request according to *Sharia.* Many people in Saudi Arabia celebrated the decision and Twitter hashtags were created to debate it such as #تمكين_المرأة_بلا_ولي *(tamkeen_almara'h_bila_wali*: empowering woman without a guardian). Although the decision drew positive responses, some were concerned about the part, stating, "unless there is a legal basis for the request according to the *Sharia*". The Royal Decree indeed is a shifting sign in the Saudi history.

Moreover, other media platforms have been used to highlight women's situation in Saudi Arabia although not necessarily in the form of a campaign. People in Saudi Arabia have utilised what is available to them such as social media platforms like YouTube to share and publicise Saudi woman's struggle to a wider audience. For instance, in 2016, Majed Al-Esa (a Saudi producer and director) published a song on YouTube related to the guardianship system. The song *Hawages* which can be translated to 'concerns' is very popular and has gained more than 45 million views. The humorous video that accompanies the song depicts the need for Saudi woman to gain permission from a male guardian in many aspects of her life. The song shows three women wearing colourful clothes with black *abayas* on top and covering their faces with *burqa'a*. The women are seated in the back seat while the driver is a young boy. The underlying meaning can refer to the guardianship system in which the male has authority over females regardless of her age or status. Moreover, the song emphasises the privileges denied to Saudi woman such as driving. The women appear in the video singing and dancing while fully covered, referencing the discourse around women's covering in Saudi society. However, many believe that women's covering is not an obstacle that should hinder women from practicing various activities such as working, dancing, playing sports.

Social media platform such as YouTube have been utilised to portray Saudi woman's condition and to raise awareness of women's rights through songs, videos, and other means. Most importantly, it has been used to launch campaigns online. For example, in 2011, an online campaign was launched to lift the ban on women's driving. Women across the Kingdom filmed themselves driving and posted videos on YouTube, as a result some of these women were arrested (Aljarallah, 2017). Later in 2013, there was an intention to launch other similar campaigns, but they were stopped as the Ministry of Interior issued a warning against such campaigns and protests. Although these campaigns did not result in lifting the ban, it directed local and international attention to Saudi women's status, which

had largely been ignored.

Three years later, in 2016, the Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman announced the Saudi Vision 2030 programme and people were expecting the women's driving ban to be lifted. However, the Crown Prince commented on this and suggested that the ban was more of a society and community matter. Activists then debated this online and launched Twitter hashtags to ask the government to allow women to drive in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, other hashtags appeared in opposition to women's driving. Encouraged by the ambitious prince and his Vision, in addition to new socio-political changes in the country, other hashtags related to women's rights in Saudi Arabia have been created.

Twitter campaign hashtags had been launched in English and Arabic asking the authorities to end the guardianship system. As mentioned earlier, the guardianship system restricted Saudi women from exercising their rights and to make their own decisions regardless of age, social status, marital status and made them dependant on male relatives, normally a father or a husband, as their legal guardian. Hence, women could be reliant on the goodwill of their guardians, and this could explain the variations across families. Some guardians supported the women dependant on them with their education, work, and other rights. However, unprivileged women did not have the same opportunities, as their guardian exploited the power he had from the guardianship system. For this reason, the United Nations Human Rights Council has been putting pressure on the Saudi government to end the guardianship system. Moreover, in 2016, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report titled "Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System"[35] criticising the guardianship system for being an obstacle to women's rights in the Kingdom despite the limited reforms over the last decade. The report called for reformation and for further campaigning. Many online campaigns were launched including the hashtag *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen*.

Social media platforms are utilised for campaigning in Saudi Arabia due to the lack of feminist organisations and the absence of civic engagement organisations. Moreover, it is assumed that the online context can provide a sense of being censored less. Selwyn (2008) suggested that people online sense lower levels of monitoring, as they feel that they are more disconnected from the offline context, and more freedom is assumed. In the following section, I shed light on the media and Twitter in Saudi Arabia.

[35] More information available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/17/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system#:~:text=As%20dozens%20of%20Saudi%20women,make%20key%20decisions%20for%20themselves

2.4 The Media and Twitter in Saudi Arabia

In the twentieth century, modern communication technologies became necessary for Saudi Arabia to keep pace with the world and to help to serve its economic and political goals. However, introducing these tools into the Saudi community was a challenge, for example, many religious scholars expressed their disapproval of launching a radio service in the 1940s. Thus, in order to gain these scholars' approval, King Abdulaziz suggested that the radio should broadcast *Quran* recitations (Boyd, 1999). When a woman's voice was heard on the radio in 1963, the government imposed more restrictions on the media by broadcasting more religious programmes in order to appease the critics and thus ease the tense situation. Opposition to the media also rejected the first public television broadcast during the 1960s (Schanzer and Miller, 2012). Ironically, these tools were later used by religious scholars to promote their beliefs and spread their ideas, contradicting the supposed religious opposition to the 'corrupting' effects of new technology (ibid, 2012, p.62).

These points of view may reveal deeply rooted ideologies and attitudes towards any modernisation[36] efforts (Al-Kandari and Dashti, 2015) and towards the role of women outside the house. This tension between the necessities of the modern era and the maintenance of conservative religious culture resulted in delays to the introduction of the Internet to the public in Saudi Arabia (Al-Hajery, 2004). The Internet was first launched in the academic sector, before it was made available to the public in 1999 (Al-Tawil, 2001). This involved the implementation of several restrictions and censorship practices to ensure that the content follows religious and social values.

However, according to the Saudi Minister of Information in 2013, this censorship is somewhat limited on social media, due primarily to the nature of communication on the platforms and to the large number of users (Noman, Faris and Kelly, 2015, p.3). Although the censorship is limited to some extent on social media, the government still somehow applies regulations to monitor any inappropriate content in terms of religious and political views and social norms, which may threaten national unity or religious foundations (ibid). Despite these restrictions, recent studies have reported a significant increase in Twitter use in Saudi Arabia. For example, the number of monthly active users reached more than 15 million in 2023, as shown below (Statista, 2023).

[36] Modernisation in this study is used to refer to a model of a progressive change in adapting new ideas in different fields such as industry, secularism, technology, science, individualism (Tohidi and Bayes, 2001)

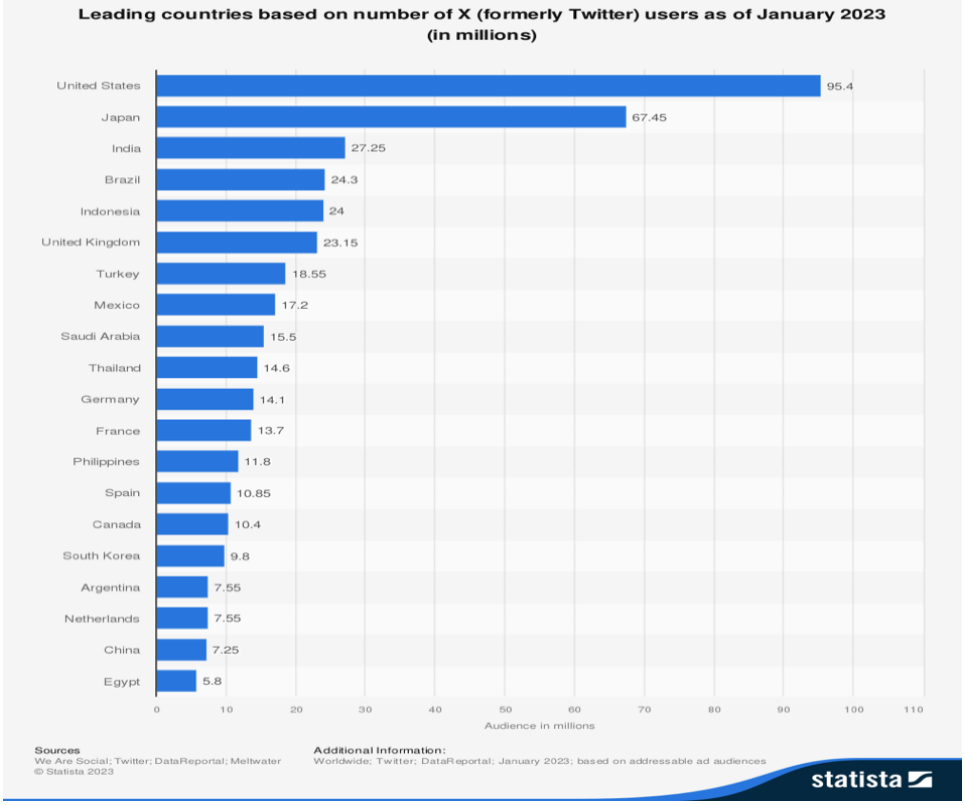


Figure 6 Monthly active Twitter users per country (Statista, 2023)

Recognising the importance of Twitter, King Salman, the present king, created an official Twitter account to address the public and share national topics (Jones and Omran, 2015). Moreover, different governmental sectors now have Twitter accounts offering direct contact with citizens in order to demonstrate more transparency (Alasem, 2015). Similarly, journalists, religious scholars, preachers, political and social critics have created their own Twitter accounts (Noman, Faris and Kelly, 2015).

Social media platforms provide a space for many activists to express their demands and to reach the public (Schanzer and Miller, 2012). In a country that largely restricts freedom of expression, including political speech and civic engagement, Twitter serves as a public space and/or "the only democracy" for different groups in Saudi Arabia to express their stances (Norman, Faris and Kelly, 2015, p.2). Significantly, Twitter has helped to reveal conservative stances that resist the empowerment of women and has helped to correct misinterpretations of Islam and history regarding women's rights (Alsudairy, 2020). For example, conservatives have created several hashtags on Twitter accusing famous columnists who support the call for women's rights (e.g., Turki Alhamad) of being unpatriotic and impious (Al-Sudairy, 2017, p.124). On the other hand, supporters may use the same Islamic religious argument used by the conservatives to defend their stances. For example, they have defended women's right to work quoting examples of working women from the early days of Islam to legitimise their argument (Al-Sudairy, 2017).

Chapter 3 Literature Review

This chapter comprises a review of the literature on stance-taking in relation to language choice practices for a campaigning hashtag on Twitter. Firstly, I show how Twitter could/can be a potential platform for multilingual practices and representation of self and other. Then, I discuss stance as a complex concept and how it has been approached online. After that, I provide an overview of traditional and non-traditional views on bi/multilingualism and related topics such as multilingualism online, code-switching, language choice and translanguaging. Finally, I shed light on self and other representation in relation to language, stance, and identity and how they were employed in the current study.

3.1 Language and Discourse on Twitter

The online context is a useful/interesting site to conduct a critical discourse analysis study as it can reveal how language, social practices and ideologies are represented and negotiated. In the following, I discuss the use of language and discourse on Twitter to ascertain how social media platforms can help in understanding human communication online. Twitter was launched in 2006 for microblogging, which is the practice of publishing short messages (tweets) up to 280[37] characters long that can include various modes such as pictures, emojis, videos, as well as texts**.** Twitter users can publish their tweets through mobile device interfaces, third-party applications, or through Twitter's website (**https://help.twitter.com**). In 2023, Twitter changed its name to X and its logo from the popular blue bird to the letter X. Twitter users are now able to write longer tweets if they subscribe to Twitter Blue.

It is worth noting that Twitter's categorisation overlaps between three concepts: microblogging, social media (SM) and social network services (SNSs). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a collaborative and participatory environment in which content is published publicly for all and/or selected participants. Participants can then modify and edit the content creatively. SM encompasses "Internet-based applications that promote social interaction between participants" including (but not limited to) podcasting, blogs, discussion forums, wikis, microblogging, and social network sites (ibid). In this sense, Twitter enables its users to publish their tweets publicly and other users can participate via various features, which I will explain in a subsequent section.

A very similar concept to social media is social network sites, which according to Boyd and Ellison (2007, p.211), are "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a

[37] The character limit was 140 but then doubled to 280 in 2017 except for tweets in Chinese, Korean and Japanese (BBC News 2017)

connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." In this sense, Twitter allows its users to construct a public profile which other users can follow, although this relationship is not necessarily reciprocal, as in the case of social network sites such as Facebook.

Social media "is not as bounded to communities of friends as social network sites are" (Murthy, 2013, p.8). Through its features, Twitter enables its users to connect and communicate beyond a user's friend list. There are some basic features on Twitter that enable its users to communicate and join in conversations such as the reply, retweet, and hashtag functions (**https://support.twitter.com/categories/281**). These features allow for fast, immediate, and widespread distribution of information and ideas across potentially large-scale audiences. In the following section I discuss five central Twitter functions, specifically tweets, replies, mentions, retweets, and hashtags.

(1) 'Tweet': Twitter users may publish short messages (tweets) which are posted to the user's own profile feed. These tweets also appear automatically on the feeds of other Twitter users who are followers. (2) 'Reply': a form of response to another tweet that enables Twitter users to join the conversations in real time. Twitter users can post a reply to others' tweets and at the same time they can post a reply to their own tweets as a way to keep the tweets connected in the form of a continuous conversation. (3) 'Mention': By posting the Twitter username of another account at the beginning of a tweet prefixed by the @ sign, that mentioned user will be notified and this can facilitate the addressivity of a tweet. Honeycutt and Herring (2009) observed that the use of the @ symbol on Twitter helps to capture an addressee's attention and enhances the coherence of tweets in a busy environment such as Twitter. Zappavigna (2012) also highlighted that the @mention can bring other voices into a tweet. (4) 'Retweet': a major feature on Twitter is the use of the 'retweet' feature, which gives users the option to share other users' posts as they are, acknowledging the original author(s). According to Boyd, Golder and Lotan (2010, p.1), the practice of retweeting "contributes to a conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of a public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context". Boyd et al. (2010, p.5) found that users retweet in various ways for a number of reasons such as to inform and entertain audiences, spread tweets more broadly, validate others' thoughts, promote themselves, and the visibility of other users and other tweets. Moreover, users can also add their own comments when retweeting, turning the tweet into a 'Quote tweet'.

Finally, a convention common to Twitter is the use of hashtags, the discursive practice most relevant to the current study. These are words or phrases that are included in the tweets and preceded by the # symbol. Hashtagging on Twitter is an example of social tagging which can be defined as the "practice of creating and adding user-generated keywords to annotate uploaded content for a number of purposes in social media" (Lee, 2018, p.1). Since its first use in 2007, hashtagging has served a wide

range of functions beyond annotating and topic marking such as corporate advertising, citizen journalism, maintaining a fan base, social networking, and political activities (Gillen and Merchant, 2013). Hashtags are usually hyperlinked and are easily searchable, which can facilitate political activism and engagement (Lim, 2012) and revolutionary movements (Attia et al., 2011), as well as overcoming geographic and social distance (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Thus, hashtags function as a symbol of community membership, connecting users around shared political and social issues (Starbird and Palen, 2012; Yang et al., 2012; Zappavigna, 2012; Park et al., 2006). Furthermore, hashtags can promote visibility on Twitter and/or engagement in popular events and topics to affiliate with the wider context.

Page (2012) analysed 92,000 tweets extracted from 100 publicly available Twitter accounts consisting of three datasets: celebrity, ordinary and corporate accounts. She found that corporate accounts used hashtags more than ordinary and celebrity accounts for branding and promoting. She also found syntactic differences among the three datasets. Celebrity accounts, for example, used more imperatives than ordinary accounts, which used more questions. The findings reflect and emphasise the socioeconomic hierarchies that exist in 'offline' contexts. Zappavigna (2011) extensively discussed the searchability feature of a hashtag, which can lead to greater visibility and more readers or followers. It can also result in "ambient affiliation", wherein various users can affiliate around shared stances although the users may not necessarily know each other or interact directly. The results showed that tweets can play interpersonal functions, as evaluative language can be employed to "build power and solidarity by adopting stances and referring to other texts (2011, p.794). In another study, Zappavigna and Martin (2018) examined how people used hashtags as a resource to build communities around shared values and stances about depression. The results emphasised that interpersonal meanings are clearly significant in understanding how social affiliation around particular stances occur. The current study explores how users have affiliated around shared stances towards the call for women's rights in Saudi Arabia using various linguistic resources available on Twitter which might reveal a variation in language use. Linguistic resources online go beyond the broad categories of languages such as English and Arabic to capture non-standard practices. These practices include emoticons, images, videos, pictures, spoken language which can be used on their own or combined with other modes such as written texts.

Variation is a natural phenomenon in all human languages, and in this case, variation is always associated with social meanings (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p.6). People use different linguistic choices in different contexts to express different meanings. On Twitter, hashtags mediate and are mediated by situated social practices as they are rooted in people's everyday lives, and hence should be studied in relation to the wider social context (Lee, 2018, p.2). Hashtagging is a linguistic and social practice that allows users to communicate and express various meanings. They can do that through various resources such as linguistic choices, language varieties, signs, images, videos, links from other

media platforms, emojis, thus giving users a creative space to express their stance and represent themselves and others in a specific context. Understandably, one might argue that language variability on Twitter is constrained by Twitter features (e.g., 280 character-limit). While this might be true, a considerable number of studies have shown that the variability of linguistic choices is not necessarily a direct result of Twitter's constraints. For example, Schnoebelen (2012) investigated the use of emoticons and found that the tweets with a nose emoticon are longer than those which do not include the same emoticon. That is to say, Twitter users may construct their tweets in relation to social dimensions to fulfil specific goals. In Schnoebeln's study, the variation in using the nose emoticon was partly due to age, as younger users were less likely to use the nose and more likely to include more misspellings and more emoticons. Language on Twitter is similar to face-to-face communication in its variability. Research has shown that social affiliation among Twitter users can predict linguistic patterns. For instance, Bamman, Eisentein and Schnoebelen (2014) used cluster analysis to identify similarities and differences between males and females. They found that females tended to use pronouns, emoticons, prepositions, abbreviations (e.g., LOL) while male tended to use swear words, numbers and technology jargon.

Relevant to the current research, previous studies have shown that Twitter is a significant campaigning tool, as it allows users to express opinions, reach people, and respond to public reactions (Vergeer and Hermans, 2013; Chiluwa and Ifukor, 2015). Most of the existing literature on campaigning discourse in the online context has focused on political events such as elections (e.g., Jackson, 2006; Vaccari, 2008). In the Arab world, in particular, there has been a growing body of research focusing on the use of Twitter in organising social and political campaigns (Hussain and Howard, 2013; Chaudhry, 2014; Castells, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, studies on Twitter campaigning are increasing, the emphasis being on its social significance. For example, Almahmoud (2015) investigated the intersection of framing and intertextuality in tweets by Saudi women activists who supported women's right to drive and in those of male clerics who opposed this right. Whereas men only used Arabic in their tweets, which tended to frame the campaign as a conspiracy against conservative Saudi society, women used English to frame the campaign as an international human rights topic and to signal group membership with the wider multilingual context. This study is significant as it illustrated the discursive strategies used to frame the campaign, and also explained how social relations are negotiated in the Twitter context.

Alharbi (2016) investigated the same online debate around women's right to drive, however he mainly focused on how Saudi women are represented. He analysed Saudi women's tweets at three levels: the text, discursive practice, and the sociocultural practice levels, following Fairclough's model. The findings showed the use of different strategies in constructing ingroup/outgroup identities. For instance, tweets included nomination strategies that assigned positive qualities to Saudi women activists, emphasising their 'ingroup' identity. The results also showed that participants tended to use

predications in positively evaluating the 'ingroup' religious men who supported the driving campaign, while negatively evaluating religious men who were against it. These findings, when placed within the wider sociocultural context, seem to somewhat reflect the complexity of sociocultural practices in Saudi Arabia in relation to Saudi women's rights.

In line with these studies, the present research extends the focus to other women's rights' campaigning hashtags in Saudi Arabia, in particular, the hashtags related to ending the guardianship system. It adopts critical discourse analysis to investigate how Twitter users creatively use linguistic resources available to them to express their stances on the guardianship system and relate it to the wider sociocultural context. I offer an overview of the concept of stance and its use in the online context in the following section.

3.2 Stance

3.2.1 The Concept of Stance

Over the past few decades, the concept of stance has emerged as a main area of language use that has gained considerable importance in linguistics and in other related fields such as anthropology, sociology, and education, as well as across sub-disciplines of linguistics such as pragmatics, critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, and systematic functional linguistics (Englebretson, 2007, p.1).These different approaches suggest that 'stance' is multifaceted, flexible, and interdisciplinary, which can make it challenging to find a consistent definition. It is even more challenging when we try to identify exactly what the term stance refers to, as different terms might be used to refer to the same phenomenon, either partially or wholly. For example, many researchers used other terms such as appraisal (e.g., Martin and White, 2005), attitude (e.g., Halliday, 1994), hedging (e.g., Hyland, 1996), modality (e.g., Palmer, 1979), and evidentiality (e.g., Barton, 1993). Evaluation is another term that has long been used in the literature with the term of stance. Evaluation is with no doubt a significant element in the process of stance-taking, as shown in the work of Biber and his colleagues (1989; 1999; 2006). However, Hunston and Thompson (2000, p.6) used 'evaluation' instead of stance to explain the ways speakers and/or writers judge and value a proposition and express their attitudes, point of view, and feelings towards that proposition. They also added that evaluation can play a fundamental role in organising the text and constructing relations with the reader.

Literature on stance, however this term is defined, is oriented towards understanding how speakers and/or writers use language to act and interact in real life situations. Any interaction involves several components such as place, time, social activities and acts, and social identities, as well as participants' stances (Ochs, 1996). Whenever we engage in an interaction, we position ourselves, evaluate people and/or ideas either positively or negatively (Bednarek, 2006). These temporary evaluations may then turn into recognised permanent values, and are eventually indexed in a

particular community. Ochs (1993, p.288) defined stance as "a display of a socially recognised point of view or attitude." Thus, stance-taking is a way to express ourselves and how we make sense of the world around us and share that sense with others. In other words, we are taking stances towards a proposed object and at the same time achieving different goals such as building solidarity with others who adopt the same stance. This view suggests that stance-taking is multifunctional: it can be used simultaneously to express our positions, build communities, and construct relations with the reader and/or listener.

Hornsby (2019) showed how elite and counter-elite multilingual groups in Breton-speaking communities are socially constructed around shared stances towards other speakers' status. In his study, different multilingual groups were constructed simultaneously not only in terms of group membership, but also in terms of exclusion from other groups based on some indexical values ascribed to the language used, such as authenticity and legitimacy. The participants tended to take a variety of stances that could oppose each other in order to make sense of their positions within the Breton-speaking community. Hornby also asserted that the process of stance-taking can involve "a continual jostling" for positions of power which may have resulted in creating a hierarchy of particular groups within the Breton-speaking community (ibid, p.401).

Biber and Finegan were among the first linguists to investigate stance. In their research, they identified different speech styles in English marked by stance and offered a somewhat broad definition, specifically: "the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message" (1989, p.93). Similarly, Biber (2004) defined stance as the expression of one's personal point of view on propositional information. In an earlier study, Biber, Finegan, Johnsson, Conard, and Leech defined stance as "personal feelings, attitudes, value judgements, or assessment" (1999, p.966). It is noted that these definitions focus on the expressions of stance in terms of the individuals rather than on interactive relations. It is also noted that the definitions of Biber and Finegan (1989) and Biber (2004) clearly state that stance needs to be expressed, while that is not the case in Biber et al.'s research (1999).

The main focus in Biber and Finegan's (1989) study was on particular lexical and grammatical forms of language when interpreting stance and its multiple meanings (cf. Biber, Finegan, Johnsson and Conard, 1999). In particular, it only focussed on the direct and explicit expressions of the speakers' attitudes and ignored other integrated markers. For example, they studied constructions such as 'I fear', which directly expressed the speaker's own stance. On the other hand, they did not investigate constructions such as 'It frightens her' due to the fact that these constructions described the mental state of other actors and not the speaker's own feelings. Arguably, these constructions may have implied the writer's stance, as they elicited the reader's sympathetic or unsympathetic response (White, 1998, p.102). That is, the descriptions of mental states of others can evoke a stance, although they may not be expressed explicitly.

The above-mentioned definitions show that 'stance' has a subjective dimension that is "the expression of self, and the representation of a speaker's (or, more generally, a locutionary agent's) perspective or point of view in discourse" (Finegan, 1995, p.1). 'Stance' also involves an intersubjective dimension, more related to other interlocutors in the interaction (Du Bois, 2007, p.170; Kärkkäinen, 2006, p.723). In other words, whenever we express our stance, it is not simply a personal matter, but it is also expressed to elicit the attention or interest of the addressee. Hyland emphasised the intersubjective dimension in which writers employ linguistic means, not only to position themselves, but also to connect with the reader and at the same time express a "textual voice or community recognised personality" (2005, p.175).

Du Bois (2007, p.171) emphasised these multi-layered dimensions of stance in his triangular, stance-taking model (shown in Figure 7 below), which involves three acts, namely, evaluation, positioning, and alignment. That is, writers and/or speakers evaluate an object depending on the sociocultural values of themselves and their society, position themselves and others in regard to the proposed object, and then align or disalign with other interlocutors' stances. Du Bois (2007, p.163) defined stance as follows:

"Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through over communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field."

In the current study, following Du Bois's (2007), stance is viewed as a public act, since it is perceivable by others through deployed linguistic choices. Du Bois combines the different dimensions of stance instead of treating them solely on their own. This can give us a comprehensive understanding when looking at how complex the online context is. Thus, stance is approached as a multidimensional process (evaluative, subjective, and intersubjective), since it involves expressing stance (subjective), it collaboratively constructs with others in the discourse, taking into consideration features of Twitter such as Mention, Quote, Hashtagging (intersubjective), and is evaluative in the sense that the speakers and/or writers judge the proposed object against sociocultural values. Moreover, it provides a systematic framework to organise the four key elements involved in the constitution of stance:

(1) Stance-taker: The social actor who takes a particular stance sharing sociocultural values with the addressee. The stance-taker in this study is a Twitter user who contributes to the campaigning hashtag.

(2) Stance markers: The linguistic resources (textual and visuals) that the stance-taker uses to express his/her own stance.

(3) Stance object: The entity towards which stance is oriented, it could be ideas or people. In this study, it could be the guardianship system, other people who support or oppose the system, and/or the government.

(4) Stance function: The communicative goal of stance-taking such as forming relations between the stance-taker and other interlocutors.

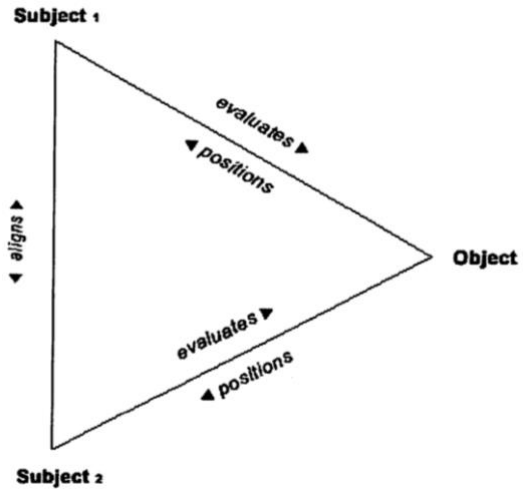


Figure 7 Stance triangle (Du Bois, 2006, p.163)

Before Biber and Finegan (1988), there had been little research done on stance markers in English (but see for example, Chafe, 1986). They investigated stance markers in academic discourse with a focus on only one particular grammatical form, namely, stance adverbials (adverbs, prepositional phrases, adverbial clauses), which they classified into six semantic categories: (1) honestly adverbials, (2) generally adverbials; (3) surely adverbials; (4) maybe adverbials; (5) amazingly adverbials; (6) actually adverbials (ibid, pp.7-8).

In a later study, Biber and Finegan (1989) extended this early work to include other stance markers in English such as verbs, modals and adjectives. They investigated variation across the spoken and written registers through a statistical technique (cluster analysis), classifying texts into clusters according to the stance markers used and their occurrences. Each cluster that contained frequent types of stance marker was considered a stance style, which was indexed and interpreted. The stance markers were then divided into 12 categories based on semantic and grammatical criteria: "(1) affect markers (verbs, adjectives, and adverbs); (2) certainty adverbs; (3) certainty verbs; (4) certainty adjectives; (5) doubt adverbs; (6) doubt verbs; (7) doubt adjectives; (8) hedges; (9) emphatics; (10) possibility modals; (11) necessity modals, and (12) predictive modals" (1989, p.1). These studies (1988; 1989) showed the importance of lexical and grammatical markers, such as adverbials as resources for conveying stance. These studies (1988; 1989) covered a large amount of data and laid the foundations for following studies to further investigate stance and to expand the work to include other linguistic forms, as well as other social aspects.

In their research based on a large corpus of American and British English, Biber et al. (1999) described linguistic stance markers in four different registers (newspaper reports, fiction, academic prose, and conversation). They argued that a speaker or writer can express his/her stance lexically and

grammatically using adverbs, complements, adjective, verbs, and nouns, and paralinguistically (e.g., through duration, tone, loudness), as well as through non-verbal means such as gestures, facial expressions, and body movements (ibid, pp.967-968). One of the strengths of this lexico-grammatical framework is that it covered a large amount of naturally occurring American and British English data. It also revealed that stance can be expressed implicitly (e.g. 'it might be that') or explicitly (e.g. 'I think'), and that stance is more common in the spoken rather than written registers.

Based on his previous work, Biber (2006) investigated three main grammatical stance markers (stance complement clauses, modal/semi-modal verbs, and stance adverbs) in academic spoken and written registers. He differentiated between three semantic categories: (1) epistemic; (2) attitude; (3) style adverbs. The study showed that modal verbs are the most common form used to express stance and that stance markers semantically can serve different functions such as "the expression of epistemicity, certainty, likelihood, or doubt; the expression of attitudinal and evaluative meanings; or a arrange of directive meanings" (ibid, pp.130-131).

3.2.2 Stance in the Online Context

The online context is of particular interest to the present research, as it investigates a campaigning hashtag on Twitter. In this regard, a number of previous studies have focussed on blogs (e.g., Myers, 2010; Luzón, 2012). Myers (2010) drew on Biber and Fiengan (1989), Du Bois (2007), and Jaffe (2009) when analysing stance and public discussion in blogs. He utilised corpus software (Wmatrix) to identify a keyword list and then manually identified stance markers, before tagging them according to their grammatical category and assigning these markers to semantic groups following the UCREL semantic analysis system[38]. He also examined the context in which these stance markers occurred via a concordance tool. The study revealed the use of various stance markers such as cognitive verbs (e.g., think), stance adverbs (e.g., actually) and conversation particles (e.g., um). Luzón (2012) also adopts corpus tools, Wordsmith in particular, in her study of ten academic weblogs. She manually identified and examined evaluative adjectives in the context in which they occurred. Subsequently, she assigned each adjective to a semantic group, before finally assigning them a positive or negative value in relation to the context. The current research examines stance markers in a campaigning discourse on Twitter in relation to the wider context, with the aim of revealing more situated stance markers.

Many of the extant literature on stance in social media applications is associated with socio-political movements, public discussion, and conflict discourse. Some studies have shown that campaigning hashtags can increase the support and affiliation with the hashtag's main topic

[38] UCREL stands for University Centre for Computer Corpus Research on Language which offers an automatic semantic analysis system, available at: https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/

(Zappavigna, 2011, De Cock and Pedraza, 2018). This could be explained by the fact that hashtags can raise awareness of a particular societal and/or political cause. At the same time, these hashtags can serve to reinforce the user's image as someone who is committed and aware through public alignment and solidarity (De Cock and Pedraza, 2018).

On Twitter, stance has been approached from different perspectives, as discussed in the following studies. For example, Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015) investigated the #BringBackOurGirls campaign launched to release the kidnapped schoolgirls in Nigeria, and to demand formal education for female children. They examined the role of affective stance in evaluating the social actors and the discursive features of the campaign discourse, applying appraisal framework and critical discourse analysis. An appraisal framework focuses more on the functions of the stance markers rather than on the linguistic forms, as in the case of the lexico-grammatical framework. Martin and White (2005, p.94) asserted that an appraisal framework is orientated "towards meanings in context and towards rhetorical effects, rather than towards grammatical forms". They examined a corpus of 2,500 tweets and 2,500 Facebook posts using Wordsmith to identify the key lexical words. They then compared this corpus to the Nairaland corpus and examined the linguistic context manually to identify the affect and judgement expressions. The results suggest that online campaigns are only expected to succeed if they are accompanied by strategic actions such as 'offline' protests. The study also showed the use of different language resources (e.g., adjectives) that reflect feelings, moods, and emotional language in negatively evaluating the social actors (e.g., the government).

In another study, Chiluwa (2015) examined stance in the tweets posted by two radical groups, Boko Haram and Al Shabab, and how they used stance markers (e.g., hedges, boosters, and attitude markers) to express their points of view and emotional commitment. He applied Hyland's (2005) model, which emphasises the role of the addressee in the process of stance-taking. The results showed that, in general, Twitter users tend to use attitude markers and self-mention to convey their stance. For example, in this case, they used name-calling (e.g., terrorists) when negatively evaluating the Nigerian government. It is also suggested that Twitter users construct their stance to persuade the reader to adopt the same point of view and align with them. Similarly, Ajiboye and Abioye (2019) examined social actor representations in the ongoing Biafra agitation in Nigeria. They applied critical discourse analysis and appraisal framework when analysing stances in two online communities (Nairaland and Nigeria Village Square). The study showed that participants used appraisal resources of graduation, attitude, and engagement to express their stances, at the same time contributing to the distribution of emotionally and socially constructed identities of the social actors. In addition, in a recent study, Wang (2020) examined how Facebook commenters argue over two same-sex marriage bills in Taiwan, highlighting the intersubjective dimension of the large-scale digital platform. He proposed an integrated framework to explain the socially determined process of constructing reality. The study also emphasised the role of the participants in shaping and framing public discourse and

demonstrated that (dis)alignments facilitate various group acts. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that various linguistic practices can be critical in expressing our opinions, stances, constructing groups and in achieving various functions. In the following section, I shed light on views on language phenomena language choice as a particular interest in the current study.

3.3. Traditional Views on Bilingualism and Multilingualism

There has been extensive academic literature regarding language contact phenomena and multilingual communities and individuals (Lamb, 2015; Cavalcanti and Maher, 2018). Nevertheless, it could be argued that growth in population, the economy, technology, political and social changes, and social media have contributed to the emergence of new language patterns across the world. The emerging language patterns have produced alternative understandings of language practices within multilingual communities. Accordingly, views of language, in terms of a discrete system of structures (as in Saussure); or in terms of context-free innate grammatical system (as in Chomsky) are starting to shift.

With the emergence of poststructuralism in the late 20th century, language scholars started to view language in terms of social practices embedded within social, political, historical, and cultural meanings (Blommaert, 2010). This view suggests that language is an ongoing process, that is always contested, changed, shaped, amended, (re)contextualised and reappropriated by actual speakers and writers. In this way, language is constantly constructed across various contexts, and thus could be considered as "portable bits of text", according to Squires (2016).

Poststructuralist sociolinguists view language as an activity rather than a structure, something we do rather than something we have (Pennycook, 2010). Many scholars (Shohamy, 2006; Thorne and Lantolf, 2007; Juffermans, 2011) have started to adopt the term 'languaging' to capture this new understanding of language as a constant interactive meaning-making process. Languaging is "a social process constantly reconstructed in sensitivity to environmental factors" (Canagarajh, 2007, p.94). This view of language as a dynamic process has extended our traditional understanding of language related phenomena, which I discuss in the next section.

The perceived overlap between different definitions of bilingualism and multilingualism is always a challenge in the study of language contact phenomena (see Grosjean, 1982). Wei (2008, p.4) defined multilingualism to include "anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)". Similarly, in a recent study, De Houwer and Ortega (2018, p.3) defined the bilingual speaker "as one who understands at least two languages at age-appropriate levels, regardless of modality". The use of two or more languages has long been associated with the terms: bilingualism and multilingualism, with the distinction between the two terms not always clear. Definitions of bilingualism have fluctuated from native-like competence in two languages (e.g., Bloomfield, 1935) to a minimal competence in using

two languages such as mastering only one language skill (e.g., Macnamara, 1967) and all points in between.

These definitions, however, have some methodological and theoretical challenges, such as what native-like competence means, what its criteria are, as well as who is included and excluded in such definitions. These challenges can be minimised when we consider bilingualism as a set of complex linguistic behaviours rather than as "something inside speakers' heads" (Auer, 1984, p.7). That is, to fully understand bilingualism, we need to focus on the linguistic features displayed in speakers' and writers' everyday linguistic practices rather than focusing on bilingualism as a mental ability. According to Auer, being bilingual is not something we are, but something we do on "stage" to act and interact in the wider community in which "bilingualism becomes a visible interactional and social fact" (Auer, 2011, p.460).

Multilingualism generally refers to the use of three or more languages, however, it can also refer to the use of two languages, as I discussed above (see also Romaine, 2013). However, bilingualism can also refer to two languages or more (e.g., Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981; Hamers and Blanc, 2000; De Groot, 2011; Cenoz, 2013). Furthermore, Canagarajah and Liyanage (2012) argued that monolinguals often switch between various registers, discourses and codes, and thus can hardly be labelled as monolinguals. Indeed, the focus of this study is on practices such as language choice in a multilingual context rather than on multilingualism or bilingualism as contact phenomena on their own. My use of the terms 'multilingualism' and 'multilingual', therefore, relates to the involvement of more than one linguistic code in the context under study. In this study, I examine language choice patterns that may emerge and vary depending on the context of a Twitter hashtag campaign as a situated practice.

Recent years have witnessed a shift in study to language contact phenomena, for example to online multilingualism and bilingualism. The online context is a rich source of data for many researchers across different disciplines, including discourse analysis, social sciences, media studies, computational linguistics, and linguistics. It offers a rich source of authentic data available both synchronously and asynchronously in different modes such as spoken interactions, pictures, videos, images, and emoticons. Researchers can easily access a great deal of data in the form of daily interactions, political discourses, and opinions, as they are often public and free. More importantly, the online context "offers a home to all languages" (Crystal, 2006, p.229). In the following section, I shed light on online multilingualism to give an overview of the linguistic diversity that exists in the rapid and shifting context of the Internet.

3.3.1 Multilingualism Online

Since the late 1990s, the Internet has become more affordable, accessible, developed, and creative, accommodating different languages and systems. Nowadays, millions of people from different linguistic backgrounds can communicate with each other across the globe. The growing linguistic diversity online has encouraged many researchers to focus on online interactions. *The Multilingual Internet* was the first comprehensive edited volume on multilingualism online and was published in 2007 (Danet and Herring, 2007). The book covered a wide range of languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Japanese, Spanish, Thai and French. Moreover, it highlighted different linguistic issues such as code-mixing, gender, and language choice across different online platforms, adopting methods that already existed in sociolinguistics and linguistics. The book laid a solid foundation mythologically and theoretically for later research on multilingualism online (e.g., Lee, 2013; Tagg and Seargent, 2012; Lee ,2017).

Most of the research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) has focussed on the impact of the English language rather than any other language, with previous studies proving that technology influences linguistics (Lobet-Maris, 2003; Yeh, 2006; Androutsopoulos, 2006). The online dominance of English in terms of users and content can be traced back to the birth of the Internet and its early popularity in the United States of America. The USA is a leading country in the field of technology, and this is evident in its influence on social media, as many platforms were launched there (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Snapchat). Thus, the dominance of English in the online setting is understandable, despite the appearance of other social media platforms from other non-English countries. Thus, it is unsurprising that English is used as the language of technology globally and that there have always been fears that English will replace other languages (Warschauer et al., 2002).

In 1998, UNESCO published a report on the diversity of languages online and, at that time, it was estimated that about 75% of web pages were in English (Pimienta et al. 2009, p. 33). However, the percentage of the web pages in English had fallen by 2005 to 45% due to increasing numbers of non-Anglophone countries creating online content in their native languages (ibid). Nevertheless, English is still very popular online, and it remains the default status for international communication online (Warschauer, 2002, p.62). The dominance of English is seen on different online platforms including Twitter (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009; Hong et al., 2011). Statista (2023) revealed that English is the most frequently used language for web content today, as shown in Figure 8 below. The diagram also shows the number of non-English web content, with Russian, Spanish, French and German accounting for the larger proportions after English. While measuring online multilingualism by web content does not necessarily represent linguistic diversity online, the statistics are still valuable indicators of the possible range of non-English languages available online.

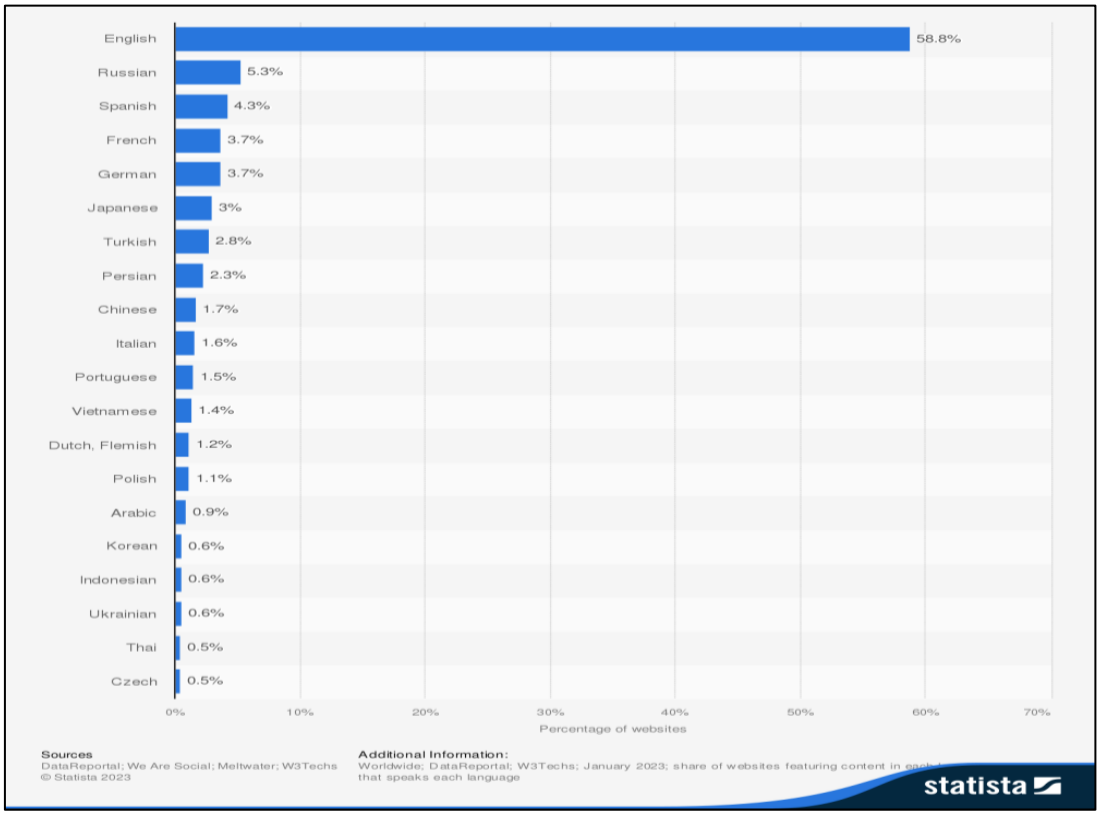


Figure 8 Languages most frequently used for web content as of January 2023, by share of websites (Statista, 2023)

Currently, one of the most popular platforms in the world that was launched from a non-English speaking country is TikTok. TikTok is a Chinese short-video application launched in 2017 with more than 1 billion active users worldwide (TikTok, 2021). Despite the rapid development in technology in China and the growing engagement with the world, the prevalence of content in Chinese in the online global context is limited compared to English. This is perhaps because the use of Chinese is generally restricted to Chinese apps used in China. Although TikTok is Chinese owned, it was launched with the aim of targeting an international audience, thus English was set as the default language outside of China. However, TikTok has a sister app, launched in 2016 and named *Douyin*, that is aimed at the Chinese market and thus uses Chinese as the default language (Schellewald, 2023). This echoes what Lee (2016) reported, that is, that an audience can play a significant role in language choice.

Other reasons for the limited use of Chinese compared to English in the online sphere might include political, economic, social, and historical factors, which are beyond the scope of this research and would need further investigation. However, it has been argued that Chinese will become a global language, in the sense that it will become necessary in politics, business, and cultural exchanges. Consequently, it is expected to become the "present day English" (Abrahamsen and Chan, 2004). This is because China is expected to gain more economic and political power in the world in the coming decades, and thus the use of Chinese is expected to increase worldwide. In addition, more than twice as many people speak this language as their native tongue compared to any other language (Svartvik

and Leech, 2006, p.246) which highlights the potential of Chinese becoming more dominant. Furthermore, it is expected that users of Chinese online will surpass those using English due to the increasing popularity of Chinese among other speakers from different parts of the world (Chua, 2015). These political, economic, and cultural development have encouraged many countries to include Chinese as a foreign language as a subject in their education systems. For example, in 2019, Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman announced the inclusion of Chinese in school and university curricula as part of the economic cooperation between Saudi Arabia and China.

The use of Arabic online, a key focus of this study, is still low compared to other languages, particularly English. Current online content in Arabic only accounts for 3% of the online content worldwide, although internet users from more than twenty countries who speak Arabic as a first language accounted for about 5.6% of the overall users by 2017 (Internet World Stats, 2017), as seen in Figure 9 below.

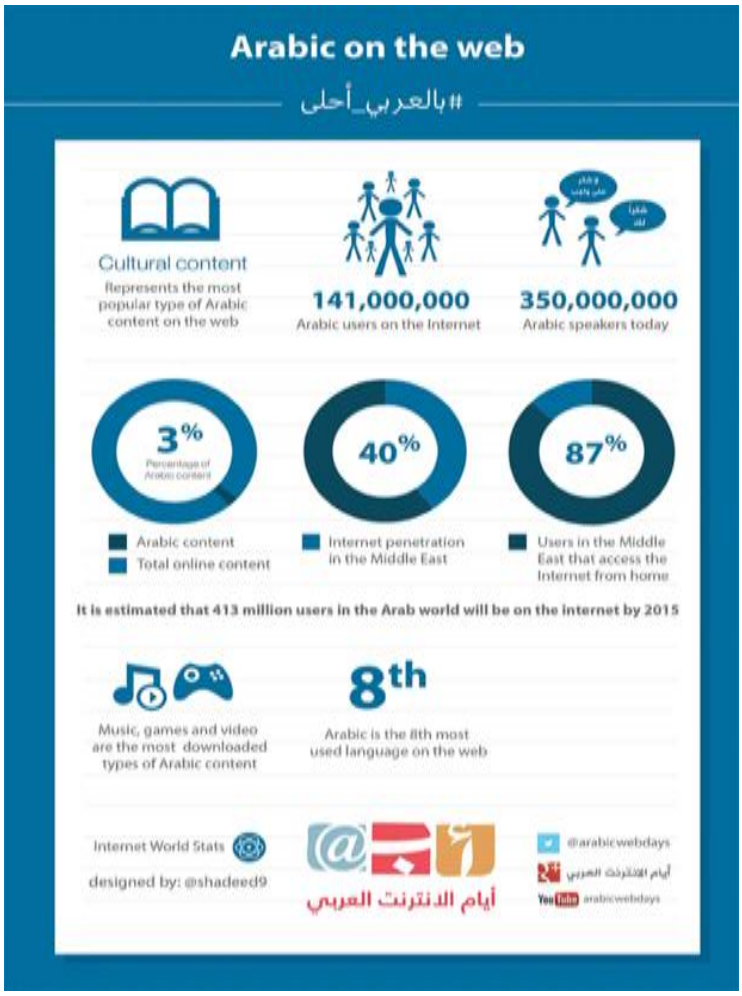


Figure 9 Arabic content online (Source: Internet World Stats 2017)

The comparatively low amount of Arabic content online could be explained by the inconvenience and impracticality. For example, the process of translating English words used in social media into Arabic is generally a tedious and challenging task (Kmail, 2016). Elmgrab (2016) emphasised the fact that Arabic lacks the terminology needed to adapt to the new era of technology. Thus, the development of the use of Arabic online is often faced with challenges and difficulties. For example, the transfer of Arabic onto the Internet is problematic because the lack of suitable electronic morphological analysers to convey the meanings, which requires a great deal of effort due to the complex nature of Arabic.

Moreover, many internet tools do not support Arabic, which has contributed to the emergence of alternatives such as Arabizi, the Romanisation of Arabic characters (Allehaiby, 2013). An example of this is the use of the word 'la3ibeen' to mean players, in which numbers are used to represent some sounds in Arabic (e.g., 3 to represent the voiced pharyngeal fricative / ʕ /ع). The popular use of Arabizi is attributed to its swiftness and ease when typing in English characters rather than Arabic in computer medicated communication (CMC) since English is the language of internet (Hamdan, 2016, p.501). The relatively late adoption of the Internet in the Arab world is possibly another factor that has contributed to the limited Arabic content online. The first languages used on the Internet were French and English (Emery, 1983). However, the Internet was introduced later to the Arab world, with Tunisia to be the first Arab country to provide it in the early 1990's (Wheeler, 2004).

Despite the increasing number of users from Arab countries, the quantity of content in Arabic is still very low and in need of improvement and for more research to address the lack of Arabic content online (Abubaker, Salah, Al-Muhairi and Bentiba, 2015). The need for more Arabic content online is motivated by political, social, and economic reasons, as technology affects different aspects of life. It is also motivated by the desire to preserve Arab identity, particularly for the coming generations (Abubaker, Salah, Al-Muhairi and Bentiiba, 2015). Sullivane (2017) reported that there is a fear among elder speakers of Arabic that Arabizi could affect standard forms of Arabic and that there is a need for more digital Arabic content. Colloquial Arabic has integrated English terms such as 'save', 'email' 'laptop', 'screenshot', 'group', 'scan', particularly in spoken form. However, it is doubtful that these terms will be integrated into standard Arabic, as it is considered a sacred language and the language of the *Holy Quran,* thus making it unlikely any changes will be accepted. Recently, *Majma' Al-Lughah Al-'Arabiyah*[39] (the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo) Arabized the word 'Trend' to become *ترند,* retaining the English pronunciation but typed in Arabic script with the plural formation in Arabic being *ترندات*. The Arabization of 'trend' has faced criticism from Arab linguists such as Abdulrazzaq Al-Saedi, the head of *Majma' Al-Lughah Al-Iftiradhi* (the Virtual Arabic Language Assembly), with him calling for a review to search for a better Arabic equivalent of the word 'trend'.

[39] The Academy of Arabic Language was established by King Fuad I in Cairo in 1932 to preserve the language and review language dictionaries.

Many Arab countries have tried to implement new policies and strategies to encourage Arabic content online, meet modern needs and accommodate the rapidly growing Arab audience. In the United Arab Emirates, the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre in cooperation with the Social Commission for Western Asia have launched a competition on digital Arabic content to raise awareness and to support initiatives in this regard. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has initiated multiple e-government applications supporting Arabic that provide multiple services for Saudi citizens and residents as well. One of the most popular platforms is '*Absher*': *ابشر*/(an Arabic word that has cultural and religious connotations often used in Saudi Arabia that closely translates to '*you got it*'), which links different governmental sectors and provides several services such as issuing passports and identification cards, paying bills and fines, etc. The application's interface is available in both English and Arabic to maintain the Islamic Arabic Saudi identity, which is in alignment with the goals of the Vision 2030 to preserve the cultural and social values of the Saudi community.

Social media applications have also started to promote content in Arabic. For example, in 2012, Twitter launched right-to-left language support for mobile websites, making sentences more coherent and organised in languages that have a right to left writing system (e.g., Arabic, Farsi) (Twitter Engineering, 2012). In addition, Twitter introduced a new language setting that supports Arabic feminine forms. For example, Twitter users can now choose to be addressed as a female, as they can now see words like *استكشفي*/*'explore'* (imperative for females) instead of *استكشف*/(imperative for males), as seen below (Twitter blog, 2021).

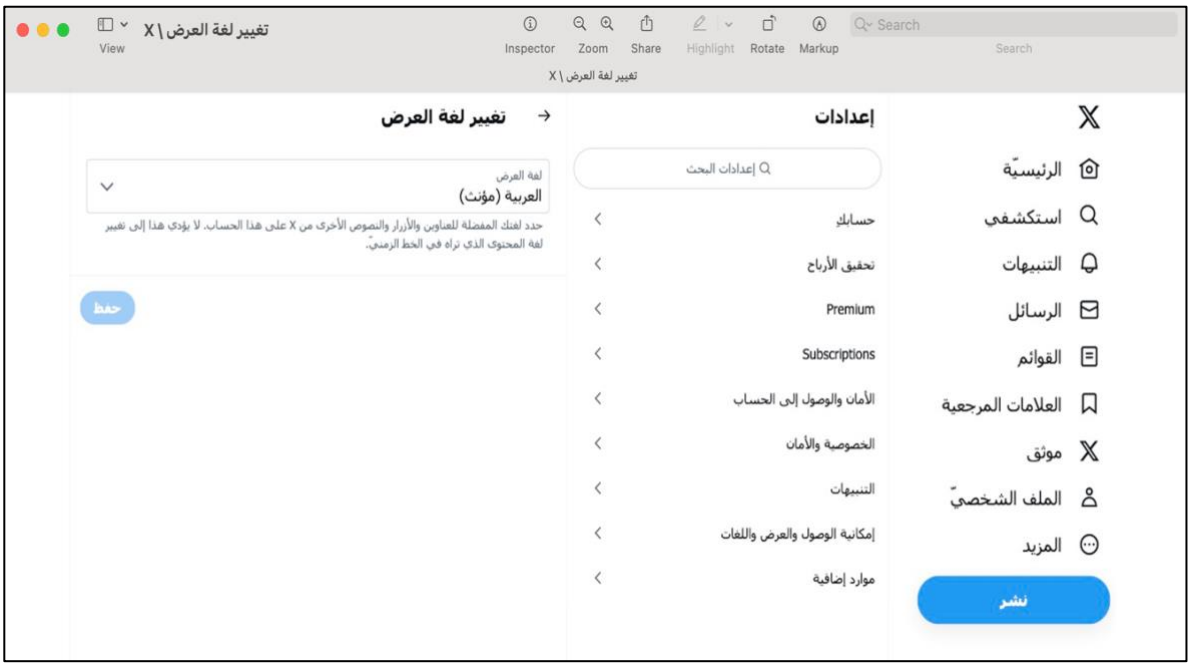


Figure 10 An Illustration of the use of feminine Arabic form on Twitter.

The online context is constantly active in terms of its development, interactions, creativity, rapidity and integration of different modes. Therefore, investigating the online context can reveal interesting results for researchers in various fields. For example, it can offer interesting perspectives on distinctive linguistic practices that may differ from face-to-face interactions. The umbrella term multilingualism and its related concepts such as language choice, code-mixing, and code-switching have been challenged to capture new meanings emergent in the online context. The online setting is a space where many multilingual practices can move across different contexts, simultaneously. In the following section, I discuss some of these practices, namely code-switching, translanguaging and language choice as a central concept of the current study.

3.3.2 Language Choice

A review of the literature suggests that language choice in a multilingual and/or bilingual community is mostly concerned with the selection of a language available to multilingual speakers in different contexts. The linguistic resources and codes the multilingual speakers draw upon are constructed according to different factors such as audience, values, beliefs, cultural backgrounds, topic, context, sense of identity and belonging (Auer, 1998; Li, 2000; Fishman, 2007; Lee, 2016; Zhang, Huang and Wang, 2024). Languages are mobile resources and codes that carry social, historical, cultural and ideological meanings, thus studying language choice in a particular context can reveal a deep interpretation of various socio-cultural issues. Language choice has been investigated in different domains such as in the classroom (MacRuair, 2011; Alghasab 2017; Johnston 2023), language planning (Chua, 2010), the workplace (Nair-Venugopal, 2000; Kingsley, 2013), identity (Warschauer and Said, 2002; Fuller, 2007; Chew, 2014; Serreli, 2019), academic publishing (Liu and Buckingham, 2022), as well as in the online domain (Warschauer, 2002; Androutsopoulos, 2006; Warschauer et al., 2006; Zvyeryeva, 2020; Nyman, 2021).

Researchers have investigated language choice online across a wide range of languages such as English and Mandarin Chinese (Su, 2003), Chinese and English (Paolillo, 2007), English and Thai (Tagg and Seargeant, 2012). In her study of language choice among multilingual students of a Pan-Swiss medical organisation, Durham (2007) showed that English was used as a lingua franca. The study suggested that the presence of a multilingual audience might encourage the use of English as a medium for communication. Other studies, however, have showed that English was not the preferred language in online communication (e.g., Androutsopoulos, 2006). Androutsopoulos (2006) investigated the relationship between language choice and topic among migrants from different backgrounds including, Greece, Afghanistan, India, Morrocco, Iran, Turkey, Poland, Russia, Southeast Asia, and Romania in diasporic discussion forums. He divided the sample from the Persian forum into five sections and 21 topic groups, as shown below (taken from Androutsopoulos study):

1) General: comprises discussions on different topics such as history, world news, Iran, economics, politics, law and sport.
2) Entertainment: includes music, movies, ethnic radio, pictures, jokes, events.
3) Culture: covers various topics such as Persian cuisine, travel, Farsi talk, religion, philosophy.
4) Science: discusses numerous topics related to education, health, psychology, computers.
5) Community: includes topics on fashion, trends, greetings.

The research into language choice online has also covered the use of other languages including Arabic, a key interest in the current study. Warschauer et al. (2007), for example, investigated different factors contributing to language choice among a group of Egyptian internet users. The findings showed that Romanised Egyptian Arabic was preferred in online chats and informal emails. English, on the other hand, was used more in formal emails. For better understanding of language choice online, I provide a brief explanation of the factors behind language choice, as discussed in the literature, below.

Previous studies have highlighted different factors that can influence language choice in a multilingual setting. These factors include the participants, setting, and audience (Fishman, 1972; Fasold, 1984; Auer, 1998). Androutsopoulos's (2006) study revealed that the use of minority and home languages were found to be preferred when discussing topics related to poetry and music, however, they were not the preference when talking about topics related to technology and politics. In another study, McClure (2000) investigated Assyrian and English in America, with an emphasis on the role of topic and audience in choosing the language. English or code-mixing between English and Assyrian were found to be preferred when discussing topics related to life in America such as American politics and schooling. Assyrian, however, was frequently used when the interaction involved other participants who spoke Assyrian, regardless of the setting or topic.

Audience is another significant factor that contributes to language choice. Cunliffee et al. (2013) investigated the linguistic practise of bilingual high school students of Welsh and English on Facebook. The study showed that the students used Welsh for messages with other Welsh speaking students. On the other hand, status updates were more frequently written in English to ensure that all of their friends were included. On Twitter, Johnson (2013) reported that language choice is found to be related to the addressee. English was more common in public posts targeting a wide audience than in replies to individuals among speakers of English and Welsh. It must be noted, however, that the relationship between language choice and topic, or audience is not necessarily fixed. As Gumpers (1982) stated, it "does not directly predict actual usage", and the relationship between different linguistic codes and different linguistic activities is a symbolic one.

The online context has appealed to many researchers from different disciplines investigating various linguistic and semiotic online resources available to participants such as videos, images, emoticon, emojis, and pictures. Androutsopoulos (2005; 2008), among others, has called for more studies in linguistics to accommodate the third wave of the Internet (Web 3.0)[40], which has witnessed the emergence of new systems and practices. In response to this, the focus of many studies on the subject of language choice have shifted their focus from simple descriptions of languages and linguistic features to include more critical aspects. For example, many researchers have investigated online identity performance using linguistic and semiotic resources (Lam, 2009; Delahunty, 2012; Tagg and Seargeant, 2012), language choice as a situated practice (Lee, 2011; 2012), self-presentation (Lee, 2014), and language attitudes (Fitriati and Wardani, 2020).

Online language choice is mostly concerned with the linguistic resources and codes available to users, as well as how they negotiate their preference to choose one resource over the other when communicating with others who may or may not share the same languages (Lee, 2016, p.119). Many users can now communicate with each other in different languages regardless of their proficiency or competence in the languages concerned. Online affordances have facilitated such communication through different tools such as online translators available on different platforms. Twitter, for example, has a translate icon that can be used for writing tweets in any language supported by Twitter, and at the same time translating the tweets of other users. Androutsopoulos (2013) referred to this kind of translation as “copy/ paste language”.

In the current study, I use the concept of language choice to refer to the selection of one language over the other in a Twitter campaign hashtag. It must be noted that the view of language choice here is not so much concerned with competence or proficiency of the users in the languages concerned, as this is beyond the scope of the current research. Moreover, within the current data, the users may utilise Twitter affordances to write a post in a language which they are not necessarily competent in. Rather, my focus is to investigate language choice (English and/or Arabic) and examine the motivations for their choice. Language choice, hence, was examined against the backdrop of the wider historical and socio-political contexts within which language is used to index meanings and ideologies represented by the stances taken. In other words, I look at the multilingual (English and Arabic) practices in tweets by participants of the Twitter campaign hashtag *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen*. Specifically, I examine how they creatively use these resources to share their stances on the guardianship system, while at the same time creating in-group and out-group representations of self and other. Investigating the language choices of Twitter users utilising a

[40] The third wave of the Internet or Web 3.0 is a term that was first introduced in 2014 by Gavin Wood, a British computer scientist, to describe the new version of the Internet that relies more on the concept of decentralisation and more user-driven experience

campaign hashtag will contribute to understanding the discourse strategies for stance-taking and the process of self and other representations.

Moreover, I look at how users employ their multilingual resources in complex and dynamic interactions online. Online interactions are diverse, challenging, fast, shifting and multimodal. While I acknowledge that languages online can be dynamic, jumbled and complex, I believe that labelling languages is necessary to understand the socio-cultural meanings and ideologies associated with individual languages. Different languages can have distinct meanings and can be a form of identity for different social groups (Lee, 2017). Language resources are carriers of social, historical, cultural and political connotations, as they are shaped by our beliefs, ideologies, experience and thoughts.

My decision was motivated by the nature of hashtag discourse and its organisation. Various tweets associated with a particular hashtag appear simultaneously showing a great deal of variation in terms of languages and codes. These tweets are posted by different people from different parts of the world who do not necessarily have a shared language. However, within the hashtag discourse, besides instances of language choice, instances of other linguistic practices in a single interaction can appear. This is supported by Twitter affordances such as Mention and Replies. The Replies feature, for example, can be used by a group of people to talk and respond to each other within the same conversation.

Language choice patterns will be investigated as they appear on the Twitter hashtag, allowing many users to be able to participate and share their tweets with others. These tweets are dispersed across the hashtag and do not necessarily exist in a single communicative episode. Language choice, hence, is a more suitable concept to examine in this study as the focus is not on multilingual practices during an individual interaction. Rather, the focus is on the tweets sharing the same hashtag that have been posted by various people who do not necessarily normally interact with each other or even know each other. However, this is not to say that other linguistics practices such as code-switching or code-mixing were completely ignored, as these terms are used as appropriate.

3.3.3 Code-switching

Code-switching is a central topic in multilingualism that has been studied in various contexts such as the classroom environment (e.g., MacRuairc, 2011), workplace (e.g., Nair-Venugopal 2000) and marketplace (e.g., Connell, 2009). Recently, scholars interested in code-switching and other language contact phenomena are beginning to pay more attention to the online context (e.g., Warschauer, Said and Zohry, 2002; Durham, 2003). Code-switching has been studied from two main perspectives: a grammatical perspective and a sociolinguistic approach. The social functions of code-switching have been studied extensively in the literature (e.g., Bailey, 2000; Chung, 2006). Holmes (1992) argued that code-switching serves affective and rhetorical functions, as the participants in her study switched

codes to convey emotional messages. Similarly, in Al-Khatib and Sabbahs' (2008) study, the participants preferred to use Arabic whenever they wanted to express words related to culture. In addition, Hashim (2010) found that advertisers used culturally related words (e.g., halal: permissible) as primordial indicators of national identity and cultural values to create a rapport with their consumers. Such words were recognised by the Malay/Muslim community and hence these words were able to invoke shared cultural meanings and give a sense of solidarity and promote their products eventually.

One of the fundamental studies on code-switching is the work of Blom and Gumperz (1972), in which they introduced situational and metaphorical code-switching. They investigated the use of two varieties of Norwegian (standard Norwegian Bokmål, and a local dialect, Ranamål). They explained that Bokmål and Ranamål are largely perceived as separate entities, despite the extensive similarities between these two varieties. Furthermore, they argued that this linguistic separateness could be attributed to social factors such as setting, audience, participants. These extralinguistic factors could "restrict the selection of linguistic variables" (421) in a way that is somewhat similar to semantic restrictions. According to Blom and Gumperz, whenever there is a change in the social setting, situational code-switching occurs. For example, the study reported that teachers tend to teach using the standard language, however, they often use the dialect whenever there is a discussion in order to motivate students to debate. Metaphorical code-switching, on the other hand, occurs when there is a change in topic. The results suggest that, in a particular situation, some linguistic variables might be more suitable than others. Code-switching, in this sense, is a situated practice constrained by extralinguistic factors, while at the same time subject to contextual individual preferences.

The suggestion that Bokmål and Ranamål represent two separate discrete codes has received much criticism. Maehlum (1996), for example, demonstrated that Blom and Gumperz failed to give a comprehensive description of any actual Norwegian community. In her view, the two varieties exist in the repertoire of the Norwegians as "idealized entities: it is their existence as norms which is important" (1996, p.753) and not as identifiable separate codes. Moreover, the classification of code-switching into situational and metaphorical is problematic. It is difficult to identify exactly what is situational and metaphorical code-switching (Myers-Scotton, 1993, p.52). In a later study, Gumperz (1982) discussed the distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching further. He related situational code-switching to diglossia, in which specific linguistic variety is assumed appropriate in a specific situation. On the other hand, in metaphorical code-switching, it is not easy to assume such a relationship between form and context, as the social context is always highly variable and complex. Gumperz (1982, p.131) referred to instances of code-switching as 'contextualization cues' that signal meanings and assumptions of a particular interaction. It is supposed that the speaker and the audience are aware of these social meanings (conventionally expected) to achieve a mutual understanding. This expected mutual understanding is emphasised by Myers-Scotton's markedness

model (1993), which associates each linguistic code in a multilingual community with a particular social role.

Myers-Scotton determined that whether code-switching has a social or a conversational purpose depends on both the speaker and the audience. The study suggested that the speakers must share, at minimum, what is normally expected from them in a specific community for a communicative meaning to be successful. She explained that "what community norms would predict is unmarked, what is not predicted is marked" (1998, p.5). In other words, code-switching, according to markedness theory, is governed by social conventions and expectations. In a way, it could be linked to social practices and how speakers position themselves in relation to others. Some critics of markedness theory argue that it relies greatly on the assumptions about speaker's internal state and beliefs, rather than focusing on the effects of code-switching on conversation. However, Auer (1998, p.10) argued that "external knowledge about language use" required by the theory is not necessary to explain code-switching.

Auer (1984, p.93) suggested that the meaning of code-switching is interactionally constructed through the sequential turns of participants in a conversation and not necessarily semantics. In his study on code-switching among Italian migrant children in Germany, he did not find a significant relationship between topic and language choice, and thus argued that language should be considered a social action rather than a fixed concept and cannot be constrained to specific meanings or situations. This sequential approach has received some criticism (e.g., Blommaert, 2005, p.67) for ignoring the role of the macro context and only focusing on the context constructed by participants in the interaction. Muysken (2000) suggested that both sociolinguistic context and structural analysis is crucial when investigating code-switching. Code-switching has also been approached from a grammatical perspective, and in the following section, I discuss some of the influential frames of the grammar of code-switching, in particular, the constraints principle, and the matrix principle.

Shana Poplack's (1980) early work is one of the most influential studies on code-switching from a grammatical perspective, paving the way for further studies. In her study of the New York Puerto Rican community, Poplack distinguished between three types of code-switching, according to the nature and length of juxtaposed elements of the languages used (examples provided below are taken from Poplack (1980)). They are: (1) tag switching, that is, instances of insertion of a tag from one language into a sentence of another language (Milroy and Muysken (1995) use the term 'extra-sentential switching' to refer to the same insertion), for example, the insertion of 'you know' from one language into another utterance which is in another language; (2) inter-sentential switching, which usually involves one clause in one language and another clause in a different language, e.g., Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English y termino en español' ('Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English and finish it in Spanish'); (3) intra-sentential switching, where the insertion occurs within the clause itself, e.g., El MAN que CAME ayer WANTS JOHN comprar A CAR nuevo ('The man who came yesterday wants

John to buy a new car'). This type of code-switching, according to Poplack, requires a high level of bilingual proficiency as the speaker needs sufficient grammar knowledge of the two languages to produce grammatically correct sentences.

She further proposed that the occurrence of code-switching is subject to two constraints, namely, the free morpheme constraint and the equivalence morpheme. The free morpheme constraint states that code-switching cannot occur between a lexical stem and a bound morpheme, i.e., within the word. The equivalence constraint predicts that code-switching occurs within constituents as long as the languages involved coincide in their surface structures. Poplack (1980) suggested the universality of this frame to all kinds of dataset, although subsequent academic scholarship has provided substantial contextual counterevidence in different languages (see, for example Belzai, Rubin and Toribio, 1994).

Myers-Scotton (1993) explained the process of code-switching in what she calls 'the matrix language frame', which states that in the process of code-switching one language acts as the dominant language, i.e. the matrix language, into which elements of other language can be embedded. This framework also includes constraints, but here a type of hierarchy may be present in terms of the languages used as dominant or subordinate. This model has also received criticism in terms of definitions of the matrix language (ML) and embedded language (EL), and Myers-Scotton later refined it by identifying the criteria of the ML according to the number of morphemes used in a sentence.

These models discussed above seek to provide a systematic account of the process of code-switching and there is substantial work that provides an interpretive understanding of code-switching in various contexts. However, previous studies have shown that language contact phenomena are complex processes with multi-layered meanings, and thus the need for more integrated approaches has emerged (Wei, 1994) to view multilingualism as "a complex of specific semiotic resources" (Blommaert, 2010, p.102) from which the speaker can choose to achieve a particular communicative function.

3.4. Non-traditional Views on Bi/Multilingualism

Emergent approaches towards various language contact phenomena address the complexity of language and, at the same time, challenge the traditional view of treating languages as discrete systems, both additive and separate, with multilingual speakers as double or parallel monolinguals. Although these approaches have been deployed successfully in some studies, they are often inadequate across different settings and in continuously complex sociolinguistic contexts. Moreover, it is not always clear what languages are involved, since they tend to assimilate in one or even multi-layered expressions. For example, they can manifest in the online context, where the boundaries between languages are becoming more blurred due to the dynamic nature of this context.

In the following section, I review some of the most recent concepts in the literature on language contact phenomena in relation to language choice, a main focus of the current study, including translanguaging (Garcia, 2009), metrolingualism (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010), code-meshing (Canagarajah, 2011), flexible bilingualism (Creese and Blackledge, 2011), heteroglossia (Bailey, 2012), linguistic repertoire (Blommaert and Backus, 2013), translingual practice (Canagarajah, 2013), and poly-languaging (Jørgensen, Karrebæk, MadSen and Møller, 2015). The common feature among these concepts is that they all view language as a social phenomenon and an integrated system rather than as discrete language units.

3.4.1. Related Terms to language choice

In their study of the multilingual practices of students and teachers at complementary schools in four English cities, Creese and Blackledge (2011) used the term 'flexible bilingualism' to refer to what Garcia calls translanguaging, a model which views bilingualism as a naturally occurring phenomenon that cannot be separated into disconnected systems. Flexible bilingualism considers language a social practice (Heller, 2007) and focuses on the multilingual speakers' performance in creatively selecting the code in order to convey his/her message effectively. Similarly, Jørgensen et al. (2011, p.23) used the term poly-languaging, which refers to "the way in which speakers use features associated with different languages even when they know very little of these languages".

For example, Blommaert and Backus (2013) drew on a core concept in the field of sociolinguistics, that of linguistic repertoire (Gumperz, 1972, p.155) to refer to the totality of the language varieties, styles, dialects, as well as multimodal forms of expressions (gestures, facial expressions, movements) that are culturally rooted in social meaning (Goodwin, 2007). Blommaert and Backus (2013, p.11) used the term 'linguistic repertoire' specifically to refer to all the means people "know how to use and why while they communicate", and these means include linguistic, cultural, and social resources. Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) also examined identity and language as a fluid and continuous complex relationship rather than ascribing languages to specific identities depending on nationality or ethnicity. They proposed the notion of metrolingualism to describe the ways in which people of diverse backgrounds manipulate and negotiate aspects of their identities through the use of language.

Furthermore, Bailey (2012) pointed out that traditional approaches can neglect the various indexical social meanings associated with different codes and that "these forms index various aspects of individuals' and communities' social histories, circumstances, and identities". Canagarajah (2013) also reflected on the limitations of traditional approaches, adopting the term 'translingual practice' to point out that language is only one semiotic resource among other resources that a multilingual speaker uses to accomplish a communicative message. Thus, multilingual speakers use their repertoire creatively, as they do not have separate competencies for each language used. Consequently, treating

them as separate units may limit our understanding of a multilingual speaker's communicative practices.

3.4.2. Translanguaging

The concept of translanguaging is an umbrella term that covers multiple linguistic practices such as code-switching, language choice, and language-mixing. Translanguaging's early appearance challenged the hitherto "essentialist restrictions in previous theorising of multilingualism" (Androutsopoulos, 2013, p.2), as it offered a way to capture the dynamic complex practices of multilingual speakers critically and creatively using the resources available in their repertoire to modify and respond to sociolinguistic contexts (Garcia and Wei, 2014, p.18). Translanguaging first emerged as a pedagogical approach that could be used to develop academic skills for students in multilingual classrooms (e.g., Baker, 2006; Creese and Blackledge, 2010). These studies showed that translanguaging is often a naturally occurring phenomenon in multilingual classes and that teaching strategies can and should be developed to consider the multiple resources multilingual students have available to them. Indeed, most studies on translanguaging in classrooms do not identify any linguistic and sociolinguistic limitations arising from the translanguaging practices of multilingual students, and thus, what was once viewed as an indicator of incompetence is now seen as a critical thinking strategy and a positive aspect of a multilingual speaker's repertoire (Canagarajah, 2011).

Garcia (2009, p.45) expanded the work on translanguaging beyond pedagogical theory to refer to the flexible use of linguistic resources and the "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds". Garcia proposed that taking a translanguaging approach to multilingual classes has the potential to enhance students' understanding when they use all the resources available to them. In addition, Garcia suggested further that translanguaging is a transformative process, in the sense that it allows new social realities to emerge. Similarly, Wei (2011, p.1223-1234) explained how it enables speakers to bring their language and cultural practices into one "coordinated and meaningful performance" where they break down "the artificial dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psycho in studies of bilingualism and multilingualism" (Wei, 2011, pp.1223-1234). Hence, translanguaging enables multilingual speakers to create "a new identity" (Wei and Hua, 2013, p.519). Wei (2011, p.1223) defined translanguaging as "both going between different linguistic structures and systems, including different modalities (e.g., speaking, writing, signing), and going beyond them". Thus, translanguaging not only involves the use of all of the resources available in the individual's repertoire, but it also encompasses going beyond these resources to include other dimensions such as attitudes and beliefs (Wei and Hua, 2013, p.519).

Studies on 'translanguaging' are increasing; this might be due to its wide adoption in the field of languages, models of bilingual application, educational policies, and the recognition of linguistic minorities. Translanguaging can refer to everyday cognitive practices, bilingual language practices, theory of education and policymaking, as well as to innate linguistic competence. These uses and developments have contributed to some criticism and disagreement. Jaspers (2018, p.2) likened translanguaging to "a house with many rooms" due to its plethora of meanings and applications, which can result in confusion. Jaspers (2018) asserted that translanguaging is less likely to be transformative and socially critical than is suggested. She further questioned the effects of translanguaging as a direct cause to recognising linguistic diversities in classrooms. She argued that that this potential transformation seen as a "desired effect and moral value" achieved through translanguaging, to some degree, follows the standard monolingual it criticises and disregards any other monolingual standard.

Another criticism towards translanguaging is that these studies are sometimes limited in the sense that they neglect the rhetorical effectiveness and discourse strategies used in producing translanguaging practices. Canagarajah (2011) addressed this limitation by adopting the term code-meshing for translanguaging in texts, in addition to translanguaging for the general communicative competence of multilinguals in his study of the translanguaging strategies used by a Saudi Arabian undergraduate student in her essay writing. He argued that many studies on school contexts suggest that translanguaging occurs naturally (Garcia, 2009). In this sense, translanguaging practices are produced unconsciously, without having been prompted through planned teaching strategies. In fact, most of these practices occur behind the teachers back, as they might be criticised and considered errors, particularly in institutions that strictly apply the monolingual standard in education such as Saudi Arabia. Canagarajah (2011) stated that we need to acknowledge the choices that are more rhetorically effective. That is, we need to benefit from the translanguaging practices multilingual students implement outside the classroom and apply them in the classroom. In other words, we need strategy-based approaches for the development of competence and proficiency in multilingual students. In so doing, he suggested that we must consider discourse and the rhetorical strategies to better understand translanguaging processes. Cress and Blackledge (2010) agreed with Canagarajah (2011) that translanguaging approaches still need to be developed in a way that enhances the learning process in multilingual classes.

Most of the studies on translanguaging practices have been limited to the education context (Oliver and Nguyen, 2017, p.467) and little is known about this phenomenon in other contexts. When researching this in the online context, Oliver and Nguyen (2017) adopted a translanguaging approach to investigate the ways Aboriginal multilingual speakers in Australia use Facebook to express their identity and group membership. The results suggested that it is important to create a space for the multilingual speakers to achieve understanding and at the same time develop their competencies. The participants developed their translanguaging practices through their interactions with others

creatively. Similar to Canagarajah (2011), translanguaging was also developed through interaction with their peers. However, Canagarajah adopted a practice-model in which competence was romanticised, and cases of errors were seen as creative from a cognitive psycholinguistic approach.

Similarly, Alimi and Matiki (2017) discussed how online newspaper readers' comments use linguistic, social, and cultural resources creatively and critically. They reported that "online forums constitute a type of translanguaging space, for airing the collective voice of the populace on issues of national importance" (2017, p.202). However, there is still a lack of studies on translanguaging practices on social media, particularly on Twitter, despite the potential to witness different language practices in what might be referred to as 'contact zones' (Pratt, 1991). Wei (2018) demonstrated that the value of translanguaging can go far beyond the learning context, fundamentally impacting the work on identity and how we present ourselves and others, as it gives multilingual speakers a space to perform and transform their identity, values, and attitudes.

In the broader sense, there is often considerable confusion as to whether the term of translanguaging could replace other terms such as code-meshing, code-switching, or code-mixing (Wei, 2018, p.9). As interest has grown in theorising the fluid linguistic practices of multilingual speakers, this has led to what Cameron (1995) called 'discursive drift'. The multiple and sometimes overlapping definitions have sometimes shifted away from the original intended meanings and this can lead to a lack of precision and misunderstanding. To avoid such confusion, I view language use as fluid, dynamic, and overlapping in this study, while at the same time acknowledging language as a social construct through which we express stance and represent ourselves and others. Therefore, I adopt the term 'language choice' to investigate the functions of the multilingual practices of Twitter users utilising the campaign hashtag under study. In this, I intend to examine the resources Twitter users apply and integrate to convey their stances and achieve their communicative goals, while at the same time representing themselves and others when creating in-groups and out-group.

3.5. Representation of Self and Other

"Without representation there could be no communication".

(Duveen, 2000, pp.12-13)

Representations of self and other are critical in understanding the world we live in, and in communicating with others. Moscovici and Markova (2000, 274) stated that "we cannot communicate unless we share certain representations". These representations define "what is 'normal', who belongs – and therefore, who is excluded" (Hall, 1997, p.10). In the process of representation, we project our social values, ideologies, ideas, and beliefs into the ways we present ourselves to the world and how we present others. Hart (2014, p.19) viewed representation as "the depiction of social actors, situations, and events." Representation entails how we perceive reality and reflect that reality onto our lives and lives of others. In his book *Discourse, Grammar and Ideology*, Hart (ibid) discussed the

ideological potential of linguistic representations, concluding that linguistic forms "do not correspond directly with the realities they describe. Rather, the grammar of representation, located in the ideational function of language, yields a linguistic product which reflects but a particular take on reality which may thus be ideologically infused" (ibid, p.19). Indeed, a wide range of factors can influence our representations of ourselves and others, including cultural background, social and individual experiences, ideologies, sociocultural norms, and expectations. In the following sections, I offer some views on representations of self and other, explaining how language, stance, and representation of self and others can be related.

3.5.1. Views on Representation of Self and Other

The word representation has a plethora of meanings and connotations in different languages such as English and Arabic (*tamthil:تمثيل)*. It can be used to refer to acting or speaking on behalf of someone as a deputy or as a delegate for a group of people, or it can also refer to the portrayal or description of someone, or a group, or something in a particular way (Heller, 2018, p.389). The notion of representation is complex, as it captures different subjective and intersubjective dimensions. It has been studied extensively in social psychology following Durkheim's (1898) notions of collective and individual representations. At the core of Durkheim's theory, collective representations refer to values and beliefs shared among members of a society and passed down through generations, and thus they may be difficult to challenge or resist. Collective representations serve to give a sense of belonging and solidarity to members of a specific community. For example, when people come together at sport or music events, political gatherings, religious rituals, and during prayers, they manifest homogenous practices through which they foster their social ties. The collective representation can be symbolised by an object or a figure that represents an ideology, values, or ideas. For example, the crescent moon symbol *(Hilal:الهلال)* is often used to represent Islam, Islamic countries, and Muslims. The crescent symbol is significant to Muslims as it is associated with the Islamic lunar calendar which defines various Islamic occasions such as Ramadan, and it is often placed on the top of mosques. Individual representations, on the other hand, are integrated within the collective representations as society influences the self's attitudes, ideas, and interpretation of the world. This view reduces the agency of the individual and perceives him/her as a recipient.

Following Durkheim, many sociologists, social psychologists, and anthropologists have discussed the idea that shared social relationships and practices can invoke individuals' feeling of homogeneity in a particular community. Within the framework of social identity theory, people assume that they have a shared identity with other members in a particular group (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Reicher, Spears and Haslam, 2010; Drury, 2018). Consequently, individuals can develop a sense of unity and mutual support to act and behave as one group (Neville, Novelli, Durry and

Reicher, 2022). Adopting Durkheim's notion of collective representations is challenging given the dynamic rapid changes of societies in different fields of knowledge and science.

However, the meanings things have are becoming difficult to predict and to comprehend as they are shifting and becoming less definite. Hall (1997, p. 228) pointed out that entities can have multiple and even opposing meanings, as meaning "floats" and cannot be "fixed". Furthermore, he emphasised the importance of context to understand the intended meaning. However, he suggested that attempting to fix a particular meaning or make it preferable is "the work of a representational practice". In various media outlets, for example, the editor/ writer attempts to achieve a targeted meaning in representing an individual or a particular group. To illustrate this, Hall gave the example of Ben Johnson's image together with the caption "Heroes and Villains" in The Sunday Times magazine. The magazine represented Ben Johnson as an athlete hero who was publicly shamed due to drug taking during the Olympics.

The meanings of things are never fixed, as they are shifting continuously similar to "a battleground between and among folk cultures, class subcultures, ethnic cultures, and national cultures; different communications media, the home, and the school; churches and advertising agencies; and different versions of history and political ideologies" (Lewis, 1994, p.25). In short, meaning continues to change as more contexts and settings are emerging continuously. These changes have contributed to deconstructing most fixed collective representations and at the same time generating more dynamic inconsistent representations (Hall, 1980).

To fully understand representation, it must be noted that individuals are not merely passive recipients of these changes. According to Goffman's work (1959), the agency of the self is to some extent acknowledged when presenting ourselves. At the same time, representation is often a collaborative and socio-political process that manifests in different areas of our lives such as in museums, cafes, medical waiting rooms, economic or political associations, and adult education classes (Moscovici, 2001, p.12). Moreover, representation is constantly a changing process with which we cope with different situations and events. Social representations function as "victors of change, because they are the medium by which we communicate new situations and adjust to them" (Philogene, 2001, p.113). Representation is a multifaceted mutual process that is constructed individually and collaboratively. Representation of self is constructed collaboratively with others, but the question is "Who is the other? Everyone is another for another" (Heller, 2018, p.391). In this sense, others may include family members, colleagues, peers, friends, society, media, religious scholars, other people, and groups. In the online context, the concept of others is more complicated, as it may expand to include other participants who are not necessarily known to each other across the world.

Others are significant in how we perceive ourselves and they contribute to shaping our identity in which we see ourselves against others' beliefs, ideas, values, and ideologies. A tension may rise when individuals' beliefs and values do not align with those of others. This may lead to discrimination and prejudice by some groups over others. For example, the tension between conservative groups and

progressive groups towards women's rights in Saudi Arabia, which is of particular interest in the current study. In the following section, I shed light on the concept of othering and how it is related to the process of representing ourselves and others, and to the creation of in-groups and out-groups.

3.5.2. Othering

It is evident in the research that 'othering' is significant in constructing social identity and in how we represent ourselves and others. Others validate our existence, and to survive, we as humans tend to categorise groups into in- and out-groups (Hart, 2010). This is to say that we may affiliate with some groups and also disaffiliate with others. In addition, we may also change our affiliation. 'Othering' is a "process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between 'us' and 'them' – between the more and the less powerful – and through which social distance is established and maintained" (Lister, 2004, p.101). 'Othering' is an essential element to define and construct the self. This implies that the in-group is identified and constructed in terms of what the out-group lacks (Brons, 2015, p.70), that is, "We understand ourselves in relation to what 'we' are not" (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996, p.8). Accordingly, this may give the dominant group the power to oppress the other(s) and the out-group is seen as an inferior, bad, and different from the dominant group (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 422).

'Othering', therefore, can reinforce the superiority of the dominant in-group, and, at the same time, legitimise their actions in excluding the other by manifesting the negative sides of the outer groups, as shown in Edward Said's (1978) ground-breaking work. The construction of the out-group is a discursive strategy through which a positive representation of the in-group and a negative representation of the out-group can be achieved. Thus, representation of self and other is evident in the use of language in which we evaluate and categorise people based on positive and/or negative values held by various sociocultural groups. Furthermore, in the process of evaluation and categorisation, we follow "moral legitimisation" (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.109). Moreover, Wodak (2001) highlighted how this practice of dichotomy, or 'us' versus 'them' is frequently used to achieve social and political goals.

Othering has been extensively studied in feminist studies, as well as in studies looking at race, colonisation, and ethnicity (e.g., Fine, 1994; Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996). However, 'othering' has been criticised for ignoring the agency of the out-group (Bhatt 2006) and also for being a dual polarity, which may not help individuals to see what is in between (Jensen, 2011). This is clearly seen in the online context where othering can be blurred and is not usually identified due to its complex nature. Harmer and Lumsden (2019, p.13) proposed the concepts of 'online othering' to refer to the endless discourses which aim to "(re)draw boundaries in, around, and between virtual spaces, and shape the rules and norms concerning which individuals and groups are endowed with status and legitimated to participate in these spaces, and those who are not". In contrast to other studies, they acknowledged

the agency of 'others' in investigating the reasons behind othering and why they practice discrimination, hate, abuse in identifying the in- and out-group. In addition, they (Harmer and Lumsden) identified various strategies people use to resist or challenge 'online gathering' (e.g., social media hashtags to challenge social and political injustice, including feminist activism). Myer (2009) emphasised the notion of 'others' by creating a relationship between the author of a blog and his or her readers. He examined how readers' comments, feedback, questions contributed to create an environment of close friendship despite the fact the only medium of interaction was through the blogs.

In this study, I explore how Twitter users deploy discursive strategies to represent themselves and others in tweets and conversations with others in the campaigning hashtag. While previous studies have provided a substantial account of how representation and identity are constructed online, this study intends to expand the understanding of the role of online language choice in creating an in-group and an out-group by interlinking three main concepts in sociolinguistics, i.e., 'stance', 'language choice' and 'representation'. In this study, online representation is approached as a dynamic concept encompassing a wide range of thoughts, values, beliefs, ideologies, evaluations, and stances. At the same time, it is seen as a negotiable, co-constructed and emergent in an interaction and not necessarily pre-existent. Therefore, I understand representation to be a social constructivist paradigm situated in a particular context of discourse.

As explained above, language is one resource through which we can communicate our representation of ourselves and others. We choose different linguistic codes and styles to highlight and/or hide aspects of the ways we see ourselves and others. Therefore, we can achieve different communicative goals such as attracting the reader's and/or listener's attention, implying ideologies, solidarity, creating belonging and becoming a member of a particular group (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Language and other semiotic systems play a key role in (re/de) constructing representations, which are dynamically interrelated (e.g., Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982; Watt, LIamas and Johnson, 2010). Thus, language may be viewed as "a social construct, historically, contextually, socially and discursively constructed in the discourse" (Beswick, 2020, p.115).

3.5.3. Language, Stance, and Representation

Previous studies have suggested that we can communicate representations of self and other, as well as our stances, through language. When we interact with each other, we make evaluations, projecting our values and beliefs and taking positions on an object or social actors either indirectly or directly involved in the situation (Du Bois, 2007). In other words, how stance is constructed in the discourse depends largely on sociocultural and ideological values and thoughts (Bednarek, 2006). Therefore, stance is a social act that can carry various meanings represented in the discourse (Du Bois, 2007; Englebreston, 2007). Stance is not merely an expression, but it can be considered as an act of representation. Similarly, many academic scholars suggests that the concept of identity is invoked at

the same time when we use language (e.g., Hashim, 2010; Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010; Bailey, 2012; Wei and Hua, 2013; Oliver and Nguyen, 2017; Wei, 2018). Joseph (2004, p.12) emphasised "the entire phenomenon of identity can be understood as a linguistic one". Thus, language is one way to understand the dynamic and multiple facets of identity such as self, as well as other representations across different contexts. In this study, the relationship between linguistic choices and representation are examined in relation to the complex context of Twitter campaigning discourse and to the socio-political and linguistic context of Saudi Arabia.

One key theory in this field is Gumperz's (1982, p.66) notions of 'we-code' and 'they-code', in which he linked code-switching to group identity. He examined three bilingual groups who were fluent in: German-Slovenian, English-Hindi, and Spanish-English. He described code-switching as a contextualisation cue by which participants constructed and negotiated meanings as well as their identities. In his study, language choice was used as an in-group and out-group marker, revealing particular ideologies concerning the shared background. The speaker's ethnic minority language was considered the 'we-code' associated with the in-group and informal events. On the other hand, the other language was considered as the 'they-code' linked with the out-group and formal activities. Hindi, for example, played the role of the "we-code" used to express solidarity with family and peers, revealing more personalised and subjective meanings. English, on the other hand, played the role of the "they-code" and was used in work, revealing more formal and detached meanings. However, Gumperz emphasised that the relationship between code-switching and group identity is "a symbolic one: it does not predict actual usage" (ibid, 1982, p.66), as we must consider other elements such as "discourse context, social presuppositions and speakers' background knowledge".

In another study, Blommaert (1992) provided a macro-level analysis of code-switching in Tanzania in which he focused on face-to-face code-switching in relation to social identities, in terms of mutual rights and obligations. In relation to Arabic, much of the studies conducted have focused on historical narratives, with little focus on acts of identity in various Arabic-speaking communities. Albirini (2016) investigated code-switching practices in English and Arabic among college students and professors from Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. The Saudi participants showed a sense of national identity, as they tended to speak in the Saudi dialect rather than standard Arabic when interacting with others. This might have been due to the positive attitudes Saudis have towards their culture and language. This positivity comes partly from the pride Saudis take from knowing that standard Arabic originates from the Saudi dialect, which is highly valued religiously and culturally in Saudi Arabia. In the broader sense, the results suggest that positive attitudes towards a particular language can influence the displayed identity and the ways we represent ourselves and others.

Thus, identity is constructed and ever evolving during interactions in which participants can represent themselves and others by utilising and excluding different resources and bringing in their own attitudes, values, and beliefs. According to Wei (2018, p.23), multilinguals "consciously construct and constantly modify their sociocultural identities and values through social practices such as translanguaging". Translanguaging is linked to identity construction, as it may evoke notions of "belonging, position and identity" (Wei, 2014, p.173). Ochs (1993) emphasised the relationship between identity construction and language choice through the use of stance as a mediating tool between linguistic choices and particular social identities.

Early research on how we construct ourselves and others on social media, however, tended to focus on the user's profile, ignoring a wide range of discursive resources available to the users to represent themselves (e.g., Ellison, Gibbs and Heino, 2006; Gonzales and Hancock, 2008). However, more recent studies have addressed this limitation by taking other resources into consideration when investigating identity construction online. These resources have included photos (e.g., Lee, 2014), links (e.g., Schreiber, 2015), and texts (e.g., Bolander and Locher, 2010; Androutsopoulos, 2013; Vasquez, 2014). Other studies have mainly focussed on the differences between peoples' offline and online identities and influential factors such as false self-presentation (Wright et al., 2018), strategic self-presentations (Barket-Bojmel et al., 2016), and deceptive self-presentation (Ranzini and Lutz, 2017).

Many social media platforms are mainly text-based, in which users reveal different facets of identity using various resources, primarily linguistic ones (Page, 2014, p.92). Words, language, and discourse continue to serve as key resources in the presentation of self online and in the construction of identities in social media (Pahe, 2014; Vasquez, 2014). Kramsch and Lam (1999) suggested that online writing resources offer new ways for users to express 'new' textual identity. Similarly, this was emphasised by Boyd (2008, p.120), who suggested that online identity construction is a process of "writing oneself into being". For example, Page (2014) showed how 20 university students in Hong Kong were able to 'write' themselves online using social media features. She identified two elements in selecting the language they used, i.e., participants' previous online practices, self-image and how they wanted to be seen and represented to others. Moreover, her study showed that the participants varied in how they chose to present themselves and, accordingly, they chose different linguistic resources to do so. This implies that to better understand social media multilingual practices, participants cannot be considered as one homogenous group.

Similarly, Wentker (2018) investigated the group identity of 682 WhatsApp messages. The study showed that the participants used a variety of ways (e.g., images, written texts, voice messages) to express discursive functions (e.g., quotation, addressing) and social functions (e.g., in- and out-group identity construction). In addition, Salonen (2018) applied textual discourse analysis to explore identity in 150 blog posts through the language used to express self-disclosure. Her study showed that

personal identity changes and shifts in different linguistic and social contexts. The study also agreed with previous studies regarding the importance of the audience in shaping and constructing identity.

In relation to this study, the concepts of stance, code-switching, language choice, representation, and identity construction have been interlinked in some studies (e.g., Ochs, 1993; Jaffe, 2009; Bassiouney, 2012; Chiluwa, 2015; Chiluwa and Ifukor, 2015). Ochs (1993, p.288) suggested that social identity is rooted in the language, which can be displayed through stances and social acts. Bassiouney (2012), similarly, explained the relationship between stance, identity, and code-switching. She showed that participants in her study employed different linguistic resources in the process of stance-taking in forms of public discourse to construct particular identities during the Egyptian revolution of 2011. She argued that the stance-taking process depends on code-switching as a strategy that indicates different sociocultural meanings and associations (e.g., English, Arabic), and thus addresses different ideologies and aspects of identity. Standard Arabic, for example, was used to invoke historical, religious, and national meanings, while colloquial Arabic was used to index emotional and informal language, invoking meanings of intimacy and spontaneity. Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p.591) understood identity as temporary and emergent in an interaction, constructed through positioning and indexicality processes. 'Indexicality' is a term that has always been associated with identity construction, as it links the linguistic forms with their intended social meanings (Ochs, 1992). According to Bucholtz and Hall, linguistic choices can index different social and cultural meanings that exist in the linguistic and interactional context. Coupland and Jaworski (2009, p.251) suggested that "the ways in which speakers manipulate indexical meaning may also be considered a performative use of language". Therefore, code-switching may be used to "index consent or dissent, agreement and conflict, alignment and distancing" (Androutsopoulos 2013, p.681).

Moreover, other researchers have linked the three components (language, stance, and representations) in their studies. For example, Chiluwa and Ifukor's (2015) study of the #BringbackOurgirls campaign on Twitter and Facebook revealed that users employed emotional language and vocabulary of moods and feelings in their evaluation and representations of groups, individuals, and government. For example, they depicted the group Boko Haram as 'barbaric animals', which explicitly expressed the writer's negative evaluation of the group, while also inviting readers and/or audience to share that evaluation implicitly. The kidnapped girls, on the other hand, were represented positively to invite the reader to align with their suffering. The users used rhetorical devices such as metaphors such as 'law of life', implicitly viewing them as the custodians of life because of their power to bear children, which is an important representation of females in many places in Africa (Chiluwa and Ifukor, 2015).

Similarly, Ajiboye and Abioye (2019) examined the representations of social actors in the ongoing Biafra secessionist agitation in Nigeria. They applied critical discourse analysis and appraisal framework when analysing the stances held by individuals in two online communities (Nairaland and

Nigeria Village Square). Their study showed that participants used appraisal resources of graduation, attitude, and engagement to express their stances, while simultaneously contributing to the distribution of emotionally and socially constructed representations and identities of the social actors. The data revealed that opponents framed the Biafra conflict negatively, as they described it as short-sighted, baseless, and dishonest. Moreover, the activists were portrayed as criminals, incapable, disunited, ambitious, and ill-informed. Supporters, on the other hand, portrayed the activists as powerful and capable. Moreover, they represented the Nigerian government as greedy, cowardly, and irrational.

In Saudi Arabia, the main country of interest in this study, Almahmoud (2015) investigated tweets by supporters and opponents of Saudi women driving through the lens of framing and intertextuality. The findings showed that both groups relied on shared ideologies and prior experiences when constructing their stances on Twitter. As mentioned previously, men only used Arabic in their tweets, representing the movement as a western conspiracy targeting conservative Saudi Muslim women. They used this strategy to gain the approval of the local community. Women, on the other hand, used English, representing the campaign as an international human rights issue, in order to gain the support of international organisations and to signal group membership with the wider multilingual context. Similarly, Alharbi's (2016) study revealed that Saudi women were represented positively, highlighting solidarity with their in-group membership. Religious men who supported the campaign were also portrayed positively, while those who resisted the change were negatively represented.

In the following section, I provide a discussion on identity as a concept that is related to representation. This step was necessary in understanding the complex process of representation of self and other.

3.6. Identity and Representation

The two terms 'strategic self-presentation' and 'selective self-presentation' were suggested prior to the concept of identity construction in the study of online identity (Huang, Kumar and Hu, 2020). This suggests that the two terms are interrelated, as both deal with how people present themselves and others. Before discussing identity in relation to representation and how they were used to answer the current research questions, it is first essential to define identity. Identity can refer to "what and who you are" (Blommaert, 2005, p.203). From a philosophical perspective, in Arabic *(alhawayya: الهُوِيّة)*[41], identity refers to the absolute truth of a thing/person which makes it distinct from others. In addition, it can also refer to how individuals make sense of themselves, their individuality, their preservation of integration, values, behaviours, and thoughts in different situations (Almaany,

[41] Available at: https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9/

2023). Identity has been studied in various academic fields such as psychology (Tajfel, 1982; Deaux, 1993; Cameron, 2004; Manners, 2018), sociology (Burke, 1980; Ellestad and Stets, 1998; Serpe and Stryker, 2011; Rost-Banik, 2020), linguistics (Gumperz, 1982; Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990; De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg, 2006; Watt, LIamas and Johnson, 2014; Beswick, 2020), and gender (Butler, 1990; Cameron, 2009; Sunderland and Litosseliti, 2002).

Existing research on identity usually focuses on one or more of its various levels at which identity may be understood: individual, relational, and collective (Sedikides and Brewer, 2001), as well as at a group level. Individual identity refers to characteristics of self-definition at an individual person level; and these may include beliefs, values, and goals (Schwartz, Vignoles and Luyckx, 2011, p.2). Theories of personal identity tend to highlight the agentic role of the individuals in creating their own identity (Waterman, 2011). However, one might question whether forming a personal identity is an autonomous process or not, as personal identity includes the constitution of self in relation to others. In other words, personal identity can refer to the traits that we believe make us and others different (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, p.298). Relational identity is also associated with our relation to other people in terms of roles (e.g., wife, daughter, co-worker) (Schwartz, Vignoles and Luyckx, 2011, p.3). Furthermore, relational identity refers to how these roles are understood by the individual who adopts them. In other words, in order for these roles to be established, they need to be acknowledged by others (Swann, 2005).

Collective identity refers to the ways people define themselves in relation to other groups and social categories and the meanings, feelings, beliefs, and positions that are associated with that particular category or group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; De Fina, 2007). Similar to collective identity, group identity may be affected by macro-categories such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, political affiliation, and religion. However, group identity refers to people's sense of belonging to groups and social categories, although these groups and categories are mainly constructed in the interactional moment and are not necessarily pre-existent (Pavlidou, 2014, p.5). Collective identity, on the other hand, relies more on the discursive construction of long-term established historical and ideological affiliations (Kleinke, Hernández and Bös, 2018, p.5). Identity, then, is a broad term that goes beyond the individual self to encompass social roles, others, representations, and the wider social groups and categories. These multiple dimensions of identity are interrelated and can co-occur simultaneously, they can also shift in salience across different contexts (Turner and Onorato, 1999).

In short, identity is a dynamic complex term that cannot be reduced to a single meaning. In the introduction of his book *In the name of identity: Violence and the Need to Belong (2001)*, Amin Maalouf discusses the multiplicity of identity, in which he talks about his personal experience being a Christian Lebanese who lives in France.

"How many times since I left Lebanon in 1976 to live in France, have people asked me, with the best intentions in the world, whether I felt "more French" or "more Lebanese"? And I always give the same answer: "Both!" I say that not in the interests of fairness or balance, but because any other answer would be a lie. What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the very fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. It is precisely that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself?" (Maalouf, 2001, p.3).

Identity and its multidimensional aspects have been largely studied from two main standpoints. Early scholars tended to view identity as the outcome of essential, fixed, internal, unified, social categories, and that all members of a particular group share certain characteristics which are seen as the essence of this group (Berg-Sørensen, Holtug and Lippert-Rasmussen, 2010). Thus, identity has been seen to be largely assigned rather than adopted or constructed (Howard, 2000) and could be determined by collectively shared, pre-set, static traits such as social and cultural backgrounds, language, nationality, religion, race, and ethnicity (Beswick, 2020). Moreover, in this sense, identity involves generalisations that can confine individuals to specific expectations and roles (Berg-Sørensen et al., 2010, p.40). However, Goffman rejected the essentialist view of identity which assigns 'natural' fixed features to members of the same group.

Social constructivists have viewed identity in terms of negotiation, fluidity, contingent, fragmented concept that is constituted in discourse (Benwell and Stoke, 2006, p.17). Identity, in this sense, has been regarded as an on-going process of change; a process of "becoming rather than being, not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so as much as what we might become, how we have been represented and that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (Hall, 1996, p.4). This opinion can be traced back to several social psychologists such as Mead (1934), who viewed identity as emergent in social interaction through self-reflexivity. In other words, other people contribute to our self-image or how we see ourselves, creating what Cooley (1902, p.227) referred to as the "looking glass self". That is, we view ourselves from the perspective of the other. We imagine how we are being perceived by others and our feelings of shame and pride stem from this imagination. This, in a way, could lead to us doing what others are doing and hence us eventually playing their roles. In short, our ability as humans to view ourselves as others see us, our reflexivity, is a universal and essential property of the self (Wiley, 1994).

This view of identity as fluid and dynamic informs much of the work on social identity. Tajfel (1981, p.251) defined social identity as "the part of individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership". This sense of belonging and membership was emphasised through linguistic construction in Kroskrity's definition: "identity is defined as the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories" (1999, p.111). Therefore, social identity theory can involve roles, social status, positions, and relationships (e.g., parent,

academic) (Ochs, 1993). Social identity theory, in this sense, links the psychological individual level (self-representation) and the social structural level of groups within which the individual self is embedded. Different social identities are not merely labels assigned to us, but rather they carry certain histories that have been created and developed over time by other group members taking similar roles. This implies that social identity is created, (re)shaped, constructed, and negotiated within the context.

From this perspective, identity is socially situated and constructed through interaction and does not exist prior to that interaction. In the same vein, Goffman (1959) described face-to-face interactions as 'performances', believing that participants in a social interaction act differently according to the demands of the settings and audience. He considered any social interaction as theatre, where participants appear before the audience and put on acts in order to give a positive impression of themselves. At the same time, backstage the participants do not have to put on any act by performing expected social roles. In this way, identity is a process situated and produced in an interaction. The micro level (individual perspective) and the macro level (groups and categories) and the meanings associated with them are constructed through sociohistorical processes (Burkitt, 2004). It is important to acknowledge that these two levels are socially constructed, thus, can be reconstructed, (re)shaped and modified accordingly.

A number of scholars have built on Goffman's view of identity as a performance. Butler (1990) viewed identity as a situated performance in an interaction dependant on the setting and audience to present self in a particular way. Furthermore, Butler argued that gender identity is something socially constructed in the discourse rather than being something assigned at birth. This view of identity suggests that identity implies notions of doing, change and flexibility. However, some scholars have used this flexibility of identity to refer to a "a plural model of endless, limitless gender" (Benwell and Stoke, 2016, p.33). Butler argued that identity performance is situated mainly within the discourse in which it occurs (Butler, 1990, p.33). Foucault (1972) also viewed identity as produced in discourse, particularly, dominant discourses. In alignment with this view, Urszula (2019) investigated the performance of local performers in relation to language and social identity linked to place. She examined how performers in West Midlands, England used their dialects features in their performances, challenging hegemonic practices linked to standard English.

Regarding the online context, Abigail De Kosnik (2019) discussed the potential of online platforms acting as performance spaces following Goffman's theory. She agreed with Goffman's view that our performances in daily life define social relationships and that the audience can be regarded as co-participants or co-performers. Similarly, interactions and relations afforded by social media features can define social media use between participants/ users. Other researchers have adopted the view of identity as a performance that we continuously and repetitively put on (e.g., Donath and Boyd,

2004; Liu, 2007; Papacharissi, 2012). In addition, due to their features, the performative dynamic of social media platforms like Twitter has been highlighted in some studies (Bennett, 2019; Kissas, 2020).

Suggesting that identity is produced in context, does not necessarily rule out the agency of the individual in this process. Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987) acknowledged that variation among individuals is likely to occur even when they respond to the same social context. To an extent, this could mean that our identities and how we present ourselves and others are not necessarily a mere reflection of our ideological construction, but rather we have agency in presenting ourselves. Hall argued that while it is true that the context has its effect on forming identities, we have agency in performing those identities to some extent in terms of being capable of choosing what to present and what to conceal. At the same time, this suggests that they exist prior to discourse and are therefore not only confined to discourse. Furthermore, to some degree, individuals choose the context to engage with that will support their views, thus use the context to legitimise and empower their position (Swann, 2005).

In political and social movement discourse, identity research has tended to highlight the importance of collective agency (Bernstein, 2005). Yet, Individuals are not merely passive recipients in the social context, however, the extent to which individual agency plays a role in constructing identity varies across different studies. According to Goffman's work, the agency of self is, to some extent, acknowledged when we present ourselves, while In Butler's work, individual agency is viewed in terms of repetition of set of acts that can eventually contribute to forming a particular gender identity. Politicians may have the privilege and power to (re)shape the common beliefs and stances of a particular community through institutional political discourses in the media (van Dijk, 2008), which, in turn, can contribute to collective and group identity construction. In a way, we act and talk to represent ourselves and others in particular ways in order to maintain or achieve the desired expected versions of us that are consistent with dominant social groups. Identity, therefore, can have a powerful influence on shaping and forming individuals, which may result in social discrimination (Benwell and Stoke, 2016, p.31).

Representation and identity construction in social media in general, and on Twitter in particular, is further complicated by what Michael Wesch (2008) described as 'context collapse'. This refers to the dissolving of multiple different contexts into one communicative act on social media. 'Context collapse' (Marwick and Boyd, 2011) challenges boundaries that have been long fundamental in shaping our relations and identity, as the audience is almost unknown in terms of who they are and how many there are, as well as how they might respond. On Twitter, users can choose how to write their tweets, which are then disseminated to their audience, be it friends, family or indeed almost anyone with immediate or potential access to the Internet both locally and/or globally. Hence, they can select how to represent themselves and others. Zappavigna (2011, p.800) used the term 'ambient

affiliation' to describe how Twitter users can bond together around shared topics via Hashtagging, for example, yet this does not necessarily predict direct interactions between users. How participants conceptualise their audience, therefore, is potentially different from face-to-face interactions. This in turn may have an impact on how we represent ourselves and others on Twitter, which is a key focus of this study.

Previous studies (e.g., Barton and Lee, 2013; Seargeant, Tag and Ngampramuan, 2012; Page, 2014) have suggested that the audience is a crucial element for multilingual users when selecting what language to use in their posts. Barton and Lee (2013, p.52) reported that there has been an increase in the use of languages other than English in microblogging sites such as Facebook and Twitter. In their study, users used English when the audience was unknown but used other shared languages when they knew the audience in the 'offline' context. Tagg and Seargeant (2014) investigated how multilingual users on Facebook choose language based on their perception of their audience. The implication of this study is that users present themselves in various ways to achieve specific goals, targeting a particular audience and also at the same time excluding others.

These multilingual practices online may index ideological meanings in which users select aspects of their identity they wish to highlight to a potentially large-scale audience. Multilingual practices online and identity construction capture previous researchers' interests to exploit the distinct and rich data these platforms offer (e.g., Varis and Wang, 2011; Zappavigna, 2012; Androutsopoulos and Juffermans, 2014). These studies suggest that identity and how we represent ourselves and others online is interactional, temporary, socially situated, performative and creative, as users position and present themselves in the online context for different purposes, i.e., what Goffman refers to as putting on acts in different contexts (Goffman, 1959).

Representation and identity construction online on social media is challenging, as the nature of communication online is to some extent different from that of 'offline' communication in many aspects. The development of social media today has challenged traditional long-established communicative practices, as more complex practices are emerging in what Bauman (2000) described as "liquid modernity". However, this is not to say that online and offline contexts are two distinct notions, but rather to acknowledge how these two contexts are interrelated in many ways, as shown in our everyday use of online communication. Indeed, online practices can reflect 'offline' practices such as political and social inequalities (Harmer and Lumsden, 2019, p.3).

Elements of identity construction and the ways we present ourselves are salient in 'offline' interactions (body movement, facial expressions, voice tone), yet they can be less salient in the online context (Seargeant and Tagg, 2014, p.7). Together with other aspects of social media such as 'anonymity', this may well be significant in representation, since it may afford users more freedom in

how they choose how they want to represent themselves in particular ways. Similarly, Twitter affords a potential diversity of audience, offering more space for the users to vary their representation based on their imagined audience (Marwick and Boyd, 2010, p.116). However, anonymity might be exploited negatively to practice discrimination and hate (Papacharissi, 2004). More interestingly, Twitter gives ordinary people the opportunity to engage with political and social discourses, and thus to be heard and seen. Furthermore, while I think it is true that Twitter and other social media forms may be exploited negatively, I believe that acknowledging issues such as discrimination and abuse online may, in a way, help to find solutions. This is because of the potential large audience and the relatively easiness in reaching and addressing power holders in ways that would be rather challenging in 'offline' contexts.

The discussion above on representation and identity shows how they are interrelated on different levels. The concepts of identity and representation have been extensively studied and questioned in the literature. These studies have debated questions like 'who are we?', 'who are they?', 'how do we see and represent ourselves/others?' to make sense of the world we live in. These two concepts continuously change and overlap across various contexts and are sometimes used in a mutually exchangeable way. Thus, it is not easy to differentiate and draw a line between these two terms, and many researchers have highlighted this issue (e.g., Breakwell, 1993; Deaux and Philogène, 2001). In the broader sense, both concepts are concerned with the understanding of complex social phenomena in society. They emphasise key terms like categorisation, groups conflicts, positive and negative construction of self and other. In short, identity is always constructed, contested, developed through and against representations (Howarth, 2002).

While we cannot technically isolate representation and identity, despite their multiple meanings in real life, each one of them may serve as an analytical tool to capture patterns of categorising and positioning, which participants display through linguistic choices in interaction. As humans, we tend to categorise groups in terms of an in/out group and construct negative associations or "threat-connoting cues" with the out-group (Hart, 2010, p.55). In this sense, identity may be conceptualised as "the social positioning of self and other" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p.586). Furthermore, individuals constantly align with some and, in doing so, detach from others; yet we may affiliate ourselves with different groups and change our alignments.

In- and out- group identity are two key concepts in social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and self-categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987). Social identity is, to a large extent, based on our sense of being a member of particular groups. Tajfel (1977) proposed that we divide the world into 'us' and 'them' (i.e., in/out groups) through three processes: categorisation, social identification, and comparison. We tend to categorise things, and people into groups in order to understand the world around us and understand ourselves as well. We then tend to follow the practices of the group or many groups we belong to i.e., social identification. We also compare our groups with the other

groups in order to enhance our self-image, highlight the negative aspects of other groups, etc. These processes are largely interpersonal as they involve defining self as either similar to or different from, better, or worse, right or wrong compared to other members of other groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

In this study, I examine the ways Twitter users represent themselves and others in a socio-political campaign hashtag which is part of their online identity. Identity is a broader term that goes beyond representation to encompass other concepts such as social roles, others, and the wider social groups and categories. These multiple dimensions of identity are interrelated and can co-occur simultaneously, as well as shift in salience across different contexts (Turner and Onorato, 1999). The current study deals with multiple tweets of various users who are not necessarily known in terms of their gender, names, nationality, race, location, and occupations, among other indicators, which are supposed to help in revealing their identity. Hence, rather than looking at their identity as a whole, I examine aspects of their identity through self-representation, other-representation, and in- group and out group construction. I look at how self and other representation can be debunked, deconstructed, and reshaped through language choice practices and stance-taking while indexing different ideologies and meanings. Thus, the emerged stances and representations will be interpreted in relation to the wider complex sociocultural context in Saudi Arabia, where extreme changes have rapidly taken place in terms of social, economic, religious, and political fields.

Chapter 4 Methodology

This chapter presents the methods used for data collection and analysis, along with a justification for the decisions made during these processes. It begins with a general discussion of the research philosophy, which shaped the design of this research. the following section offers an overview of the researcher's positionality in which I clarify my position as a researcher and as an insider. The following section offers a summary of the quantitative and qualitative methods used in the data collection and analysis. After that, I provide the data collection section which presents the steps taken to extract, select, filter, and store the dataset to prepare it for analysis. The subsequent steps are explained, which include coding and annotating, and examining the surrounding context. Following that, the adopted analytical and theoretical framework which this study draws on, will be explained. The chapter then concludes by exploring the ethical concerns that arose throughout the research.

4.1. Research Philosophy

This study adopts an epistemological perspective to investigate the participants' various stances on Twitter campaign hashtags. The epistemological view has two main research approaches: interpretivism and positivism (Creswell, 2003). The positivism approach understands the world's reality through scientific and logical treatments, while the interpretivism approach views the world in terms of different subjective interpretations of various individuals. Without interpretation, there can be no understanding of the social world (Johnson, 1987). The interpretivism approach is selected for the current study for several reasons. Firstly, this approach aims to understand human behaviours based on people's self-understanding and their varying roles as social actors. In other words, it aims to capture "the actual meanings and interpretations that actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena in order to describe and explain their behaviour" (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell and Symon, 2006, p.132). Moreover, adopting an interpretivist approach in research allows the researcher to get involved with the participants, interpret their perceptions as well as allow him/her to view a social research problem holistically (Shaw, 1999).

The current study adopts an interpretive approach as it focuses on the participants' various perspectives of the hashtags to make sense of the debate, while also exploring their different ideologies and sociocultural backgrounds. Hence, in this study, stance is viewed in terms of post-structuralist and socio-constructive paradigms and is hence understood as a sociocultural construct. Stance is the act of taking a point of view that involves evaluating, positioning and aligning processes. It is a social construct that we enact through the use of language. Therefore, it is a complex, contextualised, changing and multi-layered concept that needs a detailed and multilayered investigation. Different people construct their stances in different ways according to their experiences,

beliefs, and values. The study draws on critical discourse analysis (CDA), Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis models (CMDA) (Herring, 2004) and theories related to stance, language choice, discursive strategies, and self and other representation. It adopts a post-structuralist approach to discourse to examine how the participants using the hashtag utilised Twitter features to express their stances and how they position themselves creatively in the discourse, while also creating in-groups and out-groups.

4.2. Researcher's Positionality

A researcher's neutrality is a key principle of research in different fields. Some studies advise researchers to adopt a particular stance, especially when dealing with sensitive critical issues and topics (e.g. Fontana and Frey, 2005). However, remaining neutral is not easy to achieve when conducting research. Indeed, neutrality may be considered as a stance in itself (Jaffee, 2009), although it is not often possible. Taking a stance is often inevitable in critical discourse analysis studies, as the researcher takes an explicit stance to understand and expose power abuse and social realities (van Dijk, 2001, p.352). However, the explicit stance and commitment of researchers when conducting critical discourse analysis studies is sometimes viewed as a strength rather than a weakness (Baker 2012). The current study draws mainly on theories of critical discourse analysis, which is grounded in the belief that discourse reflects and shapes social structures of a particular community. It examines the construction and de-construction of power relations, dominance and inequality to reveal meanings and hidden ideologies in sociopolitical contexts.

In conclusion, given the purpose of the study, I think it is more important here to be able to balance my position as a professional with a neutral and non-judgmental stance. At the same time, it is important to take a position of understanding in terms of being Saudi and being aware of the sensitivity of the topic under study. This balance between neutrality and empathy helps to answer the research questions, while also gain more knowledge about the current situation regarding women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, my insider perspective is helpful when interpreting ideologies and analysing the complex multi-layered historical, social, religious, and political context of Saudi Arabia.

4.3. Research Design

In order to answer the research questions, this study draws on quantitative methods, although it is mainly qualitative in its design. Qualitative approaches allow for a deep analysis of a subject, answering questions like when, why and how to understand the nature of things and experiences (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Berg, 2009). Moreover, qualitative approaches seek to understand a particular phenomenon by observing not only what exists but also what is not there. Quantitative approaches, on the other hand, deal with numbers and measures and endeavour to test the validity of a particular hypothesis (Henwood, 1997). Mack et al. (2005, p.3) presented a comprehensive comparison between quantitative and qualitative studies, as shown in Table 1 below.

	Quantitative	Qualitative
General framework	Seek to confirm hypotheses about phenomena	Seek to explore phenomena
	Instruments use more rigid style of eliciting and categorizing responses to questions	Instruments use more flexible, iterative style of eliciting and categorizing responses to questions
	Use highly structured methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and structured observation	Use semi-structured methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation
Analytical objectives	To quantify variation	To describe variation
	To predict causal relationships	To describe and explain relationships
	To describe characteristics of a population	To describe individual experiences
		To describe group norms
Question format	Closed-ended	Open-ended
Data format	Numerical (obtained by assigning numerical values to responses)	Textual (obtained from audiotapes, videotapes, and field notes)
Flexibility in study design	Study design is stable from beginning to end	Some aspects of the study are flexible (for example, the addition, exclusion, or wording of particular interview questions)
	Participant responses do not influence or determine how and which questions researchers ask next	Participant responses affect how and which questions researchers ask next
	Study design is subject to statistical assumptions and conditions	Study design is iterative, that is, data collection and research questions are adjusted according to what is learned

Table 1 Comparison Between Quantitative and Qualitative Methods (Mack et al., 2005, p.3)

Analysis is embedded within the critical discourse analysis framework and draws on language-related and post structuralist theories. This approach is used to mitigate the researcher's bias and the subjective dimension. There are no fixed methods for data collection and analysis that work for all studies, as they are largely dependent on the research purpose, context, access to data, timeframe, financial costs, etc. In the current study, the dataset consists of a collection of tweets associated with specific campaign hashtags on Twitter. These tweets are analysed by coding and annotating them to identify the linguistic choices used, and further examination is carried out to investigate their role in the stance-taking process and in creating in-groups and out-groups.

4.4. Data Collection Methods

Twitter appears to be one of the very few platforms on which people in Saudi Arabia can challenge the expected norms and voice opinions that would be subject to repercussions such as social stigma elsewhere. As previously explained in the context chapter public advocacy and campaigning are generally not encouraged in Saudi Arabia either politically or socially. Hence, Twitter and other online platforms have become alternative spaces for campaigning and protesting. Twitter features such as hashtags, retweets, and 'mention' allow participants to rapidly spread their posts across a large-scale audience. Anonymity is another feature available to users on Twitter, allowing them to create anonymous accounts and use pseudonyms to speak freely and challenge traditional values without

revealing their identities. In addition, users perceive they have more freedom online, as they sense the reduced levels of monitoring and feel more disconnected from the offline context (Selwyn, 2008).

With a reduced feeling of being monitored on Twitter, it may be assumed that there is, therefore, more freedom of expression not found in traditional media platforms (Noman, Faris and Kelly, 2015). It is a space where preachers, ordinary citizens, government departments, journalists, and activists can engage in debates to advocate their socio-political causes. The platform tends to allow more controversial and provocative topics to be discussed, as well as different perspectives shared, despite the fact these sometimes conflict with conservative traditions. In short, Twitter is a platform that can reveal how people construct, reproduce or challenge different ideologies through their stance taking towards a particular issue.

In addition, with its various affordances such as 'hashtagging', Twitter serves as a site for multilingual practices and self-positioning, with the aim of achieving social goals in "a linguistic marketplace" (Page, 2012, p.182). Twitter supports the use of various languages and approximately 66% of the tweets are written in languages other than English (Statista, 2019). In addition, participants can use different codes and languages to address different organisations worldwide, for example, to legitimise their religious or national stance. Moreover, other features such as 'quote' highlight other strategies participants use, for example, the discursive strategies utilised to support or delegitimise others' stances.

In the current research, the units of analysis are mainly texts (the tweets associated with specific hashtags) rather than individual sentences or clauses. The decision to analyse texts is taken for two purposes. Firstly, the study aims to investigate language choice practices (use of English and/or Arabic) related to specific hashtags, and it was considered helpful to look at the entire text to examine the immediate context surrounding these tweets. Secondly, the tweets are relatively short (280 characters) and often included other elements such as images, emojis, videos, pictures, links, which added more context to the messages.

In order to limit the dataset needed to answer the current research questions, the decision was taken to exclude those containing offensive language, repetition, promotions or misspellings. In the next section, I outline the steps that were taken to prepare the data for analysis.

4.4.1. Capturing the Data

Despite the vast amount of data on Twitter, the sample must be appropriately selected in terms of nature and size. It is assumed that Twitter data is produced naturally as the users post their tweets for their own purposes (Herring, 2004), although it can be institutionally produced, for example, for outreach activities (Gong and Lane, 2020). However, it was deemed impossible to examine all the data available related to the specified hashtag under study, as irrelevant tweets would also be present, as noted in initial observations of the relevant hashtags. In addition, it is beyond the scope and space

of the current study to examine all the available data, particularly given that this study is mainly qualitative and much of the analysis is manually carried out to provide a thorough interpretation of the dataset.

Previous studies (e.g. Page, 2012; Chiluwa, 2015) have suggested that the number of tweets needed is largely dependent on the purpose and nature of the research. For example, it has been noted that a sample tends to be larger when quantitative tools such as corpus-techniques are used, while it a smaller sample is required when in-depth qualitative analysis is applied. In brief, the sample size depends on various factors such as the timeframe, and the need for transcription, translation, as well as how necessary it is for the data to undergo processing methods such as tidying up, annotation and coding. Therefore, the more steps needed to prepare data for analysis the less data are collected. The number of tweets considered sufficient according to Herring (2004), is largely dependent on the frequency of the phenomena (in this case multilingual textual practices) in the data sample. The process of collecting tweets for the current study is explained further in the following sections.

4.4.2 Sampling

Sampling is critical in the design of both qualitative and quantitative studies (Mason, 2002). However, the main goal of sampling in quantitative research is more concerned with the representativeness of the sample and its distribution across a particular population. In qualitative research, on the other hand, the main goal is more concerned with describing, interpreting, and understanding individuals' different experiences, which can enrich the data and its analysis (Polkinghorne, 2005). There are various strategies that can be followed when sampling that can offer rich and varied analyses of the topic under study and hence help to answer the research questions. Purposive sampling strategies (e.g. homogenous sampling, typical sampling, criterion sampling) have been widely used in qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007).

In the online context, sampling is challenging due to the large dataset available, and the fact that many members registered on online sites are often inactive (Barton and Lee, 2013; Page et al, 2014). In addition, it is a complex space where conversations span across the world, encompassing users from different cultures and backgrounds. Some studies have suggested setting parameters for sampling to overcome this problem (Page et al, 2014). These parameters can include: follower count, which refers to the number of followers a user has, thus implying the user's popularity; retweet, which indicates how highly a tweet by a specific Twitter user is circulated; and mention, which indicates the user's engagement with others in conversation. In the current research, however, the focus is not on specific participants using the hashtag but rather is concerned with the language choice of the participants using the hashtag. The decision to focus on tweets featuring the hashtag used by different participants rather than integrating other aspects available on Twitter, which could be useful in answering the research questions, is discussed in the following section.

Twitter users' profiles can be a crucial element of how people represent themselves online. Online profiles can be spaces for people to reflect and share their identity and engage in broader discourses. On Twitter, users can post various elements on their profiles such as their profile picture, which can be a personal photo or a symbolic image that reflects an aspect of his/her interests. Visual representation can also be achieved by displaying a header image, which is a larger visual space in the background of the user's profile. A user's bio is another aspect that Twitter users can exploit to show their identity. The bio is a 160-character space where users can provide information about themselves such as their job title, affiliation, profession, interests and sometimes includes hashtags or links. Moreover, users can post their location, which can be a specific or broad geographical location such as Riyadh or Saudi Arabia, or it can be an imaginary, fantasy place such as Utopia or Lost Land.

Twitter users' profiles are dynamic spaces where identity, discourses, and power relations can intersect. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, these profiles can reveal a great deal about how users construct their identity online, engage with different sociocultural issues, and participate in political or social movements. The combination of visual elements (profiles pictures and header images), language (bios and hashtags), and social demographic parameters (location, gender, and age) all contribute to shaping how users represent themselves and how they are perceived by others as well.

In the current study, it is noticed that the users' profiles engaging with the hashtag of #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen were varied in terms of the information displayed on the profiles. Most of the profiles were written in English, while the others were written in Arabic, Hindi, Spanish, French. The users' profiles also showed a variation in geographical locations, including places such as India, the USA and Canada, and often accompanied by the flags of those countries. Most of the users' profiles in Arabic, however, hid their location possibly for privacy reasons or to protect their identity considering that they were using a hashtag related to a sensitive topic. In addition, the users' profiles featured in the current research often included other issues and descriptions in their bios on Twitter such as LGBTQ rights, atheists, feminists, and activists.

While social variables like age, nationality, gender, location are critical for any sociolinguistic study, gathering these in the online context can often be challenging. It must be noted that if these labels, descriptions, locations are provided, they are not necessarily a true representation of where the users are from or who they are. Twitter users can assign themselves different categories, locations, and labels that are not assigned, verified, or endorsed by Twitter and users may change these variables at any time. Other categories include gender, age, and job title, which could not be obtained in this study because most of these accounts do not disclose this information and to access this information would have gone beyond the scope and the timeframe of this study. Although various software (e.g. Keyhole, Brandwatch, and Hootsuit) can offer an analysis of social media platforms and provide demographics such as age, location, gender, they are often used in broader projects and marketing. However, for the current dataset, it was not possible to use these tools because of financial

constraints, and the fact it would have required a great deal of time to learn how to manage and use these tools.

Consequently, the units of analysis in this study were mainly topic-tagged tweets using the hashtags by participants debating women's rights in Saudi Arabia, particularly the guardianship system. To obtain these tweets, I created an account with Twitter Developer, which allows academics and researchers to conduct an advanced search. As part of this process, I submitted an application to Twitter Developer in which I explained why I needed to use it and how I would use the data, and it was approved. Twitter Developer is a professional platform that provides access to an archive of tweets. The following step was to conduct an initial observation and search using the API search tool available on Twitter to capture tweets including the target hashtags. Previous studies have validated the use of API as a tool to extract tweets, since it allows access to Twitter's database, including visual data (Vergeer and Hermans, 2013; Page et al., 2014). API allows the researcher to search and download tweets associated with specific search terms. Therefore, I used API to search for some keywords in English and Arabic which are related to women's rights in Saudi Arabia such as 'the guardianship system' *(نظام الولاية)*, *'wilaya' (ولاية)*, and 'Saudi women's rights' *(حقوق المرأة السعودية).* Several hashtags appeared and were identified as being relevant to the current research, as seen in Table 2 below. The observation process has continued throughout the study to note any changes or relevant follow-ups. It is also noted that the searching process revealed no opposing hashtags to the ones supporting the abolition of the guardianship system.

No.	Hashtag	First accessible tweet	Last tweet observed	Observation Date
1	#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen	26 July 2018	27 March 2020	17/03/2020 - 27/03/2020
2	#سعوديات_نطالب_باسقاط_الولايه (Saudi women demand to end the guardianship system)	19 July 2016	21 March 2020	
3	#TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship	14 Sep 2016	15 Feb 2020	
4	#IAmMyOwnGuardian	3 Aug 2018	15 Feb 2020	

Table 2 Hashtags Identified During the Period (17 March 2020- 27 March 2020)

The hashtags above were found to be the most frequently used hashtags appearing in the search using API. The hashtags in Arabic were mainly created to address powerholders and send messages and petitions to the king (Alsahi, 2018). In addition, it was noted that these hashtags, whether in English or Arabic, were frequently used together simultaneously, to ensure more visibility and circulation of the tweets. An example is given below.

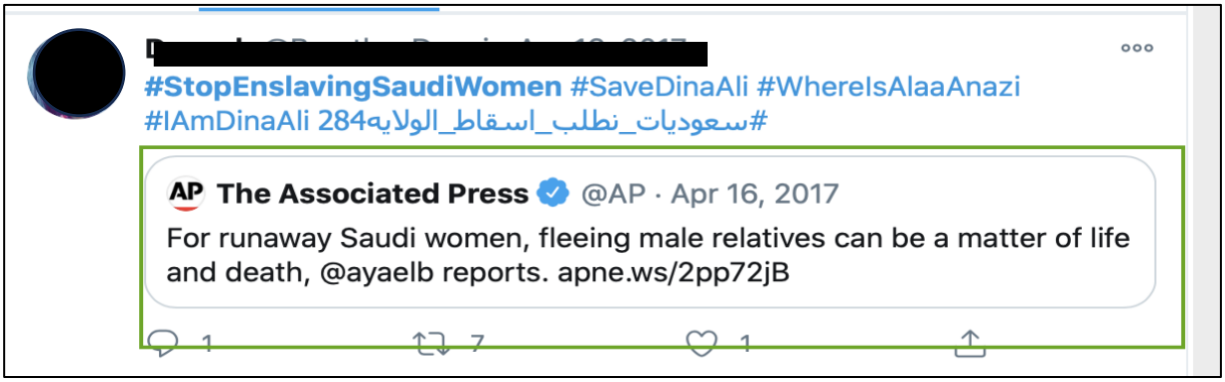


Figure 11 Illustration of the simultaneous use of English and Arabic hashtags.

Moreover, the use of the API search through my Twitter developer account allowed me to access historical tweets associated with the target hashtags. The next step after observing and identifying the related hashtags was to limit the dataset to a reasonable number of tweets to be able to conveniently investigate them in terms of time and scope. In the online context, it is not often easy to decide on a sample size, but it is important to devise an initial plan that is manageable and flexible in terms of time and economic cost. In addition, Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) provides a coherent framework for sampling criteria that can be followed in linguistic research (Herring, 2004; Herring, 2007).

Random sampling, for example, means each item of available dataset has an equal chance of being selected, which ensures that the sample is representative, thus allowing the researcher to generalise the findings. Random sampling, however, may result in loss of coherence and context and requires a complete dataset to select from, although this may not always be available and can be time consuming. Sampling by phenomenon is a non-random method commonly used in the online context that pays attention to recurring linguistic patterns or features across different levels of language (e.g., phonological patterns and syntactic patterns). Herring (2004) provided examples of phenomena on the discourse level such as conflict negotiation and joking. While this method can be effective for deep qualitative analysis of the phenomenon under study, it may not reflect the full complexity of the data available online. At the same time, sampling by phenomenon is often conducted on smaller and purposeful samples, which can limit the generalisability of the findings to a broader group or setting. In addition, there are other techniques that can be used for data collection online, as explained by Herring (2004) in Table 3 below.

Sample	Advantages	Disadvantages
Random (e.g., each message selected, or not, by a coin toss)	Representativeness; generalisability	Loss of context & coherence; requires complete data set to draw from
By theme (e.g., all messages in a particular thread)	Topical coherence; a data set free of extraneous messages	Excludes other activities that occur at the same time
By time (e.g., all messages in a particular day/week/month)	Rich in context; necessary for longitudinal analysis	May truncate interactions, and/or result in very large samples
By phenomenon (e.g., only instances of joking; conflict negotiation)	Enables in-depth analysis of the phenomenon (useful when phenomenon is rare)	Loss of context; no conclusions possible re: distribution
By individual or group (all messages posted by an individual or members of a demographic group, e.g., women, students)	Enables focus on individual or group (useful for comparing across individuals or groups)	Loss of context (especially temporal sequence relations); no conclusions possible re: interaction
Convenience (whatever data are available to hand)	Convenience	Unsystematic; sample may not be best suited to the purposes of the study

Table 3 CMDA Data Sampling Techniques (Herring, 2004)

The current study examines instances of stance-taking on the topic of the guardianship system and the use of a related campaign hashtag in Saudi Arabia. I draw on Herring's (2004) CMDA approach to identity and collect tweets related to the topic of the guardianship system. I selected thematically organised streams of online discourse (hash-tagged tweets), collecting tweets associated with the most frequent hashtag related to the guardianship system, namely, #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen. Topic or theme-based selection is one method that can provide us with all the tweets in a particular thread that are topically coherent, and to some extent excludes irrelevant tweets (Herring, 2004; Androutsopoulos, 2013). While sampling by theme or topic can help in providing a detailed coherent understanding of a specific phenomenon, it can exclude other concurrent activities or topics. In the current study, to address this limitation, other methods of analysis were integrated such as drawing on critical discourse analysis to provide a holistic understanding of the complex sociolinguistic practices online. Moreover, to mitigate this limitation, another technique was used to collect tweets which was sampling by time. Sampling by time can provide rich data, however, it might result in very large

samples, as explained by Herring (2004). To ensure that the dataset was manageable in terms of relevance and quantity, I took into consideration two significant time periods in Saudi Arabia in the process of collecting tweets. These included the period prior to the appointment of Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman and the period just after the appointment. Using the search tool on Twitter, I searched and saved the search results associated with the two periods previously identified (screenshots of the process are provided below in Figure 12):

1. From 21st March 2017 until 20th June 2017 (3 months prior the appointment of Muhammed bin Salman as the Crown Prince).
2. From 21st June 2017 until 21st September 2017 (3 months after the appointment of Muhammed bin Salman as the Crown Prince).

During the data collection process, I relied on both the mobile and desktop version of the Twitter application. The mobile version was often preferred for two reasons. Firstly, it was noticed that the mobile version offered a better resolution than other Twitter's interfaces. Secondly, it was more practical and convenient as I could access the hashtag anytime from anywhere via my mobile.

It must be noted that to ensure the search process remained organised when collecting tweets, I saved the search on my Twitter Developer account, so I could go back to the same thread and continue the data collection process. This process was challenging, because sometimes when I returned to the search results that I had first saved to continue the data collection process, different tweets appeared that were not consistent with the first ones I had saved earlier, and sometimes these tweets did not have a chronological order. One solution was to continue the data collection process without interruption or refreshing the search. During this process, I noticed that when I searched for tweets that had been posted in one month rather than searching over a three-month period at once, this provided me with more coherent and richer data. In addition, this method helped me to obtain consistent tweets in chorological order.

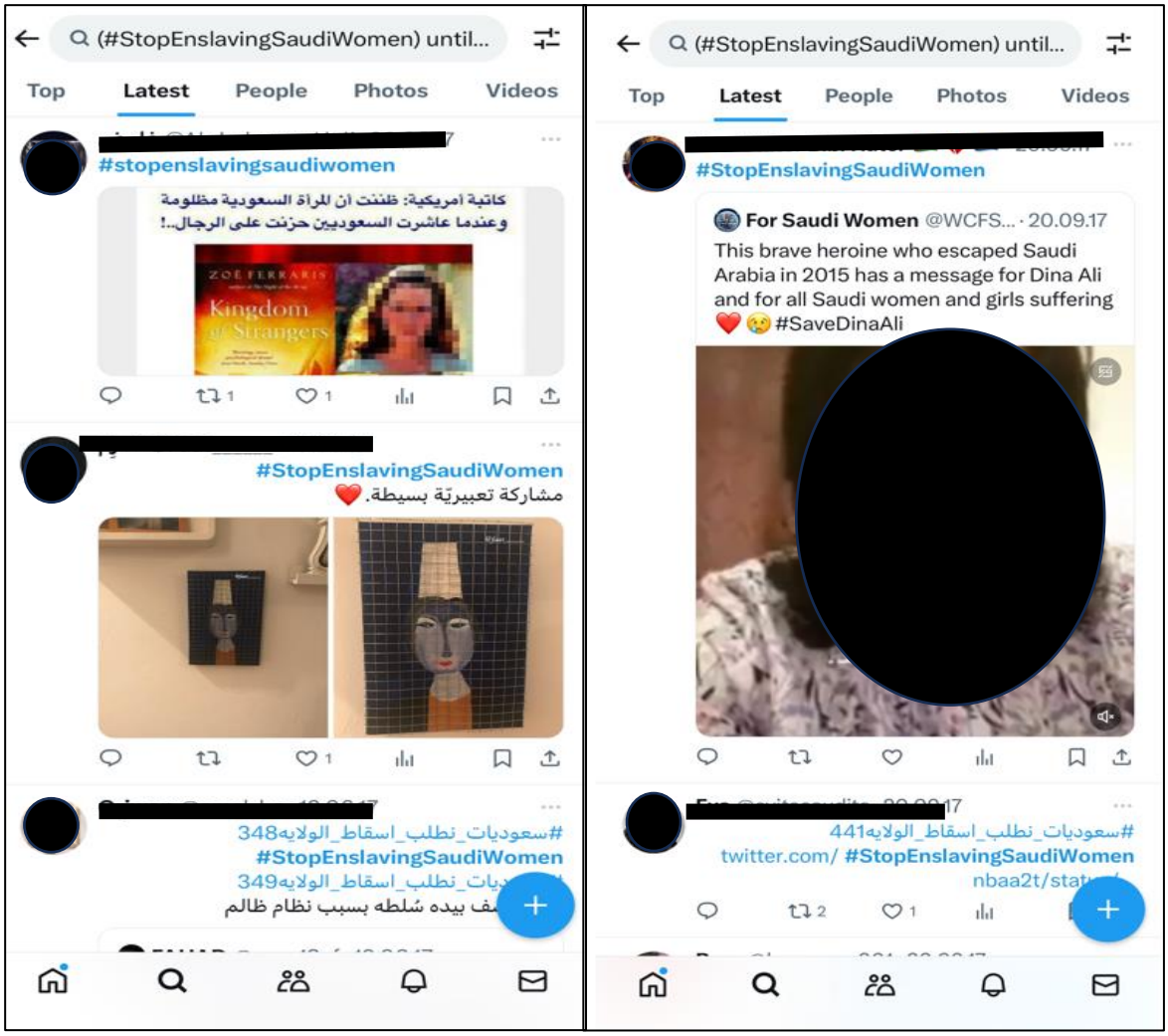


Figure 12 Two screenshots taken from Twitter showing the two periods selected for this study.

This period was intentionally selected as it witnessed the appointment of Muhammed bin Salman as the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. The appointment marked a significant shift in the history of Saudi Arabia, socially, economically, socially and politically, with many people aspiring for change in the country. Specifically, this period heralded many key reforms regarding women's rights, such as the lifting of the driving ban for women (26th September 2017), with many reforms announced but not implemented until later. For example, permission for women to attend football matches was not granted until January, 2018 and permission for women to travel abroad without a guardian's consent was only given on 20th August, 2019 (for more details see Chapter 1 section 1.3).

The tweets associated with the target hashtag amounted to more than 6,000 tweets covering the two periods mentioned above. Hence, to keep the study's scope within the required timeframe, I focused on the period prior to the appointment of Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman. In total, there were 3,162 tweets collected during this period (21st March 2017 until 20th June 2017). Despite the fact that the sample size could be considered relatively small, I intend to reduce this limitation by providing an in-depth qualitative interpretation of the data. In addition, the tweets collected are written in different languages that will be investigated to explore how different linguistic codes are

used in the process of stance-taking. Moreover, the collected tweets are found to be multimodal in the sense that they contained images, pictures, videos, links, and emojis. Although this research is more concerned with the language aspect, other semiotic resources are taken into consideration such as images, videos, emojis, as they are helpful in interpreting the patterns of language choice. The multilinguistic and multimodal tweets can significantly enhance my understanding of stance-taking as a sociolinguistic practice online. With the lack of broadly accepted methods designed for online multimodal data collection, screenshots were considered a useful technique to capture this data, as discussed below.

4.4.3 Screenshots

The next step after identifying the hashtags and tweets, was to take screenshots of the selected tweets using the desktop version of the Twitter application. This decision was taken for several reasons: 1) the desktop version offered more options for advanced searches, such as, searching for particular languages and/or specific time periods; 2) screenshots were able capture the irregularities of the languages used in the tweets such as mixing more than one linguistic code; 3) to keep the original posts as they appeared in the hashtags on twitter to capture the whole surrounding context and to avoid any typing errors. The screenshots were then saved to the desktop as pdf files, which were allocated to one of two separate documents created for each period. Furthermore, the associated pictures, images and videos were also downloaded and saved on their own in the form of screenshots. This was done for clarity and a thorough examination of them was conducted. Subsequently, these files were numbered in order and exported to MAXQDA for the process of coding and annotating, as explained later in this chapter.

In order to obtain the target tweets, I excluded any irrelevant tweets such as advertisements and promotions, duplicates, those containing either non-English characters or non-Arabic characters, etc., during the filtering process. I also concealed the usernames and Twitter handles of the participants using the hashtag. In addition, I concealed any other details such as the time, location, pictures and any other information that might breach the users' privacy. In Figure 13and Figure 14 below, I provide examples of the process of saving the files and the visuals to MAXQDA.

The main form of data in this study are tweets, which were selected as they can be used to examine the sociolinguistic practices people use when constructing their stances on a particular subject, resulting in the creation of in-groups and out-groups. However, using another source of data would have increased the credibility of the analysis of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). According to the CMC, it is recommended that researchers use traditional social science methods (e.g. surveys, interviews) alongside other methods to give a thorough interpretation of the 'offline' and 'online' datasets (Herring, 2004). Thus, conducting interviews, for example, could have revealed how and why people make their choices in regard to political engagement on Twitter (Parmelee and Bichard, 2012, p.142). This would have been a powerful method of enabling the researcher to interact with people

and ask probing questions related to their texts (Page et al., 2014, p.119). Furthermore, it could have provided further explanation about the meanings and interpretation of the data from an insider's perspective (Androutsopoulos, 2008). In short, interviewing could have offered an insight into the interviewees' experiences and afforded a space where they could discuss their stances towards the guardianship system.

However, although conducting interviews was initially selected as a supporting method for the analysis, it was found that it was not viable for this study. The decision not to proceed with conducting interviews was taken due to the technical challenges I faced when identifying suitable parameters for the interviewees. Other reasons included issues of accessibility, the financial cost, as well as the limited timeframe and scope of the study. Moreover, it was not possible to access the participants verified authentic demographic metadata in terms of gender, age, location, and any other information necessary for conducting the interviews. Although these variables are often available through paid subscription software, as explained earlier in the section on Sampling, accessing the representative sampling in terms of the demographic metadata was not possible in the current study. Moreover, it was not guaranteed that this information, if provided, would be accurate, since the information shown on the platform is only what people choose to share. Thus, there might have been a risk of any parameters being manipulated, particularly as the focus was on the use of a socio-political campaigning hashtag.

After the processes of selecting, collecting and filtering the data, the tweets were analysed drawing on quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a thorough interpretation and to answer the research questions, as I explain in the following sections.

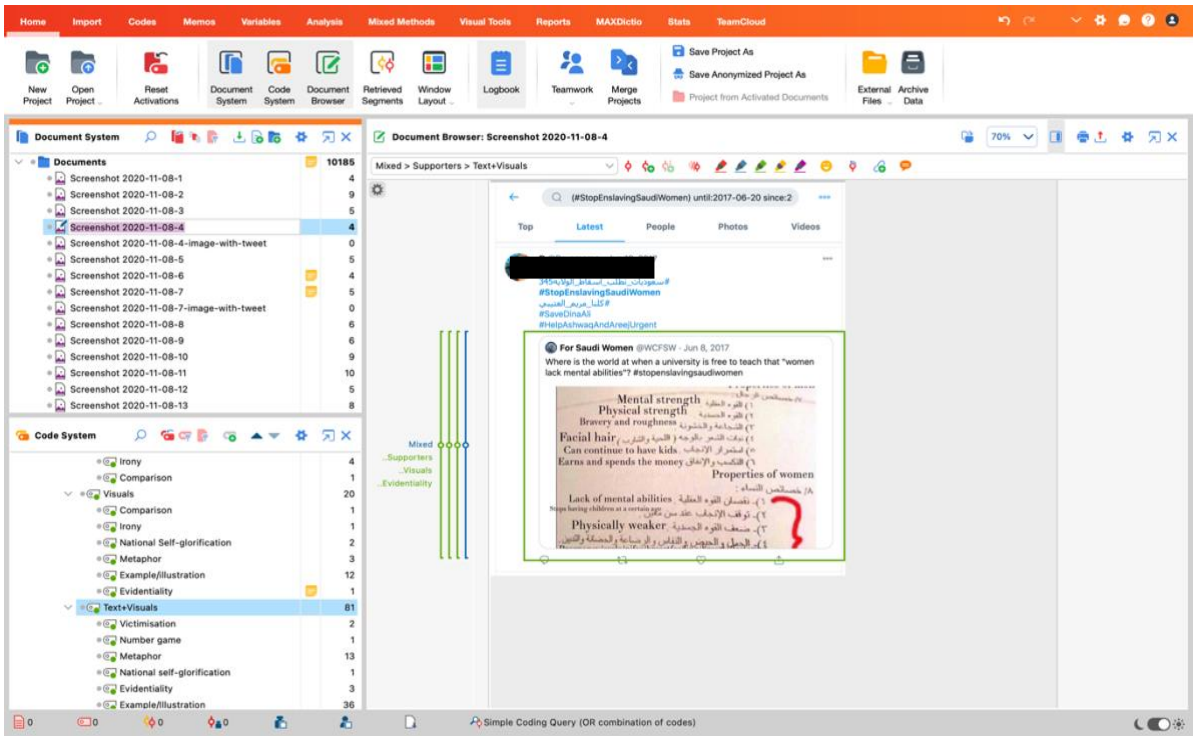


Figure 13 Illustration of the process of saving tweets to MAXQDA.

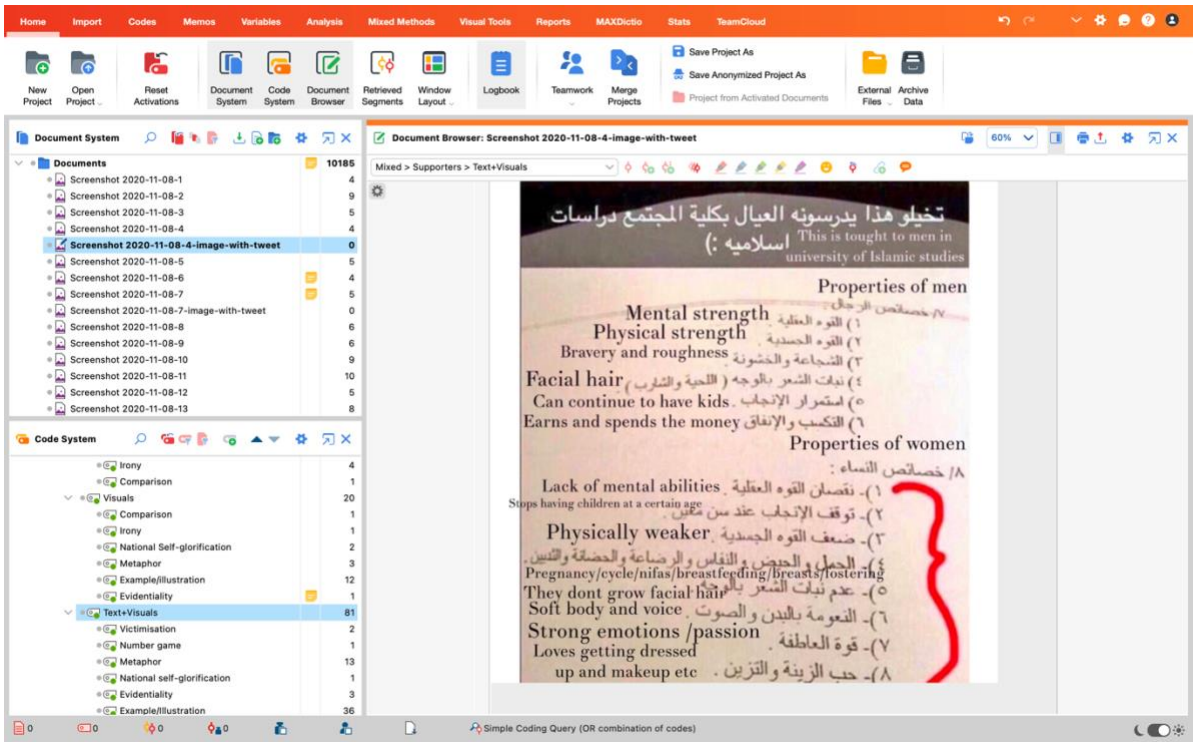


Figure 14 Illustration of the process of saving visuals to MAXQDA.

4.5. Methods of Analysis

Blommaert (2010, p.1) suggested that researchers need to re-think the different models of analysis designed for the 'offline' contexts, as new forms of communication are continuously emerging in the online context. He emphasised the need to respond to the multimodality, complexity and volume of the rapidly changing online interactions. Many researchers have adopted approaches designed originally for the 'offline' context to address the complex multilayered online contexts. For example, Herring (2004) suggested that computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) has the potential to study complex online behaviour and provide a comprehensive interpretation. CMDA allows researchers to investigate meaningful practices in the online interaction, with the advantage of being traceable unlike other forms of communication such as spoken interactions. CMDA applies methods from language-focused fields such as linguistics and communication to analyse computer-mediated practices. In addition, CMDA can be qualitatively orientated towards observation and interpretation of discourse phenomenon in a sample of texts, and also quantitative in terms of counting and coding, noting any patterns or frequencies. Both quantitative and qualitative methods often focus on verbal interactions such as messages, words, threads, etc. and textual observations (Herring, 2004). In the following sections, I present the quantitative and qualitative methods used in the analysis of the current study.

4.5.1. *Quantitative Analysis*

Drawing on Herring's framework of computer-mediated discourse analysis (2004), I adopt coding and counting paradigms to identify and conduct a statistical analysis of the linguistic patterns found in the data. This paradigm is frequently used in social sciences and based on classical content analysis. In this research, coding and counting approaches are applied to identify and count the language choice patterns, themes, topics as well as discursive strategies adopted by the participants in Twitter campaigning hashtag *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen*. This approach is useful when analysing media communication and can help in identifying regular patterns of language use (Bell and Garrett, 1998). Counting can provide measures of patterns and frequencies of various linguistic practices online such as the number of occurrences of specific words or languages. Coding involves classifying datasets into different emergent or predefined categories. This can include assigning linguistic codes, themes, topics, or discursive strategies to segments of discourse based on a framework or theory.

However, the counting and coding approach should be used carefully to avoid assigning the data into random categories for the purpose of counting without the necessary thorough investigation. The current study integrates different theories in the process of counting and coding as well as integrating other codes and categories that keep emerging during the analysis of the tweets. In addition, online users frequently communicate through multimodal resources along with texts such as videos, images, pictures, emojis, emoticons. Hence, I considered the fact that I might need to support the analysis with other qualitative methods. Hearing (2004) stated that both qualitative and quantitative methods are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the online social interactions and groupings. The application of quantitative and qualitative methods can help to mitigate bias and increase the objectivity of research findings especially in complex settings such as the online context. Therefore, the tweets were analysed from a sociocultural perspective within the framework of critical discourse analysis, drawing on stance theory (Du Bois, 2007), and on Gumperz's research (1972). I also drew on indexicality (Ochs, 1992) to explain the association and indexes of the linguistic codes used. These theoretical and conceptual perspectives informed my interpretation of the data in order to unpack the complex interplay between the three main components of the current study, that is, stance, language choice, and representation of self and other.

The initial step taken to prepare the data for a qualitative analysis was to code and annotate the tweets manually using MAXQDA. I decided to manually code the tweets, as Arabic tweets often include non-diacritic texts and unstandardised versions of Arabic, which makes it challenging for any software to identify these patterns. Moreover, the fact tweets are often rich and complex, that is, connected to other tweets and/or multimodal texts, required close observation to note the full context of the tweets. During the process of manual coding, I used MAXQDA software to help me organise and visualise the analysis process. MAXQDA offers techniques from Corpus Linguistics such as keyword searches, manual coding and classifying, and collocational analysis to identify the recurrent patterns,

contributing to a more objective analysis of the data. To use MAXQDA, I applied for a student licence to download the software and benefit from the advantages it offers. Moreover, to be able to use the software effectively, I had to attend online training courses and dedicate time to self-learning.

MAXQDA was selected for the following reasons: 1) it supports Arabic adequately, as it is possible to not only import and analyse Arabic documents, but also to create codes and variables in Arabic; 2) due to personal preference, as it offers an interface that is easy to navigate, learn and carry out the coding and classifying processes; 3) it supports coding visual elements; 4) the final coding processes could be exported into word files, which helped when writing the final findings, interpretations, and reflections on the data; 5) almost all of the changes were automatically saved in the project files (e.g., codes created and applied, data importing) immediately; 6) the presence of the double-check permission feature, which is required before any of the project elements such as codes can be deleted; 7) finally, the researcher is able to view and browse his/ her project even without a license through MAXQDA Reader. This allowed the saved dataset to be reviewed for a long period after. Despite the many advantages of using MAXQDA, I had some concerns about using this software during the analysis process. For example, data can be lost and/or corrupted if MAXQDA files are saved to cloud based storage such as Dropbox, OneDrive. Therefore, I saved the files on the desktop, which was desynchronised with any cloud-based storage outlet and another copy was saved on an external hard drive.

After saving the pdf files to the desktop, the next step was to import the those containing the captured tweets into MAXQDA. I then started the coding and annotating process exploiting various features of the software such as colouring and highlighting codes, writing notes, editing. I first coded the tweets associated with the hashtag according to the linguistic codes used in order to count the number of tweets for each linguistic group. This was done in case they revealed what stances were associated with each language, as well as to understand the full linguistic context of the data. This step was also necessary to analyse the communicative and socio-political functions of these linguistic choices. To organise the data coding process, I created three main categories based on my initial observations:

1. English: posts only in English (E)
2. Arabic: posts only in Arabic (standard and colloquial) (A)
3. Mixed-code: posts that included more than one linguistic code in the same tweet, i.e., English and Arabic (M)

Moreover, during the coding process, the following elements were considered to refine the dataset:

1. Numerical characters were excluded from the linguistic coding process due to the ambiguity of classification. Classifying numbers into linguistic codes may have been time-consuming and would not have helped to answer the research questions. However, I did not

exclude the numbers in other areas of analysis and interpretation, for example in terms of using numbers as evidence in the discursive strategies that were used to show facts and statistics, as they appeared to be useful.

2. Hyperlinks (e.g., YouTube links, Facebook links, personal links), and other details about the tweets (e.g., date, location, username, device type) were not coded as they tended to be mixed for technical reasons.

3. I also excluded the following: repeated and duplicate tweets, promotions, and tweets in any other languages detected in the hashtag such as Hindi, French and Spanish.

The subsequent step was to examine each linguistic category created after the coding and annotating process to identify different stances in order to assign them to two main stance groups that were initially created:

1. Supporters of the guardianship system ending (those who resisted the dominance and injustice of the system and supported its abolition).

2. Opponents of the guardianship system ending (those who resisted any change to it and opposed the abolition of the system).

After coding and annotating the data, the next step was to interpret the results in light of the theories used in this study and in relation to the sociocultural context, as explained below.

4.5.2. Qualitative Analysis

In the online context, discourse studies on social media have received little attention until recently, despite the existence of ample discourse studies in different fields (Bouvier, 2015). The online context is multi-layered, complex, and interconnected, with new forms of communication emerging that can lead us to question the reliability of 'offline' context models when observing online practices. The relationship between our 'offline' lives and social media is undoubtedly reciprocal, with both embedded within each other (Thurlow et al., 2004, p.75). This is not to say that online and offline contexts are separate, as they are largely entangled within each other. Indeed, further studies are needed to understand the nature of such practices as a critical part of human communication, as discourse approaches to 'offline' practices are still employed to analyse 'online' practices.

To answer the research questions, I applied qualitative methods used to analyse 'offline' discourses as explained earlier. In particular, I adopt critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the main theoretical and analytical framework for this study. CDA is appropriate for the exploration of social and political issues such as race, gender, social inequality, ideology, and power and to understand how they are constructed and reflected in particular texts (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), since it bridges the gap between the micro linguistic level and the social macro level (Fairclough, 2005). CDA, may be useful in terms of linking linguistic patterns (micro) with adopted stances on the socio-political

discourse (macro) on Twitter. Blommaert (2010) asserted that it is crucial to examine social media in relation to the wider concept of power and how communication may shift and change when influenced by power relations. In the following section, I briefly provide an overview of critical discourse analysis, since it is the main theoretical framework used in this study.

4.5.2.1. (Critical) Discourse Analysis

Zelling Harris (1952) introduced the term 'discourse analysis' (DA henceforth) to examine the language beyond the sentence level and to look at the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. In other words, DA examines the relationship between patterns of language and the discourse in which they occur. DA also considers the ways the speakers/writers present different views of the world, and how these views are constructed through the use of language. DA is also interested in explaining the relationship between participants and its effect on language, as well as how social identities are linked to language (Paltridge, 2012, p.2). DA is the study of language in use that cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms and cannot be separated from the functions these forms fulfil in a particular situation (Brown and Yule, 1983, p,1). Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) considered discourses as scripts for the 'doings' of social practices involving values, identities, experiences, and ideas.

Despite the common use of the term 'discourse analysis', there is no agreed clear-cut definition. This might be due to the multidisciplinary nature of discourse analysis and its involvement with various approaches such as linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, pragmatics, sociology, psychology, and communication research (van Dijk, 2015). A common characteristic of all these approaches is that they look at what is beyond the word or sentence, and they do not study language as an abstract system. These approaches are interested in how speakers and writers do things with language, such as expressing opinions, presenting themselves and others. Discourse analysis has been widely investigated using different approaches such as conversation analysis, sociocultural analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. Different approaches within the wider framework of discourse analysis have always served to better understand human communication in different modes and interpret different sociolinguistic practices in different domains. Conversation analysis, for instance, is mostly concerned with investigating spoken discourse that looks at the ways in which people manage their everyday conversations, how spoken discourse is organised and how social relations develops as the interlocutors carry out these conversations (Paltridge 2006).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA henceforth) is another significant approach within discourse studies, and it is often a problem-oriented. CDA examines the ways in which the discourse reflects, shapes, resist power abuse, social structures and ideologies. CDA is explicitly concerned with the role of language as a tool of social control and dominance in a specific community. CDA then investigates hidden meanings and ideologies of a particular community to reveal issues of inequality and social

dominance. CDA studies surrounding social and historical contexts when interpreting discourses of dominance and resistance. In the following section, I focus on CDA since its orientation may reveal significant interpretations of the stances adopted in a political campaigning discourse in relation to the complexity of Saudi society, the existence of different traditions and linguistic varieties etc.

Discourses are "always socially, politically, racially and economically loaded" (Rogers, 2004, p.6). Thus, discourse needs to be critically studied in relation to historical, cultural, social, and political contexts. CDA aims to investigate all discourses between the micro linguistic level and the social macro level to uncover hidden relations such as power, beliefs, ideologies, views, social inequality, and dominance (Fairclough, 1995; Widdowson, 2000; Fairclough, 2005; Wodak and Mayer, 2009). The discursive practices mediate between the textual level (micro) and the sociocultural level (macro) (Thompson, 2004: 5). Furthermore, critical discourse analysis may include textual analysis and deep interpretation of the underlying ideologies and presuppositions (Palrtridge, 2012, p.186). Moreover, it also includes how language constructs and is constructed by social relationships (Rogers 2011). Thus, CDA is a multi-layered approach that connects between the micro and macro level.

Critical discourse analysis mainly investigates how dominance, inequality and social power can be abused, reproduced, resisted and enacted in the discourse. Additionally, critical discourse analysis also allows for the scrutiny and discussion of dominant discourses and hence can empower disadvantaged and marginalised groups to challenge the hegemonic practices. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) defined some principles that underlie many studies within the CDA field. These principles include exploring social and political issues such as race, gender, social inequality, ideology, and identity and how these are constructed and reflected in specific texts. It also aims to unpack power, ideologies, and social relations and understand how these relations are performed and negotiated through discourse.

Uncovering hidden ideologies in a particular discourse is a fundamental element within the framework of CDA. Ideology can be defined as socio-cognitive shared beliefs that support the obvious representations of a group's social identity (van Dijk, 2006). Ideology can be communicated and (re)produced in discourse through language use and through other social practices (van Dijk, 1995). Moreover, CDA emphasises the role of institutionally political discourse from mainstream media (off/online) in shaping public opinion (van Dijk, 2008, pp.89-91). CDA also investigates how elite politicians can have the privilege and power to (re)shape public views towards a particular issue (ibid).

Broadly speaking, CDA seems applicable to this study, i.e. it is assumed that participants using the specified hashtags are adopting different affiliations, stances, and views towards one topic, i.e. the guardianship system and women's rights in general. The current study investigates how participants define themselves in relation to others and how they affiliate around shared stances with others in the immediate context of the campaign hashtag and/or in the wider socio-political discourse. Therefore, applying CDA was deemed to be useful in revealing the complex relationships between different

participants and how stances are constructed around these relationships. In addition, CDA might also be useful in terms of linking specific linguistic patterns (micro) with adopted stances to affiliate with specific groups within the socio-political discourse (macro). I examine how Twitter users exploit Twitter affordances and select a language to express their stances on "the call for Saudi women's rights". Furthermore, I analyse the tweets associated with the hashtag #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen and investigate how Twitter users creatively and strategically move between English and Arabic, and their varieties, to express their position and their belonging and represent themselves and others, while also creating an in-group and out-group. Discourse analysts suggest that the ways we use language contribute to the construction of our views of the world, other people, and of ourselves, and in that process, we constantly involve, selecting from various pre-existing linguistic resources (Potter and Wetherell, 1994). Therefore, language should be investigated critically in relation to social practices, social organisations and ideology (Heller, 2007, pp.1-2). This view is consistent with other linguistic theories, in which language is considered "a product of the deeply social and cultural activities in which people engage" (Pennycook, 2010, p.1). In the following paragraphs, I shed light on the theories used in the data analysis.

To encompass the multidimensional aspects of stance and construction of the in-group and out-group, I draw on Fairclough's (2003) framework. Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework is a key model in critical discourse analysis that analyses discourse on three interrelated levels: textual level, discursive level, and the social practice. The three-dimensional framework is employed to analyse the corpus of tweets (texts + visuals) on three levels, as explained below:

1. Textual level

The first dimension is more concerned with the analysis of linguistic units of a particular text such as examining grammatical aspects (e.g., use of passive versus active voice, use of pronouns). It also can include analysing vocabulary and lexical choices, and other semiotic resources such as signs, pictures, and images. In the current study, the analysis was conducted on the textual level to examine lexical choices, different pronouns, parts of speech and other grammatical aspects revealed in the analysis process. Moreover, this stage involved describing the data and prepare it for the next level, using the following two steps:

1.1. The tweets associated with the target hashtag were manually coded with the support of MAXQDA to categorise them according to the linguistic code used (E, A, M)

1.2. The tweets were described and classified into one of the following types:

a. Texts (texts)

b. Visuals (images or videos, emoticons, emojis)

c. Texts + visuals (tweets that included both texts and images and/or videos or any other visual element)

2. Discursive level (interpretation)

The second dimension of Fairclough's framework examines processes of producing, consuming, and interpreting of a text. It focuses on the producer, audience, and how the text is shared across different discourses. At this stage, I examined each tweet individually, i.e., words, images, videos, associated hashtags. This process was done in relation to other tweets in the hashtag, as well as in relation to other texts and discourses outside the guardianship hashtag. This step helped to identify the different themes and discursive strategies used together with the hashtag in the three linguistic codes employed by the two groups (supporters and opponents). Moreover, it helped to identify the stances taken, and hence each tweet was assigned to the suitable stance group created earlier. Additionally, the tweets were analysed in relation to the participants in the hashtag and to the intended audience.

Analysis was applied at the two levels, i.e., the textual and the discursive levels served to better examine the characteristics and patterns of the target data, and to quantify the linguistic choices, stances and discursive strategies used in conjunction with the hashtag. A screenshot is provided below (Figure 15) to clarify the complex analysis process (usernames and personal photos were hidden for confidentiality).

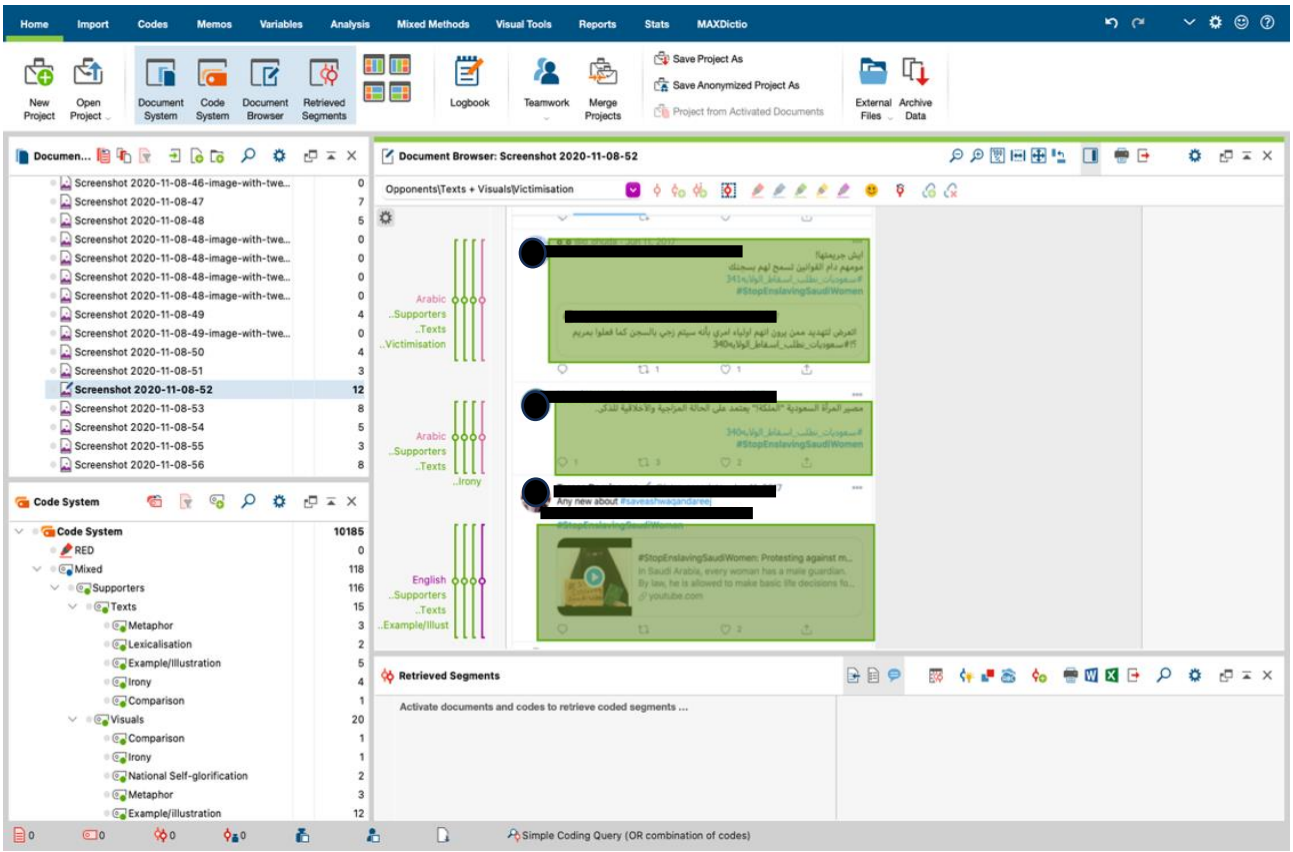


Figure 15 Illustration of the stages of tweet analysis.

3. Sociocultural level

The last step of the analysis was to link the findings of the study to the sociocultural context they are situated within. This involved examining the tweets closely in relation to religion, history, politics, and economy to be able to answer the research questions adequately. In this study, I look at how Twitter users exploit Twitter affordances in their language choice practices to express their stances on the guardianship system. Consequently, I examined the tweets associated with the hashtag #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen and investigated how Twitter users creatively and strategically moved between English and Arabic, and their varieties, to express their position and their belonging. In so doing, I drew on Gumperz's notion of code-switching as 'contextualization cues' that signal meanings and assumptions of a particular interaction, as well as indexicality (Ochs, 1992), to explain the meanings associated with specific linguist codes used to express different stances. During this process, I assigned semantic values to the emerging data, which could then be interpreted in relation to the linguistic and socio-political context in which they occurred. Within these frameworks, it was supposed that the speaker and the audience were aware of these social meanings (conventionally expected) to achieve mutual understanding.

In order to identify the different stances adopted by members of a particular group, I looked to Du Bois (2007), who stated that stance involves the participant negatively or positively evaluating other people or ideas, positioning themselves with particular groups and/or disaffiliating from other groups. In so doing, they largely look to their own sociocultural values, as well as on social ideologies. Given that members of a particular group (supporters, for example) might have taken different stances from each other to support the movement, the focus was on what was shared, as well as on what was not shared within each group. Moreover, Du Bois emphasised that stance is a public act that can be realised through deployed linguistic choices. Therefore, how individuals position themselves and others can be discursively structured. Thus, the next analytical step was to identify the different strategies used in constructing these stances. Strategy refers to "a more or less accurate plan adopted to achieve a certain political, psychological or other kind of objective", which may not always be conscious (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, Roger and Liebhart, 2009, p.31). Previous studies have shown the use of different strategies employed by individuals when constructing ingroup/outgroup stances. For example, Alharbi's (2016) findings showed that tweets included nomination strategies that assigned positive attributes to Saudi female activists, emphasising their 'ingroup' stance. The results also showed that participants tended to use the predication strategy when positively evaluating the 'ingroup' religious men, who supported the driving campaign, while negatively evaluating religious men who opposed it.

I adopt van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive framework to analyse how discursive strategies were used to create in-group favouritism and out-group derogation, as well as to uncover the ideological beliefs behind these strategies. This framework offered a method for categorising people into

dichotomous groups by relying on the basic ideological strategy of highlighting the positive self and negative other. In-group favouritism and out-group derogation are semantic macro-ideological strategies used to create division between groups based on 'us' and 'them', 'good' and 'bad', 'superior' and 'inferior', and are used to either enhance or lessen our/their bad/good characteristics. Therefore, I draw on this ideology to refer to a system of beliefs, ideas, thoughts, and values which are shared by members of a particular society, i.e. Saudi Arabia, and which indirectly influence their attitudes and cognition. These strategies are analysed linguistically from a sociocultural perspective in which language is investigated in relation to social practice, social organisation and ideology (Heller, 2007, pp.1-2). The strategies deemed relevant to the current study that were adopted from van Dijk (2006, pp.735-739) are listed below:

1. Authority: to support a claim by quoting statements from authoritative organisations or people's discourse.
2. Comparison: to compare in-group members to out-group members, either negatively or positively.
3. Evidentiality: to present proof or evidence to make claims plausible.
4. Example/illustration: to use short stories or vignettes to make their claims credible and persuade the reader.
5. Generalisation: to stereotype based on generalised negative characteristics of others.
6. Hyperbole: to exaggerate good actions and lessen bad actions, and vice versa.
7. Irony: to say something that means the opposite.
8. Lexicalisation: to use different words to refer to similar meanings depending on the role, goals, position, opinion etc. of the speaker.
9. Metaphor: to make emotional abstract meanings more concrete to persuade the reader.
10. National self-glorification: to use positive references to praise one own's nation or country, its culture, traditions, and history.
11. Norm expression: to explicitly express what we should and/or should not do.
12. Number game: to use statistics and numbers to make stance more conceivable.
13. Polarisation us-them categorisation: to express positive attributes to 'us' and negative attributes to 'them'.
14. Populism: to speak in the name of the people.
15. Presupposition: to assume the truth to be known without being explicitly expressed, rather than being inferred from the general sociocultural knowledge.
16. Victimisation: to tell negative stories about the other group.

4.6. Ethical Considerations

It may be tempting for researchers to collect data from the Internet, due to the fact it is easy to access and such an enormous amount of data can be obtained there. Nevertheless, ethical issues always arise when conducting a study in the online context (Bolander and Locher, 2014). These issues are critical especially in research related to social media to ensure the integrity of the study and to protect users' rights. Below I discuss some of the ethical challenges of using online data in research.

4.6.1. 'Privacy' and 'Public' in the Online Context

One critical issue is the different understandings of the two terms 'privacy' and 'public' in the online context (Bolander and Locher, 2014). There is an ongoing debate regarding the use of the two concepts in terms of access and content (Herring, 1996). The boundaries between what is considered 'private' and what is considered 'public' is always blurred in the online context. For example, Twitter offers its users the feature of 'privacy' to protect their tweets, and only those who are permitted to follow the account can read them. However, whenever the private account user replies to another account or uses a hashtag, the post appears publicly. In this case, the replies are read as public, although the author's account is not public. In addition, these replies could be considered private as they use "informal language which is associated with private conversations" (Landert and Jucker, 2011, p.1423). In the current study, to ensure the privacy of the participants, identifiable information such as username, profile's picture, location, time, date was concealed. Moreover, the protected accounts were not accessed in the current study.

4.6.2. Anonymity

Another ethical issue that can arise in the process of researching online is ensuring Twitter users' 'anonymity'. Twitter allows its users to create their own accounts headers and bios in which they can select their pictures, handles and usernames. In the online context, some researchers choose to reveal a user Twitter's handle, while others prefer to conceal it (Buchanan and Ess, 2008). However, even the process of concealing can be revealing, as the affordances of social media applications (e.g., 'searchability') can be used to link the tweets to the users' profiles (Spilioti, 2016).

In this study, it is assumed that the Twitter users included were aware of the public nature of the online campaign discourse, as they called on power holders in Saudi Arabia to reform particular social issues. However, I concealed their username and profile pictures to minimise any potential breach of Twitter users' privacy (an example is provided below). Moreover, the researchers must ensure that the analysis of online data must comply with terms of service of the online platform explored. In the current study, Twitter terms of service were reviewed to ensure that the data collection and analysis follow these terms. I used recommended techniques that adhere to Twitter's terms of service in the process of data collection and analysis such as using Twitter API. Moreover, I

used a Twitter Developer account which is especially designed for researchers and academics to ensure careful data analysis. Moreover, transparency is a key factor when dealing with online data to enhance the research credibility and to maintain ethical considerations. Transparency in research includes clarity in explaining different methods used in collecting and analysing the tweets. In addition, it includes acknowledging and limitations or biases of the data under study such as the lack of demographic variables of Twitter users in the current study. Moreover, the platform's rights and the users' rights were respected when conducting this research as tweets of the participants in the hashtag were documents and stored carefully. Also, these files were not shared or distributed for any reason.

Figure 16: Example of a tweet after concealment

Chapter 5 Research Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of this research in two sections in order to correspond to the research questions that guided this study. The first section (5.1) presents a quantitative, detailed description of the data findings supported by tables and figures. In this section, I present and analyse the characteristics of the two groups, that is, the supporters and opponents of the campaign to reform the guardianship system. I detail how the groups used various linguistic and multimodal resources available online to construct different stances.

In the second section (5.2), I provide a qualitative analysis of the results obtained in relation to the research questions, regarding the sociocultural and political context and in relation to previous studies. I specifically show the factors that influence choosing a specific linguistic code, the role of language choice in expressing different stances and the functions associated with the linguistic codes used here. Following that, I interpret how the discursive strategies were employed in creating in-group and out-group representations of self and other. These interpretations are discussed in relation to the ideologies and meanings ensconced in the different stances created.

5.1 Research Findings

In this section, I present an analysis of 3,162 tweets associated with the guardianship system hashtag #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen (821 tweets were excluded, for more details see chapter 4. The analysis aimed to explore how Twitter users of the hashtag employed different linguistic codes, as well as different textual and visual resources available on Twitter, to construct stances on the guardianship system. To do so, I used MAXQDA software, drawing on Gumperz (1972) to identify the linguistic codes used (E, A or B), and on van Dijk (2006) to identify the discursive strategies used. The findings are provided in figures and tables below, accompanied with an explanation. In order to answer the research questions, I first present a descriptive analysis of the current dataset and its characteristics. Following Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional framework, the data were first analysed on the textual level. This stage involved describing the data and preparing it for the next stages, and involved the following two-step process:

1. The tweets associated with #StopEnslavingSaudiwomen were coded manually with the support of MAXQDA and were categorised according to the linguistic code used (E, A, M).

2. The tweets were labelled based on how they appeared in the data according to the following types: text, this included written tweets (T); visuals, this included tweets with visual materials such as pictures, emojis, emoticons, videos, images (V); text + visual: this included tweets that had written

content and other multimodal resources such as such as pictures, emojis, emoticons, videos, images (T + V).

The results showed that tweets from both the supporters' group (users who supported the change and end of the guardianship system), and the opponents' group (users who were resisting the change and end of the guardianship system) showed a variation in the use of linguistic codes, and in the use of the textual and/or visual strategies. The tweets analysed were multilingual in the sense that they used different languages and codes. The linguistic codes used in the tweets were Arabic, English, and mixed-code (English and Arabic). It should be noted that other languages were used (e.g., Hindi, Spanish, and French), however, these were excluded as they were beyond the scope of this research. The findings showed that English was the most used language in the hashtag among both groups, i.e., the supporters and the opponents (1,544 tweets) while using both English and Arabic in the same tweet was found to be less frequent (118 tweets). Furthermore, there were 679 tweets solely in Arabic (see Figure 17 below).

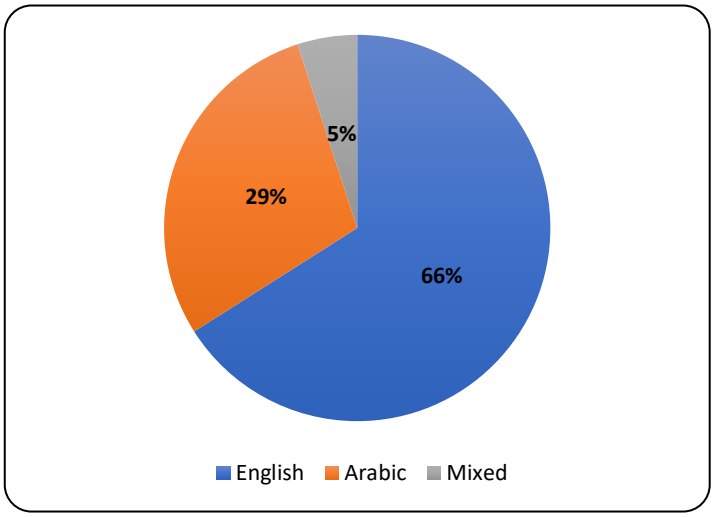


Figure 17 Number of tweets in English, Arabic, and in mixed-code used in the guardianship campaign hashtag on Twitter.

In the same vein, the supporters used English considerably more than Arabic and mixed-code. English was used in 66% (1,501 tweets) compared to 29% (668 tweets) in Arabic. On the other hand, the supporters used mixed-code in 5% (116 tweets), as shown in Figure 18 below).

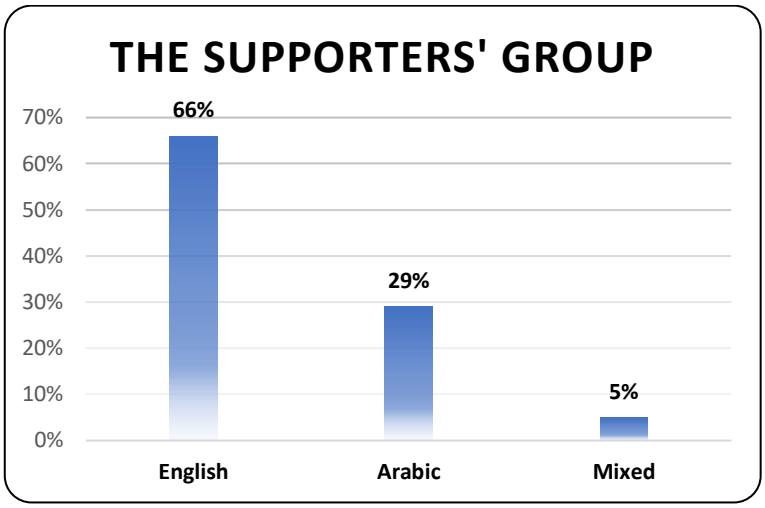


Figure 18 Number of tweets in English, Arabic and in mixed-code used in the supporters' group.

Similarly, the opponents' group used English more frequently than Arabic and more than mixed-code. Tweets in English accounted for 76.78% (43 tweets), while tweets in Arabic made up 19.64% (11 tweets) of the total. Furthermore, tweets using mixed-code only accounted for 3.57% (2 tweets), as seen in Figure 19 below.

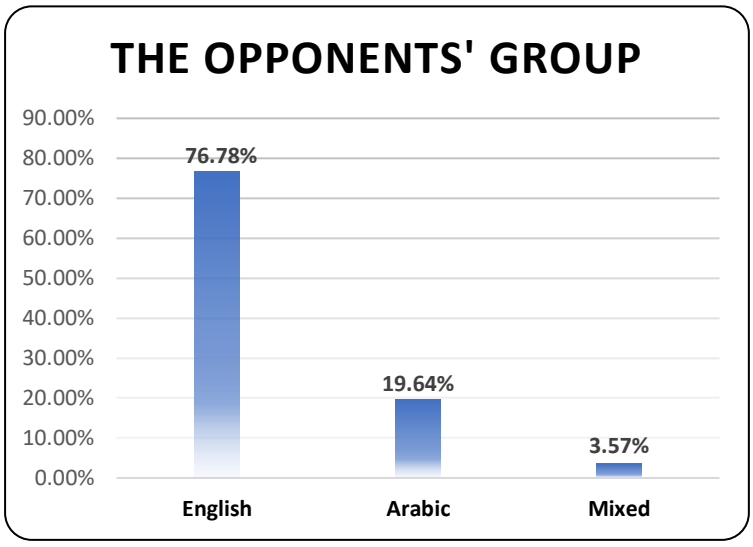


Figure 19 Number of tweets in Arabic, English and mixed-code

The results above show that English was the most used linguistic code by both the supporting group and the opposing group. Yet, the tweets that contained both languages represented the smallest proportion. The data also revealed that the two groups used the three linguistic codes differently. To clarify, it was found that some discursive strategies and themes were associated with specific linguistic codes and with specific stances, which I explain in more details in the following sections. Moreover, the data revealed that participants in both groups employed multiple resources available on Twitter to construct their stances on the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia. The resources included a variety of multimodal resources such as texts, pictures, images, emoticons, videos, and links.

The group in support of the abolishing the guardianship system tended to use text rather than visuals (images and/or videos). Hence, the tweets in English relied more on texts (T) than any other resources available on Twitter. Similarly, the Arabic tweets in the group supporting the campaign used text more frequently than any other resource. Interestingly, the combination of text and visuals resources were found to be more frequent among the supporters using both languages (English and Arabic) in the same tweet. On the other hand, the group opposing the campaign tended to use visual resources more than the other resources. Tweets in English were frequently accompanied by visuals more than any other resources, while tweets in Arabic tended to combine text and visuals. The tweets in mixed-code also relied on text combined with visuals similar to mixed-code tweets by supporters. However, no other resources were used in the tweets featuring the two languages together, unlike tweets from supporters of the campaign, who used other resources. Table 4 and Table 5 below provide more clarification.

Campaign Supporters				
Language and Total Number of Tweets	Text	Visuals	Text and Visuals	Total Number of Tweets
English	1,141	50	310	1,501
Arabic	469	46	153	668
Mixed (Arabic and English)	15	20	81	116

Table 4 Distribution of the use of resources among the campaign supporters.

Campaign Opponents				
Language	Text	Visuals	Text and Visuals	Total Number of Tweets
English	1	27	15	43
Arabic	4	1	6	11
Mixed (Arabic and English)	N/A	N/A	2	2

Table 5 Distribution of the use of resources among campaign opponents.

The following stage involved discursive analysis, which involved using the second level of Fairclough's (2003) multidimensional framework. Hence, the tweets were examined thoroughly, with the components of each tweet such as word choice, visuals, the writer, the audience scrutinised. This process was done in relation to other tweets using the same the hashtag, as well as in relation to other texts and discourses outside the hashtag such as news and events. This step helped to identify the stances taken and hence assign each tweet to the suitable stance group. Moreover, it helped to ascertain the different discursive strategies used with the hashtag in the three linguistic codes among supporters and opponents. While previous studies (e.g., Myers, 2010; Luzon, 2012; Chiluwa, 2015) focused on identifying individual stance markers, the current study focused on the entire contents of the tweets to identify the linguistic code and discursive strategies deployed in the stance-taking process. In order to identify the different stances, the analysis drew on Du Bois (2007), as the participants in the hashtag shared two main stances towards the guardianship system although expressed differently. In the process of stance-taking, the participants using the hashtag employed several discursive strategies across the three linguistic codes (E, A, B) in different modes (Text, Visuals, Text + Visuals) to achieve the following:

1. Evaluate other people/ideas related to the hashtag positively and/or negatively.
2. Position themselves and others regarding the guardianship system.
3. Align/disalign with (a) specific group(s).

It was found that the stance supporting the abolition of the guardianship system was the dominant stance among participants in this study. The number of tweets (2,285) posted by supporters accounted for 98% of those examined as part of this study, while those produced by opponents of the campaign only made up 2% of those scrutinised (see Figure 20 below).

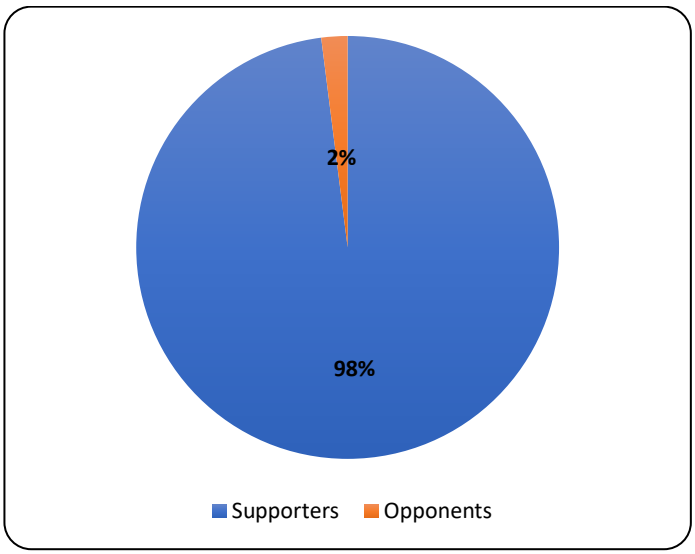


Figure 20 Percentage of tweets by both groups (campaign supporters and opponents).

The supporters' stance was the dominant stance across the data, as it was found in 2,285 tweets in the three linguistic codes used (E, A, and B), accounting for 98% of the data compared to 2% who were against the change. These results were found to be consistent with previous studies (Chiluwa, 2015; Chiluwa and Ifukor, 2015). One of the reasons for the dominance of the supporting stance might be due to the nature of campaign hashtags on Twitter. Some studies have shown that campaign hashtags can increase support and affiliation with the hashtag's main topic (Zappavigna, 2011, De Cock and Pedraza, 2018). This could be due to the fact hashtags can raise awareness of a particular a societal and/or political cause. At the same time, these hashtags can serve to reinforce the user's image as someone who is committed and aware through public alignment and solidarity (De Cock and Pedraza, 2018). In the current study, the hashtag #StopEnslavingSaudiwomen was launched to support the campaign to abolish the guardianship system and to ensure that women in Saudi Arabia gained their rights regarding, work, marriage, among other rights. Thus, most of the participants affiliated with this cause showed their commitment and support to end the guardianship system. Moreover, they showed an awareness of and acknowledged the role of education and religion in the discrimination against women. Some examples are given below in Figure 21, Figure 22 and Figure 23.

Figure 21 Example of an acknowledgment of the role of religious discourse in the discrimination against women.

Translation: Religious discourse with the help of unfair laws

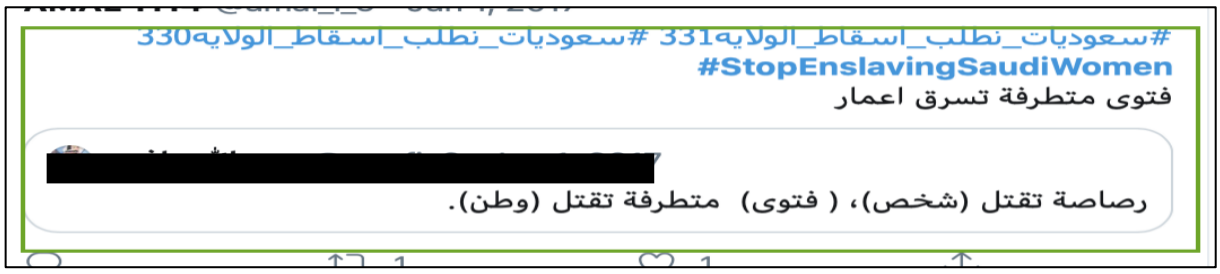


Figure 22 Example of an acknowledgment of the role of Fatwa in the discrimination against women.

Translation: An extreme fatwa steals lives – a bullet kills (a person), an extreme (fatwa) kills a (homeland)

Figure 23 Example of acknowledging the role of knowledge in empowering women

Translation: knowledge - run away

Another explanation for this dominance of the supportive stance, might be attributed to the social influence of others in a particular social context. Social impact theory explains that an individual's behaviours, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes can be influenced by the presence of others within a social setting (Latane, 1981). As human beings, we are socio-cognitive by nature, hence others' stances can affect our judgements, evaluation, and perceptions. Du Bois (2007) suggested that stances do not exist in isolation, but build on others' stances taken by a prior writer and/or speaker. Consequently, individuals can gain strength and closeness with others in the same social setting.

This can provide an explanation of how individuals adopt the same stance as others, thus supporting the cause with the same hashtag. Chang, Zhu, Wang, and Li (2018) asserted that it is easier than ever for individuals to be influenced by others in the age of social media "as social media has become an indispensable activity for people's lives and the main source of information for many" (ibid, 283). The social influence of others is possibly enhanced by the technological affordances of Twitter as physical barriers are blurred and dissimilated in the online context and individuals can access and interact with many tweets that adopt similar stances at the same time. Li and Sakamoto (2014) suggested that users may follow the collective opinion of others on social media regardless of whether the content is true, false, or controversial. The data in this study showed that Twitter users employed Twitter features such as 'quote' when adopting other users' stances, an example of which is given below in Figure 24. In addition, they utilised other features such as 'thread', by which they expressed their stances in a series of connected tweets, adding further information, context, or expanding on their point of view. An example is given below in Figure 25. Moreover, the tweets showed that a Twitter participant sometimes repeated his/her stance in separate tweets using the hashtag, although the tweets were constructed differently. An example is given below in Figure 26.

Figure 24 Example of using the 'quote' function to adopt a similar stance

Translation.1:#Saudiwomen_asking_to_end_theguardianship316, #all_of_us_Mariam_AlOtaibi

We got old and hurt, and some of us were killed and imprisoned as [they were] asking for a human right that protects and guarantees her the dignity of living, we do not want to escape, we want safety.

Translation 2: 4 million Saudi women suffer from illegal guardianship over adult women #Saudiwomen_asking_ to _end_theguardianship316

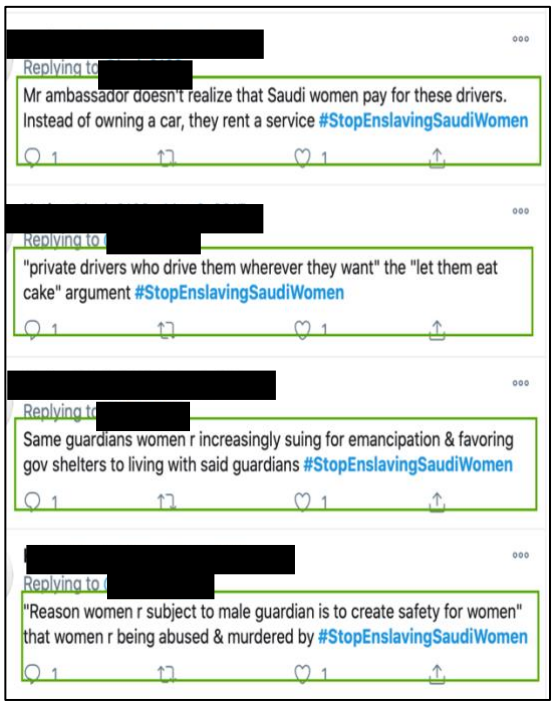


Figure 25 : Example of the adoption of the same stance using the 'thread' function

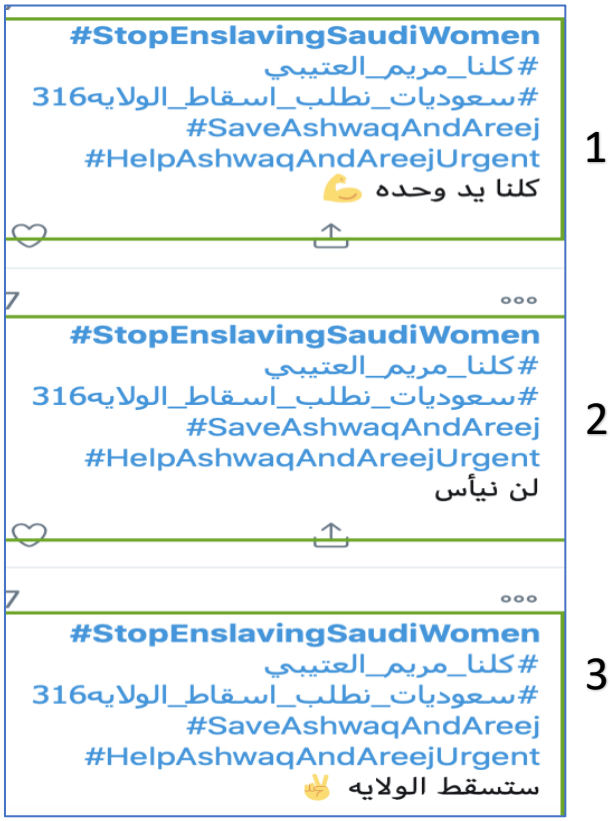


Figure 26 Example of repeating the same stance

Translation 1: #all_of_us_Mariam_AlOtaibi

#Saudiwomen_asking_to_end_theguardianship316

All of us is one hand

Translation 2: #allofus_Mariam_AlOtaibi

#Saudiwomen_asking_to_end_theguardianship316

We will not give up

Translation 3: #allofus_Mariam_AlOtaibi

#Saudiwomen_asking_to_end_theguardianship316

The guardianship will fall

Another possible reason that might explain the support for this campaign at the time was the political, social, and economic changes occurring in Saudi Arabia. When the hashtags related to Saudi women's rights were launched, Saudi Arabia was in the process of taking some steps towards empowering women. For example, in 2013, a Saudi woman was appointed as a member of the Consultative Council (*Majlis Al-Shura*) for the first time, and in 2015, Saudi women were able to vote and gained the right to be elected in the municipal elections (Al Fassi, 2020). The education sector has also received special attention, as more educational opportunities have allowed Saudi women to pursue their studies abroad (Alhareth, Alhareth and Al Dighrir, 2015). Moreover, Saudi Arabia has launched new plans and initiatives to review the school curriculum, whilst also developing teachers' training (Aldegether, 2023). These changes may have encouraged more people on Twitter to express

their support for the end of the guardianship system and challenge traditional norms, an example of which is given below in Figure 27.

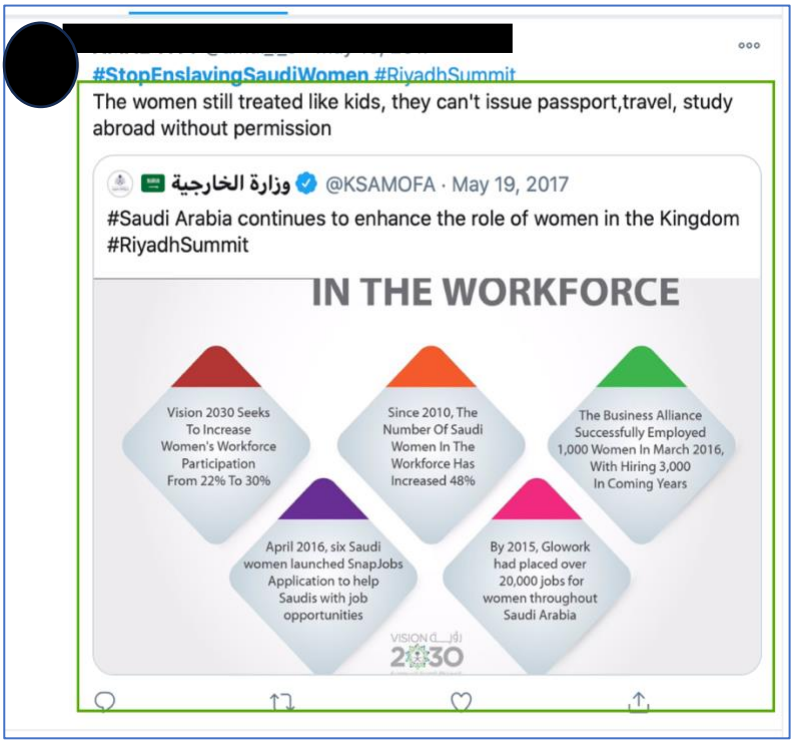


Figure 27 Example of taking a supportive stance due to socio-political reformations for women in Saudi Arabia

In addition, further changes were observed in the religious discussions around women in Saudi Arabia, as some religious scholars discussing the guardianship system and the related hashtags appeared. For example, in an interview with *Okaz* in 2016, a member of the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars (*Hay'at Kibar Al- 'Ulama*)[42] Sheikh Abdullah Al-Munai[43] said that women should have the same rights as men and a woman should be considered her own guardian in all her matters. However, Sheikh Abdullah did not support women's right to decide who to marry, adding that a woman should be required to obtain a male's consent before marriage, irrespective of her former marital status, position, or her age. [44]

These political, economic, educational, social, and religious changes, initiated and encouraged by the powerholders in Saudi Arabia (i.e., the government and religious leaders) might have played a

[42] The highest Islamic religious body established in 1971. The head of this council is the Grand Mufti, with members coming from different religious Islamic schools (Madhhab: a school of thought like Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali). Their main role is to advise the king on different religious matters. The council was recently dissolved in 2020 and new member were appointed in correspondence with the reformation process the country is going under with the Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman (https://www.alifta.gov.sa/En/Pages/default.aspx)

[43] A leading Saudi newspaper that was ranked among the top three most visited online platforms with Arabic content in the Middle East and Africa in 2021, according to Forbes, i.e., the business magazine.

[44](https://www.okaz.com.sa/article/1073459/الرأى/:~:text=أكد%20عضو%20هيئة%20كبار%20العلماء,مثل%20ما%20لل%20رجل%20من%20حقوق.)

role in raising awareness and in shaping people's opinions regarding women's rights in Saudi Arabia. The political and religious leaders have privileged access to the socially valuable resources such as mass media, wealth, education, and status. Therefore, they can influence and persuade an enormous majority of the public (van Dijk, 1993; 1998) and may change "the mind of others in one's own interests" (van Dijk, 1993: 254). This type of power is sometimes referred to as "soft power" and is used by organisations and politicians to achieve particular purposes, while at the same time exploiting different ideologies in a particular community (Chouliaraki, 2005). These statements are in line with previous studies that have shown that politicians can play a role in shaping public opinion in multiple social settings (such as Geis, 1987; Schaffner, 1997; Fairclough, 1998; Chilton, 2004).

The current study shows that users of the Twitter hashtag adopted similar stances to some religious scholars' stances on the guardianship system. For example, they utilised Twitter features to quote the views of religious scholars in which they said that there should be no guardianship unless in marriage, an example of which is provided below in Figure 28. However, other religious scholars' stances were mocked among those showing a supportive stance. In addition to using religious scholars' stances, the data showed the use of the stances of journalists, activists, and other political figures to construct a stance supporting the end of the guardianship system.

Figure 28 Example of the use of religious scholars' stances on the guardianship system to construct a supporting stance

Translation 1:

There is no guardianship over the adult woman and the interpretation of the 'Qiwama' is that the man is responsible for serving the woman and paying her expenses, and the 'Qiwama' is transferred to the woman if she pays from her own money.

Translation 2:

A member of the Senior Scholars Council "Al Munai": there is no guardianship over the woman except in marriage and Islam ensures that she manages her own matters.

Translation 3:

The guardian in the Quran is for those who have no sense or have a weakness or are unable to dictate, otherwise there is no guardianship for a male over a female or vice versa.

[Verse from the Holy Quran] (O you who believe! When you contract a debt for a fixed period, write it down. Let a scribe write it down in justice between you. Let not the scribe refuse to write as Allah has taught him, so let him write. Let him (the debtor) who incurs the liability dictate, and he must fear Allah, his Lord, and diminish not anything of what he owes. But if the debtor is of poor understanding, or weak, or is unable himself to dictate, then let his guardian dictate in justice. And get two witnesses.)

The supporters used English in their stance-taking more than the other linguistic codes in the tweets analysed. The results showed that English was used in 1,501 tweets, accounting for 66% of the data. Many researchers (e.g., Kelly-Holmes, 2004; Al-Khtaib and Sabbah, 2008; Jansen, 2010; Lee, 2016) reported that there are some factors that can play a key role in language choice between different languages or codes by users of social media. These factors include the technological affordances of these platforms, prestige, social status, presenting particular identity aspects, topic, and the target audience. In this study, the data analysis highlighted several factors that might explain the dominance of English in the campaign hashtag. For example, it could be argued that technological factors played a role in choosing English over other linguistics codes. The dominance of English in the online context, including social media, is not something unique to this dataset, as it is a global phenomenon. This is due to several reasons, specifically it was language first used on the Internet and sustained because of its early popularity in the USA, as well as the initial language of many social media platforms from the US such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Twitter. Arabic, a key language in this study, on the other hand, was less used than English in the data, as tweets in Arabic only accounted for 29% of the obtained data. The comparatively low number of Arabic tweets related to the hashtag could be explained in terms of convenience and practicality.

Language choice in the current data, however, could be attributed to other factors rather than to the technological affordances of Twitter such as audience and topic. The choice of English played a significant role in constructing different stances on the guardianship system. Previous studies on language choice online found that different linguistic codes were found to be associated with different topics. For example, Al-Khtaib and Sabbah (2008) found that their participants preferred to use Arabic when addressing cultural topics. Similarly, Hashim (2010) reported that advertisers used words related to Muslim culture such as 'halal' to promote their national identity and sociocultural values, and thus build rapport with their Malay/Muslim customers. Such words were recognised by the community and hence these words invoked shared cultural meanings and gave a sense of solidarity, leading to the promotion of products. Similar results are found in the current study, as many cultural words were associated with Arabic (e.g., *halal, Awrah*) invoking shared meanings of solidarity and the adoption of

similar stances. Jansen's (2010) study of digital activism found that English was associated with topics related to individual specific activist issues such as arrests and harassment. Arabic, on the other hand, was found to be associated with more general topics such as unemployment, government, and poverty. Similarly, in the current study, English was found to be associated with topics on individual cases of Saudi women who were subjected to injustice.

Groups using the campaign hashtag relied greatly on a number of sociocultural ideologies and social/religious values that served to legitimise and confirm or delegitimise and resist different stances of themselves and of others. In the following sections I discuss the discursive strategies and associated themes used in assigning positive attributes to self, as well as the negative attributes to others, used to construct a particular stance and hence support their group(s). I drew on van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive framework and ideology (Hellr, 2007) the tweets was investigated in relation to social practice, social organisation and ideology (Heller, 2007, pp.1-2).

The example/illustration strategy was the most frequently used strategy found in the data among the supporters. It was used in 41% of posts, making it the most commonly used strategy across the different linguistic codes. The results showed that the example/ illustration strategy was employed in 83% of the English tweets, 13% of the Arabic tweets, and in 4% of the mixed-code tweets, as seen in Figure 29 below. In addition, the data showed the use of different resources such as text, videos, images, newspapers articles, and reports to support and justify their stances to end the guardianship system. The frequent use of the example/illustration strategy could have been due to Twitter affordances, as the platform allows its users to attach links and other resources. Moreover, the use of more than one resource to support a claim may have been used to highlight their cause from different angles and attract a greater audience. Opponents' of the campaign, on the other hand, used example/illustration less frequently, which is understandable as the proportion of tweets from the opposition group only accounted for 2% of the tweets utilising the hashtag.

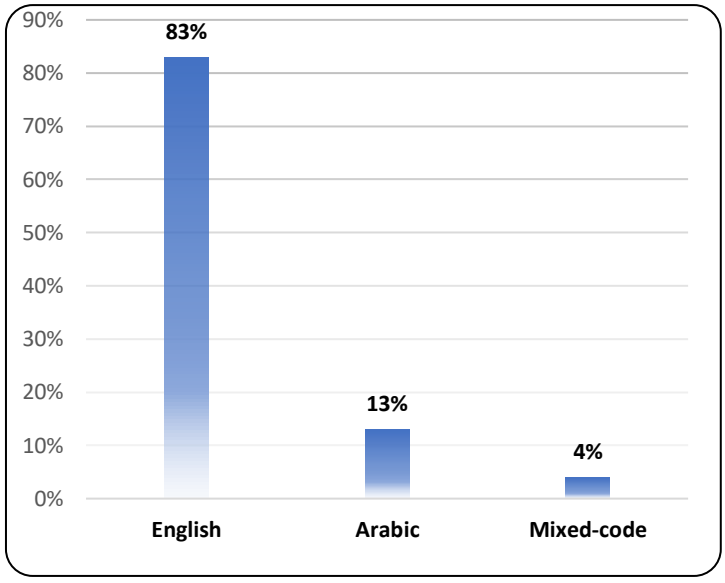


Figure 29 Distribution of the example/ illustration strategy among the supporters across the three linguistic codes (E, A, M).

The metaphor strategy was the second most frequent used strategy found in the supporters' tweets, accounting for 25% of the strategies used. However, Arabic was the most used language among the supporters utilising this strategy. Arabic tweets accounted for 52% of the metaphor strategies compared to 45% in English and 3% in mixed-code, as shown below in Figure 30. The metaphor strategy relied on different modes, i.e., text, images, videos, pictures, and other resources. Opponents of the campaign, on the other hand, employed metaphor less than the example/illustration strategies.

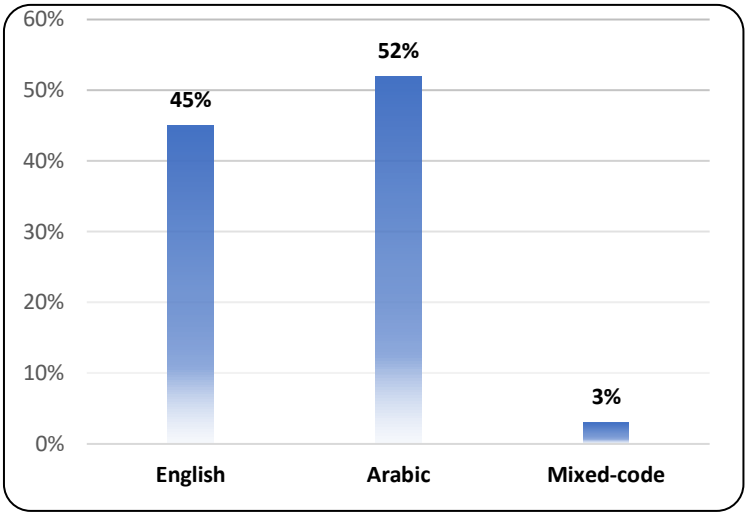


Figure 30 Distribution of the metaphor strategy among the supporters in the three linguistic codes (E, A, M).

Moreover, the data showed that the irony strategy was used frequently among supporters, accounting for 10% of the supporters' tweets. They used irony across the three linguistic codes (E, A, m), specifically in 58% of English tweets, 32% of Arabic tweets and 10% of mixed-code tweets (see Figure 31 below).

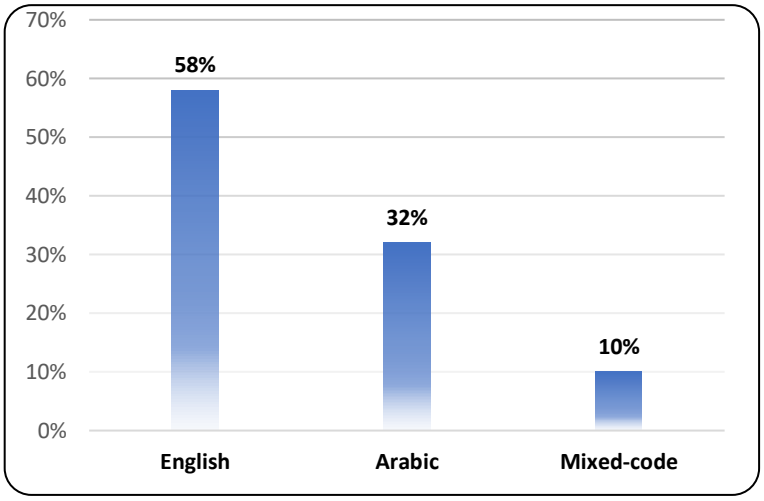


Figure 31 Distribution of the irony strategy among supporters in the three linguistic codes (E, A, M).

The analysis was applied at the two levels, i.e., the textual and the discursive levels, served to better examine the characteristics and patterns of the data, and to quantify the linguistic choices, stances and discursive strategies deployed together with the hashtag. It also helped to interpret the

results considering the sociocultural context, all of which I discuss in the following section.

5.2 *Sociocultural Analysis*

Supporters and opponents of the campaign used discursive strategies in the three linguistic codes: English, Arabic and mixed. However, the data revealed a variation in the themes associated with different languages. Hence, language choice played a significant role in constructing the stances on the guardianship system. In the following, I discuss the topics revealed in the use of the discursive strategies and how they varied in each linguistic code.

The data showed that those using the campaign hashtag on Twitter used various discursive strategies to form their stances on the guardianship system. In the constructing of these stances, the participants relied on various modes offered by social media platforms, including Twitter, such as videos, emoticons, emojis, and images. In addition, the stances constructed revealed political, religious, social, and ideological perspectives, with the language choice playing a significant role, as I explain in more detail below. Supporters and opponents put forward different arguments using different discursive strategies. In the following, I discuss the topics revealed in the tweets and how the two groups expressed these in Arabic, English, and a mix of the two languages to support their stances. The emergent topics were divided into four main groups and subtopics, as follows:

1) Women's rights: comprises discussions on different topics such as the guardianship system, driving ban, crimes of rape, murder, homelessness, and activism.
2) Government and politics: include political events, the Saudi government, political figures, governmental institutions, and education.
3) Women's covering: covers different topics such as women's covering, traditional clothes, social status, possessions, stones and gems, and nakedness.
4) Sociocultural and religious expressions and practices: involve religious practices such as prayers, supplications (*du'a:* دعاء), proverbs, poems, common phrases, and sociocultural terms and norms.

1. Women's Rights

The different stances across the groups in the current study employed women's stories, including those related to the guardianship system, driving ban, Saudi men abandoning their children, rape, murder, homelessness, and activism. Supporters of the campaign recounted many Saudi women's stories in English, Arabic or mixed code relying on various discourse strategies. For example, some supporters utilised the example/illustration strategy in English, quoting short stories, and articles from newspapers to support their stance and persuade the reader. The supporters' emphasis was on personal stories from Saudi women who were against the guardianship system. The stories of eight women were repeatedly mentioned in tweets in the form of text, videos and images. The tweets

recounted what had happened to these women and standing with them. For example, many tweets in English told the stories of women such as 'Dina Ali' and sisters 'Ashwaq and Areej' who had fled Saudi Arabia to escape their families and the injustice they suffered at the hands of their guardians. Other stories included stories of Saudi women who were against the guardianship system and were detained, but later released, such as Mariam al-Otaibi and Aziza al-Yousef.

Supporters frequently referenced stories about Saudi women in English, representing the campaign as an international human rights topic to gain the support of the international community, including international organisations, and to signal group membership with the wider multilingual context. Similarly, Almahmoud's (2015) investigation of tweets by supporters of and opponents to Saudi women driving showed they used English to highlight the driving campaign as a world-wide human rights issue, to gain the support of global institutions and to connect with the wider multilingual world. In this study, it was also found that the portrayal of the campaign as a human rights topic was reinforced through the use of Twitter affordances.

Furthermore, in their tweets, supporters represented the in-group (women who had fled Saudi Arabia and Saudi activists) as the victim, while also implicitly presenting the out-group (the Saudi government and male guardians) as the oppressor. The negative evaluation of the out-group was explicitly emphasised by repeating negative stories about the out-group throughout the data. For example, stories about Saudi men (the guardians) who had abandoned their children from non-Saudi mothers abroad were highlighted in the supporters' tweets. Opponents also focused on negatively portraying the corresponding out-group, which was the West (e.g., USA, UK), to support their stance. While supporters relied on quoting stories from the Saudi community, the opponents recounted exaggerated negative stories in the form of newspaper reports, videos and pictures from the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany. These stories highlighted cases of homeless women and their children, rape, and murder in which they implied that giving equal rights would lead directly to negative consequences such as women living on the street, which would affect family unity. In addition, opponents downplayed other countries efforts to empower women, while explicitly highlighting the protection offered by the guardianship system. To clarify, they represented the out-group (the West) as immoral, and as not setting a good example to follow, while presenting the in-group (women adhering to the guardianship system) as the morally right group. Moreover, they quoted statistics from the United Kingdom and the United States about the sexual assault and harassment of women in these countries. In short, opponents implied that a good Saudi, Muslim woman should abide by the guardianship system and not follow Western standards of equal rights.

Supporters also mentioned the stories of many activists, e.g., Manal al-Sharif and Loujain al-Hathloul who, at the time, were calling for women to have the right to drive and relating this issue back to the guardianship system. In their tweets related to the driving ban, supporters portrayed in-group members, such as activists, as heroes fighting for their rights, while at the same time implicitly

portraying the out-group (the government) as the oppressor. The linking of other topics related to women's issues in Saudi Arabia with the hashtag might have done to attract more supporters and to bond with other groups, with the aim of increasing Saudi women's rights.

The positive consequences of driving were mentioned in the form of stories about women who had to drive in emergency situations, for example, to save someone's life. Other stories highlighted the tragic consequences of not allowing women to travel, such as in the case of one woman who lost her child as she was not able to travel to a hospital abroad. Other stories of women who had launched campaigns in schools were also repeated to emphasise that the struggle was continuous and change was needed. In short, these stories all served to underscore the positive sides of the in-group and/or highlight the negative sides of the other group. Opponents, on the other hand, in their justification of the ban, had raised concerns of women mixing with men, leading to immorality.

The data also showed the role of language choice in constructing the supporters' stance. In constructing their stance, supporters used English in the stories related to the driving ban, focusing on the high expenses Saudi women had to pay for transportation services (e.g., Uber), as they were not allowed to drive. English was frequently selected, as it had the potential to reach a broader audience, since Uber is based in the United States and operates in many countries. Supporters quoted Uber's Twitter account, which was in English, to increase the visibility of their tweet, and thus stand a better chance of the tweet being liked, retweeted and responded to by the many Twitter users sharing the same concerns. In addition, it was hoped that the use of a well-known name (Uber) would enhance the credibility of their stance, as they could reference official information from its original source.

Supporters' tweets in Arabic, on the other hand, focused more on using the mockery strategy, with supporters mocking Uber for its exploitation of Saudi women's suffering in their advertisements. The use of Arabic to mock Uber was used to align with others who supported the ending of the guardianship system. Similarly, in their study of #jesuisCharlie, De Cock and Pedraza (2018) showed that mocking could be used to disalign with specific stances and express solidarity with others in the hashtags. In many cases, mockery can be culturally specific, revealing shared experience and ideologies (Raisborough and Adams, 2008). Thus, this could be the reason tweets of this tone were in Arabic, as it was more authentic in creating a supporting stance and inviting others who shared the same language to adopt the same stance.

Similarly, supporters also used irony in English when sharing their views on the driving ban. The supporters negatively evaluated religious preachers as an out-group and mocked their justification for banning women from driving to protect and honour women who should be treated like princesses and queens. The English tweets criticised religious preachers and their speeches that warned of the consequences Saudi woman and society would face if driving was allowed. Below, I provide some examples:

Women pay for drivers; men own cars, can sell them to make up for the costs/make a profit. Saudi women are privileged.

If allowed to drive, a woman will come home late and drunk.

Drunk… in a country that prohibits alcohol. Tells us a lot about this ex-con "preacher".

Moreover, supporters frequently used pictures, along with text, to mock the out-groups. For example, they mocked the *Shura* recommendation for Saudi woman to have a driving licence, despite the fact she was not allowed to drive, as seen in Figure 32 below.

Figure 32 Example of the use of the mockery (text + visuals) strategy in Arabic by supporters of the campaign to lift the ban on women driving.

Translation 1: The Shura Council does not know what to do

Translation 2: The Shura members demand that women are granted a licence even if they are not allowed to drive.

Figure 32 above presents the *Shura* recommendation for women to drive as pointless, because women were not allowed to drive at the time, likening this recommendation to a child playing a videogame with the cable disconnected. Moreover, the negative evaluation of the out-group (the *Shura)* was emphasised in other tweets, in which supporters mocked their role in empowering Saudi woman. For example, supporters described the recommendation above as being the 'season's joke' *(nouktat almawsem: نكتة الموسم),* 'Our *Shura* is funny' *(majlis al Shura haqana khafif dam: مجلس الشورى حقنا خفيف دم)* in reference to the discussion of issuing women's driving licenses although the driving ban was still in effect.

Cultural and religious ideologies were reflected in the supporters' tweets to highlight the negative side of other groups. For example, the use of expressions such as 'one of my father's songbirds, let out of its cage' was used to talk about women's demands to drive in Saudi Arabia before it finally was allowed in 2017. They used the term 'father's songbirds' to emphasise that males had power over women in Saudi Arabia through their exploitation of the guardianship system. Women

were represented as weak and in need of protection, while men were represented as protectors and caretakers responsible for providing for women and protecting as if they were birds in a cage. This view reflects the traditional stance on women in Saudi Arabia, in which men are perceived as the protector and the caretaker of women. This is deeply rooted in Saudi culture, with many religious and literary texts portraying men as heroes, honourable, wise figures, or as warriors, while women are often associated with emotions, virtue, and beauty. This comparison with a songbird was highlighted in the use of different resources, along with text, such as pictures and drawings.

It is also noted that supporters of the campaign, whether writing in English or Arabic, integrated other strategies. For example, they included women's real full names (their first name and family/ tribe name), in addition to their personal photos, when telling the stories of those Saudi women who had fled the country or called for women's rights in Saudi Arabia. The use of the real full names of Saudi women in telling the stories highlighted that these women were real, causing more supporters to believe that their cases were genuine and that change was needed. This also implied that they were against the 'assumed protection' of women, who are supposed to cover their bodies and faces, when sharing their real names and pictures. The use of real names was frequently used together with positive words and phrases such as 'good for you', 'great', 'fighter', 'inspiring', thus framing the Saudi women who called for their rights as heroes fighting a continuous struggle.

In the Arabic tweets, however, it was observed that the supporters when telling stories of Saudi women in prisons used nicknames to refer to those women. The use of nicknames and no identifying pictures is likely used to maintain their privacy and protect themselves from any negative consequences. The purpose of sharing local stories in tweets in Arabic tweet might have been to attract a wider audience from Saudi society, focusing their attention on this "local matter". The supporters when telling those stories in Arabic used phrases showing appreciation for the activists and Saudi women which included words and phrases such as strong female (*qawaia:* قوية), unbreakable (*la takseraha:* لا تكسرها), she is still (*ma zalat:* ما زالت). In her study of tweets on the debate around women's right to drive, Alharbi (2016) had similar findings, with Saudi female activists also assigned positive attributes to emphasise their 'ingroup' identity.

Supporters of the campaign utilised different phrases to both explicitly and implicitly highlight the negative side of other groups, namely the government, religious authorities, families, and male guardians. For example, they used words and phrases in English like 'fleeing', 'slavery- like conditions', 'control', 'flee', 'arrest', 'caught', 'threat', 'forcibly returned', 'escape', 'isolate', criminals', 'humiliation', and 'torture' among many others to portray Saudi Arabia as a 'giant prison' and 'responsible for misogyny'. In addition, the out-group was represented as an obstacle preventing women from living, as the 'Saudi male guardianship is taking lives'.

Similarly, tweets in standard and colloquial Arabic relied on word choice to express their stances against the guardianship system. For example, overpower *(tasalut:* تسلُّط*),* female prisoners

(sajeenat: سجينات), harm *(atha: أذى)*, victim *(dh'ahiah: ضحية),* unfair *(dh'alim: ظالم)*, crime *(jareema: جريمة)* were used to describe Saudi women, emphasising their position as the victims. The use of Saudi dialect was used less frequently among the supporters, with just a few exceptions such as in the use of the word *'تتمرمط'* (tetmarmat) meaning suffer greatly. The frequent use of standard Arabic in the data could be attributed to the desire to attract a wider audience, that is, to draw the attention of those who understood standard Arabic but not necessarily the local Saudi dialect. Moreover, the language of the media (TV, radio, newspapers, social media) in Saudi Arabia is in standard Arabic. Educational and official organisations, and religious communications such as the Friday prayers often use standard Arabic. For these reasons, standard Arabic is more accepted and trusted. Furthermore, Bassiouney (2012) asserted that the use of standard Arabic can invoke religious, historical, and national meanings. Hence, the use of Standard Arabic seen in this study might have given more credibility to the supporting stances.

In addition, supporters of the campaign used imperatives in English such as 'save', 'help', 'rescue', and 'please' to call for change and end the guardianship system. Similarly, in the Arabic tweets, they used imperatives such as 'let the battered women out of prison' *(akhrejoo almoa'nafat min alsejen: اخرجوا المعنّفات من السجن)*. Previous studies have suggested that Twitter users use imperatives in their tweets to indicate the socioeconomic hierarchies that exist in the 'offline' context (e.g., Page, 2012). However, in this study, supporters mainly used imperatives when negatively evaluating the out-group as the oppressor and the one with the power while highlighting the negative situation of Saudi women under the guardianship system. Furthermore, tweets using mixed-code repeated the same stories found in the English and the Arabic tweets. Also, some of these tweets involved comments in one language (English or Arabic) that was the opposite used in the tweet, report, video, or image being commented on.

Those using the hashtag shared various stories combined with Twitter affordances such as resources by attaching YouTube links, videos, pictures, drawings, as well as links to newspapers articles and/or reports from different media resources. It was observed that Arabic tweets tended to use articles from Saudi national newspapers like *Okaz (عكاظ)* and quotes from Saudi journalists, while tweets in English often included reports from non-Saudi newspapers such as Gulf News[45]. Supporters shared and referenced articles found in *Okaz* to support their stance-taking, as *Okaz* is a trusted, well-established newspaper known for being patriotic in Saudi Arabia. They quoted articles from *Okaz* to sway public opinion and to address the powerholders, while also highlighting that their issue was authentic. Non-Saudi newspapers in English, on the other hand, tended to be used to address a larger scale audience. For example, in the case of Dina Ali, who attempted to escape guardianship laws and seek asylum in Australia but was forcibly returned to Saudi Arabia, supporters used rhetorical questions and eye-catching titles in English such as 'Where is Dina?', 'Any news?', 'Flying without a

[45] Gulf News is a daily English language newspaper published in the United Arab Emirates.

man', and 'the mysterious case of Dina Ali' to attract the audience to their cause, implying that Saudi Arabia was responsible for her disappearance. The tweets in Arabic, on the other hand, regularly used questions to address different people such as lawyers, asking them to take responsibility for calling for women rights in Saudi Arabia. Similar results were found among opponents, who used non-Saudi newspapers in their stance-taking.

In addition, supporters also used other resources, along with newspapers available on Twitter, such as popular literary works from different parts of the world to support their stance-taking. For example, English tweets compared the guardianship system to The Handmaid's Tale[46] to help westerners visualise what Saudi women were going through. The data showed a negative representation of women's status in Saudi Arabia in the English tweets by quoting different characters and lines from the series and the book to signify what they called the 'horrific reality' of Saudi women represented in fiction. They emphasised this image using 'regime' to describe and mock the Saudi government, referring to the new reformations as 'crumbs' to emphasise that these reformations amounted to nothing and more still needed to be done to reform the guardianship system and women's rights. The new reformations were also mocked in tweets using mixed-code commenting in Arabic on pictures displaying the Saudi government reforms in English.

In the Arabic tweets, the use of more local resources was noticed. For example, *Selfie,* which is one of the most popular comedies shows that spotlights local issues and daily accounts of the Saudi society was repeatedly quoted. In particular, one of the most referenced episodes of this series titled *I am an adult (ana rashida: أنا راشدة)* was often quoted in the tweets. The show is about the struggle of a Saudi girl who wants to pursue her higher studies abroad yet faces restrictions from her brother as her male guardian after the death of her father. The references to more local stories and shows among the supporters in Arabic to make their stances more legitimate is seen throughout the tweets linked to the hashtag. In addition, the tweets using mixed-code relied on clips from movies and series to highlight the women's situation at the time.

By telling stories, the supporters relied on other strategies, including emotional and sentimental appeals, in which different emotions such as fear, sadness, relief, pride, shame, hope, anger were invoked. The supporters, in their stance-taking, emphasised their in-group membership, referring to themselves as one group, and bonded around their shared stance. For example, the terms 'sisters' and 'fellow' were seen in reference to other supporters in the English tweets. Similarly, Arabic tweets showed the frequent use of the plural form among those taking a supportive stance, for example, 'all of us are Mariam' *(kulana Mariam: كلنا مريم),* 'our union is strength' *(ittihaduna quwa: اتحادنا قوة),* 'Mariam is in our hearts' *(Mariam fee quloubana: مريم في قلوبنا),* 'the Saudi woman's cause is my cause' *(qadhiat almara'a alsaudia is qadhaity: قضية المرأة السعودية قضيتي).* Similar results were found

[46] The Handmaid's Tale is a distressing novel by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood, published in 1985, that represents a patriarchal system in which women struggle under restricted laws and systems.

in the use of other strategies, such as the metaphor strategy, which also employed the plural form in their tweets.

Moreover, in telling the stories, supporters used emotional adjectives in English (e.g., heart-breaking, dragged, mouth taped shut, legs and arms bound, horrific, horrible) to describe what had happened to those women. The use of emotional, negative adjectives can be used to create empathy and help to elicit support from the audience. In addition, the use of English in this case enhanced the persuasive power of the discourse, as it encouraged international organisations to take a supportive stance of reforming the guardianship system. The use of adjectives in Arabic was less frequent, however, 'battered women' *(moa'nafat: معنّفات)* was used to describe violence women had suffered at the hands of men. The use of adjectives in creating various stances has been proven in previous studies (e.g., Biber et al., 1999; Luzon, 2012). Adjectives can have an effect in evaluating the in-group and out-group either positively or negatively. While Chiluwa and Ifukors (2015) revealed that emotional adjectives were used to negatively portray the government, the current study showed that the use of adjectives varied across different linguistic codes. Moreover, the supporters utilised adjectives not only to explicitly represent the in-group as the victim, but also to explicitly represent the out-group as the criminal.

The tweets in mixed-code relied more on emoticons (e.g., broken heart) and pictures to express their supportive stance. Previous studies have suggested that tweets using emoticons might reveal social variations in users like gender and age. For example, in Schnoebeln's (2012) study the use of nose emoticons and misspellings was associated with younger users. However, in this study, the use of emoticons was less frequent than other resources such as text, images, and videos. Most of the emoticons used were those expressing sadness and crying to express how they felt about the guardianship system.

2. Government/ Politics

The stances groups argued about political and governmental topics such as political events, political figures, governmental institutions, the Saudi government, and the education system. They implemented various discourse strategies such as addressing political figures directly. To do so, they exploited some of Twitter features such as 'Mention'. For example, supporters mentioned Twitter accounts of different international organisations (e.g., Human Rights Watch). Moreover, many participants using the hashtag addressed English-speaking political figures (e.g., Donald Trump and Ivanka Trump) during their visit to Saudi Arabia. These politicians were always mentioned in conjunction with stories about women's distressing experiences as a result of the guardianship system, highlighting the negative side of the out-groups. Supporters also used other discursive strategies in English such as asking rhetorical questions. For example, they directed rhetorical questions to English speaking political figures (e.g. Donald Trump), foreign organisations (e.g. the UN) and journalists, including questions such as 'where's Saudi's first lady?'. This question was asked to subtly highlight the

gender injustice in Saudi Arabia, particularly women's representation in the public sphere. The underrepresentation of Saudi women at different political events can be attributed to sociocultural norms that have long restricted women's visibility in public spheres. Traditionally, strict and inaccurate interpretations of religious texts have contributed to limiting women's roles outside the house. However, the Saudi government has recently been working towards the greater inclusion of Saudi women in the public domain (for more details refer back to Chapter 1, section 1.3)

In addition, addressing political figures using the campaign hashtag is frequently accompanied by the photographs of political figures along with the tweet to increase the visibility of the tweet and, hence spread their cause to a larger audience. They employed these features and other such as 'Quote' to attract and encourage the audience to adopt a similar stance, namely, to end the guardianship system. Supporters of the hashtag frequently used English to address the audience that were not necessarily known to them, which is a finding in line with previous studies (e.g., Barton and Lee, 2013; Tagg and Seargeant, 2014). In this study, it was found that participants chose English to achieve their goals, targeting a particular audience and excluding others at the same time. They used English to express their stance and highlight negative aspects of the out-group to a potentially large-scale audience. In short, attracting a global audience and calling on different organisations to adopt their stance and sympathise with their cause, that is, the injustice Saudi women were facing, played a significant role in language choice in this study.

In the Arabic tweets, however, the supporters used Arabic to address Saudi political figures such as the King and the Foreign Affairs Minister to implicitly ask them to end the guardianship system. In so doing, they used various expressions and phrases such as 'examples of our guardians' *(a'yanat min awlia'a omourana: عينات من أولياء أمورنا)* to comment on the negative stories of Saudi men who had been involved in crimes of rape and violence. They portrayed the Saudi man (the guardian) as a criminal to highlight that men can exploit the guardianship system to perpetrate violence against women, who were indirectly portrayed as the victim.

Previous studies have also shown that audience is a key factor that plays a significant role in language choice online (Seargeant, Tag and Ngampramuan, 2012; Tag and Ngampramuan, 2012; Barton and Lee, 2013; Page, 2014; Lee, 2016). Moreover, online protests can encourage an audience to be active whilst also influencing the shaping of opinions (Chiluwa and ifukor, 2015; Jimenez-Sanchez, Fraile and Lobera, 2022). Powell and Darmoni (2012) found that participants in their study used multiple languages in their tweets on the Tunisian revolution to address a different audience and to connect groups together. Similarly, Jansen's (2010) study of digital activism in the Middle East revealed that the use of English is often employed to attract greater world attention to particular issues.

Other political events were also linked to the hashtag to emphasise the negative aspects of

the other groups and to support their stance on ending the guardianship system. For example, during the UN commission, many tweets appeared depicting male domination of women in Saudi Arabia (as seen in Figure 33 below). At the same time, by showing a woman as a chair, the cartoon shows men's reliance on woman and alludes to how they are regarded as the pillars of the house, which are hidden and absent from the public sphere. Furthermore, women are considered the central pillars of the family, despite the fact Saudi Arabia is a patriarchal society and men have authority over women (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Moreover, supporters used English to criticise some European ministers who had elected Saudi Arabia to the UN's women's rights commission. They accused those politicians of corruption and of staying silent on the subject of Saudi women's rights, in order to protect their economic interests. Other governmental figures were criticised such as Ivanka Trump, who was mocked by supporters when she praised the recent acts to empower women in Saudi Arabia. They quoted Ivanka Trump's tweet in which she praised Saudi women for their accomplishments, challenges, and vision for the future and commented that Saudi women's vision for the future was not to be enslaved. The tweets used the metaphor strategy by representing the Saudi woman (in-group) as a 'slave' and reinforced the hashtag's message (Stop Enslaving Saudi Woman).

In addition to criticising other countries and politicians who showed their support for Saudi Arabia, supporters of the hashtag also criticised the Saudi government. For example, they used English to mock the efforts to empower women by the Saudi government. The Saudi government was mocked when it started to loosen the guardianship restrictions on women in 2017. One of the comments was:

'So they can go to a doctor without permission, [yet] Saudi women can't drive, can't travel and many are still in jail.'

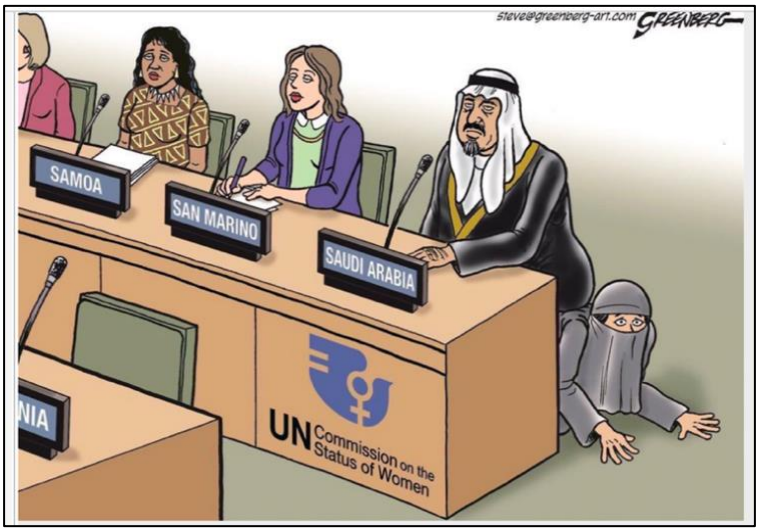


Figure 33 Example of the use of the metaphor (visuals) strategy in English used by supporters.

In the English tweets, the negative evaluation of the Saudi government was emphasised using other discursive strategies such as word choice. Many words frequently associated with the Saudi

government included ‘trapped’, ‘not safe’, ‘threat’, ‘escape’, and ‘life sentence’, and was likened to a prison. The tweets also used other words such as ‘freedom’ and ‘free’, to enhance the meaning of ‘enslaved’ and ‘slavery’. In addition, Saudi women were associated with being ‘enslaved’, ‘slavery’, and ‘chained’, frequently describing the guardianship system as a radical system to highlight the negative characteristics of the other groups. Tweets using mixed-code showed the frequent use of images representing freedom such as wings and birds. Hence, positive attributions were used to positively represent Saudi women as heroines fighting for their freedom.

On the other hand, the tweets in Arabic praised and encouraged the government’s reformations of women’s rights in Saudi Arabia. However, in multiple tweets, the fact the issue was complex and not only related to the laws but also to families and tribes were highlighted. For example, many tweets compared the stories of successful Saudi women who had the support of their family to other stories of Saudi women who did not have the same privilege. The complexity of the guardianship system is partially due to the fact that it does not have any legal grounding, however, many women are not aware of that, as it was still implemented and accepted as a social convention in many organisations and institutions (Al-Sudairy, 2017, p.124). The stories were about successful Saudi women's achievements in various fields such as education and science. It is noted that these stories about Saudi women’s achievements were widely distributed across ordinary Twitter accounts and across official media accounts. This strategy was employed to attribute positive values and not only represent Saudi woman as successful, smart, and powerful, but also to highlight that the authorities in Saudi Arabia supported women’s rights. This was observed in the hashtag, as these achievements were frequently linked to the efforts of the Saudi Arabia’ government, as well as to family/tribe support. Hence, in this case, these supporters evaluated the out-group (the government) positively, unlike supporters tweeting in English tweets, who evaluated the government negatively.

Similarly, supporters creatively exploited Twitter affordances to convey the intended meanings and stances, although that was not necessarily explicitly stated. For example, they used the irony strategy to mock the government and the reformations related to Saudi women or any other political or economic developments in Saudi Arabia. Previous studies have suggested that irony can be used in social networks to promote social interactions and evoke humour (Wilson and Sperber, 1992), and criticism and diminishing (Brown and Levinson, 1987) to attract readers’ attention (Hao and Veale, 2009). Furthermore, social media users have been shown to employ figurative language devices, including sarcasm and irony, to achieve various communication aims (Lai, Hernández, Patti and Rosso, 2017). In their study of #jesuisCharlie, De Cock and Pedraza (2018) showed that mocking was used to disalign with specific stances and express solidarity with others using the same hashtag.

In this study, the tweets in English relied on strategies such as political satire to mock the Saudi government when asking them to end the guardianship system. For example, they explicitly but sarcastically praised and encouraged the Saudi government with expressions such as ‘good job’,

'congrats', to highlight that they did not believe the government was doing enough for women's rights. This contradicts the results obtained from other strategies, such as the example/ illustration and metaphor strategies, as the use of praising phrases was typically associated with positively representing the Saudi woman positively. However, in their use of irony, supporters used praising phrases to negatively represent the Saudi government.

In the Arabic tweets, supporters expressed their contempt with the government and call for an end to the guardianship system. For example, they used expressions such as 'cursed nationality' *(jinsia mala'ouna: جنسية ملعونة)* to refer to the Saudi nationality. The use of *mala'ouna* is rooted in a religious term meaning being damned from Allah's mercy. This expression was used to indicate their belief that Saudi women are deprived from mercy, and this is stressed with their use of the adjective 'miserable' (*ba'esa: بائسة)* after *mala'ouna.* The use of cultural words in Arabic evokes shared religious, national, and historical meanings with others and signals group membership with the Saudi community (Bassiouney, 2012).

Moreover, the Arabic tweets shed some light on the change in stances of some public figures and religious scholars to align with the views of political figures. The 'elite' and 'powerful' groups in society have power and control to influence public opinion and other matters (van Dijk, 2006). In the current study, some users supported reforming the guardianship system to align with the government after a Royal Decree was issued in this regard. That is, in 2017, King Salman issued a Royal Decree to announce that women in Saudi Arabia would no longer need a male guardian permission to access public services in different domains. These results are in line with what van Dijk (2008) argued, which is that context is a crucial element, as it plays a role in understanding the meanings of language use and in stance-taking.

The findings, as shown above, suggest that the supporting groups bonded around ending the guardianship system and disaligning with the 'elite' groups such as the government. Linguistic code played a significant role in taking a stance and aligning/disaligning with different groups. In the English tweets, the supporting groups dis-aligned with the Saudi government, as they highlighted the government negatively. The Arabic tweets, on the other hand, highlighted the government positively and it was noticed that the usernames of these accounts suggested that they were Saudi. The allegiance to the Saudi government might be due to several factors. One factor is that many Saudi citizens live in relatively comfortable economic conditions. Another factor could be related to the deep historical and religious significance of Saudi Arabia and the recognition of the King as the Custodian of the two Holy mosques in Makkah and Al-Madinah. The loyalty of Saudis to the country and to the King is reinforced by the education system and the curriculum has been designed to strengthen the social, national, and religious values of Saudi citizens and society.

Although many school subjects focus on reinforcing national identity among the students, one of the findings of the current study is that supporters criticised the education system for promoting

violence against women. That is, many tweets in both Arabic and English linked violence against women in Saudi Arabia to the education system, as seen in Figure 34 below.

Figure 34 Example of the use of the example/illustration (text + visuals) strategy in Arabic shared by supporters.

Translation 1: #Education_curriculum_insult_women it is normal to find an increase in the rate of violence against women as long as our curriculum urges them to beat and discipline women.

Translation 2: Violence against women in Saudi Arabia has risen to 87%, specialists stress the need to issue a right of protection to reduce these cases.

Translation 3: Two reports of domestic violence every minute

Dammam: Zeina Ali

At a rate of two reports per minute, the Domestic Violence Reporting Centre of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development receives about 630 reports daily, half of which are new reports. "Al Watan" learned that more than 80% of the reporters were women, while reports received by children and teenagers constituted about 15%. Details p. 27

1890 reports in 3 days

916 new cases of violence

374 consultation requests

367 service inquiries

The role of education in promoting gender inequality through the curriculum has been proven in the literature across the world in different contexts (e.g., Erlman, 2015; Salm, Mukhlid and Tokhi, 2020). The inequality between males and females can be contributed to the overrepresentation of men compared to women in textbooks. For example, only 30% of images in chemistry books show females, which is a smaller presence than in other subjects such as math and engineering according to a study conducted by Becker and Nilsson (2021). In Saudi Arabia, Sulaimani (2017) examined international EFL textbooks, and the results showed that women were absent from half of the sections compared to men. Moreover, Dakhiel and Ahmed (2022) suggested that the curricula in Saudi Arabia need to be re-evaluated and reviewed regarding woman to meet the Vision 2030 goal to empower

Saudi citizens. However, there have been some updates in the curricula design in Saudi Arabia such as the introduction of new subjects like music and reducing the amount of time dedicated to other subjects such as religious courses in an effort to adapt to evolving standards and needs.

Supporters used other discursive strategies such as the use of imperatives in Arabic to encourage women to fight, speak up and take advantage of the socioeconomic changes in Saudi Arabia. Their tweets emphasised that education and awareness should end the guardianship system and any other form of violation against women. For example, they highlighted the fact that the literacy rate for Saudi women is more than 96% according to UNESCO in 2020. The topic of curriculum and education, as seen in the example/ illustration strategy, was also employed in the supporters' use of irony. While the focus of the example/ illustration strategy was on the curriculum in general, in their use of irony, the supporters focused more on religious studies in schools. They mentioned the subject of religious studies in their tweets to negatively portray Saudi Arabia (out-group) as being the most religious yet the most corrupt. The following is an example:

أكثر الشعوب تدرس مواد دينية وأكثر الدول فيها مساجد

ورغم هذا فيها أقذر بشر على وجه الأرض

Most people who study religious studies and have the largest number of mosques,

despite this, they are the dirtiest human beings on Earth.

Using various discursive strategies, supporters raised other topics related to the Saudi government in their stance-taking towards the guardianship system. For example, the data revealed the use of the example/ illustration strategy in the form of pictures and illustrations to represent the Saudi government negatively as an out group in the study. Supporters used English when evaluating some governmental institutions, to which they assigned negative attributes. Saudi Airlines, for instance, was criticised for returning 'Dina Ali' to Riyadh while she was on her way to seek asylum in Australia. To do so, supporters posted images of the Saudi Airlines logo with a death symbol, as shown in Figure 35 below. The use of the death symbol supports the negative representation of the other groups who were against abolishing the guardianship system, as discussed earlier in the previous sections. For example, words and phrases such as 'taking lives', 'killing', 'death' were used, similar to 'Saudi male guardianship is taking lives' found earlier in the data.

Figure 35 Example of the use of the example/illustration (text + visuals) strategy in English by supporters.

Saudi Airlines was also mocked by supporters in Arabic. For example, the supporters commented on a Saudi Airlines announcement seeking Saudi females to train and hire in the following way:

لا طارت ولا ساقت هذا تخدير للوضع والا كيف كابتن طيار ويطلب منها تصريح للسفر

She neither flew nor drove. This is to numb the situation. Otherwise, how could a pilot ask her for permission to travel?

They mocked the fact that Saudi Airlines intended to train and hire Saudi females, since Saudi women were not allowed to travel abroad without a male's permission, making it impossible to work for an airline. In addition, the supporters repeatedly mocked such religious teachings related to travel without mahram, or permission, in other tweets. Some examples are given below.

يقولون الدين حرم السفر بدون محرم ونحن نسافر الآف الكيلومترات داخل البلد بدون محرم

They say religion prohibited travelling without mahram yet we (women) travel thousands of kilometres inside the country without mahram

يقولون المحرم واجب في السفر، ولكن اذا وافق ولي أمرك اصبح جائز السفر بدون محرم (تناقض)

They say mahram is obligatory when travelling but it is permissible without mahram if your guardian approves it (contradiction).

The two previous examples reflect the contradiction and confusion between religious teachings and social conventions regarding women's ability to travel. The use of religion is a powerful tool used to influence Saudi society. Religion is highly valued, as mentioned earlier when discussing other strategies employed such as metaphor. Hence, the use of religion was also used to attract a greater audience to align with their adopted stance on resisting the guardianship system. It must be noted that religious teachings and practices in Saudi Arabia are not restricted to mosques or/and

schools but are pervasive in the social norms and behaviours in everyday life, as explained earlier in Chapter 2. For this reason, the guardianship system prevailed in the Saudi community, as it was encouraged and rooted in almost every aspect of people's lives.

3. Women's Covering

The data showed that Twitter users discussed topics related to culture and religion such as women's covering using the metaphor strategy, for example, by comparing Saudi women to different items such as jewels, which is common in Arabic. Indeed, the use of metaphors in Arabic is not uncommon and it is employed in everyday speech and in religious texts such as the *Holy* Quran and teachings of Prophet Muhmmed (PBUH). Metaphor, however, has a significance in any language, in thought and action (Lakoff and Johnson, 2008). Metaphors play an important role in shaping and realising our everyday realities, as they contain sociocultural aspects. Furthermore, they embody social norms, beliefs, and experiences, and they can be used as a powerful tool in shaping and defining human behaviours (Derrida 1982).

Many tweets referred to Saudi women as 'pearls', reflecting sociocultural ideology. Al-Harby (2017), among others, revealed that the reason Saudi women are often referred to as pearls or veiled pearls *(durrah or durrah masouna: درّة أو درّة مصونة)* is to emphasise the notion that they are precious, vulnerable and should be covered, preserved and protected from any damage or danger. It is not uncommon for women in Saudi Arabia to view themselves as gems and jewels to imply that they are precious and need protection (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Al-Sudairy, 2017). Moreover, the use of gems to signify a woman can imply the chastity and piety expected from a Saudi woman. This social view of Saudi women as something precious such as 'pearls' has been used to encourage women covering themselves, gender segregation, and domesticity to prevent any potential harm (Al-Harby, 2017).

This view is valued by some men and women, as it maintains the male's power in being a protector and provider and frees women from the "burden of sharing household expenses" (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p.23). Comfortable economic conditions and the oil wealth has also contributed to many Saudis embracing the perception that a household can entirely depend on the man as a provider. Moreover, religious teachings have encouraged men to play the role of being the sole provider for the household. *Qiwama:قوامة* is one controversial concept that has been related to women. It refers to the man's responsibility to protect, maintain, control and take care of women (Al Fassi, 2020, p.229). The concept of *Qiwama:قوامة* has been used to legitimise men's control over women through the guardianship system, as the terms of *Qiwama:قوامة* and *Wilaya*: *ولاية* have long been associated. An example of this from the data is provided below in Figure 36.

Figure 36 Example of the use of Qiwama by supporters

Translation 1: [Verse from the Holy Quran] (Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them superior to the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means). If the guardianship is because they spend: does the guardianship transfer to the women if they spend?

Translation 2: We agreed when we got married that the driver's and maid's, and the rent is on you and, the rest, God help me with it.

Al-Rasheed (2013) described how a Saudi woman having a job is considered "a luxury" that is not essential "despite the fact that many women today do contribute their wages to support their families" (ibid, p.24). The view of a Saudi woman's job as redundant was emphasised in the current data, as Saudi women were often associated with a higher social status. For example, Twitter users described Saudi women as 'queens' and 'princesses' who should not work and should be served by men. This perception has played a role in limiting women's involvement in economic and political activities outside the house (Al-Harby, 2017). The use of these cultural concepts in Arabic also played a role, as shown in the data, in reinforcing the guardianship system by justifying it under the umbrella of protection, that is, it being men's responsibility to take care of women and treat them like queens, princesses, and pearls. Supporters, then, assigned explicit positive attributes to Saudi woman, using words such as queen, princess, pearls to implicitly and negatively evaluate male guardians as an out-group.

The concept of covering connotated with 'durrah' is also expressed explicitly in many tweets to highlight the women's covering as an oppressing act of manipulation to erase the woman's identity and preventing her from participating in different activities outside the house as she should be under the 'man's wing' as expressed in the tweets to protect her. 'Durrah' has been associated with various characteristics that has been shifting according to the sociocultural context. The use of 'durrah' during

Al-Sahwa era (for more details see chapter 2) was more associated with women who are religiously committed, fully covered, and obeying their husbands. Religious, media and school discourse then focused on reinforcing this image of what Saudi woman should be. It is noticed in the data, however, that this stereotyping of Saudi woman as 'durrah' is changing as 'durrah' is used to mock the restrictions and the guardianship system as seen in the tweet below (figure 37).

Figure 37 Example of the use of the metaphor (text + visuals) strategy in Arabic by supporters.

Translation 1: #Saudiwomen_asking_to_end_theguardianship318

How to be durrah?

Translation 2: Women must accept polygamy. This is Allah's law and men need polygamy to be sexually comfortable.

Translation 3: She puts up with her husband even if he beats her, her obedience will ensure she gets into heaven.

Translation 4: Women are the majority of Hell-fire dwellers as they are ungrateful to their husbands.

Translation 5: I will advise them to wear a black veil, [black] like the night, and stay at home.

Translation 6: Oh pearls (durr)

Translation 7: Men are better than women and I will recommend women submit to men so they can go to heaven.

In the example above, Twitter user asks a rhetorical question: how to be a 'durrah'? addressing females in Arabic *(kaif takuneena durrah: كيف تكونين درّه)* and attaching a cartoon explaining how to be a 'durrah'. The women in the cartoon are fully covered in black with their guidance such as obeying their husbands and considering men as superiors expressed in coloured bubbles around them. The cartoon captures several narratives about Saudi woman that circulated in Saudi society during *Al-*

Sahwa through education, religious speeches, and in the media. For example,

عن ابن عباس، قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم "أُريتُ النار فإذا أكثر أهلها النساء يكفرْنَ". قِيلَ أَيكفُرنَ بالله قال "يكفُرن العشير، ويكفُرن الإحسان".

Ibn 'Abbas narrated that Prophet Muhammed peace be upon him said: *"I was shown Hellfire, and the majority of its dwellers were women who were ungrateful" and "they are ungrateful to their husbands and are ungrateful for the favours and the good done to them."*

Another narrative about Saudi woman that is deeply rooted in Saudi culture is related to polygamy, specifically the belief that a 'durrah' should accept it, as it is the will of God. This belief continues to be encouraged by some religious scholars, who support the literal interpretations of several religious texts on polygamy. Other scholars relying on alternative interpretations of the same religious texts, however, have argued that this practice is a violation of women's rights (Rahayu, 2020).

The use of pearls *(durrah: درة)* appeared in other tweets in Arabic for the purpose of mocking the guardianship system, as seen in the examples below:

الدرة المعارضة ترا عادي تقدرين تجلسين ع ولاية ذكر إذا سقطت الولاية عن الحرات

Opposed durrah: you can keep the male's guardian if the guardianship is lifted for free women

عزيزتي الدرة عبايتك وطلعتك وبقائك في البيت أشياء يحددها ولي امرك وليس انت والدليل مهزلة العقل السعودي

Dear durrah, your abaya and staying at home are things decided by your guardian, not you, and this is proved by the farce of the Saudi mind.

The tweets in Arabic referred to expensive gems such as 'durrah' in their stance-taking. However, the English tweets explicitly described Saudi women under the guardianship system as the 'cheapest stones'. The use of this analogy between Saudi women and precious stones and gems in English and Arabic emphasised the sociocultural view of women as possessions under the guardianship system. Twitter users of the hashtag highlighted this view with their word choice by describing the guardianship system as a system for selling Saudi women. In addition, they described Saudi woman as 'property' and a 'possession', 'a piece of baggage' and/or 'chattel' sold by men to other men. Although Saudi women was portrayed negatively in these examples, the supporters aimed to represent the out-group (male guardians) as the oppressor and master who these women belonged to.

The use of the traditional covering *(abaya)* by Saudi women was also compared to a woman being 'wrapped in a sheet', or the garment being simply comparable to a 'black blanket' or 'tent'. By focusing on this, they shed light on the controversial topic of women's covering in Islam. The data revealed that the supporters' stances on women's covering in Saudi Arabia are against the extreme views of some religious scholars, who say that a woman should be completely covered and consider woman as *'awrah: عورة,* which is an Islamic term to refer to the intimate parts of a human body. Many

sociocultural terms that have long been associated with Saudi/Muslim woman's covering appeared in the Arabic tweets. The use of awrah in the data is related to the social/religious norms of women covering. Some religious schools say that '*awrah*:عورة refers to covering the whole of a woman's body excluding the face and hands (Qaradawi and Jawahiri, 1989). However, other scholars believe that a woman is considered '*awrah*: عورة and she should cover her entire body, and she can only reveal her face and hands when praying.

In their stance-taking, supporters highlighted other traditional clothes besides the *abaya* such as the *'thob' (*ثوب*)*[47]. Most of the pictures and images used in the campaign represent the powerful position of males, as seen in Figure 38 below. This illustration, taken from Human Rights Watch, was regularly shared by Twitter users in the data. The powerful image shows a male hand, which is distinguishable as the traditional white dress worn by men and boys is visible, covering the woman under his protection. The woman, on the other hand, is sitting with her head down wearing a traditional *abaya* and *niqab* in black. The picture below represents the male's role as the protector and as the one who has the upper hand in Islamic Saudi society, while the woman is shown to be living in 'his shadow'. Traditionally, men are responsible for providing for the family and for their security and safety. While the supporters relied more on using terms related to covering such as *abaya* and *niqab*, the opponents, however, relied more on contrastive meanings to covering such as nakedness. In their stance-taking, the opponents represented the out-group (the ones who called to end the guardianship system and Europe) as slaves in their use of naked photos of people, commenting that it was 'modern day slavery in Europe'.

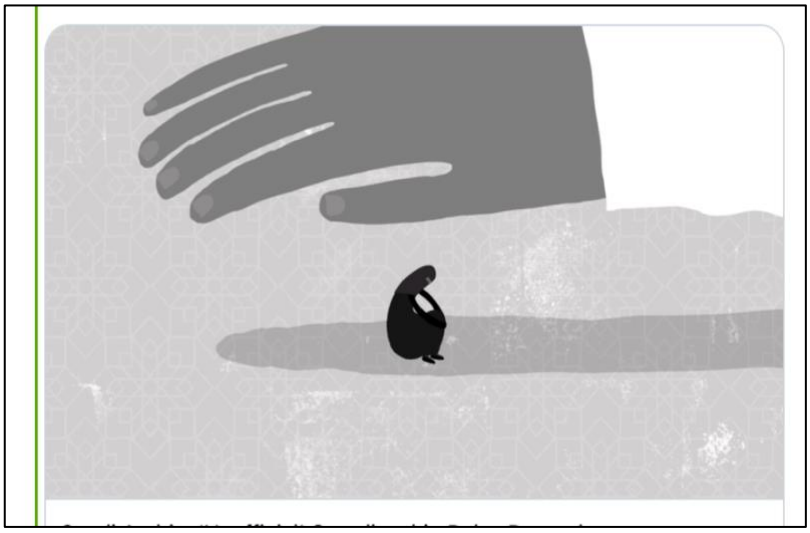


Figure 38 Illustration of the use of the example/illustration strategy (visuals) by supporters in English.

[47] A Thob, or Thawb, is an Arab dress for men and boys usually worn in white in summer and other colours in colder seasons. It is usually seen as a symbol of cultural and national identity.

Another term close in meaning to covering and awrah is '*a'r'* (*عار*) which means shame/disgrace that cannot be excused. This term is associated with 'honour crimes' against women who are perceived to have brought dishonour to their families and tribes. Men are responsible for women and family, as they are his honour or "the state's honour" (Al Fassi. 2020, p.222). Thus, acts of killing and violence against these women are justified if they are deemed to preserve the honour of the family and tribe. In the current study, it was found that supporters employed these two terms in Arabic to highlight the violence women in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world suffer, and to highlight that the other groups are criminals who commit these crimes against women. The English tweets, on the other hand, used fewer sociocultural terms, as the word shame was often used to criticise those opposing the change. In their view, opponents brought shame on themselves by promoting the violation of women's rights. The association of the two terms '*awrah'* and '*a'r'* with woman emphasises the concept of protection and covering seen in the use of the term '*durrah*'. Although these cultural terms are supposed to highlight women's high value, supporters used them to negatively evaluate and represent the out-group as the oppressor in the data.

'*Haram' (forbidden: حرام)* is another word that repeatedly appeared in the tweets posted by supporters in Arabic. The image below depicts the word *haram*, with the first letter making up the opening of the niqab covering the woman's face. Here, the use of the word 'Haram' is similar in meaning to '*awrah*', and is used here to indicate that women are not supposed to be seen, and hence, are excluded from the public sphere. Moreover, the comment on the picture below shows the suffering of Saudi woman forced to wear the niqab.

Figure 39 Example of the use of the metaphor (text + visuals) strategy in Arabic among the supporters.

Translation: Do not you see that I am fighting with all the power I have not to be buried alive, not to be suffocated. Look at me. I am not wax, but I am flesh and blood, and you want to imprison me forever as a body and as a soul.

The use of Arabic in words related to culture is proven in the literature to express national identity and cultural values, which helps to build a relationship with the target audience (e.g., Hashim,

2010). However, the current study revealed that supporters used sociocultural Arabic terms (e.g., durrah) to refute cultural values that have long been associated with those terms. That is, supporters used cultural concepts in Arabic to show different meanings and ideologies that have been preserved in such cultural words in different discourses for many years.

Opponents, on the other hand, used images of traditional clothes to construct an opposing stance in their tweets. For example, they posted a picture of *'iqal'*[48] to comment on the return of Dina Ali:

Welcome her with *iqal (istagbiloha be al iqal: استقبلوها بالعقال)*

The use of *iqal* here reveals a deeply rooted sociocultural practice in the Saudi society. The connotation of the word *iqal* is negative in this context, as it is sometimes used to refer to disciplining children, fighting, and beating. In this message, the opponents represent the out-group (Saudi woman who flee Saudi Arabia) as children who need to be disciplined, since they have gone against the guardianship system by not requesting a male's permission to leave.

4. Culture

Those using the hashtag included sociocultural and religious expressions and practices, such as prayers, supplications (du'a: دعاء), proverbs, poems, and common phrases to construct their stances on the guardianship system. Proverbs and common expressions appeared frequently in the Arabic tweets of the supporters. Proverbs are pervasive in everyday life in many cultures, including Arabic culture. They reflect the collective opinions of a society as a whole rather than the opinions of individuals (Badr, 2021). They depict sociocultural norms of a specific society regarding different aspects. For example, Arabic proverbs reflect various values such as protection, pride, bravery and generosity, as well as other aspects such as the woman's role (Brosh and Mansur, 2013). Hence, proverbs can have ideological roots in the society they are situated within. Some studies have suggested that some Arabic proverbs reveal a negative view of women (e.g., Al Obiade, 2006; Thanoon, 2016).

In the current study, most of the Arabic tweets by supporters used proverbs to portray the other groups (male guardians and the government) negatively. One popular proverb is *'yadaka awkata wa fouka nafakh: يداك اوكتا و فوك نفخ'*, which loosely translates to 'You've made your bed, now lie in it'. However, it is used to say that male guardians are responsible for women's rights violation, and those men will eventually suffer from the consequences. Furthermore, the other groups were represented negatively in the word choice of supporters. For example, they used derogatory words such as 'thieves' to describe them, along with proverbs including '*shain waquai a'in: شين و قوي عين'*, which translates

[48] A black round piece of cloth that men wear to keep ghutra (another piece of fabric that is usually red and white and worn on the head) in place.

roughly to ‘wrong and strong’, to imply that a male guardian dared to steal a woman’s rights which he justified by claiming it was for the woman’s protection. They repeatedly used the word ‘stealing’ (*sariqa: سرقة)* to highlight they believed the government, religion, and the guardianship system were stealing women’s rights in Saudi Arabia. Another equivalent is ‘*salaboha: سلبوها’* which also means ‘stealing’ but has a stronger connotation of stealing with violence and power. Similarly, the tweets in mixed-code explicitly referred to the guardianship system as ‘stealing’ and ‘robbing’ Saudi women’s dreams.

The negative evaluation of male guardians was seen in the use of other common expressions in Arabic, as they were labelled ‘enslavers’ while women were referred to as ‘slaves.’ For example, supporters used common cultural phrases such as ‘When did you start enslaving people when their mothers gave birth to them free?’ *(mata asta’abdttum alnisa’a waqd waladathum omhathoom ahraran: متى استعبدتم النساء و قد ولدتهم أمهاتهم احراراً).* In the previous example, supporters replaced the word ‘people’ with ‘women’ to express their meaning more effectively. Women were portrayed as powerless, obedient and slaves while men were portrayed as superiors, dominant, and masters. Tweets in English, however, tended to explicitly refer to the guardians (males) as masters and slave-owners. The association of ‘slavery’ with the guardianship system did not appear in mixed-code tweets. However, many pictures accompanying mixed-code tweets frequently contained images of chains in different forms to represent women as slaves to their masters.

This image of slavery was reinforced throughout the data, as many tweets in Arabic used the word chains in its different variations such as ‘tied up/handcuffed’ *(mukabalah: مكبّلة),* ‘shackles/cuffs’ *(a’ghlal: أغلال),* and ‘restrictions/chains’ *(quioud: قيود),* representing their view that Saudi women were chained by the guardianship system. Similar to the tweets in mixed-code, it was noted that supporters used pictures and drawings depicting chains in their tweets in Arabic. They portrayed Saudi women as prisoners chained by the guardianship system that hinders her progress. Moreover, they also portrayed the male guardian as a warden and Saudi Arabia as an enormous prison.

Although the images and depictions used might have been different between the English and Arabic tweets, they both implied that Saudi women were powerless and in need of guidance and protection, while men were ironically represented as wise figures and protectors. This was emphasised in the Arabic tweets, in which Saudi women were also compared to ‘animals’ to depict the powerless status of women and their need to follow their male guardians. The use of animals to negatively evaluate the out-group was also seen in Chiluwa and Ifukor’s (2015) study, in which the group Boko Haram was described as ‘barbaric animals’. This expression explicitly expressed the negative evaluation of the writer, while also inviting the reader/ audience to implicitly share that evaluation. The findings of the current study show that English tweets referenced animals when depicting the guardianship system. Saudi women were explicitly portrayed as sheep, who relying on their male guardians for protection and guidance, may be vulnerable in the absence of their shepherd. Hence,

'sheep' was used here to highlight the negative characteristic of the other groups (including the government and male guardians) in oppressing women and expecting them to follow.

Additionally, they used the word 'wolves' to describe the government (out-group) and women (in-group) as victims thrown to these wolves. Moreover, supporters used the word 'goat' to mock the Saudi government after new reformations regarding the guardianship system were announced. They criticised the changes as superficial and not fundamental, using phrases such as: *'slap lipstick on err, a goat, it's still a goat'* to indicate their thoughts about these changes. Mocking the government was also observed in other tweets commenting on economic development in Saudi Arabia. The negative evaluation of the government here supports the results discussed earlier related to the use of the example/illustration strategy when the supporters mocked the government's reformations in English.

Other tweets utilised proverbs in Arabic such as "the caravan proceeds and the dogs bark" (*القافلة تسير و الكلاب تنبح*) to encourage women to call for their rights that will then inevitably be given, no matter who criticises or opposes. In addition, supporters represented Saudi woman as strong, powerful for resisting these chains and restrictions and supported their stance with various proverbs and poems in Arabic. They compared Saudi women to mountains that will never lean, and praised them as for being fighters, patient and smart. Some encouraging and optimistic stanzas quoted from famous Arab poets also appeared in the data, including:

إذا الشعب يوما أراد الحياة فلابد أن يستجيب القدر

If one day, a people desire to live [freely], then fate will undoubtedly comply to their call.

وأول الغيث قطر ثم ينهمر

Rain starts with a drop before it pours heavily.

Furthermore, the supporters used imperatives in English to praise and encourage the Saudi women who were fighting, using words and phrases like 'keep it up' and 'fight'. Unlike the Arabic tweets, 'Queen' was used in the English tweets by supporters to encourage Saudi women, as it Is associated with common expressions and quotes such as 'A queen will always turn pain into power'. Tweets in mixed-code also used motivating words and phrases to praise women calling for their rights.

Opponents using Arabic, however, shamed and stigmatised these women, describing them as stubborn, old, and acting like teenagers. This is an oppressive norm in which a woman's worth is determined by her age, and is deeply rooted in the sociocultural context. Women are expected to adhere to particular social roles such as being fertile and young to fulfil the role of a mother. Similar results were found in the mixed-code tweets, for example, the use of *'qawa'aid' (قواعد),* which means an elderly woman past the age of marriage and child-bearing to shame these women. In addition, the opposing group emphasised their stance by shaming women using the campaign hashtag, calling them

'naked' and 'ignorant'. Proverbs, as described above in the supporters' tweets, were also employed by the opponents in their tweets. In this case, the opponents represented the out-group (the West) as corrupt in their goals to end the guardianship system and allow women to drive, which they stated would destroy the social and religious values of Saudi society.

Supporters also drew parallels between Saudi woman and objects such as skeletons. Figure 40 below illustrates this, with the implication being that women would have to wait for so long before their rights would be granted. The image also compares Saudi women's situation to that of other women from other countries who appear in the image playing and enjoying their lives. The symbolism of death was also seen in the example/ illustration strategy, as discussed previously in this chapter to portray the other group as being responsible for the deaths of Saudi woman. Similar findings were found in the tweets in English, as many supporters described Saudi Arabia as 'hell'. They also linked the other group to terrorist groups and ancient characters such as 'Isis' and a 'pharaoh' to highlight how backward they believed those who resisted change were.

Figure 40 Example of the use of the metaphor (text + visuals) strategy in Arabic by supporters.

Translation: This is how I look as the years pass by and I see the girls who were born free achieve, while I am in my place striving and not getting [anything]

Other sociocultural topics that were linked to the guardianship system among supporters was the use of the 'kitchen'. It is noted that the phrase 'go back to the kitchen' was used in the tweets in Arabic to mock the stereotype associated with Saudi woman. This stereotype implies that this is where Saudi women belong, and they should not be outside or trying to progress. This perception reinforces the messages in other tweets using other strategies that were examined earlier in this chapter and is in alignment with other studies that have remarked that this perception has played a role in limiting women's role outside the house (Al-Harby, 2017).

Moreover, in their use of the discursive strategies, supporters sought to raise other controversial sociocultural topics using various resources to support their stance. For example, they ironically used images and cartoons to depict the domination of men over women in Saudi Arabia. The image below, for instance, highlights men's dependence on woman for support, which in a way explains the complex situation of women being the pillars of the house, yet still being oppressed and exploited by men seeking to fulfil their own goals. By sharing this, supporters represented Saudi women as hidden, oppressed, and covered while men have the loudest voices and representation in society.

Figure 41 Example of the use of the irony (text + visuals) strategy by supporters in Arabic.

Translation: A Saudi woman is dignified and honoured, and all the worlds' women wish they were in her place.

Another example is provided below in Figure 42 iin which the cartoon compares two situations. In the first one, we see a Saudi woman covered in black who has been beaten and is asking society for help using the phrase *'faz'atkum ana bintkum'* which means 'Help, I am your daughter'. The use of '*faz'atkum*' is related to a widely used term in Saudi Arabia, as '*faz'ah'* refers to one of the sociocultural values and norms which are appreciated among Saudis to indicate a stronger meaning of help. The second situation depicts a murder where we see a man covered in blood saying the same phrase used by the woman '*faz'atkum ana waldkum'* which means *'Help, I am your son'*. Th cartoon mocks two situations in Saudi society in which violent crimes against women are justified on the basis of culture. In short, the act of beating a woman is legitimised by blaming the victim. The cartoon shows that 'she must have done something', indicating she went against the sociocultural values, and hence deserved the beating.

Moreover, the second situation legitimises the murder, as it has been committed by a man who is supporting his justification with a verse from the *Holy Quran*:

(ومن أحياها فكأنما أحيا الناس جميع)

(and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people)

Figure 42 Example of the use of the irony (text + visuals) strategy by supporters in Arabic.

The implication of this could be understood through the lens of some of the sociocultural practices in Saudi Arabia. In Islam, if a murder is committed that was not deliberate (i.e. manslaughter), the killer only pays financial compensation *(diyah: دية)* to the victim's family as a form of redress for the harm caused. This is an alternative punishment to retaliation *(qisas)* if the victim's family agrees to forgive the killer. This practice has been exploited in terms of justifying murders and collecting money often by a group of tribal men. In 2021, Okaz described those involved in collecting the money to be paid to the victim's family as *'diyat's* brokers' *(سماسرة الديات)*, 'blood traffickers' *(المتاجرين بالدماء)* and 'money collectors' *(جامعي الأموال)*[49]. Saudi Arabia has recently proposed new legalisation and reforms to review and organise the *diyah* system.

Topics related to religion such as prayers, supplications, and religious occasions were frequently mentioned in the supporters' tweets. In their Arabic tweets, supporters referenced religious topics more than in English tweets. English tweets made religious supplications less frequently, for example 'my prayers are with…', mentioning the names of women who had been arrested due to their activism regarding women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Supporters posting in Arabic, however, made

[49] Available at: *(*https://www.okaz.com.sa/news/local/2086678*).*

supplications including the names of important Islamic events such as Ramadan[50]. Linking supplications to religious occasions such as Ramadan has deeply rooted sociocultural meanings, as Muslims believe that Ramadan is a holy month, and any supplications made during this month will be responded to. Some examples are given below:

Last Ramadan, they were with us (in reference to women defending their rights who were imprisoned or died) (Ramadan alsabiq kunna baynna: رمضان السابق كنا بيننا)

Blessed Ramadan, and I ask Allah for you for victory and relief (Ramadan Mubarak wa asa'lu Allah lakun alnasar wa alfaraj: رمضان مبارك واسأل الله لكن النصر والفرج)

The use of supplication (*du'a: دعاء)* was observed in other tweets in Arabic. For example, the use of *'Allah is sufficient for us and the best of those on whom to depend' (hasbi Allah wa ni'ma al-wakil: حسبي الله و نعم الوكيل)* was used to mean that those (Saudi women) under oppression were counting on God to solve the situation. They sometimes used it in their tweets with extended characters such as *الوكيييييل*/instead of *الوكيل* to emphasise the extreme injustice (an example of this In English would be 'it's soooo unfair'). Muslims often use this statement in difficult situations and when injustice occurs, as they have faith in Allah resolving the issue. The use of religious language in the data suggested the difficult situations Saudi women faced under the guardianship system. In addition, it was used to attract a larger audience, given that religion is something that influences and unites Saudi people. Hence, it can be used to persuade people to believe and, in turn, support a particular stance. Religious and sentimental appeal was also observed in the data as 'Hope in God' appeared in many tweets in Arabic, with tweets including verses from the Holy Quran such as:

(لعلّ الله يحدث بعد ذلك أمرً)

(You never know; Allah may bring about a new situation afterwards)

Other examples included supplication/prayer *(dua'a: دعاء)* and wishing disasters/ bad luck on those who were responsible for returning one of the Saudi girls who had fled Saudi Arabia. By doing so, they distinguished the out-group (Saudi male guardians) as the oppressor. The use of religious language in Arabic may have attracted a larger audience to sympathise with those campaigning for women's rights in Saudi Arabia, as the use of religious language can give more credibility to the supporting stance as explained earlier.

[50] Ramadan is a holy month observed by every Muslim around the world. It is known as a time for family, friends, relatives and people to gather, community service, prayers, reflection, and fasting.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The current study investigated Twitter campaigning hashtag *#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen* to explore how Twitter users use different discursive resources to construct stances towards the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia. Saudi women were restricted by the guardianship system where male dominance was the norm justified by religious and cultural values. It must be noted that, during the time of writing this thesis, Saudi Arabia has implemented important reforms to women's rights and the guardianship system (for more details refer back to Chapter 1, section 1.3). For example, women in Saudi Arabia can now travel abroad without the need for a male guardian's approval as issued on 20th August 2019. Another critical change was lifting the ban on driving on 24th June 2018. The recent reformations stress the continuous efforts Saudi Arabia is doing in empowering Saudi women in line with *Vision2030*.

Different groups of people have traditionally employed various discursive strategies and sociolinguistic practices to support and/ or resist the sociocultural conventions and customs that are usually challenging to resist as they are often adopted by dominant national/religious groups in a particular society. The dominance of specific groups over other groups can be legitimised, normalised, emphasised, resisted, and reproduced through language use in a variety of forms in socio-political contexts (van Dijk 2015). The study aimed to understand how Twitter users negotiate cultural, social, and religious norms and values in the process of stance taking while relying on language choice and various discursive strategies, and at the same time utilising Twitter affordances. Moreover, it examined the ways in which these discursive strategies contribute to the creation of in-group and out-group representation of self and other in the online discourse. Additionally, it examined role of the multilingual resources such as language choice in constructing these stances while looking at meanings and ideologies that are represented in these stances.

The study deployed qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse the tweets needed for this study. Particularly, theories on stance, language choice, Computer Mediated Discourse models (CMDA), discursive strategies, and self and other representation were integrated within the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis. With the support of MAXQDA, 3,162 tweets associated with the guardianship system hashtag #StopEnslavinngSaudiWomen were analysed on three levels i.e., textual, discursive, and sociocultural levels following Fairclough's three dimensional-model.

The tweets revealed that Twitter users deployed various discursive strategies in constructing their stances towards the guardianship system. For example, the supporters frequently used example/ illustration strategy as it was used in 41% of the tweets. The opponents' group, on the other hand, used example/ illustration strategy less frequently and this is understood as the overall tweets of the opponents' group consists only 2% of the tweets. While I drew on van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive framework as a guide in exploring these discursive strategies, the current study showed other

discourse strategies emergent in the targeted campaigning hashtag in addition to strategies of example/ illustration, metaphor, irony, comparison, etc adopted from van Dijk's framework. Emergent strategies included imperatives, rhetorical questions, political satire, sentimental appeal, supplication, using real names of activists, etc. This supports the view that language should be investigated in relation to the immediate context as well as the wider sociocultural context as new meanings can always emerge (van Dijk 2006).

Moreover, Twitter users relied greatly on different modes available online such as texts, videos, images, links, emojis, emoticons in their use of the discursive strategies to support their stances. The online discursive strategies in their use of non-traditional modes such as emojis can enhance to our understanding of the discursive strategies normally used in the 'offline' context. Additionally, it was found that Twitter users tend to incorporate more than one discursive strategy in the same tweet relying on various Twitter affordances such as 'mention', 'quote', etc to strengthen their argument. It must be noted, however, that it was challenging to distinguish various discursive strategies on Twitter as they sometimes integrate within each other which required a careful consideration when analysing them. This highlights the need for more research related to the online context to provide methods that can help in analysing complex online interactions.

The results showed that that the supporting stance to abolish the guardianship system is the dominant stance in the data accounting for 98% of the data compared to 2% who were against the change. The dominance of the supporting stance might be attributed to several reasons such as the nature of the campaigning hashtags in promoting affiliation using features available on Twitter. Another reason might be due to the social influence of other supporters exist in the same hashtag, as the supporters built on others' stances taken by a prior writer and/or speaker. For example, the data showed that Twitter users deployed Twitter features such as 'quote' in adopting stances of other users (e.g., religious scholars, journalists) which can legitimise, strengthen their stances while bonding with others in the same social setting. Also, the political, social, and economic change in Saudi Arabia may have contributed to the dominance of the supporting stance found in the data.

The resulted stances of Twitter users varied in being radical, conservative, liberal, moderate, and traditional representing a range of views on political, religious, social, and ideological issues. For example, a group of the supporters adopted a moderate stance towards Saudi Arabia in which social actors (e.g., the government, powerholders, the King) were positively evaluated and praised for their efforts in empowering the Saudi women. The supporters while aligning with the Saudi government, aligned with traditional and religious core values highly respected in Saudi Arabia such as respecting societal order to maintain national cohesion and political as well as economic stability. Other groups of the supporters, however, adopted less moderate position towards Saudi Arabia in which the Saudi government was negatively evaluated and repeatedly criticised for not doing the necessary about the guardianship system. The results showed that the language choice played a significant role in the process of stance-taking and to align/ disalign with different groups.

Language choice played a significant role in constructing those stances and other stances towards the guardianship system in the Twitter campaigning hashtag (*#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen*). In the positive evaluation of the Saudi government, for example, the supporters used Arabic in their arguments to index national identity and cultural values to legitimise their supporting stance. Additionally, Arabic was used in cultural topics indexing their sociocultural values to build a rapport with other participants and with the audience. Many cultural words were associated with Arabic (e.g., *halal, Awrah, a'r*) which are recognised by the Saudi Muslim community and hence these words could invoke shared cultural meanings and give a sense of solidarity and promote their stances eventually. Additionally, people's opinions of powerful people can influence other's stances. For example, the Arabic tweets highlighted the stance changing of some public figures and religious scholars to align with the recent stance of the Saudi government towards women's rights in the Kingdom.

Arabic, however, sometimes is used to refute sociocultural values that have been long associated with terms such as *durrah*. That is, supporters used cultural concepts in Arabic to show different meanings and ideologies that have been preserved in such cultural words in different discourses for many years. The results showed the meanings shift of these sociocultural terms according to the sociocultural context in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Arabic was used in addressing Saudi political figures (e.g., King Salman) to ask them implicitly to abolish the guardianship system. In their stance-taking, they were inviting the audience and the addressees to adopt their supporting stance.

English, on the other hand, was used in addressing English-speaking political figures and international organisations on their Twitter accounts (e.g., Human Rights Watch, Donald Trump). Moreover, Twitter users used English when telling storis of Saudi women who were against the guardianship system to address a larger scale of audience. At the same time, they represented the guardianship campaign as a human rights topic to gain the support of the international community, and to signal group membership with the wider multilingual context inviting others to align with them.

The findings also showed that the power hierarchy existed in the 'offline' context was reflected in the online context on Twitter which supports previous studies (e.g., Page 2012). The construction of the in group and the out-group is a discursive strategy through which a positive representation of the in-group and a negative representation of the out-group was achieved. Representation of self and other in the current study was done through language choice and other resources available on Twitter. In this, stance-taking involved evaluating and categorising people based on positive or/ and negative sociocultural values. The current study represented the out-group (e.g., Saudi government, male guardians, religious scholars) as the powerful dominant gender while the in-group (Saudi women) were represented as the weaker gender. These findings when placed within its wider sociocultural context, seem to partly reflect the complexity of sociocultural practices in Saudi Arabia. The sociocultural complexity was captured in the data in which Twitter users debated the integration of religion and social traditions regarding many topics (e.g., women's travelling, polygamy).

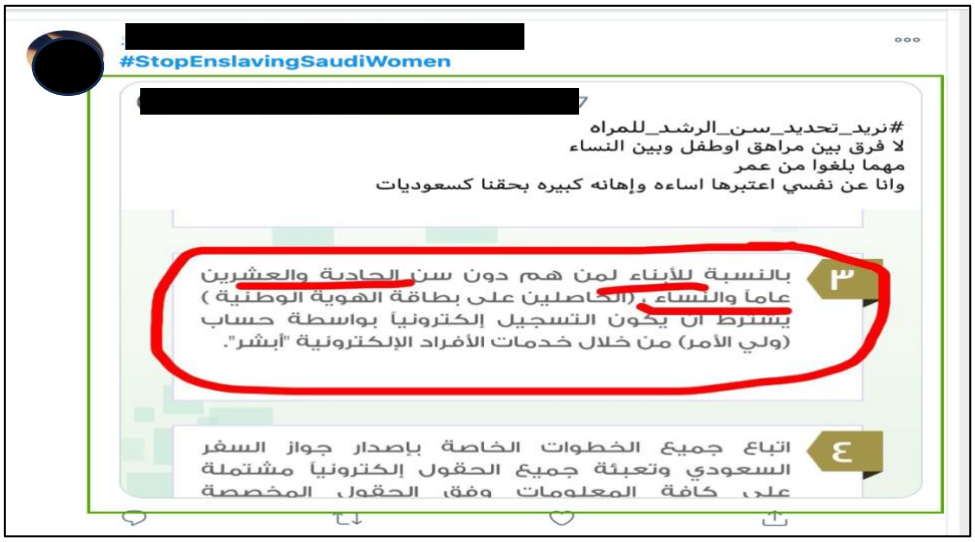
The current study examined how stance-taking is constructed through different discursive strategies using various linguistic codes in the guardianship system hashtag on Twitter. It must be noted that this study was initially conducted prior to the recent reformations regarding women's rights in Saudi Arabia. To better understand the process of stance-taking as a practice in relation to political, religious, and sociocultural context a further work that covers the period after the Crown Prince appointment and the recent changes is recommended.

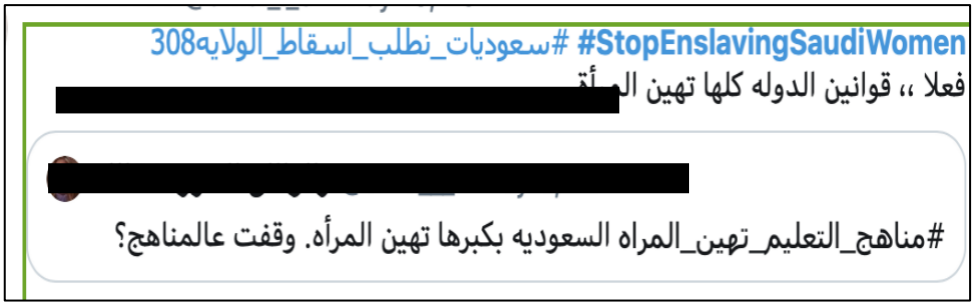
Moreover, the results show that the guardianship system was legitimised and justified under the umbrella of protection. Traditionally, the guardianship system had been exploited in ways that hindered women's progress although it has no legal grounding. Moreover, the false religious interpretations which were taken out of their original contexts have contributed to legitimise the system. In addition to the guardianship system, the data showed that the discrimination against women can be reinforced by the education system, and the religious discourse around women. The data showed that other discriminatory practices against women appeared in the data such as driving ban, polygamy. While many studies focused on the driving ban, further studies may consider how these topics are related to better understand the sociocultural ideologies used to legitimise such practices. Further studies also may pay attention to other linguistic varieties in Saudi Arabia in relation to differences in women status across different cities and tribes.

Another limitation was that the sample was relatively small to be convenient with the timeframe and scope of this study. To overcome this limitation, more collaboration is needed between different disciplines such as sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, and social media experts to provide tools that support the complex multilingual online platforms. Moreover, the collected tweets involved different languages (e.g., Spanish, Hindi, French) which can further our understanding of the topic under investigation but were not investigated due to timeframe and scope of this study and to the researcher's lack of adequate knowledge in these languages.

Appendix

Examples of the Arabic tweets





اللهم باعد بيني وبين النار
كما باعدت بين المذاهب والإسلام
.
.

#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen
#سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولايه319

#سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولايه327
اصبحت #المرأة محور فتاوي #كهنة_الدين
لاتجد فتوى بعيدة عنها وعن جسدها وشعرها وعطرها
لن تجد فتوى لمصلحتها

[redacted]

Replying to [redacted]

#سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولايه321
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen
غطاءالوجةليس من الاسلام
هوثقافةلقبائل معينه لذلك تزخربه قصائدالشعرقبل الإسلام

1

[redacted]

أهم خطوة في محاربة التطرّف ؛ أن تناقش قضايا المرأة وتفتح نافذة في جدارها الصلب !!

#مركز_الحرب_الفكرية
#اقف_ضد_التطرف
#اعتدال

1

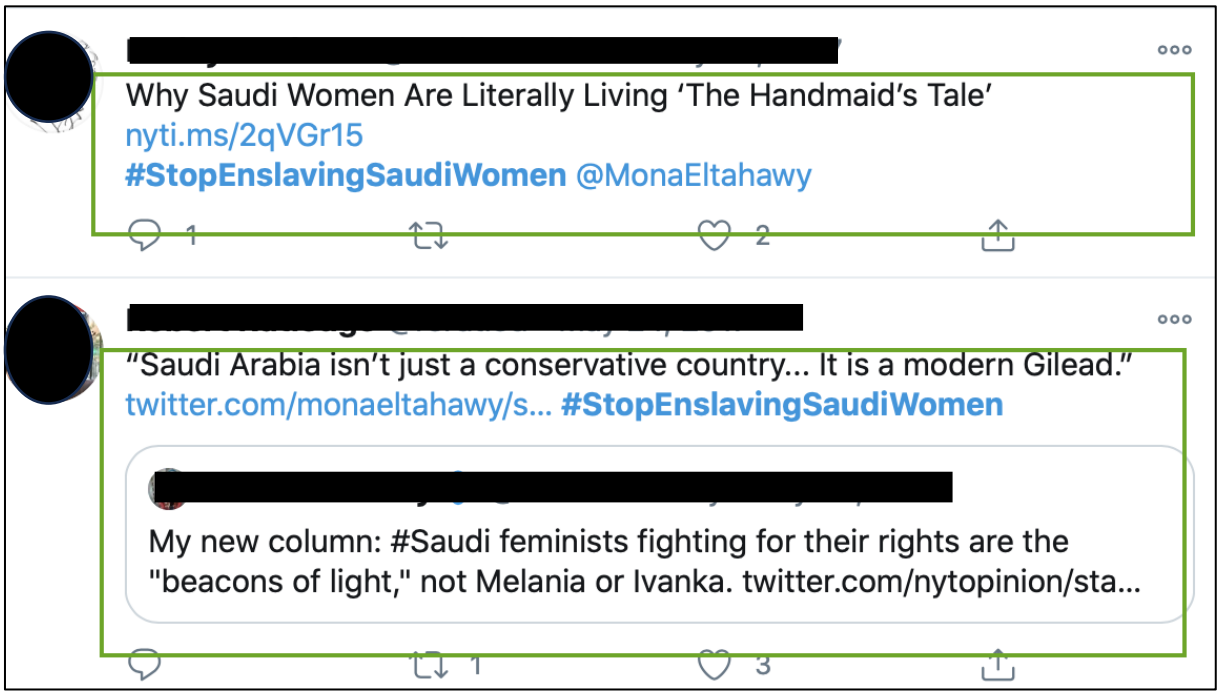
[redacted]

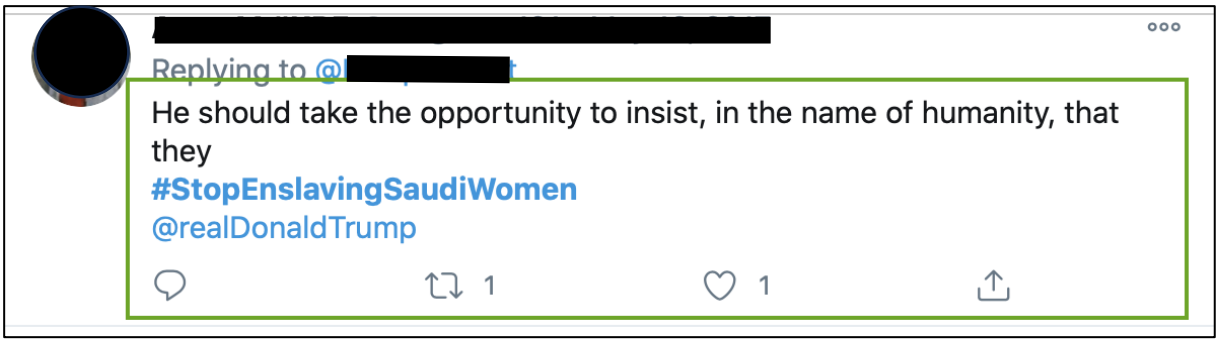
325#سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولاية #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen

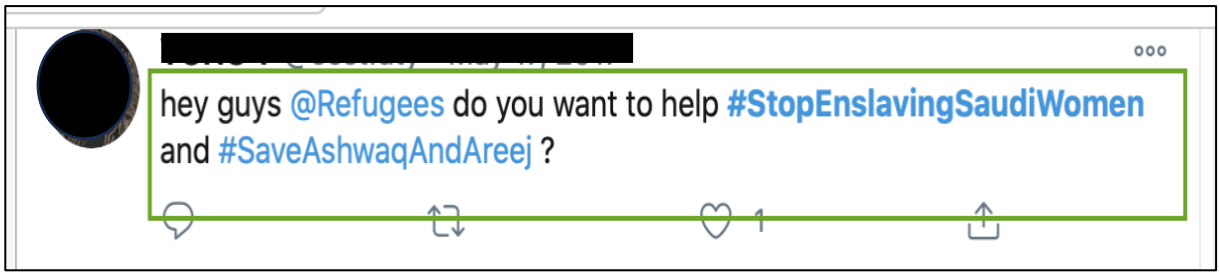
روتانا خليجية @Khalejiatv · May 27, 2017

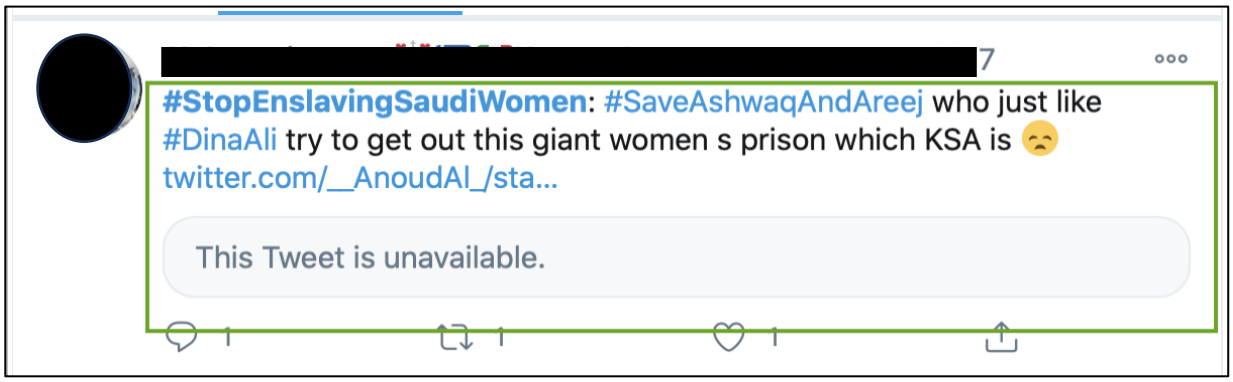
د. عدنان إبراهيم:
ولاية الإجبار لا تصحّ، ولا يجب إجبار المرأة على الزواج فهو مخالف لكل أحاديث الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم
#صحوة_إسقاط_الولاية

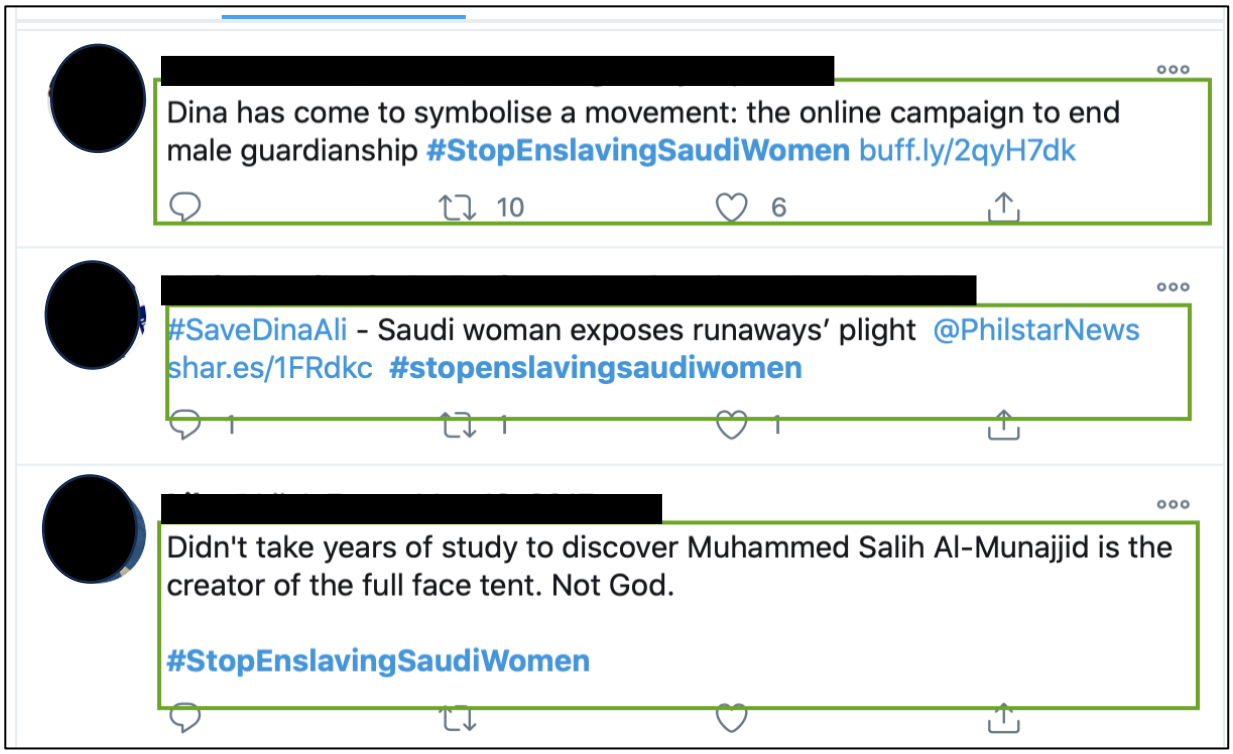
Examples of the English tweets

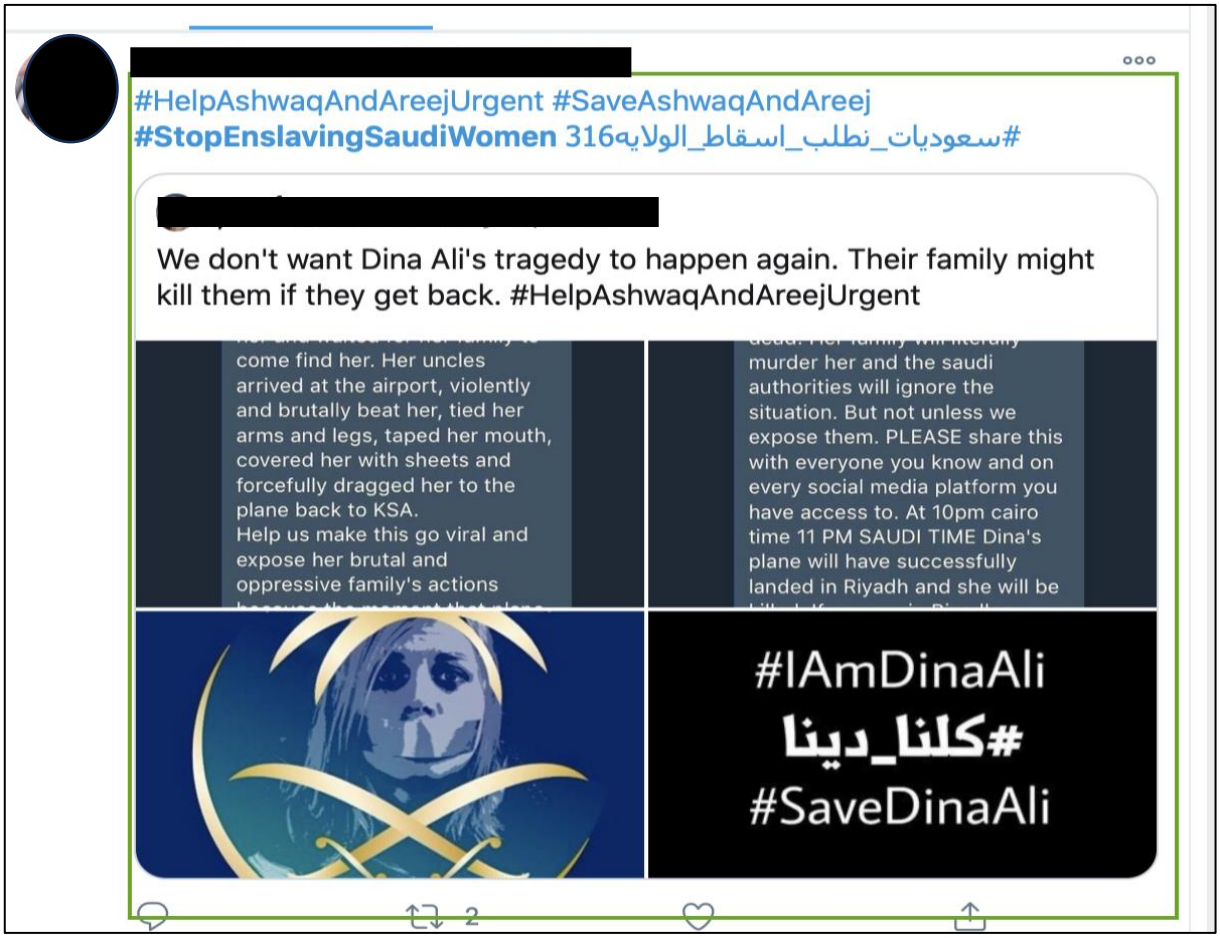


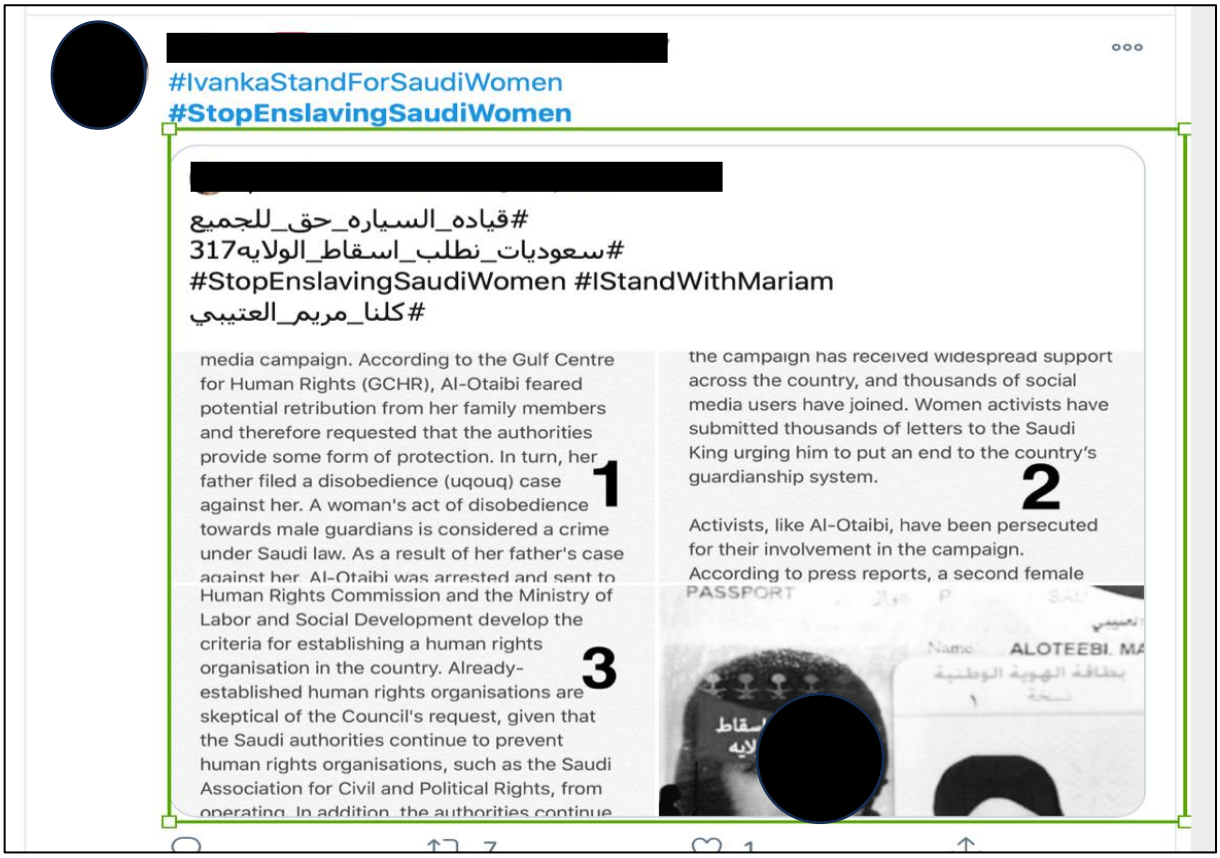



[redacted]
hey guys @Refugees do you want to help #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen and #SaveAshwaqAndAreej ?
1

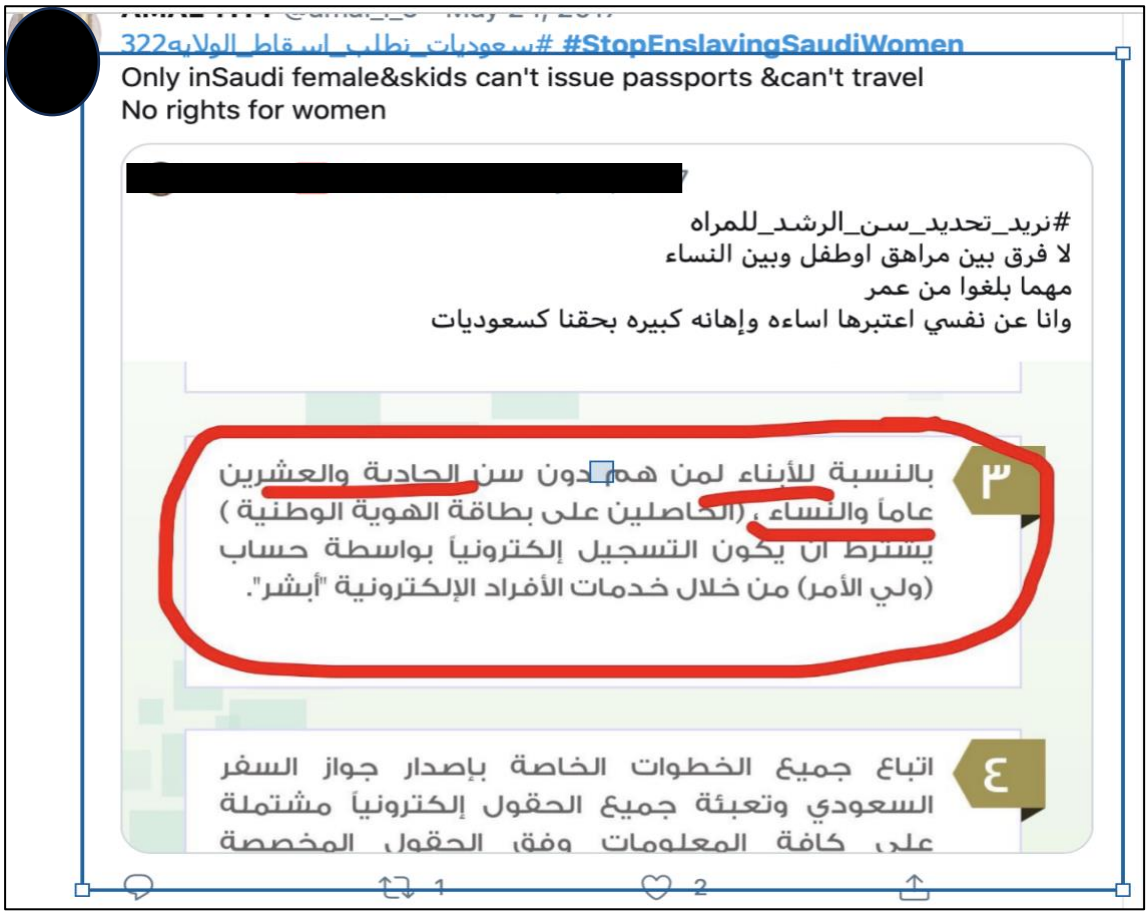

[redacted]7
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen: #SaveAshwaqAndAreej who just like #DinaAli try to get out this giant women s prison which KSA is
twitter.com/__AnoudAl_/sta...
This Tweet is unavailable.
1
1
1


[redacted]
Dina has come to symbolise a movement: the online campaign to end male guardianship #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen buff.ly/2qyH7dk
10
6
[redacted]
#SaveDinaAli - Saudi woman exposes runaways' plight @PhilstarNews shar.es/1FRdkc #stopenslavingsaudiwomen
1
1
1
[redacted]
Didn't take years of study to discover Muhammed Salih Al-Munajjid is the creator of the full face tent. Not God.
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen


#HelpAshwaqAndAreejUrgent #SaveAshwaqAndAreej
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen #سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولايه316
We don't want Dina Ali's tragedy to happen again. Their family might kill them if they get back. #HelpAshwaqAndAreejUrgent
come find her. Her uncles arrived at the airport, violently and brutally beat her, tied her arms and legs, taped her mouth, covered her with sheets and forcefully dragged her to the plane back to KSA.
Help us make this go viral and expose her brutal and oppressive family's actions
murder her and the saudi authorities will ignore the situation. But not unless we expose them. PLEASE share this with everyone you know and on every social media platform you have access to. At 10pm cairo time 11 PM SAUDI TIME Dina's plane will have successfully landed in Riyadh and she will be
#IAmDinaAli
#كلنا_دينا
#SaveDinaAli
2


#IvankaStandForSaudiWomen
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen
#قياده_السياره_حق_للجميع
#سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولايه317
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen #IStandWithMariam
#كلنا_مريم_العتيبي
media campaign. According to the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Al-Otaibi feared potential retribution from her family members and therefore requested that the authorities provide some form of protection. In turn, her father filed a disobedience (uqouq) case against her. A woman's act of disobedience towards male guardians is considered a crime under Saudi law. As a result of her father's case
1
Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Labor and Social Development develop the criteria for establishing a human rights organisation in the country. Already-established human rights organisations are skeptical of the Council's request, given that the Saudi Authorities continue to prevent human rights organisations, such as the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights, from
3
the campaign has received widespread support across the country, and thousands of social media users have joined. Women activists have submitted thousands of letters to the Saudi King urging him to put an end to the country's guardianship system.
2
Activists, like Al-Otaibi, have been persecuted for their involvement in the campaign. According to press reports, a second female
PASSPORT
ALOTEEBI. MA
7
1

Examples of the mixed-code tweets


#سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولايه322 #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen
Only inSaudi female&skids can't issue passports &can't travel
No rights for women
#نريد_تحديد_سن_الرشد_للمراه
لا فرق بين مراهق اوطفل وبين النساء
مهما بلغوا من عمر
وانا عن نفسي اعتبرها اساءه وإهانه كبيره بحقنا كسعوديات
٣
بالنسبة للأبناء لمن هم دون سن الحادية والعشرين عاماً والنساء (الحاصلين على بطاقة الهوية الوطنية) يشترط أن يكون التسجيل إلكترونياً بواسطة حساب (ولي الأمر) من خلال خدمات الأفراد الإلكترونية "أبشر".
٤
اتباع جميع الخطوات الخاصة بإصدار جواز السفر السعودي وتعبئة جميع الحقول إلكترونياً مشتملة
1
2


واحد يبني لها مسجد والثاني تكفى ماتكفى! والسعوديات احلى لكن مدفونات بالنقاب بسببهم! منجد لا عقل ولادين ذكور هالبلد
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen
Rudaw English @RudawEnglish · May 21, 2017
#Trending: Saudi national takes to the social networking giant @Facebook, where he requests King Salman to ask for the hand of @IvankaTrump.
0:17 10.7K views
3
1

[redacted]

#HelpDinaAli
#SaveDaniAli
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen

@UNHumanRights
@hrw_ar

[redacted]

@IvankaTrump #HelpAshwaqAndAreejUrgent #كلنا_مريم_العتيبي
#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen 345#سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولايه
#SaveDinaAli

[redacted]

My heart broke into million pieces in a second 💔 حسبي الله و نعم الوكيل فيك من بلد #saveDinaAli #stopenslavingsaudiwomen

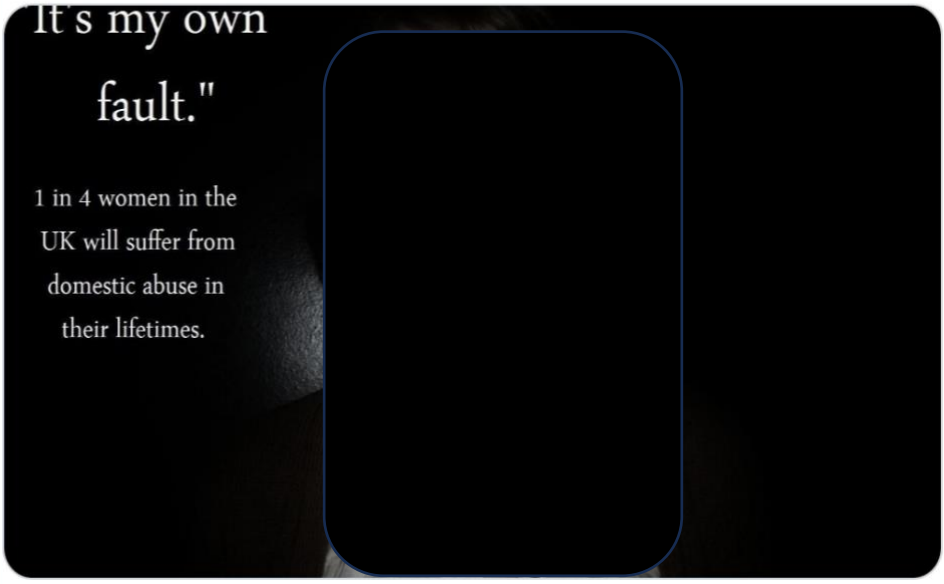
AJ+ @ajplus · Apr 12, 2017

A Saudi Arabian woman says she was stopped at a Philippines airport ... and that her life would be in danger if she returned home.

[redacted]

#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen

يجب إلغاء قانون الولاية في بريطانيا 💡



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