

Article:

Saudi Young Women #Activism: The Online Discourse Against the Male Guardianship System

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Abstract

In Saudi Arabia, it is illegal for women to constitute political parties, form civil society organizations, or participate in political demonstrations. Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia young women have had the chance to take advantage of social media's ability to bring sociopolitical change, to freely express themselves, fight for their rights, voice their opinions, and draw attention to and confront the country's oppressive political and social conditions for women, particularly the male guardianship system. The #EndMaleGuardianshipSystem Twitter campaign, which started in 2016, has received the most attention out of all the women's online campaigns in Saudi Arabia. Twitter's ability to organize, record, and publicize content has given young Saudi women the confidence to voice their social and political ideas and demands and to campaign against this system. This article assesses the communication tactics and online discourse used by Saudi young women in their hashtag activism against the male guardianship system while addressing the question: What kind of online discourse was produced and shared against the male guardianship system? For this purpose, an online observation was conducted for the (سعوديات نطالب باسقاط الولاية) # [EndMaleGuardianshipSystem]), where three thousand tweets were collected and analyzed using the qualitative content analysis method. The research led to the identification of three communication strategies that were used by Saudi women: (1) political soft and assertive communication strategy; (2) religious medium and persuasive communication strategy; and (3) social hard and educative communication strategy.

Keywords

Communication Strategy; Feminism Movements; Hashtag Activism; Online Discourse; Saudi Arabia; The Male Guardianship System

Introduction

In 2011, the internet and social media platform's ability to document abuses and discrimination, disseminate information, encourage social and political participation, and mobilize the overthrow of decades-long dictatorships made headlines as a wave of uprisings across the Arab region, which was often called the "Twitter Revolution." Arab women took part in these uprisings with the intention of bringing about political change and social justice. Years later, Arab women are still confronted with similar obstacles in their attempts to assert their political and social rights in the patriarchal and conservative culture they live in (Alsahafi 2019).

Motivated by the 2011 Arab Spring movement, in a country such as Saudi Arabia where women's participation in politics and society is severely restricted, the internet and social media platforms have become essential, especially to the younger generation of women who have grown up with technology as their primary source of information, activism, and engagement. Therefore, women in Saudi Arabia have found the internet to be a powerful tool for increasing their political and civic participation and offering a way out of being confined in the public and private spheres.

This is highly subversive of the conventional definition of women as biologically determined and confined to the private sphere. The twin visions of bodily transcendence in cyberspace and easy engagement in the public realm of international politics are certainly seductive (Wajcman 2004, 8)

Undoubtedly, the proliferation of social media platforms and technological advancements has brought about a radical transformation in the ways that Saudi women activists document, record, promote, and mobilize their causes (Khamis 2022). This is especially notable for them because of the taboos associated with Saudi women's public engagement and the discussion of sensitive subjects such as sex, gender equality, and social justice. The online sphere provides women activists with new tools in a virtual environment that transcends local conventions and limitations for discussing very difficult

topics. This sphere also provides greater independence, simplicity, and protection in some situations. Furthermore, ideas may spread quickly on the internet and be called out, acknowledged, and encouraged to act—all of which are signs of the awareness, engagement, and mobilization needed for an online campaign for political or social change to be successful (Al-Rasheed 2013).

Saudi women are perceived as invisible in the public and have experienced prejudice in the commercial, political, social, and legal domains. Religious police prohibited women from running for office, casting ballots, and or mingling in public with men who were not related to them. Wahhabism ideology and the state patriarchal system were major political and legal factors that contributed to gender inequality in Saudi Arabia and the implementation of the male guardianship system. Through official measures, men's direct control over women was reinforced and solidified under this state patriarchy and religious ideology (Eum 2019).

With new communication technologies and in accordance with the emerging phenomenon of online activism, which was defined by Gerbaudo (2012) as any use of online media to achieve any political or social goals, young Saudi Arabian women had a great deal of potential to create their own virtual communities and advocacy campaigns. This virtual power was used to fight for political and social rights in the context of authoritarian regimes, a lack of democracy, and freedom of speech.

Under these restrictive and oppressive circumstances, the Twitter hashtag function has challenged the restrictions implemented on women and fueled Saudi Arabian women's socio-political activity. Therefore, hashtag activism became among the few "gateways" accessible for protesting as it provided a public forum for bringing attention to and challenging the uneven social standing of women in Saudi Arabia.

Consequently, Saudi women have launched a number of social media initiatives. The most well-known of these was the (سعوديات نطالب بإسقاط الولاية) # [EndMaleGuardianshipSystem]), Twitter campaign, which, since its start in

2016, has generated a lot of discussion about the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia, which limits a woman's freedoms and ability to make independent decisions apart from their male guardians. After more than eight hundred days of campaigning, a royal proclamation was issued that removed the restrictions placed on women and repealed the male guardianship system (@alhayat_ksa 2018).

While most of the literature and studies of women's online activism have focused on how social media platforms and new communication technologies have undermined several cultural, political, and religious norms that restrict women's social and political participation, there is a dearth of literature that addresses feminist action such as the women's movement in Saudi Arabia. There are a few quotes on women's Twitter statuses that may be found in academic studies conducted in Saudi Arabia. The "limited historical knowledge and current research on Saudi women" is a major obstacle for researchers as "most research focuses primarily on the history of the Kingdom, its politics, the rentier economy or the Wahhabi strain of Islam practiced there" (Al-Rasheed 2013, 33).

By concentrating on the online discourse produced and disseminated on Twitter to advocate for Saudi women's rights and dismantle the male guardianship system, this article seeks to explore a new facet of Saudi women's online activism. An analysis of the literature on Saudi Arabian women's activism against the male guardianship system revealed that it did not go very far in illustrating Saudi feminism's communication strategy. Acknowledging this, the collected data from Twitter was carefully examined for this purpose, and the analysis revealed three communication strategies: educational social communication strategy, persuasive religious communication strategy, and assertive political communication strategy.

The Theoretical Framework

To thoroughly examine the phenomenon of women's online activism in Saudi Arabia, this research theoretical framework focuses on three principal pillars: women's statuses in the Saudi Arabian authoritative environment, the

male guardianship system, and the phenomenon of hashtag activism and its contribution to women's political and social activism.

Country profile and women challenging statue in Saudi Arabia

Clarifying the complexity of the Saudi context and identity, as well as its historical, religious, cultural, and economic components, was essential to understanding the emergence of the phenomenon of Saudi women's online activism. Saudi Arabia, in contrast to most other Gulf countries, is a large country rather than a city-state. It is a country that is attempting to maintain its traditional and religious culture while coping with the physical, political, and social changes and consequences that surround Saudi society. Saudi Arabia has a rentier economy and a significantly larger population (Alsahi 2019).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a new country in terms of its history and political background. It was founded in 1932 by King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Saud. The Saudi Royal Family, and the King in particular, have significant control of both the security forces and the legal system in Saudi Arabia (Alsehafi 2019).

Wahhabi theology is characterized by its literal reading and interpretation of Islamic texts, such as the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Lacroix 2015). The dominant Sunni Wahhabi school of Islam and the nation's Bedouin past, with its tribal identity, have played a major role in shaping Saudi Arabian culture, social and gender norms, and political regulations.

As Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with a system of religious courts that strictly enforce Islamic law (Sharia), this rigorous religious heritage has a significant influence over social behaviors and Saudi identity. Thus, the Qur'an is not only a sacred text but also, together with the Sunnah, the foundation of Sharia law and the nation's constitution.

Saudi Arabia's economy grew quickly and unexpectedly in the 1930s after oil was discovered, and its oil reserves have been exploited since the 1970s to develop the country. Approximately 25 percent of the world's conventional

oil reserves are now found in this nation. Saudi Arabia has greatly benefited from the ensuing economic prosperity, which has accelerated the country's development process in many areas, especially education and the adoption of new technologies (Tønnessen 2016).

The political system, religious ideology, and traditions of Saudi Arabia have had a significant impact on the status of women in the country. Women were viewed as the male guardians' extensions; instead of having an independent identity and enjoying equal rights, they were treated as secondary citizens who belonged to their husbands' or fathers' families. Furthermore, the religious police believed that women's freedom to go about and engage in public life should be restricted and that Saudi women shouldn't acquire Western ideas and lifestyles. Since gender mixing is strictly prohibited in Saudi Arabia, gender segregation has emerged as a defining national moral characteristic that sets Saudi citizens apart from international residents (Le Renard 2014).

Consequently, gender segregation norms and gender inequality are pervasive and have always had an impact on how women behave and advance in society. For instance, mixing genders at work and school is prohibited. While women can attend universities, this has not translated into equal access and opportunities in the labor market. Despite a recent increase in employment, Saudi women are still not fully included in society, and they are still underrepresented in the economic force, which negatively affects women's financial freedom and advantages (Le Renard 2014).

The economic growth with which the Kingdom thrived at the beginning of the 20th century contributed to women's education. These educated Saudi women produced a number of literary works, including fiction, poetry, and articles, to emphasize their social position and advocate for their rights. The first generation of educated women's voices remained marginal. As the new oil riches began to provide Saudi society with numerous opportunities, services, and benefits in the 1970s, and as religion began to increasingly dominate society, concerns about gender equality and civil and political rights began to fade. Women were prohibited from demanding equality and an end to exclusion by the prohibition of autonomous associations, mobilization, and

inadequate organizational capacity, which is a prohibition and restriction that is still in place today (Meijer and Aarts 2012).

Even though Saudi Arabia is a prominent figure in the Gulf region's modernization narrative, the country nonetheless serves as a harsh model of gender inequality around the world. It was placed 147th out of 156 countries in the Gender Gap Index in 2021. Women have to contend with many restrictions and continue to fight laws that, despite the claims of authorities, deny them their rights (Sirri 2024).

Saudi Arabia has taken steps to advance women's rights in their society within the past ten years. There are initiatives in place to improve the representation of women in public service and government roles. However, there are still major obstacles that prevent women from fully engaging in civic, political, and economic life. Opponents contend that rather than obtaining actual gender equality, these state-led initiatives instead serve to legitimize already-existing disparities. The political objective of Saudi Arabia's autocratic rulers, who use women's rights as a focal point of policy to promote modernization processes and bolster their legitimacy and prestige both at home and abroad, is a major driving force behind these reforms (Al Obeidli 2020).

The male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia

A Saudi woman is required by law to have a male guardian who must be selected from among her close relatives (father, husband, brother, etc.) and who must provide written permission before she engages in different activities. Applying for a scholarship, enrolling in higher education, obtaining official documents (such as a passport or identification document), being released from state institutions (such as prisons), undergoing certain medical procedures (such as abortion), using bank services (such as opening an account), working in the public and private sectors, and using the legal system are just a few examples (Ibrahim 2019).

The guardianship system is enforced by Saudi Arabia's powerful religious institutions, not by the courts or royal decrees. Two major events led to the

implementation of this system: the Islamic Awakening Movement, which started in the 1960s, and the 1979 seizure of the Mecca Grand Mosque. This led to the enforcement of the male guardianship system by religious organizations, which also began to influence public life, particularly the lives of Saudi women. Additionally, Saudi women's access to free work, education, and travel was severely restricted, which had a profound impact on their social, political, and economic circumstances (Lacroix 2015).

Many legal restrictions on Saudi women are thought to be based on both the extremely conservative culture of Saudi society and Wahhabi interpretations of Sharia law.

Mahram, or legal guardianship of women by a male is practiced in varying degrees and encompasses major aspects of women's lives. The system is said to emanate from social conventions, including the importance of protecting women, and from religious precepts on travel and marriage, although these requirements were arguably confined to particular situations. (Ertürk 2009, 10)

Under the male guardianship system, Saudi women are economically marginalized and regarded as second-class citizens. While socioeconomic injustice leads to the inability to obtain adequate economic benefits—such as full and equal access to employment in the public and private sectors or rights to personal banking services and investment opportunities—without the consent of a male guardian, social injustice as well produces cultural denial of rights (Al-Rasheed 2013).

There is a strong gender divide and segregation in Saudi Arabia that is legitimized by the law and supported by social norms, which has frequently resulted in widespread gender inequality practices that are seen in the absence and marginalization of women in public life. Mobility is a significant barrier that severely restricts Saudi women in comparison to men. In addition to Saudi women being prohibited from driving, the male guardianship system imposes further restrictions on women and affects their day-to-day lives, such as travel, education, receiving health treatment, getting married, or being

released from prison after serving prison terms. A woman is always in need of the consent of her male guardian (Tønnessen 2016).

The largest barrier that Saudi women encounter is the male guardianship system, which affects not only how they exercise their freedom and rights to work, travel, receive an education, and engage in society, but also how inadequately legislation against domestic abuse is practiced and enforced. In general, Saudi women are quite reluctant to draw attention to domestic abuse experienced by their male guardians. The reason for this is that “an abused woman is more likely to be charged with disobeying her male guardian than her guardian is likely to be charged for abuse” (Tønnessen 2016, 16).

The male guardianship system was challenged by Saudi women activists, who saw it as a blatant infringement on their right to equality in society. Liberal Saudi women’s rights activists organized a campaign called *Treat Us Like Adult Citizens—Or We’ll Leave the Country* in 2009; the movement demanded that Saudi Arabia’s male guardianship system be abolished. Moreover, Saudi women utilized the hashtag #SaudiWomenRevolution on Twitter in 2011 to advocate for women’s rights, including the abolition of the male guardianship system, among other rights (Chaudhry 2014).

The most significant movement to abolish the male guardianship system was launched by Saudi women activists in 2016 under the hashtag #EndMaleGuardianshipSystem (#سعوديات نطالب باسقاط الولاية). An online petition was signed by 14,700 Saudi men and women, providing their complete names and ID numbers. After the October 2016 petition was submitted to King Salman bin Abdulaziz, the hashtag trended every day until August 2019. Since then, several government offices have implemented new rules, eliminating the need for guardian permission. A significant campaign demand was fulfilled in August 2019 when a royal edict was issued allowing women over 21 to travel and get passports without a guardian’s consent (Alotaibi and Mulderrig 2021).

Twitter and hashtag activism contribution to women's activism

Twitter was initially introduced in 2006 as a microblogging service that allowed users to post text updates to their followers that were limited to 140 characters. The character count was later increased to 280. Twitter has an automated *following* method that works like a subscription to other users' tweets. This distinguishes Twitter from other social media platforms, maintaining connections that already exist and promoting bidirectionality in its place (Bonilla and Rosa 2015).

Using this tactic, Twitter starts to resemble a blog, where it costs relatively little to form a one-way relationship with a reader. Through private and public messaging, users from all over the world may publish and share textual and multimedia content, and conversations take place in real time. Different types of tweets also carry varying implications. Tweets are messages that a person can post to their timeline. Retweets function as a forwarding method to spread messages (Pavan 2013).

Texts and hashtags are the two main components of a tweet's content. A hashtag is a word that may be found in tweets and is represented by the "hash" symbol (#, e.g., #ToEndTheMaleGurdinashipSystem). Like tagging tweets with keywords, using "tags" to arbitrarily categorize web content or blogs accomplishes the organizational goal of encouraging discussion about particular topics or events (Alsahi 2019).

A message may reach a group of people who are interested in the same topic or event by utilizing hashtags, in addition to its followers. Tweets with hashtags establish and identify a focused audience for communicative action, in addition to providing a macro-level of exposure for aggregated communication since they can be located through an open, searchable interface. Tweets are generally public unless a user opts to create a private, protected account. Twitter's distinctive features, such as its ease of accessibility, led to the creation of a lot of data. Up to 500 million tweets are generated every day by its 330 million monthly active user base (Internet World Stats 2019).

In addition to its recent feature additions, Twitter's trending topics and hashtags have made it a well-liked platform for women activists and advocacy groups to organize and communicate. The information and new media revolution provided women in Saudi Arabia with an equal chance to address gender issues, raise public awareness, and influence public opinion, despite decades of political and cultural restrictions that have prevented them from participating in public life. The Arab Spring of 2011 and the 2016 campaign against male guardianship, both of which occurred in the Middle East, are notable examples of protests that made use of Twitter (Alsahi 2019).

Furthermore, based on his theory of network power, Castells (2012, 11) theorizes that activist hashtags operate in a manner akin to the way historically occupied spaces have operated for social movements. They create a dialogue platform open to the public, "which ultimately becomes a political space, a space for sovereign assemblies to meet and to recover their rights of representation." Baer's (2016) work marks the beginning of hashtag feminism in the context of feminist movements, particularly in relation to the Twitter activities of #YesAllWomen, which centers on the digital sharing and narration of actual experiences of violence against women. Furthermore, Peuchaud (2014) points out that Egyptian feminists use Twitter to post specific facts and places in order to monitor the severity of sexual harassment experienced.

Twitter usage has increased significantly in Saudi Arabia, particularly since the 2011 Arab Spring. Several political campaigns via hashtag activism have gained popularity in Saudi Arabia. When it came to size, duration, intensity, and mobilization, these actions were the most potent, including *Women2Drive*, *Salary Not Enough*, *Saudi Women Revolution 2*, and the most prominent campaign, *Saudi Women Want to Abolish* the male guardianship system, which was launched on Twitter in 2016 (Eum 2019).

Simultaneously, research indicates that social media platforms in Saudi Arabia have been a crucial instrument for political and social activism throughout a range of mobilizations, fulfilling functions for discussion, correspondence, and information sharing (Lotan et al. 2011). Up to 80 percent of the 32.9

million total population in Saudi Arabia has access to the internet, which is combined with the country's propensity for individuals to utilize social media platforms as a safe sphere. Despite being controlled and monitored, Twitter has grown in popularity in Saudi Arabia. Saudis account for 29 percent of all active Twitter users in the Arab world and publish more than 32 percent of all tweets from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Freedom House 2018).

In a similar vein, Saudi Arabia's social and political participation has changed significantly with the introduction of the Twitter platform. Forums have developed into venues for opposition, self-expression, and calls for the rights of Saudi women. One example of an offline shift that Saudi women's Twitter campaigning helped bring about is the 2018 royal edict abolishing the ban on Saudi women driving. This was seen as a victory for Saudi women's hashtag activism on the internet (Doaiji 2018).

Research Methodology

The research clearly states that its objective is to explore the notion of women's hashtag activism in Saudi Arabia by examining the communication strategies and practices employed by Saudi young women to support their social and political engagement, mobilization, and advocacy for their rights and gender equality, as well as their participation in the Twitter campaign against male guardianship. Thus, the main goal of this research is to close the gap in the literature about Saudi feminist movements in general and the communication approaches employed during this campaign in particular.

This study will employ the interpretivism research paradigm, which is grounded in the understanding that processes, people, and the relationships between variables all influence one another. This paradigm made it easier to create the framework and structure that direct the process of comprehending the issue, determining the type of knowledge needed, how to find it, and how to gather it. To do this, qualitative methods for collecting data were employed in order to better understand the pertinent problem and how prior knowledge can influence the course of the study, the analysis of the data, and the conclusions.

In the case of this research, a grounded theory approach was followed to examine social media contents and develop concepts and theories from the acquired data and available facts using an inductive approach. Grounded theory facilitates recording and interpreting Saudi women's subjective experiences and abstracting these subjective experiences into theoretical statements. Furthermore, this article's epistemological perspective is social constructivism, which assumes that reality is a moving target, is socially constructed, and exists entirely in the mind. Therefore, the movements against the male guardianship system were socially constructed to define the rules that govern gender inequality practices.

Data collection methods

The investigation will concentrate on the Twitter campaigns against the male guardianship system that took place in 2016 and 2017, with the aim of examining and evaluating the communications tactics employed by young Saudi women. Data was acquired to determine and investigate how young women in Saudi Arabia used Twitter for social and political activism, as well as the kinds of social and political advocacy discourse that this campaign was propagating.

Twitter has been especially popular among social and political activists, according to research on the relationship between social media sites, political and social discourse, and discussions. The platform can convey news and information quickly and efficiently, which raises awareness of social and political issues (Weiss et al. 2013). In Saudi Arabia, the number of Twitter users in 2024 will be 17.12 million, which accounts for 66.30 percent of the total population (Global Media Insight 2024).

The Twitter posts from the major hashtag (in Arabic) opposing Saudi Arabia's male guardianship system constitute the main data gathered for this study: *سعوديات نطالب باسقاط الولاية* # [#EndMaleGuardianshipSystem]. This hashtag was updated daily by Saudi women's activists and campaign participants to honor the campaign's day count and make it the longest and most successful campaign in the history of Saudi women's hashtag activism.

Online observation was the method used to collect the data, as it is a research method that comprises the deliberate selection, observation, and recording of online events as well as their capture, recording, and storage. This may entail gathering data, making measurements, and documenting findings and assessments. Instead of using a preset technique, online observation for qualitative research can be open, unstructured, flexible, and diverse (Dawson 2019).

Three months were covered by the retrieval of Twitter data, from August 1, to October 31, 2016. Some justifications for this timeline may include: (1) following the publication of the Human Rights Watch report *Boxed In* on July 17, 2016; (2) around the country's Saudi National Day celebration on September 23, 2016—one of the biggest celebrations in the country; (3) prior to the royal decree of April 17, 2017—which terminated the male guardian's permission to access government services; and (4) prior to the royal decree of May 4, 2017—which allowed women to access a variety of services without the consent of their male guardian.

In order to conduct this study, postings were selected from Saudi women activists and participants who received the greatest attention from followers and retweets throughout the designated time frame and were associated with the Arabic hashtag (#EndMaleGuardianshipSystem) [سعوديات نطالب باسقاط الولاية]. Three thousand tweets were collected and examined based on these popular and highly circulated tweets. The Twitter application programming interface (API) was utilized to extract real-time data from the selected dates within the sample period. While collecting the data, the English hashtag, English tweets, and replies where gender could not be ascertained were excluded.

Data analysis methods

This research will use qualitative content analysis of tweets posted by Saudi women in the سعوديات نطالب باسقاط الولاية # [EndMaleGuardianshipSystem] campaign opposing the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia. The qualitative content analysis research method consists of “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified

characteristics of messages” (Holsti 1969, 14). When research follows an interpretivism paradigm, qualitative content analysis is more effective than the quantitative method, as the aim is to pinpoint unique themes and codes within the body of the text and to offer a deeper understanding of constructed social reality in a specific context. This research analysis method will follow Krippendorff’s (2013) approach. By critically analyzing the collected data produced by Saudi young women in terms of language, meanings, and the relationship between the text and the concepts, this will identify patterns in communication and measure the effectiveness and comparison of different types of online discourse.

For the purpose of this research, three thousand tweets were collected from the specified hashtag and selected days from each month. These tweets were then collated into Excel sheets. Each Excel sheet included the hashtag, accumulated day number, date, text, user ID, user gender, posted date, and type of text.

The thematic analysis method—a process for finding, evaluating, and summarizing patterns (themes) within the data—was used to ensure a thorough analysis and maximize the amount of data gathered (Braun and Clarck 2006, 79). Using this data analysis technique, significant trends were found that contributed to answering the research question: What kinds of social and political materials—assertive, persuasive, or educational—were employed by Saudi women to challenge the male guardianship system and to promote women’s rights in Saudi Arabia? Following this analysis technique, familiarization with the collected data was completed by reading, rereading, and noting down initial ideas and codes, then organizing and grouping these codes into themes, and finally reviewing the developed themes and labelling them.

Key Findings and Discussion

The bulk of the collected tweets referred to various problems faced by women’s rights groups in Saudi Arabia, which are tied to familial, legal, political, religious, and societal systems. The online discourse was intended

to reach men, women, and society at large, as well as political and religious organizations. Therefore, the collected data that was analyzed produced three themes related to the communication strategy that was used: assertive, persuasive, and educative.

In addition, the data gathered from the Twitter campaign revealed that the goal of the Saudi women taking part in this campaign was to inform, convince, and educate people about their rights. For this reason, the discourse was divided into three categories: social discourse, which aimed to educate Saudi society about social injustice, gender inequality, and the lack of women's empowerment due to oppressive social norms; religious discourse, which explained women's rights in Islam and persuaded the public to support women activists; and political discourse, which informed and emphasized participants' allegiance to the monarchy and the government.

Moreover, there is a noteworthy presence of independent women's activism in Saudi Arabia that uses feminist principles and tactics to challenge patriarchal political structures, state security apparatuses, and sectarian control. These achievements have been made by women in spite of the difficult sociopolitical context of the country. In order to remain independent from foreign organizations seeking influence and state control, many of these women's rights individuals and groups use strategic language and refuse to identify or describe their activities as activism.

These independent individuals and groups use a variety of online tactics, including organizing, posting, lobbying, and protesting, to advance gender equality in both the public and private spheres. But eventually, some independent projects are appropriated or incorporated by governmental bureaucracy or royal patronage. Even though they share the same objective, they frequently see defining and pursuing their social change agendas from different angles (Sirri 2024).

Saudi women activists also use literature and the arts as platforms to voice their opposition to the limitations placed on them by the political, religious, and social structures. They all face the same obstacle, though, which is

a constrictive and heavily regulated environment created by the intersection of many hegemonic systems, such as global capitalism, transnational government, security, and the family. As a result, the majority of independent activity in Saudi Arabia uses digital media and online forums heavily, operating informally or virtually (Alkhaled 2021).

Soft and assertive political communication strategy

Despite certain limitations, social media platforms have significantly opened the pathway for women in Saudi Arabia to participate in a wider range of communication and influence in terms of bringing up matters linked to women's concerns. Their political involvement and participation experiences have been significantly impacted by social media platforms, and the fact that women in Saudi Arabia have relatively little access to the public realm and less opportunity to take on political or social roles is presumably the cause of this.

Nevertheless, we also must bear in mind that the internet has been governed by content monitoring, cyber laws, and surveillance techniques. In light of the enormous power handed to state rulers and the lack of justice and security, the risk of political repression has increased and is now more unexpected. This, in my opinion, inspired Saudi women to fight against the male guardianship system on Twitter with a more moderate political tone.

Unlike previous campaigns, which focused on specific issues such as bureaucratic restrictions in family law, women's education, and women's mobilization, the anti-guardianship campaign redefined the problem as primarily a political, religious, and social one, but to varying degrees. Politically, it focused on strengthening the women citizen-state relationship and seeking government support to remove restrictions on women and achieve gender equality with no direct threat to government stability. This was a shift in the focus of Saudi activists' actions from the conventional technique of obtaining social recognition to a new, softer approach to inform and confirm loyalty to the state, gaining political representation, and gaining government support for the movement and

women's rights. For example, @Arwa336 expressed the hope that she had in the Saudi state to support women's rights and tweeted:

املنا في وطننا كبير ان تلغي التمييز ايضا بين الذكر والانثى وتساهم في تحسين وضع المرأة

[Our great hope in our country is that it will also abolish discrimination between males and females and contribute to improving the status of women.] (@Arwa336, September 22, 2016)

And @infinity4551 expressed the trust that she had in the government and tweeted:

هي قوانين من الدولة وراح ترفعها مثل ماوضعتها وصحت كثير من القرارات السابقة

[These are laws from the state, and they will be lifted just as they were put in place and many previous decisions will be corrected.] (@infinity4551, August 24, 2016)

While calls for gender equality are valid in the framework of state policy, social actions such as accountability calls, protests, and organizational movements are highly risky politically, especially when they are seen as going too far and will not receive full support or coverage from the mainstream media. Therefore, reducing the political risk is the first step toward elevating an activity to the point where it needs to be covered by the mainstream media (Li and Li 2017).

The most important element in this risk management procedure is topic selection, which also explains why Saudi women's rights movements frequently concentrated on "people's livelihood" instead of political or ideological problems like democracy. The former is substantially less politically sensitive and subject to much less control. For instance, @on_fire90 tweeted about how she exploited the suffering of the previous generations to ask the government for help improving the position of women in the nation:

وطني يكفي معاملتك القصريه لجدتي وأمي وأختي وأنا نحن كاملين الأهليه لسنا أطفال أو مجانين

[My country, enough of your harsh treatment of my grandmother, my mother, my sister, and me. We are fully qualified, not children or crazy people.] (@on_fire90, August 4, 2016)

And @Astria1111 expressed her understanding of the political and social challenges that the Saudi government was facing and tweeted:

الدوله السعوديه أمامها تحديات في التحول الوطني و ليست بحاجة لمواطنين لا يفرقوا بين "الحقوق" وبين "الدعارة"

[The Saudi state faces challenges in national transformation and does not need citizens who do not differentiate between "rights" and "prostitution."] (@Astria1111, August 24, 2016)

The online movement against male guardianship was one of the main themes that shaped women activists' political discourse, with participants announcing their Saudi identity. Activists and participants had to defend themselves against accusations of state betrayal, feminist connections to outside organizations, and interactions with foreign media in the context of growing nationalism ideology. @kalemat256 tweeted:

بلادي وان جارت علي عزيزة.امن بلادنا اهم

[My country, even if it wrongs me, is dear to me. The security of our country is more important.] (@kalemat256, September 2, 2016)

And @Rimondelove added that:

لأنني سعودي وفي يوم وطني أطالب بحقوقي التي هيه جزء من انتمائي لهذه الوطن دام عزك ياوطن

[Because I am Saudi, and on my National Day, I demand my rights, which is my reward for belonging to this country. May your glory last, my country.] (@Rimondelove, September 22, 2016)

The topic of conformity and loyalty to the state was evident throughout the qualitative content analysis of Twitter discourse. The Twitter movement against male guardianship had been courteous to the political establishment and had been quietly appealing to the Saudi government and leadership to stand in support of Saudi women. In addition, prominent activists and Saudi women pushed policymakers to promote women's rights and encouraged Saudi women to act to lessen their suffering. As we can see in the tweet of @rajaa_tuwairqi:

لسان حالها يقول ياوطني انا محبه لك و لديني وأهلي وحامله وطموحه وأم وصانعه للفكر
وللرجال لكن كن معي لا ضدي

[Her tongue says, “My country, I love you, my religion, and my family.”
I am a dreamer, ambitious, mother, and creator of ideas and men.
But be with me, not against me.] (@rajaa_tuwairqi, August 6, 2016)

The Saudi government's open-door policy was introduced in 2016, and as a result, the King and other state leaders communicate with the public via their official Twitter accounts. The King was addressed four hundred times in tweets by activists using the handle @KingSalman, some of which included images and videos of women being ostracized by male guardians. The government took various steps offline, even though the activists did not receive any responses online (Thorsen and Sreedharan 2019). For example, @rogaia_hwoiriny tweeted and mentioned the king in her tweet:

هنا المشكلة اذا أحد طالب بحق من حقوقه فيه ناس تنتقده ويتهمونه إتهامات غريبة مع ان
المملك حفظه الله فاتح بابه للجميع

[Here is the problem, if someone demands one of his rights, people criticize him and accuse him of strange accusations, even though the King, may God protect him, has opened his door to everyone.]
(@rogaia_hwoiriny, August 25, 2016)

Saudi Arabia unveiled its 2030 vision in April 2016, promising to keep fostering the abilities and momentum of women while also providing the

necessary opportunities to secure their futures and meet the needs of their communities. According to that vision, the Kingdom made a number of adjustments that were adequate and loosened restrictions placed on women, including allowing them to engage in politics to a limited extent, encouraging employment, and permitting them to drive.

In fact, these changes have so far only partially destroyed the foundation of the institution of male guardianship over women. Saudi women who enter care facilities to escape domestic violence still need the consent of one of their male relatives to leave, and women prisoners cannot leave state facilities without male guardians' approval. Besides, a woman's right to marriage still requires the approval of the male guardian (Alsahafi 2019).

Therefore, personalizing feminist initiatives has become a crucial communication practice that is derived from the suffering of Saudi women. Moreover, women's rights activists frequently initiate actions that come into direct contact with the government in their individual capacities, such as requiring public information and making suggestions, in order to avoid the inherent political danger surrounding the organized movements. The support of professional judgments aids in elucidating the significance of these actions from the viewpoint of the movement (Li and Li 2017).

Saudi women activists regularly criticize the male guardianship system, highlighting its shortcomings and the harm it causes to women and government initiatives. They specifically target and criticize government entities that are deemed to be "close to people's daily lives" and are therefore subject to greater freedom of criticism by both women activists and the media. The Ministry of Justice, the Education Department, and the courts are notable examples of how this is done. Women activists also regularly target government organizations that are in a comparably "disadvantaged position" or are already under public criticism because of the male guardianship system. For instance, @i_mlil reflects on the challenges that the male guardianship system hinders the Ministry of Justice and tweeted:

قانون الولاية عبء على وزارة العدل باسقاط هذا القانون يوفر عليها آلاف القضايا سنويا

[The guardianship law is a burden on the Ministry of Justice. Repealing this law will save it thousands of cases annually.] (@i_mlil, September 2, 2016)

And @SelimaPax also tweeted:

المحاكم سجلت 50 قضية خلال العامين الماضيين تطالب فيها نساء بنزع الولاية

[The courts registered 50 cases over the past two years in which women demanded the removal of guardianship.] (@SelimaPax, August 24, 2016)

Despite the fact that the Saudi government started to advocate for laws that would expand women's roles in society, many women activists have opposed or rejected these laws, calling them "state feminism," which views women's professional advancement and education in terms of nation- and state-building processes. Scholars have criticized these initiatives for serving state interests and avoiding more comprehensive issues like women's emancipation and the pervasive effects of patriarchy, especially in the context of tribal and kinship structures, even though they have made significant contributions to healthcare, social welfare, and education. As part of its modernization agenda, the Kingdom supports women's access to political, economic, healthcare, and educational opportunities. However, these top-down initiatives have also complicated traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity by influencing societal perceptions of gender roles (Sirri 2024).

Medium and persuasive religious communication strategy

Islam is the main element that determines Saudi identity, and it also represents Saudi society's customs, beliefs, and practices. Islam also has a significant impact on how customs, norms and practices are defined. Since the country's founding, there has been a close relationship between Saudi

monarchs and Islamic leaders, which is the underlying reason for the Islamic influence in every part of Saudi Arabian society.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia applies the philosophy of the Hanbali School to the interpretation of Islamic literature. Its norms, one of which has been rigidly upheld, are the male “guardianship” of women. According to the Hanbali School, there are two exceptions to this rule: during marriage and while traveling. But in the 1980s, the male guardianship system was extended to other establishments (including schools, hospitals, etc.).

As a result, Saudi women are considered legal minors, viewed as second-class citizens, and subject to unheard-of legal limitations.

In fact, the use of the word “guardian” in the campaign’s Arabic language hashtag is misleading. In Islam, the concept of a “guardian” is specifically related to marriage, i.e., a guardian plays an essential role in completing a woman’s marriage. Although the word choice was inaccurate, it had been used previously in official documents in reference to this system for controlling women’s freedoms. (Alotaibi and Muldering 2021, 2)

The discourse of correcting women’s rights in Islam was adopted by many participants in the campaign against the male guardianship system. For example, @dndoon411 tweeted:

العقول اصبحت ساقطة ومتأثرة بالغزو الفكري ونسو ان الاسلام منصف المرأة وليس ضدها

[Minds have become weak and affected by intellectual invasion, and they have forgotten that Islam is fair to women and not against them.] (@dndoon411, August 15, 2016)

And @ma9999_ added:

المرأة إنسان كامل الأهلية مثل الرجل و يحق لها أن تكون مسئولة عن حريتها مهمل ما يكون الرجل مسئولاً عن حريته

[A woman is a full-fledged human being like a man, and she has the right to be responsible for her freedom in the same way that a man is responsible for his freedom.] (@ma9999, September 21, 2016)

As was previously said, Saudi society is seen as being conservative and religious, and Saudi Arabia generally protects religion from criticism. Despite their involvement in a fight for social change, people seem driven to respect and uphold religion. Women campaigners demanded that actual Islamic laws be implemented in place of the current laws, which they claimed were based on cultural standards.

In 2016, Saudi women activists started an online campaign *سعوديات نطالب باسقاط* *الولاية* [#EndMaleGuardianshipSystem] to eliminate the male guardianship system. In fact, the use of the word “guardian” in the campaign’s Arabic-language hashtag is misleading. Despite its misleading terminology, the campaign has proven successful. The hashtag began trending daily and eventually led to a series of recent reforms in state regulation.

They stressed that mahram in the Quran and prophetic hadith have a different meaning from the one emphasized in Saudi Arabia. They contended that the current interpretation came about during the awakening movement of the conservative stronghold and that it has resulted in the derogation of women’s rights. (Thorsen and Sreedharan 2019, 16)

Consequently, a significant case was made by prominent Saudi women activists that the male guardianship system, which denies them their rights, is not founded on the true teachings of Islam. They started spreading this discourse to question the morality of such an unfair system. Instead, they blamed preexisting social and power systems and argued that women should be granted more rights in line with the true principles of Islam. @meema_333 posted a persuasive image (Figure 1) that received endorsements from influential political figures and religious experts, stating that the male guardianship system lacks a religiously valid basis and tweeted:

الولاية ليست من الشرع كفا كذبا وافتراء على شرع الله

[Guardianship is not part of the Sharia, but it is a lie and slander against the law of God.] (@meema_333, September 23, 2016)

سعوديات : نطالب بإسقاط نظام الولاية!

الأمير محمد بن سلمان: هناك حقوق للمرأة في الإسلام لم تحصل عليها، سندعم حرية المرأة..

الشيخ عبدالله المنيع: لا ولاية على المرأة إلا في الزواج.

الأميرة بسمة آل سعود: من الحقوق الأولوية للمرأة هي إزالة الولاية..

الشيخ عبدالعزيز الفوزان: الحقيقة أن وسم إسقاط الولاية يتضمن مطالب مشروعة.

الشيخ سليمان الماجد: المرأة البالغة العاقلة ليس عليها ولاية.

الشيخ خالد المصلح: ما كان من الولاية في العرف والمجتمع يجب أن يبعد عن الشرع ويبين أن هذا أمر لا علاقة له بالشرع.

القاضي عيسى الغيث: هناك فرق بين الولاية والقوامة ، الولاية في الإسلام ليست إلا في الزواج.

إنه تحالف صهيوماسوني

A ←

B ←

C ←

D ←

E ←

F ←

G ←

Figure 1. Influential political figures and religious experts, stating that the male guardianship system lacks a religiously valid basis (@meema_333, September 23, 2016)

Figure 1 was a clear persuasive communication strategy that was used by women participants in the male guardianship campaign to prove that political leaders and religious scholars are supporting women's activism against the male guardianship system. This argument was clarified by the below-selected quotes:

- A. [Prince Mohamed Bin Salman: There are rights that women have not obtained in Islam. We will support women's freedom.]
- B. [Religious Scholar Abdullah Al-Manea: There is no guardianship over women except in marriage.]
- C. [Princess Basmah Al Saud: One of the priority rights for women is the removal of the guardianship system.]
- D. [Religious Scholar Abdulaziz Al-Fozan: The truth that the hashtag of dropping the male guardianship system includes legitimate demands.]
- E. [Religious Scholar Suliman Al-Majed: A sane adult woman does not have guardianship.]
- F. [Religious Scholar Khalid Al-Mosleh: What was of guardianship is custom, and society must be kept away from Sharia law, and it should be made clear that this matter has nothing to do with religion.]
- G. [Judge Essa Al-Ghaith: Guardianship in Islam is only in marriage.] (@meema_333, September 23, 2016)

Furthermore, Saudi women emphasized that while women in other Muslim nations had more political, social, and personal rights, Saudi Arabia was the only Muslim nation to restrict women's rights by enforcing the male guardianship system.

Additionally, Saudi women dispelled myths about Islam endorsing the restrictive guardianship system by sharing the testimonies of Islamic experts.

For instance, this was accomplished via tweeting passages on the issue from religious professors. “Saudi women argued that the primary interpreters of Islamic law and policymakers in the modern history of Saudi Arabia were mostly male scholars, and their interpretation was partial, biased, and selective.” (Ibrahim 2019, 16). In this regard @sooso2015sn for example, tweeted:

نظام الولاية يتعارض مع الشريعة الإسلامية والنظام الأساسي للحكم

[The guardianship system contradicts Islamic law and the basic system of government.] (@sooso2015sn, August 10, 2016)

And @fhfh69411 added:

لو نرجع على عهدة الصحابييات ماكان عندهم ولي عليهم

[If we go back to the time of the Companions, they would not have had a guardian over them.] (@fhfh69411, August 6, 2016)

The anti-male guardianship movement made an effort to validate itself by turning to religious intellectuals and authorities. On the one hand, including quotes from religious professors lessened the topic’s sensitivity. On the other hand, as impartiality is a fundamental necessity, it is vital to incorporate professional and outside opinions.

Online discussion topics included the opinions of religious authorities who were consulted about social movements and women’s issues. This also helped to ensure that specialists who were unaware of the movement or who held opposing views were not mentioned. Saudi women activists have been emphasizing that guardianship is only necessary for youngsters and those with mental problems, that religion should not be used as an excuse, and that people should educate themselves on Islamic guardianship rules.

@Oma_Mohd asserted that women have full legal capacity in Islam and posted the below conversation (Figure 2) to logically persuade others with this

assertion (in terms of a question by the male guardianship system proponent and an answer from a religious scholar).

س٢: كيف تزعمون أن الولاية ع النساء بدعة جديدة، والقرآن يقول "الرجال قوامون على النساء" !! هذي ابرز دليل ع الولاية !! التي ترفضوها !!

!ج: ومن قال لك أن الولاية هي القوامة في كتب الفقه -وعد إليها يا أخي- لا ولاية إلا على القاصر والسفيه !! وعد لكتاب الله ستجد ذلك يقول تعالى في آية الذّين من سورة البقرة " فإن كانَ الَّذي عَلَيْهِ الْحَقُّ سَفِيهاً أَوْ ضَعيفاً أَوْ لَا يَسْتطِيعُ أَنْ يُمِلَّ هُوَ فَلْيُمِلْ وَلِيَهُ بِالْعَدْلِ "

: فهنا ذكر ربنا من الذي يجب أن يكون عليه ولي السفيه و الضعيف و العاجز ،،، فهؤلاء يحتاجون ولي يقوم على مصالحهم ويحافظ عليها و يكون له سلطة عليهم لنقص أهليتهم، !ويحاسب إن فرط في صيانتهم أما المرأة فهي كاملة الأهلية في الإسلام ولاتحتاج ولي مسئول عنها ،، بالله قل لي : هل لو قامت المرأة بجرم ، سيحاسب ولها !! طبعا !! لا ،، لماذا ؟؟ لأنها كاملة الأهلية ليس عليها ولاية

Q: How do you claim that the guardianship over women is a new innovation. When Qur'an says, "Men are guardians of women" ?. This is the most prominent evidence of the guardianship that you reject.

A: Return to the Book of God, which stated that the one who must have a guardian is the foolish, the weak, and the incapable. These people need a guardian who will look after their interests, protect them, and have authority over them due to their lack of legal capacity. This guardian will be held accountable if he neglects to maintain them. As for the woman, she has full legal capacity in Islam and does not need a guardian responsible for her. By God, tell me: If a woman commits a crime, will her guardian be held accountable? Of course not, why? Because she has full legal capacity and has no guardianship

Figure 2. A question by the male guardianship system proponent and an answer from a religious scholar. (@Oma_Mohd, September 1, 2016)

Additionally, Saudi women activists were persuading and encouraging other Saudi women to take part in the current conversation and the campaign's symbolic and nonviolent resistance actions by highlighting and explaining how Islam supports women's equality rights. Commenting on Figure 2 @_MaySQ stated:

اتفق معه لما قال ان اغلب المشاكل سببها جهل المرأة بحقوقها، وان الاعراف احيانا ظالمة، واعجبني لما قال مافيه شي اسمه ولاية على المرأة بالاسلام

[I agreed with him when he said that most problems are caused by women's ignorance of their rights and that customs are sometimes unjust, and I liked when he said that there is no such thing as guardianship over women in Islam.] (@_MaySQ, September 2, 2016)

Hard and educative social communication strategy

Saudi Arabia's culture is characterized as traditional and resistant to change. Tribal systems are heavily reliant on the Saudi social structure. Saudi Arabia is a growing country, and its tribal system has made it difficult to uphold modern democratic values. Tribal values are still present despite efforts to keep them out of the nation-building process in many facets of public life.

Additionally, some tribal customs, such as those pertaining to different parts of women's lives, are perceived as being extremely rigid. It gives men the advantage over women in decision-making by giving them more power and dominance. It is crucial to emphasize that tribal traditions in Saudi Arabia have an impact on how Islam is viewed as well as Saudi society's way of life (Maisel 2014).

One consistent message and theme that emerged from the campaign's tweets was rage and intolerance for the male guardianship system and the repressive societal norms that supported it. Saudi women's rights advocates pushed for the abolition of this oppressive system and utilized their activism to challenge the dominant power of religious scholars and legislators to do the same. For example, @meme_957, after analyzing the online discussion about the validity of the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia, tweeted:

اكتشفت بعد المناقشات اللي صارت بذا الهاشتاق ان العادات والتقاليد والمفهوم الاجتماعي اقوى من الدين بالمجتمع

[After the discussions that took place with this hashtag, I discovered that customs, traditions, and social concepts are stronger than religion in society.] (@meme_957, September 22, 2016)

Saudi women, under this rage and intolerance theme, urged that such gender discriminatory laws and injustice practices of the male guardianship system be repealed and that they be treated equally in society as adults and not minors. During their campaign, Saudi women activists employed a variety of inventive and artistic methods to express their opposition to the male guardianship system.

To empower Saudi women, raise their voices, and protect their human dignity, Saudi women activists and participants used a variety of artistic and symbolic performances in original and unique ways. Saudi women's activists also used satire as an effective rhetorical device in this campaign.

For example, @zooztox posted:

”هل تعتقد ان الله وهب المرأة عقل ثم جعلها هي والسفيهه تحت حكم واحد“الولاية

[Do you believe that God gave women a mind and then made them and the foolish woman under one rule?] (@zooztox, September 2, 2016)



Figure 3. A poster depicting a woman's face covered in black hands as a reference to slavery and limited rights for women. (@lovhum, August 14, 2016)

Additionally, @lovhum created and posted a poster (Figure 3) depicting a woman's face covered in black hands as a reference to slavery and limited rights for women, such as the right to express herself freely. These posts were widely shared and retweeted by Saudi women in their activism against the male guardianship system. Furthermore, @lovhum posted this and tweeted:

انتهى زمن العبيد وبقى زمن الولاية في القرن الواحد والعشرين

[The time of slaves has ended, and the time of isolation remains in the 21st century.] (@lovhum, August 14, 2016)

Furthermore, the blame-laying of current power structures and Saudi Arabia's patriarchal system of male guardianship emerged as another significant theme in the Twitter discourse. Saudi women criticized the use of religion as a defense for such an unjust system and blamed patriarchal institutions, social and tribal conventions, and economic and socioeconomic systems.

To keep society aware of the reasons and challenges facing women and to share the support options that are accessible, sharing informative postings that featured information, facts, and support sources was one of the most commonly utilized communication tactics. Sharing posts on Twitter that highlight the disparities between Saudi Arabian women's status and that of women in other Muslim cultures and the rest of the world is one example. This can be seen in the tweet of @huoryh:

الى متى المرءة السعودية هي المرءة الوحيدة في العالم ناقصة وغير كاملة الاهلية

[How long will Saudi women be the only women in the world who are deficient and incomplete?] (@huoryh, August 14, 2016)

Twitter gave Saudi women many opportunities to start and participate in conversations on topics that were previously forbidden in traditional media and conservative Saudi culture. Women activists used a powerful educational discourse strategy of self-expression to end the taboo and break down barriers by sharing their personal struggles with the male guardianship system and

by explaining their struggles in order to inspire other women to share their stories and the discrimination they experienced as a result of this system. @Za14800 argued that Saudi women to take action and speak up in her tweet:

لكل معنفة لكل من تتعرض للتحرش اختصرى الطريق وتعلمي أيسر الطرق في الدفاع عن النفس
لاتنتظري إلى أن تسن قوانين الحماية

[For every violent woman, for every woman subjected to harassment, take the shortcut and learn the easiest ways of self-defense. Do not wait until protection laws are enacted.] (@Za14800, September 2, 2016)

In regard to this, Mariam Alotaibi, a Saudi activist who was taking part in a Twitter campaign against the male guardianship system, was physically assaulted by her brother in order to cease the campaign, delete her photo, and hide her Twitter identity. Mariam's father filed a complaint against her for parental disobedience, which is illegal in Saudi Arabia, when she reported her brother to the police for domestic abuse. She was detained after being apprehended (Ibrahim 2019).

Mariam aggressively tweeted her story, which was shared to raise awareness of oppressive practices against women in families and society at large, to build support for women's movements and activism, and to encourage other Saudi women to speak out and share experiences of similar discrimination and oppression. Many testimonies from other women who experienced the discriminatory guardianship system were shared by Saudi women on Twitter. For example, @SelimaPax tweeted about the struggle of divorced women with the guardianship system:

سيدة مطلقة تخسر وظيفة في مستشفى مرموق لان اوراق طلاقها لم تكتمل ولا يوجد لها ولي لم
يُقبل توقيع اخيها

[A divorced woman loses a job in a prestigious hospital because her divorce papers were not completed, she has no guardian, and her brother's signature was not accepted.] (@SelimaPax, September 13, 2016)

And @JOTfy also shared her personal experience:

كشفت وجهي في السيارة أشرب عصير وكانت النتيجة سب وشتم وقذف من ولي أمري أخوي الصغير
بصف ١ ثانوي

[I uncovered my face in the car drinking juice, and the result was insults, cursing, and slander from my guardian, my younger brother in the first year of secondary school.] (@JOTfy, September 2, 2016)

Women who have taken part in the anti-male guardianship campaign have encountered harsh reactions, cyberbullying, slander, defamation, and threats from some conservatives and hardliners in Saudi society. This is especially true given that many Saudis view such activism as being harmful to Saudi social customs.

Consequently, this illustrates how involvement in sociopolitical concerns in a very conservative community may occasionally result in negative responses. Additionally, it demonstrates how Saudi tribes have an impact on members' actions. "A tribe in Saudi society forms a social and political unit whose members cannot go beyond traditions and customs in a way that could affect its reputation and status" (Alsahafi 2019, 230).

These unfavorable reactions have been brought to light by participants who have vehemently defended the movement and themselves on Twitter. For example, @SelimaPax tweeted:

لماذا عندما يُطالب اي فصيل من المجتمع بحقوقه يُتهم بالعمالة الخارجيه ؟ هل السعودي عاجز عن
المطالبة بحقه

[Why, when any faction of society demands its rights, is it accused of foreign employment? Is the Saudi unable to claim his rights?] (@SelimaPax, August 24, 2016)

And @xr6rr tweeted:

سيحاولون تشويه هذه الحمله بشتى الطرق لكن لن نتوقف الا بإسقاط الولاية عن كل امرأه
حُرّه مهمها حاولوا تخويننا

[They will try to distort this campaign in various ways, but we will not stop except by removing guardianship from every free woman, as important as they try to betray us.] (@xr6rr, September 22, 2016)

The lack of women’s NGOs capable of working with the government, mobilizing institutional resources, and performing experiments and changes pertaining to women’s concerns harms women’s movements in Saudi Arabia. In order to promote women’s causes, they frequently turn to tactics that were uncommon for their predecessors, such as public mobilization, calls for accountability, and impactful lawsuits (Alotaibi and Mulderrig 2021).

As a result, Saudi women activists responded to the lack of women’s organizations and legislation by stepping up and proposing a list of changes that need to be implemented for women’s concerns. @AlharbiRanoos, for instance, detailed these reforms in the following tweet:

- (1) We demand equal rights and preparations and that some women be equal as full, first-class citizens, like working men.
- (2) We demand that we be given the right to education, treatment, work, travel, and marriage without the approval of a guardian.
- (3) We also demand the abolition of the prison law for violent women in protection homes and the introduction of a strict law that protects against violence against women.
- (4) Abolishing the guardian’s right to imprison a woman if she reports violence against her.
- (5) Introducing a strict law in which the harasser and aggressor are held accountable with the harshest penalties.

(6) Giving women the full right to drive cars, just like men, and freedom of movement. (@AlharbiRanoos, September 24, 2016)

The patriarchal culture and societal norms have historically limited women's participation in public life in Saudi Arabia. These limitations result from a number of things, such as cultural prejudices, strict religious interpretations, and tribal patriarchy. But it's important to understand that culturally shaped interpretations, not the ineluctable conclusion of religious texts, are what lead to male dominance.

Conclusion

There are many potentials and lessons to be learned from the Saudi women's hashtag activism campaign against the male guardianship system for future virtual advocacy and women's empowerment efforts. Saudi women participated in this campaign as part of a continuous struggle for social and political reform in the country's patriarchal culture and political and socially restrictive environments.

The current study and earlier research on women's activism both indicate that Saudi women activists used Twitter to encourage other Saudi women to actively participate in society as opposed to acting as passive spectators. The current study and earlier research on women's activism both indicate that Saudi women activists used Twitter to encourage other Saudi women to actively participate in society as opposed to acting as passive spectators. Three distinct sectors were targeted by three different communication tactics. First, political institutions to gain their support; second, religious institutions to support and legitimize the women's movement; and third, the socially oppressive framework to enhance women's ability to act together and address more urgent social issues.

To assert, educate, and persuade women and society at large about the repressive situation and the need for change, Saudi women used Twitter in an inventive and creative way. Young Saudi women activists and participants in the anti-male guardianship Twitter campaign were excellent at building

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