

The Contribution of Saudi Female Journalists in Newspapers: Before and After Saudi Vision

2030

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the contributions of female Saudi journalists to traditional newspapers between 2014 and 2018 and analyzed the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 on their work. The findings indicated that Saudi female journalists predominantly discussed local affairs and social issues, while their coverage of political, economic, and women's issues was limited. After the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030, female journalists' contributions to political and economic matters, women's rights and issues, and social issues such as unemployment and terrorism decreased. However, coverage of Islamic movements and religious extremists remained consistent before and after Vision 2030 and was mostly featured in the *Alwatan* newspaper.

INDEX WORDS: Saudi female journalists, Women in journalism, Journalism in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia media, Gender and journalism

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loved ones who supported me every step of the way. To each one of you, thank you for your constant prayers, unconditional love, and unwavering support.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In less than a century, Saudi Arabia has evolved from historical modes of thinking to a more modern understanding of Islam. Specifically, Saudi Arabia moved from “Wahhabism,” which was derived from the Hanbali School of Sunnah founded in Saudi Arabia’s central region during the 1740s (Commins, 2006) to the re-modernization of Islamic teaching and the promotion of “moderate Islam” by Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (MBS) on his appointment to deputy crown prince in 2015. The massive change took place after the launch of the Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016, which aims to restructure Saudi Arabia’s position economically and socially. Of particular note is the impact of the recent shift in areas that Wahhabism dramatically impacted, including women’s rights, women’s empowerment, and law-enforced gender segregation. These changes strengthen women’s contribution in the public sphere including, but not limited to, the journalism industry.

Saudi women’s journey into the journalistic profession started in 1952. Women were essentially absent from the first four decades of the Saudi press. The journey of Saudi women journalists has been full of challenges and obstacles, such as gender discrimination and segregation, lack of opportunities to hold powerful positions, and sexist laws (e.g., driving car ban, bans against independent travel, and regulations regarding women in labor) (Aljuaid, 2020; Kurdi, 2014).

The Saudi Vision 2030, however, publicly endorsed the elevation of women to higher positions of power in almost all industries including journalism. In fact, the Vision includes a goal to empower women and reduce the gender gap by increasing their participation in the Saudi labor market and improving women’s status overall (Vision

2030, 2022). The implementation of various laws and regulations has facilitated greater participation of women in the public sector, including strengthened legislation against gender discrimination and sexual harassment. Further, the plan has removed many obstacles facing women journalists (e.g., in June 2018, the government lifted the driving ban and in August 2019 independent travel became allowable).

Yet, the question remains whether the Saudi 2030 Vision positively impacted women journalists' contribution to media or whether the Vision merely create a facade for the support of women's rights and role(s) in media. Particularly as the number of detained Saudi journalists, including women, has increased rapidly since 2017 (Reporters Without Borders, 2021), further study is needed to investigate the tangible reflections on women's empowerment and the national transformation plan in the journalism field. This study will help fill that gap by examining the opinion pieces that Saudi female journalists have written from 2014-2018.

1.1 Women Journalists in Saudi Arabia: A Scholarly Review

Few previous studies evaluate the contributions of Saudi women to media generally and the more specific field of journalism. One of the earliest studies that aimed to provide an overview was Maha Akeel's 2010 work titled *Saudi Women in the Media*. This work discussed female journalists' position in the contexts of Islamic teaching and Saudi traditions, noting the kind of obstacles and constraints that accrued from such conditions. She concluded that gender segregation and stereotypes were the major challenges that Saudi women journalists had to overcome, along with their battle to find their own identities as Saudi journalists. Another study by Eiman Kurdi (2014) examined Saudi women journalists' experiences in the Saudi press, investigated the challenges and obstacles, and examined the goals and motivations for women in the future of journalism. She described the impact of cultural and religious factors on women

journalists' experiences, which, according to her findings, had a negative effect. Similar to Akeel's findings, Kurdi (2014) interviewed seven Saudi women journalists and found that the main concern of women journalists was gender discrimination and segregation. Interviewees reported that female Saudi journalists felt that their gender had adversely impacted their salary, job and promotion opportunities, and even their access to information. Moreover, stories assigned to women journalists were limited to women's issues only, a sign of the segregation of the sexes in Saudi society. The same study found that female journalists struggled with the strict censorship that prohibited them from criticizing state and religion, even when these factors impacted women's issues.

A qualitative study by Aljuaid (2020) investigated women journalists' perspectives regarding their roles, challenges, and goals. Aljuaid interviewed nineteen journalists from April 2015 to August 2016. Saudi journalists reported that Saudi traditions were still the main challenge in the profession which restricted them and made them feel unable to perform their jobs in the ways they wanted. They agreed that men still supervised the concept of women's empowerment in Saudi society, preventing women from being seen as autonomous individuals. Furthermore, Saudi women journalists reported that the strict laws regarding online content and the fear of committing cybercrimes under Saudi law made them hesitate to participate online.

Mellor (2010) also shed light on the status of women journalists in Saudi Arabia and tried to understand their roles and work within the context of a women's empowerment notion in Saudi society. She argued that the existence of Saudi women journalists in the profession was not necessarily a reflection of women's empowerment. Instead, as she described it, the existence of women journalists was an effort to generate "publicity for the moderate policies of Saudi Arabia." (p. 217). She argued that Saudi women journalists had either limited or no power over

the content of their work, thus diminishing their role in the profession. She also explored the Wahhabi movement's impact on Saudi society in general and women and media in particular. She argued that it prevented journalism from flourishing at different levels and negatively impacted female journalists.

Further, Alnajrani, et al. (2018) explored Saudi journalists' point of view on freedom of expression during the era of national transition. They concluded that journalists still attempted to avoid writing and covering stories related to women, and the coverage of women in newspapers remained uncomfortable territory. Yet, the results of their study lacked generalizability as they were limited to the small number of journalists from Medina, which had a unique position as a holy Islamic city that might influence journalists' decisions on discussing controversial topics.

Taken on the whole, one of the important gaps in this current research on gender and Saudi journalism concerns the time frame for data collection. Most of the interviews occurred prior to or during the launch of Saudi Vision 2030. In fact, the notion of "moderate Islam," which might play a role in changing the public narrative and guaranteeing journalists some power against Islamic extremists, emerged in October 2017, after *The Guardian* interviewed the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). Thus, conducting a study after new rules were in place and absorbed provides a needed update to the information regarding the status of Saudi women journalists both in the profession and in Saudi society.

Previous studies on the topic of women in Saudi media were also limited because they were based exclusively on interviews. Such an approach reveals the journalists' point of view of the profession and their roles within it, including shedding light on female journalists' views of the challenges and struggles that they had to negotiate to effectively perform their job. However, interviews may not reveal the actual contributions of these journalists to the field, especially as

their work is subject to the law of regulation and publication. Analyzing and examining female journalists' writings in traditional newspapers that strictly follows law and regulation will contribute to the knowledge of female contribution within regulatory frameworks of journalism in Saudi Arabia.

To date, studies of female journalists have also omitted measurements of the possible effects of recent government reforms aimed at minimizing the impact of religious extremism and limiting Wahhabism's power on journalistic praxis. Despite various studies suggesting that religious factors and extremism previously prevented female journalists from discussing women's issues in newspapers (Almaghlooth, 2013; Awad, 2009; Mellor, 2010), the possible effects of the reforms that began in 2016 remain largely unexplored. Yet, these reforms may have led to a change in journalistic praxis, allowing Saudi female journalists to have more freedom to discuss sensitive topics such as the veil and men's guardianship. Furthermore, in the current phase of Saudi society's transformation, religious groups have less impact on public opinion than they did in the past. These conditions suggests that factors that have previously preventing female journalists from discussing sensitive issues may no longer be operable.

Further, previous studies have also ignored the immediate context of the newspapers outlets as they assess conditions for female journalists. Despite the fact that Saudi newspapers are not overtly affiliated with any political or social orientation and they are not officially classified as either liberal or conservative newspapers, the editorial policies and underlying ideologies of these newspapers may also affect the contributions made by journalists. Accordingly, the need to consider the institutional context where female journalists work should also be considered.

Thus, the goal of this study is to provide an in-depth examination of female contributions in traditional newspapers during the study timeframe. More specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

- 1- What kind of topics and issues do female journalists discuss in Saudi newspapers?
- 2- Have the contributions of Saudi female journalists to newspapers changed over time in relation to Saudi Vision 2030?
- 3- Do the contributions of Saudi female journalists differ according to the newspapers where they publish?

2 HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Answering the study's questions fully requires a contextual understanding of the factors that might affect the journalism industry in Saudi Arabia and the influence of the environment in which Saudi female journalists perform their roles. This is especially true since the role of government and its ideologies is paramount in regulating the journalism industry and defining the journalist's role and regulation of their practices. The Kingdom's policies since its unification, the relationship between the nation's leaders and religion, the existing laws and regulations regarding women and their rights, and the changes of these factors overtime might illustrate the circumstances in which female journalists conduct their jobs.

Further, the knowledge regarding Saudi women's issues and the kind of rights they had or lacked in three different eras, including the reforms after 2016 and the implications of Vision 2030, intertwine directly with Saudi female journalists' contributions in the media. In other words, Saudi women's status is part of the journalists' status in general in terms of the level of empowerment, its influence on all other aspects of their work, and also on the way in which society perceives their roles as women and journalists. In addition to the importance of revealing

Saudi female journalists' challenges and obstacles, comparing their status to other journalists in the Arab world provides a thorough overview of their similarities and differences, consequently positioning Saudi female journalists on the female journalism practices in Arab countries. In general, this chapter aims to identify the political or social circumstances that possibly intertwine with the work of female journalists.

2.1 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Brief Background

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic, Arabian, and Middle Eastern country that has a rich history and unique aspects. Saudi Arabia is the destination of all Muslims around the world as it contains the two holiest Islamic sites: Makkah and Medina. The Kingdom's history has three major phases. In 1744, Muhammad ibn Saud and the religious reformer Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab aligned to establish the first Saudi state, which lasted approximately 75 years before the Ottoman campaigns dissolved the state in 1818. The second Saudi state commenced after Prince Turki ibn Abdullah's successful fight against occupying forces in 1824 and ended in 1891 due to internal disputes (Gerges, 2010). Then, in 1932, King Abdulaziz bin Saud, whose sons succeeded him in power, re-established the Saudi state, now considered the modern Kingdom. Since the first Saudi state, *Shari'a* (Islamic law) derived from the Holy Quran and the sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed serves as the foundation of the Kingdom's rule (Kosebalaban & Ayoob, 2009). Saudi Arabia's rule is an absolute monarchy under the auspices of the al-Sa'ud family as the Kingdom permits no political parties (Zuhur, 2012). Hence, the monarch, who is also the Prime Minister, has the ultimate legislative power.

During the Kingdom's history, the discovery of oil in the 1930s has contributed to its massive transformation and progressive position. Yamani (1996) considers that the rapid increases in the Kingdom's income due to oil-generated revenue in the 1970s led to the

restructuring of Saudi society at different scales. However, the aftermath of the Iranian Shi'a revolution in January 1979 followed by the Grand Mosque seizure in November 1979 terminated the promising shift toward progress (Hamdan, 2005). Indeed, after the incident of the seizure of the Grand Mosque in 1979, the Saudi government deferred to religious leaders to boost its religious standing as a pious Islamic country (Sakr, 2008). That action resulted in rules that affected all within the society, but mostly women.

2.2 Saudi Arabian Women: Overview of Rights and Issues

The issue of women's rights in Saudi Arabia is one of the most discussed topics by both conservatives and progressives. In fact, the outcomes of religious movements and certain government policies in each era has influenced women's status in Saudi Arabia. In her book, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia*, Al-Rasheed (2013) argues that the government has used images of Saudi women for their political and religious interests since 1744 when an alliance was formed between the Saudi royal family and the Wahhabi leader. She maintains that neither religious leaders nor societal norms constitute the only reasons behind women's predicament as a result of gender inequality, but the government has used women as symbols for their own interests, whether to promote modernity or demonstrate piety.

For example, the incident of the seizure of the Grand Mosque in 1979 resulted in laws that affected women by denying them the right to appear on television or having their rights discussed in newspapers (Sakr, 2008). According to Hamdan (2005), the 1979 incident led to the end of the official discussion of women's rights which began after the discovery of oil off the east coast of Saudi Arabia and the resultant presence of American oil companies in the country. The early presence of American oil companies and their employees influenced Saudi society, as they introduced a different set of values that were brought by American engineers and their

families (Hamdan, 2005). Saudi women started demanding rights that American women enjoyed in the Kingdom, such as driving cars and not wearing the Hijab in public.

Yet, in the post-1979 period, the influence of incidents relating to Islamic movements dashed hopes of improving women's status. During the 1980s, Saudi society benefited from an increase in the export of petroleum. However, rather than moving forward with women's rights, the Kingdom chose to maintain Islamic values and their own traditions (Huyette, 1985). As multiple studies have argued, the government's ideology directly affects women's status in Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2003; Sakr, 2008). Accordingly, the following will review major women's issues will be linked to the regimes in each era.

2.2.1 *King Fahd Era (1982 -2005): Overview of Women's Status*

King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, the fifth ruler of the kingdom, ruled the country for twenty-three years. During his reign, his regime witnessed numerous international and national events that deeply influenced his policies and Saudi society alike such as the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989), the peak of the *Sahwa*¹ movement (1987- 1997), the Gulf War (1990-1991), the first protest against women's driving ban in 1990, the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Riyadh bombings in 2003.

One of the important improvements in women's status during King Fahd's reign was in the education sector. The General Presidency of Girls had overseen females' formal education separate from boys' education, which the Ministry of Education supervised. According to Hamdan (2005), the administrative separation of females from males in education was to ensure that the education system, including materials and regulations, served the main goal of educating girls to prepare for their roles as wives and mothers. And even if females wanted to enter the

¹ The Saudi al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya (Islamic Awakening), or Sahwa, refers to a powerful social and political movement that led to a massive change in Saudi society between the 1960s and 1980s.

labor market, the education system had to prepare them for certain majors and jobs that were perceived as suitable for their nature, such as teaching and nursing (Prokop, 2003).

However, a tragic event occurred in 2002 that ended with a major change in policy. In the 2002 Mecca girls' school fire, 15 young girls perished in their school when the members of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice prevented rescue efforts from saving the girls. The Committee's reasoning for such inaction was that the girls were not wearing their hijabs which would render male rescuers entering the school sinful (Aljazeera, 2002). This incident and its massive media coverage both nationally and internationally led to the merging of female education supervision under the Ministry of Education with one administrative entity for both genders. This royal decree received massive criticism from religious leaders who perceived this as a step toward mixed gender schools and other secular beliefs (Alrasheed, 2010).

Eventually, females' education during this period witnessed significant improvement in terms of the number of schools and universities that offered majors that had not been available for females before 2002.

In addition to the change in education, the Saudi government in 2001 allowed women to obtain national identity cards for the first time. Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz, the Interior Minister at that time, permitted women to possess their own identity cards to help prevent fraud and forgery and help the country to cover the needs that emerged in the contemporary period (BBC, 2001). Before the regulatory change, women's official documents had been on "family cards," which only male guardians could acquire.

In spite of these advances, Islamic movements strongly impacted this period nationally and internationally, especially the *Sahwa* movement. The status of women was mostly limited despite the government's attempts to encourage women to be active in the public sphere in the

wake of 9/11 and as a response to international criticism for exporting terrorism and extremism (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Sakr, 2008).

2.2.2 *King Abdullah Era (2005-2015): Overview of Women's Status*

Tracing Saudi women's development and employment reveals that King Abdullah's regime was a period in which women were granted several significant rights. Indeed, King Abdullah, in his interview shortly after he became king with Barbara Walters in 2005, stated that he "believed strongly in the rights of women." (ABC News, 2005). One of the first reform laws in his regime regarding women's status was allowing them to be issued national identity cards without the consent of their male guardians, which the law had required in the previous era (Ghanam, 2015). Consequently, such a law granted women some level of independence and permitted the issuance of other official documents to women without documentation requiring male guardian approval. Women's status was dramatically changed despite the conservatives' and religious leaders' opposition.

Although major obstacles such as guardianship systems and the driving ban remained unresolved, King Abdullah's reforms paved the way for empowering women at different levels. During his reign, women actively participated in the public domain and gained the power to demand their rights through multiple channels (Tsujigami, 2008). However, the government's reaction to the demands for rights was not consistently positive. For example, the government arrested Manal Al-Sharif, a Saudi activist, after she shared a video of herself while driving as her action was perceived as challenging the government and its regulations. Manal was accused of disrupting the public order and inciting public opinion (MacFarquhar, 2011).

Two years later, the 26 October Campaign began protesting the ban on women of driving. The Saudi government declared its stance on the movement by blocking the Campaign's website

and asking the leaders to refrain from communicating on the issue (The Women to Drive Movement, 2022). Aziza Al-Yousef and Eman Al-Nafjan, two of the prominent female advocates for the right to drive, persisted despite the warning. Both of them were immediately arrested and detained for hours until their husbands arrived at the police station and signed a pledge that their wives would not drive again (Jamjoom, 2013). In brief, this period witnessed positive changes in regulations regarding women's status socially, politically, and economically; yet, major obstacles left such issues as the women's driving ban and guardianship system unresolved.

2.2.3 *King Salman Era (2015- Present): Overview of Women's Status*

The reign of King Salman and his crown prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) is arguably the most progressive era empowering Saudi women due to the momentous changes in laws and regulations. Although the previous regime paved the way for such changes, King Salman had the authority and resolve to minimize the power of religious leaders who negatively affected the pursuit of women's rights over the years. The government's attempts to reform the understanding of Islamic teaching and establish what MBS referred to as “returning the Kingdom to moderate Islam” was part of a massive national project called “Saudi Vision 2030”. The Saudi government announced several regulations and reforms and established a number of new policies to ensure women's participation fully in society. For example, in 2017, women won the right to drive after years of struggle. The Saudi official TV channel announced a royal decree allowing women to be issued drivers licenses and to drive in Saudi Arabia starting in 2018 (Saudi Press Agency, 2017).

Several studies have referred to the lifting of the ban on women driving as a positive step for women's rights and an effort to bridge the gender gap (Allele & Ibrahim, 2021; Al-Jundi,

2019; Al-Refaei & Al-Faydi, 2020). Yet, some argue that this reform was for economic reasons only (Hvidt, 2018), and women remain powerless even with the government's permission for them to drive (Al-Sharif, 2019). Perhaps the guardianship system was one of the reasons behind skeptical voices questioning women's empowerment. Women did have the right to drive, but before 2019 they still needed approval from male relatives to obtain legal documentation that would allow them to obtain passports, travel, marry, acquire family records, and in some places, even apply for jobs.

As the guardianship system strongly contradicted the notion of women's empowerment, the Saudi government had to modify several policies to be consistent with its new ideology. In 2019, a royal decree enacted a modification to labor and civil laws toward gender equality: women no longer needed a male guardian's permission to obtain passports and travel abroad if they were over 21 years of age; women could now register births, marriages, or divorces; and women could be issued official family documents (Saudi Press Agency, 2019). However, women still needed a guardian's permission to leave government shelters or jail after completing sentences and to marry and register marriage officially (Bacchi, 2019). In short, women during King Salman's reign received significant rights under the umbrella of the Saudi Vision 2030 that has influenced many sectors.

2.3 Saudi Vision 2030 and Government Reforms

On April 25, 2016, the Saudi King, Salman bin Abdulaziz, and his crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) launched Vision 2030, which has had a great influence on the Kingdom at different levels since then. The Vision, which the Council of Economic and Development Affairs has developed under the supervision of MBS, has three main pillars: "Vibrant Society, Thriving Economy, and An Ambitious Nation" (Vision 2030, 2020). The three

pillars, despite differences in detailed agendas, aim to reduce oil dependency and diversify sources of income, improve public service sectors, increase the quality of life overall, and open the Kingdom to the world, all of which are the ultimate goals of Vision 2030 (Vision 2030, 2022). Vision 2030 aims to reach the vibrant society via several steps, such as increases in the cultural and entertainment avenues around the Kingdom, the registration of more Saudi legacy locations with UNESCO, and the fostering of healthy lifestyles among the citizens. The plan also seeks to have a thriving economy that revolves around diversifying the Kingdom's economy and providing a dynamic market for Saudi citizens by focusing on industries that were underdeveloped, such as tourism, manufacturing, privatizing state-owned investments, and updating the education curriculum at all educational levels, to name a few (Vision 2030, 2022). The ambitious nation, the last pillar, aims to establish a sustainable foundation for the Kingdom's success by adopting accountability and transparency values as strategies for governing by adopting zero-tolerance corruption policies at all levels, enhancing online services, and boosting the non-profit sector, amongst others (Vision 2030, 2022).

Empowering women is one of Vision 2030's goals (Vision 2030, 2022). Specifically, women's participation in the Saudi labor market has been a priority as the Vision aims to increase the percentage of working women from 22 percent to 30 percent by 2030 (Vision 2030, 2022). In fact, this goal was achieved in 2022 as the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD) announced that women's participation in the labor market reached 33.7 percent, which represented a tremendous success for the Vision's target (MHRSD, 2023). The achievement of enhancing women's economic position resulted from the change and implementation of a variety of laws and regulations that facilitate women's participation (Mohamed, 2020). For example, women had more protected rights in the workplace, including

strengthened laws related to gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and pregnancy and maternity leaves. Several other initiatives that bolstered women's status included free training programs, an official online platform for unemployed women, a "*Wosool*" program to support women's transport to and from work, and a "*Qurrah*" program that helped working mothers (The General Authority for Statistics, 2019). Several studies have aimed to measure the impact that the recent empowerment initiatives had on Saudi women. According to Alessa et al.'s (2022) survey of 903 Saudi working women in both public and private sectors, women perceive Saudi Vision 2030 and its implications positively. Participants reported that they were satisfied with women's economic status quo and believed that they had more chances to be economically empowered. However, the study also pointed out that Saudi women still struggled with the cultural and traditional influences in society, the negative views about women in leadership positions, and the lack of financial independence and self-confidence among women (Alessa et al., 2022). On the other hand, Topal (2019) argues that the notion of women's empowerment—economics in particular under the Saudi Vision 2030—was utilized in the Kingdom to encourage competitiveness and increase foreign economic involvement within the country's economy. Thus, the Saudi government's efforts to empower women, according to Topal, “has been far from being path-breaking” (2019, p.7).

In addition, Vision 2030 contributes to the empowerment of women in the political arena. However, attempting to include women in the political field requires empowering them at several levels. To illustrate, the Saudi government embraces the notion of empowerment by achieving gender equity and bridging the gap between women and men, which, according to Al-Yahya (2015), eventually would positively enhance women's participation in politics. In 2019, the Saudi Ministry of Defense declared that women could join the military; and in the same year witnessed

the appointment of Reema Bint Bandar Al Saud, the first female ambassador in the kingdom's history.

Yet, Saudi women are still underrepresented in political fields. According to Alqahtani et al. (2020), a study including 218 participants occupying positions in higher education finds that women's status continued to face barriers and challenges due to negative perceptions. Alqahtani et al. (2020) indicate that the societal point of view towards women, their capabilities, and the women's lack of financial standing still obstructs women's involvement in politics in the Kingdom. Perhaps, the delay in applying regulations that strengthen women, in general, is one of the reasons why the study's findings regarding the satisfactory implication of Vision 2030 on women and politics (Alqahtani et al., 2020). In brief, Saudi women have more opportunities to enter the political field when the implementation and reformation of laws and regulations in terms of women's status despite the presence of several barriers that might need more time to be solved.

2.4 Journalism in Saudi Arabia: Foundation and Regulation

The history of the press in Saudi Arabia goes back to the Ottoman era, before the Saudi Kingdom's unification. Specifically, this history begins in 1883 when the printing press arrived in the city of Mecca in the *Al-Hijaz* region (Alshamikh, 1981). The first edition of the newspaper, named after the region of its publication, was issued in 1908 and published in both Arabic and Turkish (Alshamikh, 1981). However, the history of the press in the region that is currently known as Saudi Arabia was intertwined directly with the attempts at uniting the government and establishing the new Saudi kingdom by the founder of the third Saudi state, King Abdul Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman (Alshamikh, 1981). During his reign, *Umm Al-Qura*, the first official newspaper in the history of the united Saudi kingdom, was established and

published in 1924. The main reason for establishing *Umm Al-Qura* was for it to be a source of all decisions and statements of the Saudi government for establishing the roles and principles of its contemporary kingdom (Alshamikh, 1981).

In the modern era, the Saudi press has moved through three main phases (Alshamikh, 1981). Each phase was characterized by variable sets of regulations and legislation. The first phase, the “individual's press,” allowed the citizens of Saudi Arabia to initiate and publish their own newspapers which they fully organized and financed. In order to provide an organizational approach, the Saudi government eventually abolished the “individual press” phase and established the second phase of the Saudi press—“the publication system”—in 1964. In this phase, citizens were still able to own their newspapers; however, the process of publication and distribution had to conform to the publication system. The last and current phase is associated with the new system of press organizations that was approved in 2001.

The aim of the new system was to fill the gaps and resolve the issues of the previous system. The new press system’s goals comprise three main points. The first was to facilitate the work of the Ministry of Media as the governmental body that regulates the media in its different forms and eases the process of establishing a specialized organization for journalists (Al-Shebeili, 2000). In the second, based on the new system, the government abolished the editorial supervision committee, and each press institution had its own board of directors (Al-Shebeili, 2000). In the last phase, the government enacted legislation to safeguard journalists from arbitrary dismissal proceedings, as well as to address the issue of press institution membership duplication (Al-Shebeili, 2000). The media and press in Saudi Arabia are regulated by the Ministry of Media, which is one of the governmental entities established by royal order since the issue of the first newspaper. The Ministry of Media is directly linked to the Council of Ministers

of Saudi Arabia led by King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. Media regulation is operated by "Media Policy in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," which was approved by the Council of Ministers in 1982, and still works as the guideline of all forms of media in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Media, n.d.).

The Saudi government strictly censors and controls the media via the Ministry of Media. Such regulations have impacted journalists' practices and contributions to the field at different levels. Indeed, Saudi journalists are, by law, forbidden from criticizing the religion of Islam, members of the royal family, and the government entities and their representatives (Awad, 2006). The fear of the consequences of publishing sensitive topics became part of Saudi journalists' identity as they embraced it for self-preservation (Al-Askar, 2005; Khazen, 1999). According to Alshamiry (1992) and Awad (2006), censorship in Saudi journalism emerges in three forms: official, editorial, and self-censorship. The official censorship starts by regulating any publication activities by law. For example, journalists and newspaper owners must also obtain approval from the Ministry of Media in appointing editors-in-chief. Editorial censorship is what Awad (2006) refers to as the power that editors-in-chief exercise over journalists' content, including topic choices and permission to cover controversial stories, along with making critical decisions regarding the publication of sensitive topics. The last type of censorship is self-censorship which journalists themselves practice while performing their job, whether consciously or unconsciously. In this regard, Jihad Khazen (1999), one of the founders of Arab News, the first Saudi newspaper that used English as an official language, stated that Saudi journalists with whom he worked were not willing to cover controversial stories, as they did not want to upset the public.

In addition, non-state factors including cultural background and religious views hold sway for the practice of Saudi journalism. According to Alnajrani et al (2018), journalists reported that they consider Saudi society and its norms, religious factors and its power, and the judgments from family and tribal members as factors that prevent their reporting on women's issues and controversial religious subjects. The same study argued that cultural and religious factors affect journalists' practices more than laws and regulations that emerged with the announcement of Vision 2030. The embracing of moderation in all aspects would, implicitly, alter the journalism field and guarantee some level of freedom.

2.5 Women and Journalism in Saudi Arabia: Background and Establishment

The entry of Saudi women into the journalism industry began in 1952 when the newspaper *Al Belad* employed Latifa Al-Khatib as the first woman columnist and editor of the women's section (Mellor, 2010). Al-Khatib paved the way for other women, such as Thouryya Qabel who joined *Quroyash Magazine* in 1959. Then in 1960, *Oukaz Newspaper* devoted 25 percent of its space for women journalists who were focused on women's issues (Reda, 2008). However, women who were in the Saudi media at that time represented a certain social status that enjoyed a high level of education and privileges (Mellor, 2010). Several women had to use pseudonyms to enter the field (Reda, 2008) since, during the previous period, women journalists had not occupied powerful positions in their male-dominated newspapers. However, in 1980, due to the expansion of mass media in Saudi society, *Al Riyadh Newspaper* launched the first women's department in the history of Saudi journalism. The editor in the established section was Dr. Khayriyah Al-Saqqaf, one of the pioneers in women journalism in Saudi Arabia (Almannai, 2017). Despite the early contribution of women in newspapers, the first woman editor-in-chief,

Somayya Jabarti, was appointed to the *Saudi Gazette* newspaper only in 2014 after her extensive experience which started in 1996.

Yet, one woman editor-in-chief is not enough. The lack of female journalists who hold powerful positions in newspapers contrasts the notion of empowerment and minimizes the impact of participation. Indeed, the reasons why women in journalism remain under male control are attributed to cultural, religious, and governmental factors. These factors influence the perception of journalism as a male profession, which has been an obstacle for women entering the field and gaining powerful positions.

To illustrate the cultural factors at play, the Saudi Arabian government is an Islamic state governed by *Sharia* law. Traditionally, and before the recent Saudi reform of the law, women were treated as permanent legal minors, and in the field of journalism, women were restricted since journalism involves personal representation and direct interaction with men (Hudhayri, 2021). In fact, the traditional culture of male guardianship still affects women working in the field of journalism. In practice, authorities still permit the culture of guardianship among professionals, which adversely affects the work of female journalists (Mellor, 2019). Furthermore, government oversight over the media and the stringent regulations adversely affect female journalists in perceived discriminatory ways (Mellor, 2019). Personal autonomy and decision-making are stifled on controversial subjects due to the required input from higher political authorities.

2.6 Women and Journalism in Saudi Arabia: Overview of Status

Several female journalists have used their personal experiences to initiate an in-depth exploration of Saudi females' status in the media realm. Their studies examined many aspects, including the impact that institutional regulations had on their work, the challenges caused by

social norms and their pressures, and the influence of gender roles and discrimination. Each aspect consists of several factors that contribute to the conclusion that journalism in Saudi Arabia has remained one of the most challenging professions for females over the years. In 2005, the journalist Halah Alnasir, who started her career in the early nineties, launched her book titled *“Shahrazad in Saudi Journalism,”* which aims to trace Saudi female journalism’s history from its beginning. According to Alnasir (2005), the conservative Saudi society and its position on women generally has influenced female journalists’ experiences in several forms that differ in intensity over each period of time. For instance, women could not use their names and had to publish their work under pseudonyms due to family pressures. The cause of such practices was the fear of criticism about women's work, especially in professions like journalism, which was found to be reprehensible by some. Thereby, the use of pseudonyms or their real name but hiding their family and tribes’ names was a step that female journalists took to avoid clashes with their communities. Interestingly, the same phase witnessed the use of female names by male journalists who wanted to broaden their readers' base by using female names at a time when communication with the opposite gender was restricted and prohibited (Alnasir, 2005). The use of female names, for example, received massive success in sports news according to Alnasir (2005), as the male audience felt attracted to the notion that females were discussing sports matters. However, even though such incidents were exploiting women, Alnasir (2005) believes that such practices have benefited female journalists since readers became more accepting of females’ journalistic work and liked their style, especially since it took years before the truth of the practice was revealed. Further, Alnasir’s (2005) book incorporates a variety of female journalists’ testimonies as part of the author’s attempt to document the evolutionary improvements for women in the profession when compared to reports from several years back.

Yet, despite such progress, the journalist profession for females remains challenging and full of obstacles. Journalists believe that females' lack of academic education in media and journalism writing courses in Saudi Arabia negatively affects their performance in both theoretical and practical knowledge, and also obstructs their hiring opportunities. Thus, most of the pioneers in female journalism have either studied abroad or in private schools, which only privileged families could achieve (Alnasir, 2005). In 2001, the College of Business Administration in Jeddah made the first attempt to offer a diploma in journalism for female students but failed to have enough applicants as only two students have enrolled in the three years since its commencement. Alnasir (2005) believes that the failure of the program was due to the perception that the journalism profession for women was not a stable and decent job as it was an unexplored choice for women at that time. Several studies argue that the 9/11 incident and international pressure on the Kingdom's ideology somehow instigated journalism education for female students in hopes that it would improve the Kingdom's image globally (Mellor, 2010; Saker, 2008). In 2006, the Imam Mohammad ibn Saud Islamic University offered a master's degree in media for female students for the first time, followed by the King Saud University in 2006, King Abdulaziz University in 2008-2009, and Umm Al-Qura University in 2008, which offered a bachelor's degree in journalism and media (Akeel, 2010). Currently, most of the major governmental universities offer media and communication degrees with multiple concentrations for female students.

Furthermore, Saudi female journalists refer to journalism institutions and their policies as one of the reasons that deter them from flourishing professionally. Alnasir (2005) argues that media institutions are represented by executives and reporters that still hold outdated perspectives about women in the industry; thus, they deliberately or accidentally contribute to

female journalists' struggle. For example, some executives have doubts about employing females as they are perceived as less capable of handling the job requirements; therefore, they prefer to work with them as freelancers to avoid financial commitments (Alnasir, 2005). Financial aspects, such as gender pay gap, insufficient budgets for female reporters, and financial exploitation, have been reported by researchers for decades (Alnasir, 2005; Aljuaid, 2020; Akeel, 2010; Kurdi, 2016). The massive gap in salary and bonuses between female and male reporters due to gender prejudice causes women's work to be perceived as less important and thus, deserving less payment.

In addition, Maha Akeel (2010), a Saudi journalist and lecturer, contributed to female journalism research via her book titled *Saudi Women in the Media*. Her effort consisted of two parts: the findings of her research conducted in 2004 and the changes that she observed up until 2008. Akeel (2010) interviewed six journalists with work experience ranging from four to twenty-four years. From those efforts, she highlighted three main challenges facing women in the journalism profession: societal, institutional, and gender related. Societally, working in journalism required family approval; without it, women had no chance to pursue their careers, as family played a critical role in women's choices and decisions. Indeed, journalists reported that their family support and endorsement were essential to their job, particularly women with children, as they struggled to meet their jobs requirements and parenting responsibilities. Further, the travel ban law that was in effect until 2019 and the law that prevented women from driving until 2017 were massive job restrictions for female journalists who found themselves unable to pursue their jobs and follow national and international stories. In terms of institutional challenges, the female journalists viewed the absence of females in leadership positions as evidence that journalism is a male-dominated profession, especially since the law requires that

the editor-in-chief position be held by a male. Further, female journalists argued that the lack of unions and organizations that advocate women's rights and address their issues in Saudi society have caused a kind of burden on them as they feel responsible for playing this role and using their platform to be the voice for other women. Yet, the issue of representing women has also been intertwined with other factors. Even when the Saudi Journalists Association was established to advocate journalists' rights and protect them from their institutions, female journalists were not part of the process; therefore, they felt that they were not perceived as equal to male journalists (Akeel, 2010). Furthermore, she points out the impact of gender in journalism praxis, media content, and institutional policies. Taken together, Akeel's findings align with previous research that investigated female journalists in Saudi Arabia that confirmed how gender is a critical factor in the journalism industry as female journalists believed that they were being treated unequally due to their gender.

2.7 Women Journalism and Society

Saudi society, like other societies, has its complexity and uniqueness. Religion and traditions intertwine strongly in the conservative Saudi culture. Hence, the resistance to changes, especially if individuals perceived them as contradicting religion, is part of Saudi society's nature (Nydell, 2006). Specifically, when the attempt to change involves challenging and questioning Islamic teaching, the resistance is stronger. Indeed, Islam determines social norms and controls principles among Saudi society (Shaikh, 1989). Along with the power of religion, Saudi's tribal system contributes to creating and maintaining cultural norms and social practices. According to Maisel (2013), the tribal system in Saudi society is powerful enough to reject the promotion of modernity in spite of intense attempts. Thus, the reform of laws and regulations by the government does not guarantee transformation when the power of tribes and Bedouins is

predominant. For instance, during the early attempt to provide formal schooling for girls by King Faisal in 1963, some tribes and Bedouins demonstrated against forcing their girls and women to be educated (Lacey, 1981). Eventually, and by using official forces to end the protests, King Faisal managed to convince the tribes that females' education was important; yet, he did not enforce his mandate about sending girls to school (Lacey, 1981).

The strength of the tribal system in Saudi society influences women at different levels and in all sectors including journalism. For example, women who desire to be in the media sector refer to tribes as one of the many challenges they have to overcome in order to pursue their dreams. One of the women that wanted to enter the profession stated, "I am aware that for a girl from Buraida, from a tribal background, to expose her hair uncovered on television would be considered sacrilegious" (Yamani, 2000, p.144). Tribalism, its rules, and sometimes extreme religion, combine and result in the patriarchal system that continues to generate tremendous obstacles for Saudi women (Al-Rasheed, 2013). One of the implications of such a system is gender segregation, which is reported by the majority of female journalists as the main challenge they face in the field (Akeel, 2010; Aljuaid, 2020; Kurdi, 2014). In short, women in journalism praxis reflect complex social factors that society has generated and reinforced over time. Therefore, analyzing the contributions to journalism of Saudi females over the years, in terms of issues and subjects discussed and areas of interest, might illustrate their rising or declining status inside society.

2.8 Women in Saudi Newspapers

According to several studies, stories about Saudi women by men or women journalists used to be perceived as troublesome, especially by editors-in-chief who preferred not to encounter criticism by religious leaders who were legally powerful entities. For example, when

newspapers included pictures of women during their participation in the Jeddah Economic Forum, they received massive criticism from the Grand Mufti himself, who represents the highest religious authority in the country. He criticized the publication of women's faces as it was against Islamic teaching that ordered women to wear the veil and cover their faces (Arab Press Freedom Watch, 2004). Hesitancy to publish on women's topics differs in its intensity from one editor to another due to personal factors and the nature of the controversy, and how they applied the publication law. A study by Awad (2009) discusses decision-makers' views in the Saudi media realm by interviewing men journalists and editors and reporting their thoughts and opinions regarding the profession and their decision-making processes. He found that issues such as women driving were not covered due to the conservative foundations of Saudi society, which makes certain issues sensitive and hard to cover.

Due to the power of religious leaders, some editors-in-chief have decided not to cover any stories involving women participating in subjects that were labeled as liberal or secular. Examples include the coverage of girls' football games because, according to the editors, the stories pose a risk that the newspaper was not willing to take (Awad, 2009). Another includes the decision to write and talk about women's rights. Indeed, in 2003, columnist Hussain Shobokshi received a death threat after his article discussing women driving. Women's issues in the Saudi media were recently taboo, and religious extremists were the official justification for preventing journalists from discussing such subjects in newspapers.

Therefore, investigating the influence of journalists' gender on media content, whether by the subjects they choose to cover or the stories that are assigned to them by their supervisors, is essential to fully understanding Saudi female journalists' experiences. In addition to being restricted to light subjects and women's topics, female journalists reported that they did not feel

satisfied with the way in which their issues were portrayed in their institutions (Akeel, 2010). They maintained that common stereotypes about women in society limited their roles and underrated their abilities both in the profession and the broader context. As a result, female journalists were excluded from public matters, such as politics, security, and corruption issues (Alnasir, 2005; Akeel, 2010). The fact that some government entities used to prevent women from entering their buildings, cover events, or interview their employees might be one of the reasons behind denying female journalists' opportunities in their field (Alnasir, 2005). Yet, those were not the only factors. For example, Abu Khalil (2004) argues that Saudi women's independence and their power in the media is a government decision that was constructed under the assumption that individuals and their religion would be protected due to restrictions. However, the issue of the restoration of women in media is a case that incorporates several factors including, but not limited to, authority and society.

Furthermore, in a 2023 book titled *Arab Women between Empowerment and Marginalization Media Cases*, Dr. Azza Abdelelah analyzes four well-known Saudi newspapers from January 5th to 7th in 2007 to assess news and articles about women's issues. She argues that each newspaper sheds light on specific subjects based on their agenda and ideologies according to agenda sitting framework. All four newspapers (e.g., *Al Riyadh*, *Okaz*, *Alyaum*, *Alwatan*) prioritize women's employment, particularly the issue of preventing them from entering certain professions. Next in order of priority are subjects that revolve around domestic violence, lack of political participation, the driving ban, and the Hijab. Further, Abdelelah points out that journalists in all newspapers approach these issues with extreme discretion as they try to follow the editorial policy and media regulations. Journalists wanted to follow the tenth article in the Saudi Media Policy Principles that states that shedding light on women's topics should be

approached by “respect the nature of women and the roles they are expected to play in society, without allowing those roles to conflict with that nature” (Ministry of Media, n.d., p. 4). In addition, Abdelelah’s study concludes that Saudi newspapers neglect to discuss critical issues related to women’s lives, such as women's participation in the political realm, early marriage, and the issue of runaway girls. She suggests that this is due to an effort to avoid criticism from society. However, journalists openly write about the same cases when they take place in other countries (Abdelelah, 2023). In short, despite the lack of studies that examine newspapers’ content about women topics, Abdelelah’s (2023) findings and previous interview-based studies indicate that Saudi women and their matters do not receive equitable attention in newspapers.

According to Hammad (2006), women’s contributions to media have been affected by two contradicting ideologies: the Islamic beliefs that oppose women in the media as it contradicts religious teachings and the liberal view that women's role in media is an amusement. Both views have their supporters who want to demonstrate their power and prevalence vis a vis women's relationship with the media in all its forms. For example, in 1979, King Khalid banned women from appearing on television even if they were modestly dressed; then, in 1982, King Fahd lifted the ban (Alkameis, 2015). The difference between the two eras was based on the ideologies that each ruler wanted to support and promote. The ban on women in media might be due to the massive pressure that Islamic leaders experienced due to the Grand Mosque seizure of 1979. The ban lifted due to international pressure after the September 11, 2001 attacks (Alkameis, 2015; Sakr, 2009).

Further, throughout the years, the visibility of women in media has been linked to the "promotion" of different ideologies. After several governmental reforms in 2009 that intended to embrace more modern views in the Kingdom, religious leaders petitioned the Minister of the

Media at that time, AbdelAziz Khawja, and demanded a "reform at a time of moral dissolution at the Ministry of Culture and Information, the television and the radio" (Tamimi, 2010, p.6. as cited in Kurdi, 2016). In fact, these leaders demanded that the Minister prohibit women from appearing on television for the same reasons that they were banned in 1979. Moreover, they also criticized what they referred to as the "westernization" of Saudi women by allowing them to work with men and wear make-up, which conflicted with their sense of modesty (Kurdi, 2016).

Alkameis (2015) indicates that the use of "westernisation" in the previous context was to link women's freedom and empowerment with negative concepts, such as cultural imperialism. Although the Saudi government did not respond to these demands at that time, King Abdullah received the same request in 2006, and he ordered newspapers not to publish pictures of women. He said that pictures of women might "lead young men astray" (Howden, 2006, Para1). On the other hand, some public leaders, who were known for their liberal views, addressed the Minister as well and denounced the religious leaders' demands (Kurdi, 2016). According to them, women should be able to work alongside men without barriers and be in the media realm "to hear their ideas, not [in order to] see their bodies, which is how the reactionary [forces] regard them" (Kurdi, 2016, p.19). Both sides used women and their contribution to the media to advocate their perspectives regarding different ideologies (e.g., liberalism, conservatism). Further, the situational goals of supportive governments in each era were also instrumental influencers over women's role within the media.

2.9 Female Journalists in the Arab World

The challenges that Saudi female journalists experience are similar to other Arab journalists in different Arabian countries, especially in Gulf countries that share equivalent characteristics and ideological perspectives with the Kingdom. Therefore, shedding light on

female journalists' status quo in the Arab world could ultimately enhance the current understanding of female journalists in Saudi Arabia. Hankir's (2019) book titled *Our Women on the Ground: Essays by Arab Women Reporting from the Arab World* discusses the career challenges that nineteen Arab female journalists from several Arab countries experienced and aims to provide an in-depth examination of being a female journalist in Arab countries from their own words. The nineteen stories that Arab female journalists share reveals that there remain unequal opportunities between the sexes, and females continue to be underrepresented and excluded. The female journalists reported that they are not feeling protected or safe due to the lack of gender discrimination policies in their institutions (Hankir, 2019). For instance, Eman Helal, the Egyptian photojournalist, said that she decided not to file a complaint against a male colleague who sexually harassed her while reporting a story together abroad, as she believes no one would believe her, and even if they did, they would merely stop mandating females on abroad reports (Hankir, 2019). Overall, in the Arab world, despite differences in detail due to each land's circumstances, female journalists struggle with gender discrimination in all forms. To provide more additional illustration, specific examples from Emirates as an example of Gulf countries, Egypt as one of the North Africa countries, and Lebanon from the Levant region will follow.

In the case of the Emirates, the culture of tribalism intertwines enormously with women's status. As a result, female journalists struggle to prove themselves in the media industry despite various governmental attempts to establish a gender-equal environment (Alobeidli, 2020). Yet, Emirati female journalists reported that misogyny and sexism is one of the major challenges they confront while conducting their jobs. According to Alobeidli (2020), who interviewed 22 Emirati and nine Arab expat female journalists, the male-dominated environment prevents the

professional development of these journalists by minimizing their roles by limiting them to feminine topics, such as childcare and fashion and constantly questioning their abilities, especially in terms of balancing their career and family commitments. Further, the same study finds that strict media laws and regulations affected Emirati female journalists negatively and forced them to self-censor when covering topics that might contradict social norms and religious values (Alobeidli, 2020). Thus, according to interviewees, they feel that their journalistic work is limited to boosting governmental achievement without comprising any form of investigative journalism. In support, Kirat's (2004) interview study found that Emirati female journalists practice self-censorship and focus on mobilizing the government's agenda.

The status of female journalism in Egypt is quite similar to other Arab lands. Overall, Egyptian female journalists reported that two levels of challenges that they face: institutional within their organizations and social within their communities (Kaye-Essien & Ismail, 2018; Ismail, 2019). At the institutional level, media organizations still pay their female journalists less compared to their male counterparts due to the absence of wage policies and the dominance of sexist stereotypes in which males are perceived as the breadwinners (International Women's Media Federation, 2011; Kaye-Essien & Ismail, 2018). In fact, sexist stereotypes affect female journalists at multiple levels and establish a harmful work environment in which women have to fight to gain their fundamental workplace rights. According to several Egyptian female journalists, the predominant misconception regarding gender roles in the workplace led to questions about their ability to perform their assignments and limited them to certain themes, such as light topics (Kaye-Essien & Ismail, 2018; Ismail, 2019). For example, some interviewees reported that they were not allowed to cover protests during the 2011 revolution as their supervisors either felt they were responsible for protecting them or they were suspicious about

their qualifications, both of which, according to those journalists, was due to sexist perspectives (Ismail, 2019). At the social level, norms cause women to feel more restricted and limited. Studies conclude that Egyptian female journalists face severe social pressures to perform their tasks, especially if they are from or work in conservative areas (Kaye-Essien & Ismail, 2018; Ismail, 2019). Overall, they felt that their gender, directly and indirectly, obstruct their development in the journalism industry.

Furthermore, studies that examine female journalists' status quo in Lebanon align with the previous findings from Egypt. According to Elhajj (2019), Lebanese female journalists comprise of the main gender in the media industry and have been predominantly active for several decades. Yet, they do not have access to powerful positions despite all efforts. One of the significant reasons is the patriarchal culture and its influence on perspectives that control the media industry and make decisions (Elhajj, 2019). Lebanese women journalists express their frustration regarding the assumption that they lack the ability to report and analyze "hard news," such as politics and business as their superiors do not perceive them as reliable sources (Elhajj, 2019). In fact, the patriarchal culture at workplace might lead to more than excluding female journalists. A study by Melki and Mallat (2016) found that sexual harassment in and outside the workplace is a massive hardship encountered by female journalists in Lebanon. With an absence of strict regulations concerning sexual harassment in the workplace, female journalists are burdened with protecting their own safety and reputation in the organization and within their society (Melki & Mallat, 2016). Moreover, some journalists reported that the lack of laws and regulations that protect them from any sort of harassment causes them to even be harassed by public officials in the field as they know their power is above the law (Melki & Mallat, 2016).

Thus, Lebanese female journalists feel discouraged to file a complaint and claim their rights since there is an absence of legal regulations that protect them.

In conclusion, the government and its regulations and society and its norms contributed significantly to defining women's role in Saudi society, including their role as journalists. To clarify, the nature of challenges and the level of obstacles Saudi female journalists reported in different studies conducted at various time frames aligned with women's status overall. Besides, although the recent reforms concerning women's rights, especially due to Vision 2030, were significant, tracing Saudi women's status revealed that the previous era under King Abdullah's rule paved the way for such changes. However, the notion of embracing and promoting a moderate version of Islam significantly occurred with the current regime under King Salman and his crown prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). Yet, the role of other factors such as tribal systems and social norms and their impact on women in general, and journalism practice in particular, remained powerful. Consequently, female journalists' situation in the Arab world, especially due to patriarchal beliefs, is similar to their Saudi counterparts.

3 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

To answer the research questions concerning the topics and issues female journalists discuss in Saudi newspapers and how their contributions changed over time and across different newspapers, I selected three different newspapers distributed across multiple regions of Saudi Arabia. The first newspaper, *Al-Jazirah*, which was established in 1960 in Riyadh, represents the central region of the country. The second newspaper, *Alwatan*, started in Abha in 2000 and represents the Southwest region. The third newspaper, *Alyaum*, is published in Dammam and has served the Eastern region since 1965. All three newspapers published daily in Arabic and are

well-known throughout Saudi society. I collected data from the online archive that each newspaper provides.

From each newspaper, I chose three female journalists based on two criteria. First, the journalist had to be a Saudi national. Second, each had to have stories published during the study's timeframe. From *Al-Jazira*, the study used the work of Khairiah Alsaggaf, Thuraya Alarrayed, and Samar Almogren. From *Alwatan* I referenced Azzah Alsubaie, Maysoun Aldakhil, and Abeer Alalis' work. Lastly, from *Alyaum* I assessed Shuaa Alduhailan, Hana Makii, and Anissa Alsharifs' work. After collecting the journalists' opinion pieces, I chose the first article each journalist published in each month of the study timeframe (2014-2018), for an average rate of twelve articles per year. Since not all chosen journalists regularly published articles on a monthly basis, the number of analyzed articles differs slightly from one journalist to another. The average was 56 per journalist. In total, I analyzed 495 articles from the three Saudi newspapers: 170 articles from *Al-Jazirah*, 164 from *Alyaum*, and 161 from *Alwatan*.

This study examined opinion articles written by female Saudi journalists. In Saudi newspapers, the discussion of social issues, including but not limited to women's subjects, takes place in opinion articles (Albalawi, 2022; Alqarni, 2014). Journalists writing in opinion sections have sufficient freedom to express their ideologies and perspectives. Moreover, Saudi journalists, along with Islamic scholars, share the title of opinion leaders in Saudi society and have the power to shape the public narrative and perceptions of contentious topics (Albishr, 2006). Perhaps as a result, opinion articles in Saudi newspapers represent critical aspects on societal topics more than news stories, which tend to predictably depict a mostly positive outlook consistent with the nation's regulatory frameworks (Alqarni, 2006).

The scope of the study covered opinion articles published from 2014 to 2018. As Saudi Vision 2030 was launched in 2016, analyzing articles two years before and after Vision 2030 provided an opportunity to assess the possible influence of the plan on journalists' work. Additionally, from 2014 to 2018, major reform laws concerning Saudi women's status were launched; hence, female journalists' contribution might be affected by such rules in terms of types of topics and issues discussed.

This study utilized a qualitative content analysis to investigate Saudi female journalists' contribution to newspapers through the period of the study. Due to the complexity of the opinion articles, qualitative content analysis was ideal for examining the multiple levels of the text, including primary and latent meaning (Becker & Lissman, 1973), as cited in Mayring, (2000). Qualitative content analysis enabled this study to conduct an in-depth analysis of journalists' articles and find the common themes and patterns in their work. First, I analyzed data using coding, which refers to the process of labeling and categorizing the data and then identifying recurrent themes and patterns. Second, I created a codebook (Appendix A) based on the study's goals and the initial analysis of the data.

Specifically, the coding instruments included the way journalists discussed women's rights and issues, local matters and social issues, political and economic contributions, Islamic movements, and religious leaders. Items in the codebook also measured the extent to which journalists included the patriotism notion and personal aspects in their articles. Each one of the instruments assisted in comprehending the Saudi female journalists' contribution from different angles. The analysis then aimed to measure the differences in their opinion pieces over the study's timeframe and across the three newspapers used in this study. To illustrate, the coding instrument recorded the general characteristics of the analyzed opinion pieces. In particular, they

focused on the date of the article's publication, the newspaper that published it, and the female journalists who wrote it. Identifying these elements assisted this study in distinguishing between the type of articles journalists wrote before and after the Saudi Vision, thus, answering the research's question regarding the changes in their contributions year after year. Moreover, including of the newspapers that published the opinion pieces, along with the journalists' names, helped this study in specifying any sorts of patterns that emerged in their articles across space and writer. To be specific, the results related to the categories would point out if one of the three newspapers showed more interest in particular areas or whether it had no publication concerning specific themes.

Coding categories about women's issues and rights helped in measuring the extent to which female journalists represented Saudi women's voices. Specifically, the coding options shed light on the problems that the journalists portrayed as an issue that needed to be solved from 2014 to 2018. The options also helped measure the possible impact of the government reforms in shifting journalists' perspectives regarding the nature of problems that earned their emphasis. The coding categories enabled the study to analyze the journalist's opinions about women's lives in the Kingdom and how they evaluated it, whether by demanding more rights and improvement or by reflecting satisfaction about their situations. The codebook also included categories on other aspects of women and society in Saudi Arabia. One coding category measured the scope of the journalists' discussed women's rights and issues, whether globally, regionally, locally, or some combination of the three.

A coding category on governmental efforts regarding women's status examined the journalists' opinion in this regard and the space they had to express their opinions especially when they believed that the government's role was not satisfactory. Another category asked

about the journalists' view the role of women in society. The primary purpose of this category was to measure the potential reflection of the government's promotion of the notion of women's empowerment, the role of Vision 2030 in encouraging women to be part of the labor market on journalists' discourse in this regard before and after 2016, and to discern any differences in opinion based on the regions of the country targeted by the newspapers. In short, this coding category enabled the study to examine the prevalence of such a concept in traditional newspapers before and after the government's embracement of it, as well as across the country's main regions.

In addition, the coding instrument focused on journalists' contribution to local matters and social issues that concerned Saudi society mainly. The goals of these categories were not only to shed light on the predominate issues in Saudi society but also to answer how the journalists' contributed to related coverage. Further, indicating the kind of social issues that received more emphasis each year enabled this study to trace any potential influence of Saudi Vision 2030 and its role in problems prioritized in journalistic articles.

The instrument also explored the journalists' areas of interest regarding government entities, including all major ministries and ministers. More specifically, these coding categories examined the stance on the Consultative Council and government entities, measuring the journalists' positive or negative perspectives regarding the work and effort of these entities. The inclusion of the Consultative Council was due to its supposed importance as a legislative body that directly advises the King on important issues in Saudi Arabia. Hence, the journalists' opinions regarding the Council's work might reveal the extent to which journalists were able to discuss its recommendations freely, or if a such discussion was missing from the majority of journalists' articles.

The codebook categories also examined Vision 2030. These categories aimed to identify the perspectives journalists had regarding the Vision and its goals. In particular, the items analyzed the consequences of Vision and its anticipated outcomes that the majority of journalists focused on in their articles, the aspects of the Vision that received the greatest emphasis, and the tone regarding the Vision overall. As a result, this study was able to measure whether the Vision served as a vital part of journalists' discussion and which of its various goals the journalists portrayed as the most influential.

Coding categories concerning Islamic movements and religious leaders examined the role that Islamic movements and their leaders played in Saudi society in general and journalism in particular. Besides, the government's recent shift and the Kingdom's embrace of more progressive Islamic views after 2016 made exploring its possible influence on journalistic practices essential. These two instruments revealed the extent journalists had to discuss sensitive topics before and after 2016, as well as their ways of referring to religious leaders in relation to Islam and its teachings.

The coding categories also investigated journalists' articles about political and economic matters. Regarding political affairs, the coding options focused on whether the opinion pieces examined mainly the Kingdom's foreign policies, or if journalists shed light on global political events with no reference to the Kingdom. Thus, the codebook enabled the detection the journalists' orientation in this regard, and whether they were able to share their opinion regarding local and international political events. Similarly, I added a coding category to detect whether journalists covered economic matters, whether locally or internationally, and the journalists' view on the impact the global economy had on the local culture. The importance of including these categories emanated from the study's goal to detect the influence of Vision 2030 on female

journalists, especially in subjects that used to be problematic due to gender inequality. Besides, both instruments also assisted in answering the research's first question about the nature of topics and issues that Saudi female journalists believed were worth covering.

Another coding category measured the extent of the inclusion of patriotism and defending the Kingdom and its rulers in the journalists' opinion pieces. The goals of this category were to enhance the understanding of journalists' practices overall and identify whether Vision 2030 implicitly and explicitly impacted the rate of reference to the importance of patriotism. Based on the coded results, this study could prompt further discussion regarding the role that female journalists might they perceive as part of their profession, especially in relation to the importance of the defense of the country and its leaders.

Coding categories concerned with personal aspects and feelings incorporated into the journalists' opinion pieces linked directly to the study's first question, which aimed primarily at the current understanding of Saudi female journalists' practices from various angles. As an earlier pilot analysis had revealed that several journalists had primarily focused on their personal stories and emotions, the broader examination of the phenomenon across time and space was warranted.

After coding the selected opinion articles using Excel, I extracted data in relation to the primary categories this study aimed to measure. In this stage, I identified categories that received the highest number of articles and calculated the subcategories primarily responsible for the increases and decreases in the counts. Then, I examined the number of articles according to the years in this study's time frame and divided them into the years before and after Vision 2030. This step assisted the study in discovering whether the dates before and after Vision 2030 correlated with any changes in the nature of articles. The next step was to examine the findings

disaggregated by the newspapers to assess if any of the changes over time correlated with specific newspapers in the dataset. Then, I disaggregated results according to the designated themes, from topics that received more attention to the fewer ones based on numbers: journalists' contributions to local affairs and social issues, political and economic matters, Islamic movements and religious extremists, and women's rights and issues presented along with the subthemes in each category.

4 FINDINGS

This study aimed to analyze the opinion articles of Saudi female journalists to understand their contribution to newspapers. One of the main objectives was to identify the topics and issues that they primarily discussed and to reveal their participation rate in various areas of interest during the study timeframe. This analysis allowed the study to detect the subjects that journalists deemed worthy of discussion, the areas that they did not cover, and the changes that might occur in their interests over time. Therefore, this study provided an overview of the nature of topics and issues that Saudi female journalists were concerned about, whether locally or globally, which eventually might contribute to the overall understanding of Saudi journalism practice.

In general, the results indicated that Saudi female journalists focused more on topics concerned with local matters and social issues and the work of various governmental entities. In fact, those topics generated more than half of the analyzed articles. The journalists also discussed political and economic matters in 149 articles, followed by the discussion of the Islamic movements and religious extremists in 69 articles and specific issues and rights of Saudi women in 46 articles.

4.1 Saudi Female Journalists' Contribution to Local Affairs and Governmental Responses

Saudi female journalists wrote 90 opinion articles about local matters and social issues. Most journalists used their articles to comment on current events and incidents that had high impact on Saudi society. Specifically, when notable incidents, such as terror attacks and crimes occurred, journalists shared their perspectives. However, the analysis revealed that female journalists predominately deliberated on three main social matters: unemployment (32 articles), terrorism (30 articles), and societal morals and values (28 articles).

Female journalists considered unemployment in Saudi society as a key matter that had to be resolved to improve Saudi citizens' overall status. The discussions that occurred in 32 articles did not distinguish between females and males. They also considered unemployment as a national issue that affected all citizens regardless of gender. Journalists attempted to provide in-depth explanations about this issue and suggested practical solutions that could decrease the unemployment rate. Several articles that focused on unemployment stated that it was the Ministry of Education's responsibility to guide the youth towards majors and specialties that corresponded to the needs of the Saudi market. For instance, in a 2015 article titled "New Opportunities", Alduhailan discussed the launch of an educational program that aimed to link studying abroad to the needs of the labor market. Alduhailan believed that this step would offer a variety of job opportunities in all fields, and enable youth to actively participate in the enhancement of the Saudi economy. She concluded that "career and education are two sides of the same coin, and employment is a major goal in the educational process" (para 1). Another example linking unemployment with education was Alarrayed's 2018 article titled "The Fateful Challenge". Alarrayed claimed that the high unemployment rate remained a national issue even

among those who graduated with high potential. Alarrayed indicated that “there is an imbalance between the efforts and costs of educational institutions and the current labor market need” (para 1). Overall, journalists tended to provide suggestions to decrease the unemployment rate, mostly by suggesting that the Ministry of education must have a role.

Saudi female journalists also discussed terrorism, which represented the second local issue receiving the largest focus (30 articles) and linked it to related issues like sectarianism. The references to terrorism in journalists' articles were not only in response to local terrorist attacks, but included international incidents of terrorism mostly related to Iran, Hezbollah, and ISIS. Journalists examined the influence that Hezbollah, ISIS, and global terrorism had on the Kingdom's safety. For instance, Alali's 2015 article titled “Council of Senior Scholars against ISIS” explained ISIS's terrorist acts within the Kingdom and emphasized the importance of the combined effort to fight against them. She also asserted that the real danger involved in the adoption of ISIS ideologies and the need to diminish terrorist actions and claims to the religion of Islam. According to Alali, “confronting ISIS requires not only security efforts but should be preceded and coincide with other efforts, various means, and innovative ways that contain such a terrorist trend that is growing among the youth” (para 2). She concluded that correcting Saudi youth's understanding of religion had to be the first step to winning the war against terrorism.

In addition, journalists also discussed the impact of sectarianism, especially between Shi'a and Sunnis' role in perpetrating increased terrorism in the Kingdom. Journalists explained how sectarian violence might have divided citizens who should have been united to protect their country from global and national terrorism. In 2016, in her article titled, “Sectarian Strife and Undermining Patriotism,” Alsharif emphasized the role of sectarianism in the instigation of terrorism in the Kingdom. According to her, “it is not just sectarian, it is sedition” (para 1).

Alsharif also stated that patriotism and the sense of belonging in the Kingdom had to be above all other affiliations; otherwise, the Kingdom would be an easy target for terrorism and strife. Journalists also repeatedly stressed that individual citizens should help the Kingdom in its war against terrorism and other external enemies by being attentive to their actions, beliefs, and surroundings. Some journalists specifically referred to the negative influence of Islamic groups (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood) and the importance of standing against their ideologies. In general, journalists focused on the implication of terrorism on citizens and the Kingdom and thoroughly discussed the possible ways to minimize it.

In addition to unemployment and terrorism, Saudi female journalists discussed morals and values in 28 articles, which mostly intertwined with their commentary on local issues. Specifically, local events evoked further discussion of societal morals and values and their impact on citizens' lives at different levels. For instance, Alsharif, in her 2017 article titled "Respect Differences", emphasized the importance of respecting differences among Saudi citizens. According to her, "the diversity of points of view contributes to correcting erroneous opinions if the proposal is realistic and comprehensive" (para 1). She referred to respect as a way of living in harmony without excluding those who hold different opinions. Another example is Aldakhil's 2018 article titled "When Beauty Calls" in which she indicated the importance of being grateful, meditating on attractive sceneries around one's life, and appreciating that beauty as it can lead to positive impacts on individuals' well-being. She said that "when beauty calls you, stop and meditate, learn and contemplate, if you deny it, you ask for drought and your life becomes deserted" (para 5). In brief, journalists showed interest in highlighting the importance of morals and values and advised their readers to adopt them.

The analysis of Saudi female journalists' opinion articles showed that they discussed the work of different governmental entities and commented on their decisions and regulations. Specifically, a total of 59 articles discussed the work of various ministries, while only six articles addressed the Consultative Council Members' work. Saudi female journalists showed the most interest in the Ministry of Education's work (43 articles), followed by that of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (16 articles). Other governmental entities were discussed in less than ten articles.

The discussion of the Ministry of Education involved examinations of school infrastructure, curricula, educational content, the Ministry's regulations, and personnel (i.e., teachers and educators). Journalists mostly provided constructive suggestions for education in the Kingdom involving the Minister's decisions, teachers' performances, and educational outcomes. The journalists often linked their criticism of curriculum to unemployment and suggested that the school curriculum should better prepare students for the market. Journalists also linked curricula to terrorism and sectarianism and the way the curricula could be created to fight against the scourges. For instance, Alali's 2017 article titled "Education and Al-Qaradawi's Book" praised the education minister's decision to ban Al-Qaradawi books from all educational institutions. She also discussed the importance of reviewing curricula and ensuring that they do not contain extremist ideologies, such as the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrines. Alali reported:

The battle with terrorism has always existed before even the ministry noticed it in these and other books, and we are still suffering from the reasons that lead to it or that keep it as a malicious seed in the hearts and minds waiting for a favorable land that embraces it and bears fruit in its demonization. (para 3)

Another article titled “Our Schools are in Danger” by Aldakhil in 2014 criticized the prevalence of terrorist ideologies in educational institutions and called for immediate action to protect youth from this evil that destroys their futures and that of the Kingdom. She said that “when we see that some boys are drawing ISIS slogans on the walls of schools, all alarm bells should ring as we do not have the luxury of saying that they are individual cases” (para 4). Overall, the analysis of journalists' articles revealed that the work of the Ministry of Education was not satisfactory and needed improvement.

When not focusing on the Ministry of Education, journalists repeatedly discussed the work of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (16 articles). In these articles journalists described the Ministry's role in the development of the labor market for Saudi job opportunities. They commented on the Ministry's regulations and the impact they had on the lives of individuals. They also recommended changes and modifications to maximize needed developments for Saudi society. Nevertheless, journalists relied on neutral comments and commendations of the Ministry's efforts when providing suggestions for improvement. For example, Alduhailan's 2018 article titled “the Disabled Citizens” discussed the Deputy Minister's statement regarding current initiatives that aimed to improve the status of individuals in the Kingdom with disabilities. She believed that “providing proper jobs for individuals with disabilities and understanding their creative abilities would grant more development that includes all segments of society” (para 1). Alduhailan also stressed the importance of making greater efforts to ensure that citizens with disabilities were sufficiently integrated into society in a way that accommodated their situations. Generally, journalists commented on the Ministry's responsibility as an entity that should regulate the Saudi labor market for all.

Across the full corpus of articles discussing local issues, journalists had differing opinions concerning the work of different governmental entities. Specifically, about 41 articles had a positive tone towards Saudi ministries and ministers, commending their work and highlighting their efforts. For example, in 2018, Alsaggaf wrote “To Adel Al-Jubeir, Best Regards” to praise the work of Al-Jubeir, the previous Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia. Alsaggaf focused on Al-Jubeir's strengths, such as speed of intuition, intelligence, and wisdom, during his work as the Kingdom representative. She said that “Al-Jubeir is the voice of the homeland and the best representative of the Kingdom and its citizens” (para 1). Thirty-seven articles, in contrast, had a neutral tone that referred to the Saudi ministries and ministers’ strengths and weaknesses and offered suggestions for improvements. For instance, Almogren’s 2014 article titled “The Racism Fight” commented on a court ruling of a racist crime that punished a citizen who used racist words towards another citizen, calling it the first step in the establishment of a legal way to criminalize racism. However, she believed that the court's ruling did not go far enough, especially as the number of racist crimes increased and recommended going further. She stated that:

... the criminalization ruling in this case should be the first step to stop the ruling in dissolution of marriages under the claim of perceived lineage differences, which have become strangely exacerbated in our courts because some judges ruled in its favor.

(para 1)

Almogren also suggested that the end of racism requires an integrated system that encompasses all forms of racism, regardless of the person's physical appearance, skin color, or tribal affiliation.

Thirty-four articles focused on governmental entities deficiencies and weaknesses. For example, in a 2018 article titled, “The Straw, Philosophy and Education,” Alsubaie criticized the work of Ahmed Al-Issa, the Minister of Education. Alsubaie claimed that the Minister’s decisions lacked insight and comprehension of core education issues. She also referred to his decisions as “one-day decisions that aimed to capture the media's attention without making a deep change” (para 3). On the whole, journalists differed in the ways they commented on government entities' efforts; they delivered positive, neutral, and negative views based on the specific contexts and entities they served as the focus on their writing.

Some journalists' articles rounded out their discussions related to the government by discussing the topic of patriotism. In 14 articles, the journalists worked to develop a sense of patriotism, while 20 others discussed the value of patriotism. Mostly, journalists stressed the importance of being part of the Kingdom and participating in its protection and development through loyalty and patriotism. For example, Alsharif's 2015 article titled “Prepare to Die for the Country” stressed the individual’s role in defending the Kingdom by all means, up to and including a willingness to die for the sake of the nation’s security. She emphasized the importance of belonging throughout the article and ended by warning readers about the possible outcomes of underestimating the necessity of being patriotic in the face of the Kingdom’s numerous enemies. According to Alsharif:

Citizenship is our personal willingness to die for the sake of the country, and our sure sense of the meaning of patriotism is love of the homeland and defending it and working for it in deed and word and preserving its unity from dispersion and separation. (para 1)

Also, Almogran's 2018 article titled "The Danger of Dissent" criticized some offenses to the country and individual questioning of its institutions, especially in social media. Almogran concluded that such actions contradicted genuine patriotism which should be unconditional and immutable over time in her view. She concluded that, "opinions and trends are what change, this is the nature of human beings, as for patriotism, it is steadfast and does not shake, no matter what happens" (para 2). In short, when journalists included patriotism in their opinion pieces, they mostly referred to the value as only one component of the article, especially when they discussed topics such as terrorism.

Saudi female journalists, however, avoided discussing the Consultative Council's work in their articles. Only six opinion articles discussed the Consultative Council's work. Three articles were negative and other three articles were neutral. A negative view of the Council's work appeared in Almogran's 2014 article titled "the Shura Council is Hacked!" where she criticized the Council's rejection of the execution of a sexual harassment law and claimed that some Council members had what she called "Muslim Brotherhood's ideologies" that had led them to reject progressive recommendations. She referred to the rejection of sexual harassment law as "a clear and direct implementation of the orders of the Brotherhood and ISIS, so if we are trying to reject them, how can we carry out their orders and respond to them in such entities as the Shura Council" (para 1). An example of the neutral tone appeared in Alali's 2018 "Be Careful, You Have Violated Public Taste." In that article Alali discussed the Shura Council's proposal regarding the public taste regulation. Alali started her article by referring to the positive aspects of the Council's suggestion on individuals' behaviors in public spaces. She said that "This proposal, if approved, would cause an important shift in, but the inclusion of the phrase public taste, which is a loose concept, in the text of such an important law might be understood

differently from one to another” (para 3). Then she indicated the weaknesses in using such a broad concept and suggested ways to improve it. Overall, journalists demonstrated negative to neutral attitudes towards the work of the Consultative Council.

4.2 Political and Economic Contributions

The analysis of Saudi female journalists’ contribution to the politics and economic realms appeared in 149 articles. In the discussion on political affairs, journalists mostly commented on and analyzed international incidents and their possible impact on the Kingdom. Journalists wrote a total of 55 articles that differed in their main focus, with all shedding light on Saudi Arabia’s political environment. For instance, Alarrayed in 2016 wrote an article titled “Why Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act Now?” that discussed the implications of Congress overriding a presidential veto of JASTA legislation on the Kingdom. She highlighted the negative economic consequences of the bill would affect the US— not the Kingdom. She ended her article with a series of rhetorical questions: "Why was this law introduced at this particular time? After hitting conventional oil prices by infusing large amounts of US shale oil into the oil market? After escalating to Syria, shooting and the Yemen war?" (para 4). Another example of the political focus of the opinion pieces is Almogran’s 2017 article titled “Hajj in the Iranian and Qatari Mindset” addressed the diplomatic conflict between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Almogran argued that Qatar was responsible for embracing terror in the region following Iran's lead. She believed that Qatar was politicizing the Hajj season and claiming that the Kingdom prevented their citizens from entering the Kingdom and providing Hajj. According to her, “the Qatari regime, while following the same Iranian approach, enters into a very big game in which it might have the same end as Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein since history repeats itself.” In

brief, journalists focused primarily on political matters that intersected with the affairs of the Kingdom.

Moreover, a total of 29 articles discussed international matters without making references to the Kingdom. For instance, Alali's 2014 article titled "Libya between Western Pragmatism and Ideological Militias" shed light on Libya's predicament after the revolution. She discussed the implication of the rise of Islamic groups and militias that aimed to establish an Islamic emirate on Libyan land and transform it into a war zone. According to Alali:

The West, represented by the United States, deals with terrorism and its implications in the Arab region with the principle of double standards, as it seeks and is keen to bring together various initiatives from the countries of the region to strike against ISIS. While ISIS has been extending another arm to it in Libya since an early age, it considers that this activity is not important at the present time. (para 2)

In short, the discussion of politics in journalists' opinion pieces typically aimed to identify influences on the Kingdom, whether positive or negative.

The discussion of economic matters focused more on the Kingdom's economy. Specifically, Saudi female journalists wrote 70 articles about Kingdom's economy, compared to only 24 articles that concerned the global economy. For example, Alduhailan's 2017 article titled "Pilgrimage's Benefits" focused on the positive outcomes of the pilgrimage season (Al-Hajj) on the Saudi economy from different aspects. She discussed the fact that pilgrims, who visit the Kingdom in large numbers annually, enhanced the national economy directly through their daily expenditures and indirectly by providing seasonal job opportunities for Saudi citizens. She emphasized the possible positive outcomes of Al-Hajj, especially on youth:

The Hajj season is distinguished by the abundance of activities and works that help young people achieve their goals in a short period, and there are possibilities to double the economic, functional, training and voluntary activities as well to raise the level of work culture and its continuity. (para 1)

A 2016 article by Alarrayed titled “The Shift from Centralized to Holistic Development” discussed the economic benefit of providing balanced opportunities in all cities rather than limit them to major cities. She argued that the current disparity in development plans among cities would lead to economic consequences that eventually might force citizens to immigrate to major cities. She stressed that “we need is a shift from the expansion of specific cities to a Holistic coordination of the growth of all regions within the framework of national development” (para 4). In sum, journalists discussed a range of strategies aimed at improving the Saudi economy.

Saudi female journalists also discussed the broader global economy in their articles. In a 2014 article titled, “The UAE, a Success Story”, Makii discussed how the UAE government succeeded in reducing its dependence on oil and resulted in the flourishing of the country's economy over time. She believed that “United Arab Emirates has been able to strengthen sectors to rely on as an alternative to oil and its derivatives, and thus it is making for itself a success story that must be commended” (para 1). Makii detailed efforts, such as encouraging tourism, that had led to UAE's economy to thrive as these efforts facilitated investments and opened the market to foreign investors. Overall, Saudi female journalists showed more interest in the national economic aspects than they did the global economy.

4.3 Islamic Movements and Religious Extremists

The journalist’s opinion pieces tended to highlight the negative impact of Islamic Movements and religious extremists on individuals and society (69 articles). Thirty articles

discussed the Islamic movement's influence. All of the journalists referred to the movements negatively, criticizing their actions and beliefs. For instance, Alsubaie in 2015 in her article “War is Affordable and Peace is Pricey” condemned religious movements, linking them to hostility and destruction. She claimed that religious movements worldwide aimed to deceive the public by pretending that they were the only party that could deeply comprehend religious teachings; therefore, Saudi Arabia had the right to exclude them. Alsubaie stated that:

A dark future awaits the leaders of hatred and their soldiers, a day will come - indeed, its signs have begun - when people will discover the truth about those who used religion, and people will not obey them in right or wrong. (para 5)

Another example was Almogran's 2014 article titled “Freethinking and Muslim Brotherhood's Ideologies Do Not Align” in which she objected to the selection of the President of the Ennahda Movement, Rached Ghannouchi, for the Ibn Rushd Prize for Freedom of Thought. Throughout Almogran’s article she referred to the Muslim Brotherhood as a political group that used religion as a cover to distribute terrorist ideologies. She concluded that, “Freethinking does not comply with those who are using religion for political purposes, igniting the fuse of the fire of extremism” (para 4). Overall, none of the journalists had positive perspectives towards such movements or none articulated positive impacts such collectives had on the Saudi community.

Articles that referred to religious extremists more generally mostly concluded that they hindered society's progress. The results indicated that journalists discussed the influence of extremists in 39 articles without linking them to specific groups. For instance, Alali in her 2015 article titled “The Hate of Life in Our Society” discussed the notion of using religious views to publish what she described as “The Culture of Death” (para 5). She wrote that extremists denied Saudi citizens their right to have a normal and stable life by prohibiting arts and leisure. Alali

explained that extremists “In the name of religion, closed doors of life in people's faces... including the joy of dancing and singing, and the beauty of the image and sound” (para 6). In 2016, Almogran similarly wrote “The Killing Jealousy” which was a response to an incident when an individual shot the male physician who delivered his child when there were no female physicians available. Almogran claimed that such a tragic incident resulted from the prevalent extremist ideologies that tarnished the concept of honor and jealousy in Saudi minds. According to her:

Saudi society has suffered from religious influence for a long time, and it does not get rid of it so easily... we reap what the Awakening sowed in the minds of society until we dared to kill in the name of jealousy over honor. (para 4)

In brief, journalists focused on the negative influence of extremists on Saudi society.

Yet, most journalists who discussed Islamic movements and religious extremists tried to distinguish between Islamic teaching and religious extremism by stating that the extremists did not represent and misinterpreted Islam and its values (31 articles). Another eight articles expressed both the misrepresentation and misinterpretation between extremism and Islam. For example, Alsubaie, in her 2018 article titled “Why Do We and the Islamic World Depend on Ibn Salman?” referred to Mohammed bin Salman’s role in presenting real Islam to the world and distinguished between that and what the extremists claimed. According to her:

...the crown prince, MBS, since its appointment he and his team made several changes and real reforms that led to a return to the origin of the religion and the truth that are not related by any means to terrorism. (para 1) She stated that the Kingdom's recent reforms changed the negative stereotypes of Islam that extremists disseminated, and presented Islam as being aligned with modern life and civilization.

Also, Alali's 2014 article titled "So that We Can Regain our Happiness" criticized the link between Islam and the terror acts of extremists worldwide. She concluded, "The news of death and wars, and groups that claimed that they represent Islam, robbed joy from the hearts of many, especially in light of the control of extremist ideology and the drastic finance of it" (para 4). In brief, journalists in these articles criticized extremists by attempting to draw the line between the extremists and Islam.

4.4 Women's Rights and Issues

Most Saudi female journalists did not write opinion pieces about women's issues. Only 46 articles discussed women's issues. An analysis of the journalists' articles devoted to women's matters revealed that gender inequality received the most attention (18 articles), followed by various issues including, but not limited to, marriage and divorce (16 articles), domestic violence (5 articles), sexual harassment (4 articles), and male guardianship of women (3 articles).

Journalists who referred to the issue of gender inequality in their articles considered it as an obstacle embedded in Saudi society's beliefs. Alarrayed, in her 2016 article titled "About Saudi Women, Government and Development" for example, stated that Saudi women continued to struggle in society due to outdated beliefs that perceived women as not equal to men. Alarrayed argued that women's dilemmas originated from men and women who still believed that women were not as capable as men to sufficiently participate, even when the government enhanced women's roles. According to Alarrayed (2016):

Women suffer because there are men and women who are convinced that she is the weakest, or she is convinced that she is the weakest, in the sense that she cannot protect herself from her abuse, or the desire of the male to exploit her weakness. Society has conspired to keep it in this position even after the details of life have changed, and the

differences in muscle strength are no longer what distinguishes one from the other. (para 6) Alarrayed stressed the significant role of society in the dilemma of Saudi women's rights despite the government's efforts in this regard.

Journalists wrote 16 articles shedding light on personal laws and contracts impacting women, such as early marriage, divorce laws, and inheritance rights, to name a few. The articles aimed to enhance public awareness of women's struggle to attain their rights or to remain safe. For instance, Alshari's 2017 article titled "Underage Marriage" criticized the prevalence of underage marriage in Saudi society. She explained the intense, negative consequences of forcing underage girls to marry, how such practices jeopardize physical and physiological health, and the approach's overall negative impact on society. Alsharif argued that:

...the consent of the minor should not be used in marriage as girls might be forced due to the greed of some parents and the trafficking of their daughters, and most of this happens in some remote villages due to the lack of awareness of the parents there. (para 1) She asserted that the most efficient solution to this issue was government intervention.

Saudi female journalists also discussed the issue of domestic violence in Saudi society. They presented it as an urgent issue that required radical solutions. One of the articles that shed light on the subject was Aldakhil's 2016 article titled, "No, Everything is Not Fine," in which she maintained that domestic violence remains an unsolved issue in Saudi society. She argued that women who are suffering from domestic violence in its various forms are viewed as shameful for even trying to escape their situation. Aldakhil claimed that:

Domestic violence, one painful incident after another, and what happened? Nothing! A girl who escapes and her family refuses to take her from the care home, so she commits suicide, and others flee outside the country, then they are accused of disobedience

because they fled! Excellent. What about the one who tried all methods to escape the violence, but rather addressed her tribe, and submitted communications? She was destined to be accused of disobedience and dragged to the care home as well! Meaning you are guilty if you complain and condemned if you run away! Then someone who insists on hibernation comes out to you and claims that all of this is a charade. (para 3)

Aldakhil strongly condemned instances of domestic violence against Saudi women, recognizing the severe struggles that they faced. Generally, journalists agreed on the fact that the domestic violence crisis remained unsolved.

In addition, journalists focused on sexual harassment and showed their resentment towards its prevalence in such an Islamic society as Saudi Arabia. For instance, in Alsubaie's 2014 article titled "Too Dangerous to Publish," she criticized society's belief that women's appearances and their choice of clothing justified any sort of harassment and emphasized the necessity to fight these beliefs to provide a safe environment for women. Alsubaie ended her argument by stating:

Woman is deeply humiliated in the incident of harassment, and she is one of the most important members of society, as she is the mother who raises the whole society, so what do you expect from a being who is humiliated at the core of himself to be raised?. (para 6)

She repeatedly argued that a woman's appearance did not justify any sort of harassment.

Moreover, journalists expressed their unfavorable opinion about the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia and portrayed it as a barrier in Saudi women's lives. For instance, Alsubaie in her 2016 article titled "When I Found Out I Have a Male Guardian" wrote that she had no problem with the guardianship system until she needed to renew her passport and was unable to

do so without her husband's permission. She explained how she had felt discouraged and heartbroken at that moment and thought about other Saudi women in the same situation.

Alsubaie recalled that in this situation, "the faces of Saudi women passed in front of me, and I imagined that Hayat Sindi, Ghada Al-Mutairi, and Fadila Al-Jaffal (pioneered women in their areas) could not renew their passports without a guardian". (para 5) In sum, none of the journalists who referred to the guardianship system portrayed it positively.

Moreover, articles about the appropriate role of women in Saudi society in terms of working and participating in the public sector was a major focus in the journalists' opinion pieces. Most of the journalists (23 articles) stated that Saudi women had the right to be part of the development plan in different sectors. For example, Alarrayed wrote in a 2014 article titled "How Do We Continue Building our Nation" that women had a key role in developing their country by becoming part of the labor market. She referred to women's employment as a necessity that society should accept in the same way that it accepted women's education decades ago. Alarrayed also argued that "women have to work and help with their income in the sustenance of the family as the current economic conditions made women's employment no longer a luxury" (para 1). In brief, Saudi female journalists believed that women's appropriate role was in labor market just like men.

Notably, when journalists referred to women's issues, they presented them in relation to the fate of women outside of Saudi Arabia. About 26 of these opinion pieces referred to women's rights and status worldwide or in the Arab world. These articles compared the differences and similarities between women in other countries with that of Saudi women. For example, in Alsubaie's 2018 article titled "In Harassment and Assault, You Are Part of the Solution, Not the Problem", she highlighted the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace by

discussing the well-known case of the former producer Harvey Weinstein. By using Hollywood stars as an example, Alsubaie demonstrated how power can silence the victims of sexual harassment and how society can contribute to the issue by disgracing the victims rather than the predators. Alsubaie also believed that by “giving the girl safety when she speaks, safety from scolding, blaming, or passing judgment on her and describing her as wrong will give her the opportunity to speak up if she becomes a victim of sexual harassment” (para 6). The reliance on the broader scope of women’s rights issues was clear in Alali’s 2017 article titled “Entertainment Authority and Saudi Women” in which she argues that the recent attempts to include Saudi women in entertainment were inadequate. Alali gave examples of non-Saudi women's rights in the Kingdom: “I wonder if Oprah Winfrey visited Saudi Arabia, would she be required to cover her hair while traveling? Would she be limited to discussing specific topics only?” (para 3). Next, Alali provided suggestions to improve women's status in the entertainment industry in the Kingdom. Overall, journalists showed more interest in women's rights and issues worldwide instead of discussing Saudi women's status in the Kingdom.

When journalists examined Saudi women's status specifically, most concluded that the status quo was unsatisfactory (14 articles). To illustrate the unsatisfactory tone regarding women’s status, several articles discussed how social norms, tribal systems, and individual perspectives hindered women’s ability to improve their position in society. For instance, Alail’s 2014 article titled “They are Scared of Women, not Worried about Them” referred to several outdated beliefs that she believed distorted women's image in Saudi society. According to her:

Some tribes in Saudi Arabia do not recognize a woman’s right to inheritance, and they consider that a “disgrace,” such as mentioning a woman’s name in front of others...the humiliation and underestimation of women has accumulated over this vast time and

social scale, and some extremists have been able to collectively think for many years that have increased the walls of isolation and exclusion of women at the expense of their rights to education, work, and a sense of independence and safety.” (para 4) In short, journalists emphasized the role of social factors, such as the tribal system, in contributing to the unsatisfactory status of women in Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, when journalists specifically referred to the government’s efforts regarding women's issues, they indicated that their role was outstanding (13 articles). For example, in a 2017 article titled “The Government and the Challenges of Adopting the Right Decision”, Alarrayed strongly accused extremist groups of hindering the Saudi government from improving the Kingdom by enhancing women's empowerment and status. According to her:

This extremist current, which is burdened with its bias towards visuals that serve the desires of a special class, does not see that it is slowing down the country's locomotive, which is carrying everyone, men and women! which impedes the path and efforts of government. the vision of the government is clear and wise, and it is concerned with the approval of the moderates. The difference in factional interests must be confronted with firm and decisive fateful decisions that build citizens' sense of living security, belonging and contentment, and lead the path in the right direction. Women's participation in rebalancing economically, emotionally, socially and behaviorally is a necessary step, even if it initially encounters opposition from minority groups for various justifications. (para 5) Further, Almgren’s 2017 article titled, “Shura Council and Women's Empowerment,” strongly condemned the Council’s refusal to discuss a recommendation to appoint women to leadership positions within Saudi embassies, which were limited to males only. She stated that:

We should not be angry with the Shura Council, which is outdated, as we are now working towards achieving development at a speed that has exceeded the council's discussions due to Vision 2030 and its objectives the empowerment of women in all sectors (para 2). Overall, journalists believed that Saudi women struggled due to social norms and tribal systems, even when the government implemented progressive legal changes.

4.5 Vision 2030 and National Transformation

In fifteen articles, journalists referred to Vision 2030's anticipated outcomes, such as enhancing the Kingdom's image internationally and improving citizens' economic and social status. For instance, Alarrayed, in her 2017 article titled "The Most Stunning Transformation is Coming and I See It" believed in the power of Vision to enhance the region's civilization at different levels. She began by noting that, "Transformation Vision 2030 includes a dream that promises us to enter a future world of dimensions and horizons; a dream I hope to see come true" (para 1). Then, she discussed how the Vision would enhance cultural transformation inside and outside of the Kingdom, encourage both citizens and foreigners to visit the Kingdom's attractive sites that were developed according to the Vision, and eventually make the Kingdom one of the developed countries both culturally and economically.

Most of the articles that referred to the relationship between Vision 2030 and Saudi women elaborated on the reforms that occurred during and after the launch of Vision. About five articles focused primarily on Vision 2030's impact on improving Saudi women's status and empowering them. One of these was Almogran's 2017 article titled "Shura Council and Women's Empowerment" in which she referred to the role of Vision in empowering women and Mohammed bin Salman's belief in the importance of women's participation in achieving the

Vision's goals. She stated that, "Vision 2030, and his godfather Prince Mohammed bin Salman emphasized the participation of women in every sector, and whose goals included the empowerment of women in all sectors, because development is impossible to achieve without women" (para 2). Almogran wrote that Vision 2030 encouraged Saudi women to be part of each sector in the country and actively participate in its development. She also emphasized that Saudi women's future would be full of recognition and empowerment. Generally, articles highlighted and anticipated how Vision 2030 could create a massive, positive change in the status of Saudi women.

In addition, four opinion pieces mainly discussed the role of Vision 2030 for improving citizens' economic and social status. For example, Alarrayed's 2017 article titled "The Dreamers Shake Hands Consciously" depicted the Vision as the plan that would metaphorically guide Saudi society to the light that would lead to the future after years of darkness. Alarrayed wrote that the Vision would succeed despite skepticism, especially from outsiders, as it was full of firmness and determination. She wrote:

NEOM in the far northwest will establish a city that rises from scratch to realize science fiction dreams, and "Qiddiya" in southern Riyadh, will provide those who lack joy and entertainment with the opportunity to obtain it internally, and the Red Sea project, will embody a vast network of economic and tourist entertainment opportunities, investing in the aesthetics of the Red Sea and attracting money and business. (para 7). Overall, Saudi female journalists tended to discuss the Saudi Vision 2030's positive influence on diverse aspects of society instead of focusing on one premier area.

4.6 The Form of Female Journalists' Opinion Pieces

Female journalists' opinion pieces showed that they felt free to include their personal experiences and feelings as they presented thoughts on a range of topics. Sixty-seven articles mentioned some instance of the journalists' personal history or emotional reactions, while 49 others devoted their entire articles to the sharing of personal stories or emotions. To illustrate, some journalists shared poems in their articles (mainly journalists who had a literary background like AlSaggaf), traveling experiences, and childhood memories, to name a few. For example, in 2016, Almogren wrote an article titled "Why Do I Live in Saudi Arabia" in which she shared her feelings about her hometown and how she could not live away from it. She recalled:

In every place I go to, people ask me why you do not live outside Saudi Arabia, like the large numbers of Saudi immigrants including those who work in media? In short, I replied, I cannot live outside Saudi Arabia. (para 1) Almogren noted, "this article is personal..." (para 3) and the main goal for it was to express personal feelings toward home.

In addition, Alsaggaf's 2018 article titled "Only for You" shared her memories with her mother, to whom she said, "Today, mom, I was called by the echo of your voice" (para 3) She recalled her childhood and her life before losing her mother and expressed her feelings of grief and loss. Taken as a whole corpus, some journalists were comfortable including their personal experiences, stories, and emotions in their opinion pieces.

In summary, female journalists in Saudi Arabia demonstrate a high degree of interest in discussing local affairs, including social issues and the work of government entities. This finding is important in enhancing understandings of the engagement of female journalists with Saudi society and highlights the importance of local circumstances in shaping their opinion articles.

The results also shows that certain government entities and ministers receive criticism from some journalists for perceived shortcomings in their work, while others do not. Such differences offer insight into the journalists' perspectives on their role in relation to the Saudi hierarchy and the investigative spaces available to them. Similarly, the results indicate that journalists criticize the negative impact of Islamic movements, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood. This finding should enable a more in-depth examination of Saudi journalism's perception of Islamic movements, particularly those established outside the Kingdom. Finally, the results indicate that Saudi female journalists play a modest role in writing about women's rights and issues. This finding should generate further investigation about whether female journalists feel free to discuss such issues and whether they perceive women's issues as part of their journalistic work or as a matter of personal interest.

5 SAUDI FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN CONTEXT: DISCUSSION OF CHANGE

The objective of this study is to improve comprehension of the involvement of Saudi female journalists in newspapers and expand on the existing understandings of their role in Saudi journalism, more broadly. However, in order to provide an in-depth explanation, this study measured the influence of context factors, such as massive governmental change and leanings of the newspapers, that might having influenced the writing of female journalists' opinion pieces. The study specifically analyzed the changes in journalists' contribution pre- and post-announcement of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016 by comparing the number of articles published before and after its launch. Further, it identified any differences in the journalists' opinion pieces based on the newspaper that served as the publication outlet for the writings.

5.1 Change of Topics Before and After Saudi Vision 2030

This study examined the possible effect of Saudi Vision 2030 on Saudi female journalists' contribution to newspapers by tracing notable changes in terms of the nature of topics and issues that appeared in journalists' opinion articles before and after its implementation. More specifically, the study examined the increases and decreases in the number of articles that journalists wrote pre- and post-the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 in all tested areas of interest.

5.1.1 *Local Affairs and Government Responses*

Opinion pieces highlighting local issues declined after the implementation of Saudi Vision in 2016. Specifically, journalists showed less interest in writing about unemployment and terrorism after 2016 (49 before and 13 after), but continued writing about morals and values at a similar pace (15 before and 13 after). Further, the discussion of governmental entities' work in different ministries and ministers before and after Saudi Vision 2030 also fluctuated. Overall, Vision 2030 did not demonstrate a sharp change in the discussion of ministries and ministers' work (30 before and 29 after). Yet, the number of articles that focused on the government entities' deficiencies declined after the Vision (24 before and 10 after).

The discussion of unemployment also differed after Saudi vision 2030. To be specific, articles about unemployment notably diminished from 16 articles before 2016 to seven after 2016. This decline aligned with the findings of the General Authority for Statistic's report (2023) regarding the unemployment rate among Saudi citizens. The report showed that in 2018, Saudi Arabia witnessed a decrease in the total unemployment rate and an increase in the percentage of citizens' participation in the economy. This fall in the unemployment rate, as well as the reduction in articles on the topic by female journalists, might have resulted from one of Vision 2030's goals specifically aimed to increase the employment rate by providing a variety of

opportunities that had not received attention before, such as the tourism (Vision 2030, 2022). Accordingly, the journalists might have perceived unemployment as a problematic issue that the government via its various entities had already acknowledged and was making efforts to decrease. Another possible explanation might be that journalists, instead of aggregating unemployment among both females and males to present it as a local issue that affects all citizens, referred to it implicitly while discussing the importance of women's employment and financial independence. Thus, they highlighted unemployment as a women's rights matter, especially as the unemployment rate used to be highest among women before implementing plans to increase their participation in the labor market in 2016. Hence, a variety of factors likely explained the diminishing number of female journalist articles related to unemployment in Saudi society after Saudi Vision 2030.

The discussion of terrorism also altered after Saudi Vision 2030. Specifically, articles about terrorism dramatically declined from 10 and 14 in the two years before the Vision to only four articles after the announcement of the Vision. One possible explanation for this decline might be that before the Vision in 2015, the Kingdom witnessed tragic terrorist attacks known as the Qatif and Dammam mosque bombings in the East region where the majority of Shia live. The increase in terrorist events was due to the rise of ISIS, which declared its responsibility for several terrorist incidents (Qurtuby & Aldamer, 2021). Hence, writing about terrorism and its threat to public security arguably served as an appropriate response to the major events that were hard to ignore, particularly for working journalists. In fact, the journalists' content reflected both the different incidents in the Kingdom, as well as and the prevalence of the attacks in general throughout Saudi society. Terrorism, in this case, might not be a type of issue that journalists commonly overlook, despite their disparities in topics' interests, as it interconnects with national

security and public safety. This might explain the increase in articles about terrorism when the Kingdom underwent several ISIS-related attacks, and the subsequent decline when Saudi Arabia experienced fewer or no major terrorism incidents.

The discussion of morals and values in journalists' opinion pieces was almost equal in number before and after 2016 (12 before and 11 after). Since the discussion of morals and values was appropriate and fundamental at all times, no major alteration might be anticipated in the pre- and post-Saudi Vision 2030 periods. Overall, this outcome indicated that the Saudi female journalists' considered references to morals and values a constant part of their contribution to newspapers regardless of the timing.

Saudi female journalists maintained their level of emphasis on the work of some governmental entities. The discussion of the Ministry of Education's work was quite similar before and after Saudi Vision. Journalists wrote a total of 19 articles about this matter before the Vision and 18 articles after its implementation. Although education functions as a critical sector worthy of attention and further discussion, other possible explanations exist for the journalists' focus on education. Perhaps, what contributes to this finding is the fact that most of the nine journalists emerged from academic backgrounds, hold high degrees in different majors, and have worked or currently are working in education and academia. In addition to the possible effect of journalists' personal interest in education, Saudi Vision 2030 might play a role in the consistent discussion of this topic. To illustrate, one of the Vision's three main pillars is a "Vibrant Society," which aims to include educational institutions to achieve its ultimate objective. According to the Vision statement, educational institutions should seek to embrace and promote positive values, provide an environment that encourages students to thrive, and include parents in

their strategies (Vision 2030, 2022). Thus, the Vision predictably contributes to maintaining education and its related factors in the journalists' discussion.

Similarly, the number of articles that referred to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (HRSD) was equal. The results found six articles before Saudi Vision 2030 and six articles after its announcement. The consistency of journalistic emphasis likely emerges from the fact that the work of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development remained essential to the lives of Saudi citizens. Further, the Vision goals directly entwine with the work of the HRSD Ministry, as the Ministry's mission is to empower Saudi citizens as individuals and as a society and enhance the Saudi labor market, both of which are parts of the Vision.

On the whole, journalists commended the work of the Saudi ministries and ministers. Positive assessments of the government's efforts reached their highest point in 2014 (12 articles) and 2017 (10 articles), while neutral articles that referred to strengths and weaknesses declined from 18 articles before the announcement of the Saudi Vision to 12 articles after it. The number of articles that focused on the government entities' deficiencies also declined after the Vision. The decrease of both neutral and negative-toned articles after the Vision might be due to the plan's implementation. In order to ensure that the Vision's objectives would be achieved in a manner, King Salman bin Abdulaziz decreed the formation of a supreme committee, led by the Crown Prince and several statesmen, whose primary goal was to combat corruption in all forms. The establishment of this group may have also affected journalists' perceptions regarding the importance of shedding light on the deficiencies in work of government entities, since the Crown Prince himself chaired the powerful entity. Another explanation might be that journalists sensed

that the government entities' performance had improved, such that no ongoing deficiencies rose to the level warranting reference in their works.

Some journalists also devoted space in their opinion pieces to highlighting patriotism, either as the sole focus or a chief focus of their writings. Notably, most of these articles appeared before the announcement of Saudi Vision in 2016 (28 pieces), with only six appearing after the Vision. The decline in the number of articles promoting patriotism might have resulted from the felt need by journalists beforehand to promote citizen unity and cooperation around the Vision's mission and goals. The diminished number of articles mentioning patriotism might have diminished once Saudi leaders announced and stood behind the Vision.

5.1.2 *Political and Economic Contributions*

The number of opinion pieces that journalists wrote about political affairs and economic matters changed after Saudi Vision 2030. The contributions of Saudi female journalists in political matters decreased after the launch of Vision 2030 in 2016. Before 2016, journalists wrote 29 articles concerning political affairs. Then, after Vision 2030, journalists wrote only 16 articles. Although the Vision might not have a direct link to the decrease in political discussion in journalists' articles, it might implicitly shift their focus to other areas, such as needed social changes. The announcement of Vision 2030 may have prompted journalistic discussions focused on Saudi citizens and society along with the possible influence of such a massive transformative national plan. Then again, another potential explanation for the decrease in journalists' political articles concerned the incidents and events that occurred from 2014 to 2018. Several major incidents occurred before the announcement of Vision in 2016, such as the Second Libyan Civil War (started in 2014), the declaration of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (2014), and Operation Decisive Storm (started 2015), to name a few.

The number of economic articles, however, did not establish such a clear trend. They steadily increased from 20 in 2014 to 24 in 2017, but dramatically decreased to 11 articles in 2018. One possible explanation for this result is since the announcement of Vision 2030, the Saudi economy, including its growth, strategies, and future investments, has been widely discussed in several avenues, such as official economics conferences, television interviews with government officials, along with the Vision's official website in which all economic information can be found. Thus, journalists might perceive this area as already saturated and not in need of further discussion. Overall, journalists had less contributions after Saudi Vision 2030 that addressed political and economic topics.

5.1.3 *Islamic Movements and Religious Extremists*

The opinion pieces journalists wrote about Islamic movements and religious extremists occurred both before and after Saudi Vision 2030, with only slight changes over time. To illustrate, the references to the negative influence of Islamic movements in journalists' opinion pieces before and after Saudi Vision were convergent. Fourteen articles discussed the Islamic movements' effect before the Vision compared to eleven articles after its initial implementation. In fact, most of the articles that occurred after the Vision were in 2017. Several factors might explain the journalists' continuous contribution in this regard. For example, in 2017, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt declared a joint statement regarding the new terror designations (Saudi Press Agency, 2017). In the joint statement, several individuals and entities such as the Muslim Brotherhood were labeled as terrorists. This statement might contribute to explaining why most of the articles occurred in 2017 after the Vision's initial implementation. In fact, Saudi Arabia and its Council of Senior Scholars announced that Muslim Brotherhood was a terrorist group in 2014. Hence, the discussion of Islamic Movements, their leaders, and followers

existed and was supported by the government before Saudi Vision. After the Vision, in his interview with both *Time* magazine and *The Atlantic* in 2018, the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, referred to Muslim Brotherhood as a very dangerous terrorist organization. Therefore, journalists might have felt more empowered to discuss such a sensitive issue as the government's stance had been declared. Overall, journalists shared their perspectives on Islamic movements and religious extremists before and after Saudi Vision.

5.1.4 *Women's Rights and Issues*

The number of Saudi female journalists' opinion pieces that focused on women's rights and issues occurred at a similar total rate after the Saudi Vision 2030 (18 before, and 19 articles after the Vision). However, when examined on a year-by-year basis, the rate of publication decreased since the Saudi Vision announcement in 2016. The number of articles reached its height in 2015 (18 pieces), then dropped dramatically from 14 pieces in 2017, to only five articles in 2018.

The discussion of gender inequality, for example, occurred in each year from 2014 to 2018 at a similar rate. The journalists published eight related articles before the Vision and five after it. The slight decrease that occurred after the Vision might be the result of the governmental efforts in this regard based on the Vision's parameters. Perhaps journalists recognized the effort the government had made to bridge the gender gap by increasing the percentage of females' employment and seeking to reform laws that permit the gender wage gap, to name a few. Thus, the decline in the number of articles discussing this issue might indicate that it had been solved or was on its way to becoming solved.

In addition, the references to various social issues that impact women, such as marriages and divorces, occurred slightly more after the Vision, increasing from five articles before the

Vision to seven articles after it. The highest number of articles (6) were published in 2017, followed by a dramatic decline in 2018 where journalists only wrote one article addressing marriages and divorces. One possible explanation of the increase in 2015-2017 was that during this time frame, women's laws in marriages and divorces were in urgent need of improvement. For example, a husband was able to unilaterally divorce his wife without her knowing that the action was taking place. Thus, journalists may have noticed and wanted to reward the government for the efforts it made in granting women other rights. They may have also wanted to highlight their right to be equal to their partner in marriage and divorce laws, which the government eventually reformed in 2020.

Remarkable changes occurred in the journalists' coverage of domestic violence. Journalists did not discuss the issue of domestic violence after the implementation of the Vision in 2016. However, according to the National Society for Human Rights, 2017 domestic violence cases whether construed as marital violence or violence against children increased notably by 23 percent compared to the previous year. Therefore, the decrease in the number of articles was not due to an improvement in status. Further investigation will be needed to ascertain the reasons behind the journalists' lack of domestic violence coverage despite its ongoing prevalence in Saudi society.

Articles about sexual harassment were sparse both before and after the Vision. Only four articles focused on sexual harassment, but journalists wrote two of them in 2018. That might be a result of the declaration of the Anti-Harassment Law in 2018 that defined harassment and its forms and elevated such activities as illegal in Saudi society. Therefore, journalists' contributions to the issue of sexual harassment might simply be a response to the government reforms.

In a similar fashion, the three articles by journalists addressing the male guardianship system appeared only after the Saudi Vision. Perhaps, journalists perceived the discussion of the guardianship system as a religious and culturally sensitive topic. Then, when they discerned the change in the government's ideology in regard to improving women's status, journalists may have felt more free to shed light on such a complex issue.

The analysis of journalists' perspectives on Saudi women's status showed distinctive outcomes that correlated with the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030. The number of journalists' opinion pieces discussing Saudi women's status as unsatisfactory fluctuated around the Vision. Specifically, journalists in 2014 referred to the unsatisfactory status of Saudi women in six articles, followed by one in 2015, five articles in 2017, and only two articles in 2018. One potential explanation for the vacillations may be linked to the difference in the government's stance on issues and rights that contribute to women's status overall. The situation of Saudi women has improved gradually, with disparities still apparent in various areas. For example, the government granted the right to drive in 2017, but women still remained in need of a male guardian to obtain the legal documents needed to exercise that right. Another explanation for the fluctuation in journalists' discussions of Saudi women's status is related to the nature of Saudi society and the sensitivity surrounding women's rights issues. With some government reforms contradicting longstanding accepted situations (e.g., the car driving ban for religious reasons), the understanding of women's overall status may vary, leading to fluctuations in what is considered an unsatisfactory situation. To put it differently, this outcome could suggest that there was some ambiguity and uncertainty, especially in the early stages after the implementation of the Vision, regarding the specific rights afforded and held back for Saudi women. Such

uncertainty might have influenced how journalists viewed the overall status of women in the country.

In addition, journalists who evaluated the government's efforts revealed that the government's role was outstanding in improving Saudi women's status (13 articles). The number of journalist articles praising the government's role trended upward from four articles before the Vision to nine articles after 2016. Possibly, such an increase was a result of the series of reforms that the Saudi government implemented in order to achieve the Vision goals that concerned women's empowerment.

Furthermore, articles about the role of women in Saudi society in terms of working and participating in the public sector were a major focus of the journalists' opinion pieces after the Vision. The reference to women's roles and rights in the public sphere increased after the launch of Saudi Vision 2030. Although journalists commented on the public role of women in nine articles before 2016, the number gradually rose to 14 articles in the post-Vision period. One explanation of the journalists' focus on this role likely linked directly to the Vision aims and effort to increase the number of women in the Saudi labor market at a different sector.

Journalists who discussed women's rights globally or regionally participated at the same rate before and after the Saudi Vision 2030. They wrote 13 related articles before and 13 after 2016. Perhaps, the consistency of these efforts underscores the reality that the Vision was a national strategy without noticeable outcomes, at least in the short term. Presenting women's issues as universal and using phrases like "not just Saudi women" or "women worldwide struggle with..." also may have helped avoid criticisms that might occur when referring to Saudi women in particular.

Finally, the number of journalists' opinion pieces which included notions of empowerment changed after Saudi Vision 2030. Notably, the number of articles that utilized the concept of women's empowerment or its synonyms grew steadily from five before the Vision to 12 afterwards. The increase in the use of this concept of in journalists' articles aligned with government-initiated, public discussions resulting from the promoted concept in the Vision. Therefore, journalists might have referred to women's empowerment more as a response to the government and its entities adopting and embracing empowerment as a concept and as a goal.

5.2 Topics Changes by Newspapers

Although Saudi newspapers have no declared stance regarding political and social leaning and none are officially recognized as liberal or conservative newspapers, the editorial policies and ideologies may have an impact on the contributions of journalists. Therefore, scrutinizing the articles of Saudi female journalists by differentiating the newspapers in which their opinion pieces were published could uncover whether each newspaper had a potential inclination or showed more interest in particular subjects.

5.2.1 *Local Affairs and Governmental Responses*

The analysis of articles focusing on local issues revealed that all three newspapers contributed to this discussion. Specifically, among the 90 articles written by journalists about social issues, *Alyaum* published 34, followed by *Alwatan* with 31 articles and *Al-Jazirah* with 25 pieces. When examining opinion articles that discussed the work of different governmental entities, however, sharp differences in emphasis emerged. *Alwatan* published 33 articles, followed by *Alyaum* with 17 articles, and *Al-Jazirah* with nine articles. Disparities in publication rates among the three newspapers could be reasonably explained by differences in journalists' interests rather than editorial policies. Yet, discussing local affairs is one of the core aspects of

Saudi journalism, and the majority of newspapers aim to cover topics that would attract their local audience.

5.2.2 *Political and Economic Topics*

The analysis of Saudi female journalists' contribution to the politics and economic realms were revealed in 149 articles. *Alyaum* received the highest number (87), followed by *Al- Jazirah* (32), and *Alwatan* (30). Although no obvious explanation in terms of ideologies and editorial policies would explain why *Alyaum* published the highest number of articles, additional research has uncovered that two journalists at *Alyaum* may have had a special interest in economic topics. Specifically, Maki, who identifies as an economics and finance writer, and Alduhailan, a businesswoman and the chair of the National Committee for Women's Decorating Salons and Workshops in the Federation of Saudi Chambers, contributed to the articles' high number. Consequently, in this instance, the critical factor may not be the editorial policies but rather the journalists' individual interests and specialties.

5.2.3 *Islamic Movements and Religious Extremists*

Saudi female journalists wrote a total of 69 opinion pieces discussing Islamic movements and religious extremists, which were published in different newspapers. Among these, *Alwatan* published the highest number of articles (51), followed by *Al-Jazirah* (17), and only one article in *Alyaum*. This discrepancy in the number of published articles suggests that the newspapers may have varying editorial policies and ideological orientations. According to the Strategic Fiker Center for Studies (2013), *Alwatan*, in particular, is known for its more liberal agenda since its inception. The newspaper has had a history of unfavorable views towards Islamic movements, which may explain why it published the most articles on this topic. Another possibility if that

female journalists who share similar ideologies recognized the newspaper's undeclared stance and found it to be a suitable platform to express their opinions.

5.2.4 *Women's Rights and Issues*

Although all three newspapers included opinion pieces about women's rights and issues, *Alwatan* published the highest number of articles (21), followed by *Al-Jazirah* with 16 articles, and *Alyaum* with nine. One possible explanation for why *Alwatan* demonstrated a greater interest in publishing articles about women's issues may be attributed to its liberal ideologies. Prior to the recent government reforms, discussions on women's rights were considered a sensitive topic due to the influence of religious leaders in society and journalism. As *Alwatan* was also found to have published the highest number of articles referring to religious extremists, it could be inferred that the newspaper is more willing to address topics that used to be labeled as sensitive topics due to the power of religious extremists on matters of women's rights.

5.2.5 *Vision 2030 and National Transformation*

The discussion of Saudi Vision 2030 and its impact emerged in 25 opinion pieces. *Al-Jazirah* published nine articles, followed by eight articles in *Alwatan* and seven articles in *Alyaum*. A likely explanation for the similarities in publication rates among the three newspapers is the fact that Saudi Vision 2030 is significantly intertwined with various aspects of life, making it a crucial topic in any discussion related to local change. Therefore, despite their ideological perspectives, the newspapers could and did discuss the Vision and its outcomes.

In summary, the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030 had a noticeable impact on the topics discussed in opinion pieces by female journalists in Saudi Arabia. This impact varied depending on the subject matter. The number of articles on unemployment and terrorism declined after the Vision, while the discussion of morals and values remained consistent. Further,

journalists' contributions to discussions on political and economic matters declined after the Vision, but discussions on Islamic movements and religious extremists remained even over time. In terms of women's rights and issues, a slight decrease in articles discussing gender inequality occurred, while coverage of social issues such as marriages and divorces increased, and domestic violence received little coverage. The male guardianship system and the government's role in improving Saudi women's status were addressed more after the Vision, with an increased focus on women's roles and rights in the public sphere.

In addition, the contributions of Saudi female journalists to various topics were analyzed, with a focus on different newspapers' editorial policies and ideological orientations. In local affairs, all three newspapers contributed, but differences in emphasis were observed on certain issues. In discussions of political and economic topics, *Alyaum* received the highest number of articles, which may be attributed to the individual interests and specialties of its journalists. *Alwatan* published the highest number of articles discussing Islamic movements and religious extremists, which may reflect its liberal agenda. *Alwatan* also demonstrated a greater interest in publishing articles about women's issues, which could also be attributed to its liberal ideologies. The discussion of Saudi Vision 2030 and its impact was similar across all three newspapers, likely due to its importance in any discussion related to local change.

6 CONCLUSION

This study explored the topics and issues covered by nine Saudi female journalists across three daily newspapers. It also examined the changes in their work that occurred in relation to Saudi Vision 2030 and across the selected newspapers. In a context where empowering women served as one of the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 and the Saudi government's embraced of a more moderate version of Islam, the findings show that changes in the female journalists'

contributions did correlate with the government's new public posture. The findings also reveal that the changing content of the opinion articles was also associated with the newspapers that published the journalists' opinion pieces.

Overall, the analysis of opinion pieces revealed several aspects of Saudi female journalists' contributions regarding the topics they discussed and how they approached them. Journalists tended to focus on local affairs and provided commentary on the work of various government entities. They shed light on issues that may concern Saudi society, such as unemployment and terrorism, and offered suggestions to minimize their impact. Generally, journalists mostly had a positive tone towards the work of Saudi ministries and ministers. However, discussions on the Ministry of Education, which was the most discussed entity, revealed a critical perspective and an unsatisfied stance on education in the Kingdom. Journalists were less vocal in their assessments of other governmental entities. They also discussed Islamic movements and their negative impact on society before and after the implementation of the Saudi Vision 2030, which helped to understand, to some extent, Saudi society's stance on Islamic movements and religious extremists during the study timeframe. Journalists' involvement in political affairs, economic matters, and women's issues was relatively limited, yet their contributions revealed several characteristics regarding the discussion of potentially critical subjects. For instance, in the discussions of women's rights and issues, journalists included Saudi women's issues in a global context, emphasizing that the struggles faced by Saudi women are part of the worldwide struggle that women face, regardless of their location.

The journalists' emphasis on internal matters highlights prevalent issues within Saudi society across the different years in ways that lead to better understandings of the society as a whole. For example, the journalists' opinions on the Ministry of Education, which received the

highest number of articles compared to other government entities, could and perhaps should stimulate further discussion on the status of education in Saudi Arabia. In this case, the journalists' perspectives on the obstacles and challenges within education would provide an overview of society's views on education in general and the work of the ministry in particular. Based on these findings, the study concludes that female journalists in Saudi Arabia tend to have a stronger preference for covering local and national issues, as opposed to global ones. This enhances our understanding of the focus of the journalists' work and generates additional ideas regarding the educational practices that might benefit individuals training to be female journalists in Saudi Arabia.

In addition, findings related to the journalists' engagement with public matters could also improve the space such assets occupy in the newspaper work place. For instance, previous studies found that female journalists, due to women's status in the Kingdom at the time, were not able to engage in discussing public matters, especially critical ones such as politics, security, and corruption (Alnasir, 2005; Akeel, 2010). However, this study found that female journalists commented prominently on public issues, including but not limited to critical matters such as terrorism and the Kingdom's security. Therefore, this finding, considered in conjunction with previous studies, demonstrates that the overall improvement of women's status and the rights should be considered and reflected in their journalistic practices, providing them with more space within the newspapers and, perhaps, greater confidence.

The study's findings further indicate that Saudi female journalists had lower levels of engagement in discussing political and economic matters. These findings are consistent with earlier research (Elhajj, 2019) which also showed that female journalists tended to contribute less to political and economic issues than their male counterparts. The female journalists' limited

involvement with political and economically focused opinion pieces exhibits similar patterns to Arab female journalists in general. Perhaps the continuation of these findings, despite efforts to empower women in Saudi Arabia, could be attributed to complex social factors, among other factors, that contribute to the continued perception of political and economic areas of interest as male-dominated domains.

Moreover, the study revealed a willingness by Saudi female journalists to actively discuss Islamic movements and religious extremism. They expressed negative opinions towards Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and highlighted the danger posed by religious extremists. While previous studies have not extensively explored the perspectives of female journalists on Islamic movements and religious extremism, the assumption that articles on such subjects might be too controversial may have shifted along with broader societal attitudes in this area.

In addition, this study found that Saudi female journalists made only a modest contribution to discussing women's rights and related issues. Overall, this study's findings regarding female journalists' contribution to women's rights and issues are consistent with several previous studies (Abdelelah, 2023; Akeel, 2010; Alnajrani, et al., 2018). The similarities included not only the fact that the discussion of these matters received less attention in journalists' work, but similarities were evident also in terms of the kinds of issues and ways of discussion. For instance, this study indicates that gender inequality and domestic violence were two of the top three issues that journalists referred to when discussing women's rights, which is in line with earlier studies.

The reasons for why female journalists chose to emphasize work on issues unrelated to women's rights and associated issues, however, are complex. Recent reforms might not yet have

had a significant impact on increasing journalistic pieces that focus on women's issues reflecting their perspectives. Further, the government's recent effort to enhance Saudi women's status by modifying major laws that had obstructed women's status for decades and establishing new regulations to improve their status quo may continue to minimize the need to focus on such issues in the media. Another possible explanation is that journalists themselves did not focus on these issues and instead found themselves more interested in other areas. A further complicating factor might be found in the conclusions of previous studies that indicated that Saudi female journalists felt that reporting women's issues and advocating for their rights were part of their responsibility since no unions or organizations were conducting this role in the Kingdom, but the status of gender inequality in journalism practice prevented them from playing such a role (Akeel, 2010). Moreover, journalists' contributions to this area may still be influenced by other factors, such as societal norms and traditional family and tribal structures, despite legal reforms aimed at granting women greater autonomy. Alternatively, it is also possible that journalists may choose not to actively shed light on issues related to women for personal reasons. Therefore, further investigation is needed to examine how female journalists feel about their role in representing other women's concerns and reporting their issues as it is unlikely to be revealed without interviewing them.

This study also has notable outcomes among journalists who are engaged in discussing women's rights and issues. For example, journalists who did write on such topics were more focused on women's rights on a global or regional scale in almost half of the articles instead of focusing only on Saudi women. This finding is concordant with Abdelelah's (2023), who found that journalists wrote freely about women's issues in other countries, even if such problems also related to Saudi citizens. In fact, the journalists frequently discussed women's rights from a

broad perspective and considered Saudi women's issues as issues that all women struggle with worldwide, not just Saudi women. The finding might avoid discomfort in discussing women's issues that previous studies have reported repeatedly. An open question associated with this finding is whether journalists intentionally took this approach or whether it was just their way of covering such stories by providing extensive background.

One of the study's findings regarding content focused on working and participating in the public sphere was what journalists referred to as a "women's role". In contrast, Abdelelah (2023) reported that female journalists in 2007 tried to align with the tenth Saudi Media Policy Principles regarding respect for the nature of women and their roles in society, and avoided of writing about roles other than marriage and nurturing. Interestingly, journalists interpreted the same media principle differently from 2007 to the study timeframe, and they exclusively focused on women's right to work and be active members of their societies. Government reforms in redefining women's roles might be responsible for the shift, particularly in areas involved in the Kingdom's development and women joining the labor force. Further, the embrace of the notion of women's empowerment by the government, which gradually increased in use in journalists' opinion articles could also explain this outcome.

This study clearly illustrated that Saudi Vision 2030 appears to have had an impact on the contributions of journalists and changed the rate of their participation in certain areas. Specifically, since the implementation of the Vision, there has been a decrease in the number of opinion pieces written by journalists that address local issues such as unemployment, terrorism, shortcomings of government entities, domestic violence, politics, and the economy. The decline in articles no doubt has varying interpretations depending on the specific discussion topic. For instance, the decrease in the discussion of terrorism might indicate that the issue is no longer as

prevalent in Saudi society. However, the decline in political and economic discussion could be a cause for concern and require attention. Therefore, these findings could pave the way for further investigation into the areas that female Saudi journalists have shown less interest in covering since the implementation of the Vision.

The Vision also appeared to impact discussions surrounding women's rights and related issues. The government's new stance correlated with a rise in the number of articles utilizing the concept of women's empowerment or its synonyms, as well as an increase in references to women's involvement in the workforce and the public sector. These findings demonstrate how the government's stance, represented by the Vision in this case, influenced women's rights and the issue of journalists' contributions. Specifically, the government's embrace of "women's empowerment" in the Vision companied a heightened focus on the issue in the female journalist's opinion pieces.

The study also detected the potential influence of newspaper editorial policies and ideologies on journalists' contributions. This analysis revealed that some newspapers demonstrated more interest in publishing articles about certain areas. Notably, the majority of articles discussing the negative influence of Islamic movements and religious extremists were published in one newspaper, *Alwatan*. Similarly, journalists at *Alyaum* predominantly focused on economic aspects, while giving minimal attention to political affairs, which were addressed more frequently in the other two newspapers, *Al-Jazirah* and *Alwatan*. These findings are significant since Saudi newspapers have no declared ideologies or orientations. However, they emphasize the importance of examining the influence of the institution's editorial agenda, even if it is not officially recognized.

Despite the value of these findings, this study did have a limitation in that it only focused on female journalists who were consistently publishing between 2014 and 2018. While this criterion allowed for a comparison of their work before and after the implementation of Vision 2030, it excluded journalists who made significant contributions during the study period but were not publishing constantly. Additionally, some prominent female journalists, such as Haya Almaneea, who wrote extensively about women's issues in *Al-Riyadh* newspaper from 2012 to 2017 but did not contribute sufficiently after Vision 2030, were also excluded. Future researchers could conduct a comparative study based on a wider range of publication years and be more inclusive of all female journalists regardless of their consistent output over time.

Furthermore, the study's timeframe requirement prevented the examination of opinion pieces published in 2019, a year marked by significant reforms for women. Although some journalists were active in 2019, those who did not publish in 2013 could not be included in the study's analysis as there would be no comparison of their articles before and after the Vision was implemented. Consequently, the study did not encompass other influential newspapers like *Al-Riyadh*, as no journalists met the study's criteria. To address this shortcoming, future studies could consider choosing years before and after the Saudi Vision and analyzing the work of journalists who were active in these periods as a whole, by year, and by author.

While this study sheds light on major themes and provides an overview of Saudi female journalists' contribution to traditional newspapers, a more comprehensive understanding of the area of female journalism in Saudi Arabia requires further investigation from various perspectives. Based on the findings of this study, future studies should interview Saudi female journalists about their contributions to obtain an in-depth explanation of the reasons why they focused and discussed the topics they did before and after Saudi Vision 2030. Further, future

studies should expand their selection of female journalists to include those at the early stages of their careers to provide a new perspective on journalism. Furthermore, comparative analyses of the work of junior and senior female journalists could be conducted, exploring the differences between the two generations of journalists. Future studies should also examine opinion articles in online-only newspapers, which offer a different set of views and ways of practicing journalism.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Coding System

General Characteristics

The date: When was the article published?

1. 2014
2. 2015
3. 2016
4. 2017
5. 2018

The publication: In which newspaper was the article published?

1. Al-Jazirah newspaper
2. Al-Watan newspaper
3. Al-Yaum newspaper

The author: Which journalists wrote the article?

1. Khairiah AlSaggaf
2. Thuraya AlArrayed
3. Samar Almogren
4. Azzah Alsubaie
5. Maysoun Aldakhil
6. Abeer Alali
7. Shuaa Alduhailan
8. Hana Makii
9. Anissa Alsharif

Local matters and social issues

Stance on the Consultative Council (*Majlis Al-Shura*) members' work and recommendations: How do the journalists perceive the effort of the Saudi Consultative Council?

1. Positive (the article mostly commends the work of the Consultative Council members)
2. Negative (the article specifically examines the deficiencies of Consultative Council members' work)
3. Neutral (the article includes the strengths and weaknesses in the work of the Consultative Council members and aims to provide suggestions for improvements)
4. Non-applicable; the journalist does not discuss the work of the Consultative Council

Journalists and government entities: Which of the following most accurately reflects the journalists' view of Saudi ministries and ministers' work?

1. Positive (the article mainly commends the work of the Saudi ministries and ministers)
2. Negative (the article mainly discusses the deficiencies of Saudi ministries and ministers)
3. Neutral (the article includes strengths and weaknesses in the work of the Saudi ministries and ministers and aims to provide suggestions for improvements)
4. Non-applicable; the journalist does not refer to Saudi ministries and ministers' work.

Areas of interest: Which government entities receive the most words in the opinion piece?

1. Ministry of Education
2. Ministry of Media
3. Saudi Ministry of Culture
4. Ministry of Tourism
5. Ministry of Health
6. Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development
7. Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture
8. Ministry of Commerce and Investment
9. Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
10. Ministry of Economy and Planning
11. Ministry of Energy
12. Ministry of Hajj and Umrah
13. Ministry of National Guard
14. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
15. Ministry of Interior
16. Ministry of Defense
17. Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources
18. Ministry of Investment
19. General Sport Authority
20. Ministry of Transport
21. Ministry of Finance
22. Ministry of Justice
23. Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs
24. Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance
25. General Entertainment Authority
26. More than one entity
27. None of the above

Social matters: Which topics related to Saudi society received the most attention from the journalists?

1. Racism and Sectarianism
2. Consumption
3. Terrorism
4. Unemployment
5. Social media and influencers
6. Parenting advice
7. Islamic occasions (Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Ramadan, Pilgrimage)
8. Morals and values
9. Other matters
10. Not applicable; the journalist does not refer to specific Saudi matters

Political and Economic Contribution

Political affairs: Which of the following most precisely describes journalists' contribution to political matters?

1. Investigate the Kingdom's foreign policies and its international relations with other countries
2. Analyze the impact of international incidents on the Kingdom
3. Discuss International political events with no reference to the Kingdom

4. More than one of 1-3
5. Not applicable; the journalist does not shed light on political aspects

Economic matters: Which of the following most accurately describe journalists' contribution to economic matters?

1. Discussion of Saudi economy only (Note: If the article refers to the economic aspects of Vision 2030 it will not be coded)
2. Discussion of the impact of the global economy on the Kingdom
3. Discussion of the global economy only
4. Not applicable; the journalist does not refer to economic matters

Islamic Movements and Religious Extremists

The influence of Islamic movements: Which of the following best describes the journalists' perspective regarding Islamic movements and their influence on society?

1. Positive (journalists refer to Islamic movements as part of society's identity)
2. Negative (journalists perceive Islamic movements as a reason for backwardness in Saudi society)
3. Neutral (Islamic movements have positive and negative outcomes on Saudi society)
4. Non-applicable; the journalist does not refer to Islamic movements

Islam teachings and religious extremists: Which of the following most accurately reflects journalists' perspectives regarding religious extremists?

1. Religious extremists misinterpreted Islam's teaching
2. Religious extremists do not represent Islam values
3. Religious extremists focus only on fundamentalist aspects of Islam
4. More than one of 1-3
5. Not applicable; the journalist does not refer to religious extremists

Women's Rights and Issues

Primary attention: What is the primary women's issue discussed by journalists?

1. Domestic violence
2. Gender inequality
3. Guardianship system and the need for permission from a male relative
4. Car driving ban
5. Sexual harassment
6. Other issues
7. Not applicable; the journalist does not discuss women's issues

Perspective regarding Saudi women's status quo: Which of the following most accurately reflects the journalists' opinion toward women's status quo in Saudi Arabia?

1. Saudi women's status is fair and does not need improvement
2. Saudi women's status is fine but does need improvement
3. Saudi women's status is unsatisfactory and needs legal changes
4. The journalist does not provide a clear perspective on women's status quo

Stance on government efforts regarding women's issues: Which of the following most accurately reflects the journalists' perception regarding the government's role in terms of women's current status?

1. The government's role in enhancing women's status is outstanding
2. The government's role in enhancing women's status is satisfactory, but it needs to provide more
3. The government's role in enhancing women's status is unsatisfactory
4. Non-applicable (unknowable from textual references)

Women's role in society: Which of the following most accurately reflects the journalists' view of the role of women in society?

1. Birth and Nurture
2. Marriage and Domestic Tasks
3. Both 1 and 2
4. Working and participating in public sphere
5. Matter of personal choices
6. Some combination of 1-5 (not 1 and 2)
7. Not applicable; the journalist does not discuss women's role in society

Promoting the notion of women's empowerment: Which of the following most accurately reflects the journalists' work regarding the notion of women's empowerment?

1. Journalists use the concept of empowering women or its synonyms throughout their articles
2. Journalists use the concept of empowering women or its synonyms at times in their articles.
3. Journalists do not use to the concept of empowering women or its synonyms in their articles

Discussing women's rights from a global angle: Which of the following most precisely describes the journalists' articles that discuss women's rights?

1. Journalists discuss women's rights on a global scale
2. Journalists discuss women's rights on a regional scale
3. Journalists discuss women's rights on more than one scale
4. Journalists discuss women's rights on a local level only
4. Not applicable; the journalist does not discuss women's rights

Vision 2030 and National Transformation

The consequences of Vision 2030: Which of the following anticipated outcomes of the Vision 2030 best reflects the journalists' perspective?

1. Enhance the Kingdom's image internationally
2. Improve citizens' economic and social status
3. Provide jobs opportunities and reduce unemployment rate
4. Improve women's status and empower them
5. More than one of 1-4
6. Not applicable (published before 2016 or not mentioned in opinion piece)

The major discussion of Vision 2030 and its impact: Which aspect of the Vision receives the most words in the opinion piece?

1. Economic aspect
2. Social aspect
3. public sector aspect
4. International aspect
5. More than one of 1-4
6. Other
7. Not applicable (published before 2016 or not mentioned in opinion piece)

The tone regarding Vision 2030: Which of the following best describes how the journalists' perspective regarding the Vision 2030 plan?

1. Positive (journalists perceive Vision 2030 as the kingdom's future)
2. Negative (journalists point out the possible disadvantages of Vision 2030 on the Kingdom or/and citizens)
3. Neutral (journalists discuss Vision 2030 objectively by referring to its possible advantages and disadvantages)
4. Not applicable (published before 2016 or not mentioned in opinion piece)

Personal experiences: Which of the following accurately describes journalists' incorporation of personal aspects and feelings in their work?

1. Journalists share articles focused only on personal aspects and feelings
2. Journalists share personal aspects and feelings as part of their articles
3. Journalists do not refer to their personal aspects and feelings in their articles

Patriotism and Defending the Kingdom and its Rulers: Which of the following best describes journalists' use of articles to develop a sense of patriotism?

1. Journalists devote their entire article to promote patriotism
2. Journalists refer to patriotism as part of their article
3. Journalists do not refer to patriotism in their articles