

**The Role of Social Media in Providing New Opportunities in Work
and Life: A Qualitative Study of Professional Saudi Arabian
Women**

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ABSTRACT

This study builds on a small but growing body of research concerning socio-economic, cultural, political, and personal challenges influencing Saudi women's professional development. Although Saudi women have more advantages and opportunities in 2020 compared to previous historical periods, women still face challenges related to employment and professional status. This research provides an in-depth analysis of the insider experience connected to challenges Saudi women face in work and life that hinder their professional development. Specifically, this research explored the role of social media in providing new opportunities to help Saudi women overcome challenges they face in work and life. Guided by a qualitative approach, this interpretive study is conducted through interviews, supporting documents analysis, and personal experiences. This study draws on Technofeminism, Intersectional Feminism, and Social Role Theory in order to provide a broad theoretical lens to help interpret findings. Using thematic analysis, six main themes were uncovered: (1) socio-cultural challenges, (2) personal challenges, (3) ethical challenges, (4) institutional challenges, (5) civic and professional engagement, and (6) socialization and privacy issues. General findings indicated that despite efforts from the Saudi Arabian government to enhance women's rights in society, women continue to face socio-cultural, personal, and ethical challenges in work and life. The advanced analysis revealed that social media does have a positive role in providing Saudi women with new opportunities to overcome challenges they face but that cultural norms and traditional practices continue to create challenges which hinder Saudi women's professional development.

Keyword: Saudi women, Saudi Arabia, culture, Social norms, Islam, Challenges, Opportunities, Feminism, Equality, Professional development, Social media, Technofeminism, Intersectionality.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated first and foremost to both my parents, **Azizah Hafez** and **Hisham ALBakri** for their infinite support and love. They provided the help and inspiration necessary for me to complete this process. I appreciate all the help you provided, taking care of life's every day demands when I didn't have the time to do so myself.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions	8
Researcher's Perspective.....	8
Significance of the Study	9
Definitions of Terms	11
Theoretical Framework.....	12
Thesis Organization.....	13
Chapter Two: Literature Review	14
Background for the Review.....	14
Profile of Saudi Arabia.....	14
Saudi Society and Culture	15
Women in Saudi Arabia	17
Feminism	22
Intersectional feminism.	23
Social Role Theory.....	24
Technofeminism.....	24
Women's Empowerment and ICTs.....	26
Barriers to Women's Empowerment.....	27
Possibilities Brought by ICTs	30
Use of Digital ICTs to Support Women Empowerment, Agency, and Identities.....	31
Self-confidence and independency.....	31
Social Gendered Norms.....	31
Socioeconomic Status.....	32
Economic Opportunities.....	32
Collective Actions.....	33
ICTs and Leadership.....	35
Chapter Three: Methodology	38
Research Questions	39
Research Design and Rationale.....	39
Role of the Researcher.....	41
Population, Sampling, and Recruitment Procedures	43
Sampling procedures	43
Criterion sampling.....	44
Recruiting procedures.....	45
Instrumentation.....	46

Data Collection	47
In-depth interviews using VoIP	47
Documentation.....	50
Researcher journal field notes.....	52
Data Analysis.....	54
Process of Data Analysis of Selected Documents.....	56
worthiness	59
Triangulation.....	59
Member checks	60
Audit trails	60
Adequate engagement with the data.....	60
Ethical Considerations	61
Chapter Four: Findings	63
General Findings	63
Demographic Description.....	63
Themes and Categories	65
Category 1: Challenges Facing Saudi Women.....	66
Theme 1: Socio-cultural Challenges	67
Theme 2: Personal Challenges.....	73
Theme 3: Institutional Challenges.....	78
Theme 4: Ethical Challenges	83
Category 2: Role of Social Media.....	87
Theme 5: Civic and Professional Engagement	88
Theme 6: Socialization and Privacy Issues.....	94
Summary	96
Advanced Analysis and Interpretation	98
Category1. Challenges Saudi Women Face in Work and Life.....	100
Category 2: Role of Social Media.....	110
Conclusion	116
Chapter Five: Discussion	118
Introduction.....	118
Discussion of Key Findings.....	119
RQ1: Challenges Facing Saudi Women in Work and life	119
RQ:2. The role of Social Media	126
Theoretical Implications.....	129
Implications and Recommendations	131
Limitations.....	134
Conclusion	136
References	138
Appendices	155
Appendix-1 Ethics Board (Health Sciences and Science REB) Approval.....	155
Appendix-2 Request for Interviews and Consent Form (English).....	156
Appendix-3 Request for Interviews and Consent Form (Arabic).....	159
Appendix-4 Possible Interview Questions.....	160

List of Tables

<i>Table 1 Demographics Information.....</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Table 2 Overview of emergent categories and themes</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Table 3 Emergent themes and sub-themes related to challenges facing Saudi women.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Table 4 Emergent themes and sub-themes related to the role of social media</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Table 5 Summary of general findings</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>Table 6 Summary of key findings.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>Table 7 Analyzed documents (Challenges Facing Saudi working women)</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>Table 8 Analyzed documents (Role of social media)</i>	<i>172</i>

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter begins with a general introduction to the background on the roles and types of information and communication technologies associated with women's empowerment and leadership status. Then, the research problem is identified, the gaps in the existing literature that motivated this research are discussed, and the research questions, which consist of one main question and three specific sub-questions, are stated. Finally, the chapter closes with a general introduction to the theoretical frameworks which informed this research and guided each step in the study.

Over the last two decades, feminist writing within the field of science and technology has theorized about the relationships between gender and technology, and has often focused on new information and communication technologies (ICTs) involving digital communication networks used as platforms to gather, store, analyse, process, and transmit information in various forms such as emails, videos, blogs, data, MMS, and SMS (Prasad & Sreedevi, 2013). These forms of ICT have been tremendously important in the improvement of women's rights and empowerment. Since the 1990s, feminist approaches have emphasized the positive impact of ICTs on the possibilities to empower women and transform social gender-based norms (Kemp & Squires, 1998; Green & Adam, 1999; Kirkup, Janes, Woodward, & Hovenden, 2000).

Women's empowerment means the ability of women to take action to build their inner strengths such as self-confidence and openness to learning new ideas by achieving a more representative social status (Mehta & Sharma, 2014). Essentially, women's empowerment emphasizes the fact that women are able to independently make and implement important social, economic, and political personal decisions that have consequences for their lives and the lives of others around them (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005). Mehta and Sharma (2014) suggested that

women's empowerment is based on different domains, e.g., mobility, visibility, leadership, the ability to make decisions within the household, economic security, and the ability to effectively interact in the public domain. Mobility and visibility help women move towards creating an innovative, interactive, and complete integrated culture where women are accountable. In other words, mobility and visibility lead directly to women's leadership (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

That being said, ICTs have created new economic, political, cultural, and social possibilities for women's empowerment as well as their leadership (Saleh & Luppicini, 2017). According to Kaushik (2013), ICTs have caused changes in social and economic environments in a way that allows women to take advantage of work and entrepreneurial opportunities in different economic sectors, which is a source of national economic development (Kaushik, 2013; Mehta & Sharma, 2014). ICTs have also opened different investment opportunities for women who are unable to act independently or affected by poverty (Goyal & Parkash, 2011), and that's through enabling those women to create or find new jobs and business opportunities online (Saleh & Luppicini, 2017).

Nevertheless, the road to women's empowerment through leadership is not easy (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Research has shown that women worldwide face different challenges, such as stereotypes, a lack of role models, difficulties in imposing themselves in mixed-gender environments, and lack of access to management and leadership training (Al-Ahmadi, 2011, Elliott & Stead, 2008). Arab working women, in particular, face extra challenges such as a lack of trust in their abilities, gender discrimination, and negative attitudes toward them from members of their societies and organizations (Al-Lamky, 2007). Local and community culture-related behaviors in the workplace affect the advancements of Arab women in their potential careers (Al-Ahmadi, 2011), and more specifically, women in Saudi Arabia still suffer from the

underrepresentation in leadership positions due to their gender (Dumato, 2010; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Saudi Arabia is among the few countries in the world where women are almost excluded from playing an important role in society because they lack choices regarding their fundamental life decisions and have limited access to employment, transportation, and justice as compared to men (Dumato, 2010). These factors including the underrepresentation of Saudi women in leadership positions greatly affect the economic and personal wellbeing of those women and prevent them from taking care of themselves (Almunajjed, 2010).

In recognition of those factors, the Saudi government has recently begun to improve Saudi women's education and increase their participation in both the public and private spheres, Saudi women are promised to have more advantages and opportunities than at any time before (Thomson, 2015; Aljabre, 2013; Alturise, 2013). These achievements and promises by the government are significant in that they empower Saudi women through different opportunities to help them develop in their professional careers, and hopefully improve their status globally. Nonetheless, women still face challenges to their employment and professional career as well as their participation in economic, social, and political life (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). . As revealed by the literature, cultural norms and traditional practices are among those challenges hindering Saudi women's professional development (Alsaleh, 2012; Saleh & Luppicini, 2017). As such, this qualitative study examines the challenges Saudi women experience in work and life that hinder their professional development. The extent and nature of these challenges are rooted in insider experiences of these women and yet to be captured and uncovered as public knowledge. In addition, this research explores the relationship between social media and the challenges Saudi women face in work and life. Through a qualitative method, this study involves the collection of data through interviews, document analysis, and personal experiences.

Statement of the Problem

In the last few years, Saudi Arabia has witnessed an increasing number of Saudi women enrolling in different positions in both public and private sectors (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Studies have shown that the perceptions about Saudi women are changing due to governmental promises to improve women's education and employment opportunities (Thomson, 2015). Thus, as a result of women enrolment in the workforce in different fields including managerial and leading positions in Saudi Arabia, there becomes a need to research this phenomenon in order to uncover the insider perceptions of those women. Recent developments and new reforms by policymakers included in the document of the Saudi Vision 2030 should expand the role of Saudi women in the country's economic development and political system (Vision 2030, 2016). However, evidence suggests that women still face challenges that hinder their professional development due to socio-cultural, personal, and political aspects (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alsaleh, 2012). Despite the recognition of the problems regarding women's education and the recent implementations to expand women's participation in the workforce, barriers to women empowerment are deeply pervasive (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017).

As of 2015, Saudi Arabia was ranked 134 among 145 countries with gender-gap issues (Global Gender Gap Report, 2015). In such a society, Saudi women represent and play certain traditional roles imposed by the society, such as expecting them to be good mothers and wives (Dumato, 2010). Previous studies have shown that cultural practices, traditions, and social norms of the Saudi society have promoted gender in equality and have a negative effect on women (Alsaleh, 2012). Consequently, "Saudi Arabia has developed a reputation for being more restrict of women's mobility and public activity than other Arab or Muslim societies" (Alsaleh, 2012, p.

125). This ever-changing position of Saudi women has increased scholarly interest both globally and nationally, but there remains a gap in the literature where the insider experiences of Saudi women is almost missing. It is this researcher's belief that because Saudi Arabian society is often viewed by the Western media as having a conservative culture and Saudi women are often portrayed as oppressed and marginalized (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017), the focus of the literature and media is often on more general matters such as the veil, segregation, or driving. The researcher suggests that Saudi women are facing different reality and more important matters that is not reflecting in the current literature. Thus, there is a need for professional Saudi women's voices in the literature to explain their insider experiences, perspectives, challenges, and needs.

Furthermore, many believe that Saudi women are less qualified and more disadvantaged than other women across the world due to the strict implementation of Islamic teachings (Doumato, 2010). Some scholars have argued that the distorted image of Saudi women in the Western world is not a result of the interpretations of Islamic principles (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Al-lily, 2011). That being said, gaps remain in what researchers know about the challenges affecting the quality of Saudi women's work and life either directly or indirectly. Further, little is known about how social constraints are connected to the cultural aspects of Saudi Arabia, which are embedded within an ideology of male superiority due to advocates who believe that leadership is not a job for women, is affecting Saudi women in their work and life (Al Alhareth, Al Alhareth, & Al Dighrir, 2015). Therefore, this study attempts to uncover insider experiences and perceptions of Saudi women, and capture the quality of their work and life by exploring challenges that hinder their professional development. It will also explore the role of social media in helping those women overcome the challenges they face in work and life.

Saudi Arabia is a young nation with a rich history and deeply rooted traditions that has witnessed a rapid transformation to become a modern country. This transformation came as a result of the oil discovery and the integration of new technologies (Rugh, 2002). As a result, the interaction between Saudi culture and communication technologies has had a remarkable impact on Saudi society (Al-Saggaf, 2011). For instance, the advent of modern technological communications has exposed Saudis to different cultures across the world, helping to address existing and perhaps new opportunities. The widespread popularity of Internet services allows for the creation of new communication styles such as social media (e.g, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram) (Al-Saggaf & Simmons, 2015). Also, research has shown that Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have contributed significantly in building social media, which has led to political, social, economic, and personal empowerment for people in general and for women in particular (Prasad and Sreedevi, 2013).

Social media platforms have become an important new technology not only for social interactions, but also for social and political changes (Al-Lily, 2011). For example, social media led to major political changes and social shifts during the Arab Spring, and especially impacted the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt (Steponova, 2011). Social media enables people to spread huge volumes of unrestricted information in order to fight against discriminative actions and legislation enforced on them by dictatorial governments (Al-Saggaf & Simmons, 2015; Al-Saggaf, 2011). Aman and Jayroe (2013) and Al-Saggaf (2011) found that due to the widespread use of social media in the Middle East and specifically in Saudi Arabia, people were able to engage in political actions which was a restricted and a taboo subject for them to discuss. As a result of the growing adoption of communication technologies in Saudi society, a dramatic change in social, economic, and political domains have occurred (Al-Saggaf & Simmons, 2015;

Al-Saggaf, 2011). Thus, it is this researcher's assumption that social media has a potential role in providing Saudi women with professional opportunities as well as helping them overcome their work and life challenges.

In the context of the Arab world, a small but growing body of research have considered the role of social media in providing professional opportunities and addressing challenges for women in work and life (Metcalf 2011; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011, 2013; Prasad & Sreedevi, 2013; Thompson, 2015). These studies examined how Arab women have utilized social media to call for their rights, search for agency, equality, and social status to defeat their socio-cultural constraints. However, current literature has not captured insider experiences of Saudi women in regards to the challenges they face in work and life nor considered the role of social media to help those women overcome the challenges they face. This is a key research gap and this qualitative research contributes to the body of knowledge and fills in the gap by uncovering insider experiences of Saudi women and exploring their perceptions to understand the extent and nature of the challenges they encounter in work and life, and the role of social media in helping them overcome challenges.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the insider lived experiences of Saudi working women and investigate any challenges experienced by women in the workplace that hinder their professional development. Also, the aim of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the opportunities provided by social media to help Saudi women overcome the challenges they face in work and life. Therefore, the main objectives of this study are the following:

1. Investigate current challenges experienced by women in the workplace that hinder their professional development.
2. Explore how social media helps Saudi women in building professional opportunities and overcoming challenges in work and life.

Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions based on the research objectives.

The main research question is: “What is the role of social media in building professional opportunities to help change Saudi females’ lives for the better?” and the sub-research questions are:

- 1) What are the challenges Saudi women perceive in work and life?
- 2) How does the participation in social media help Saudi women overcome the challenges they face in work and life?

Researcher's Perspective

The current research grew from an interest in Saudi women's challenges and experiences in the workforce, and from personal experience since the researcher is a Saudi female who shares the same background as the women in this study. As a Saudi female who was born, raised and worked in Saudi Arabia but also lived a significant amount of time in Canada to pursue her higher education, this researcher observed the differences between both countries and was able to reflect on her own experience. Also, in the last few years, the researcher has witnessed major changes in regards to women rights in Saudi Arabia, she was interested to have a closer look into these changes in the society by reaching out to Saudi women and capture their own experiences.

The researcher was encouraged to understand how these changes influence the perceptions of those women in light of the current challenges they still face. Thus, it is the researcher's assumption that there is a need to give a chance to voiceless women to uncover their insider experiences, which are almost missing in the current literature. The researcher believes that this will help capture real stories that were not previously revealed to the public, and will also help increase awareness in regards to the nature and extent of the challenges Saudi women face. Uncovering the insider experiences of Saudi women will also help in understanding the dynamics of the current changes and how far these changes are in favor of Saudi women.

Significance of the Study

This study intends to address a gap in the literature with respect to the topic of the challenges Saudi women face in the workplace and to explore insider experiences of working women rather than outsider perspectives. The researcher attempts to capture real experiences of Saudi women who strive for professional development in work and life to enhance Saudi women practices, quality, and the outcomes they engender. The shortage of literature pertaining to challenges Saudi women face in work and life from insider perspectives is nearly nonexistent. Therefore, there is a need to research this phenomenon to determine the nature, impact, and extent of the challenges Saudi women encounter in the workplace. That been said, this study is exceedingly significant particularly for Saudi women who strive for success and independence in work and life. Also, this study provides rich and deep information about Saudi women that can support the goals of Saudi Vision 2030 (Saudi vision, 2016) by turning them into actions for empowering Saudi women.

Moreover, the empirical studies about the role of social media in providing professional opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia is extremely limited. This lack of information and

knowledge related to the role of social media in empowering Saudi women imposes further research into an area deemed crucial for Saudi females. The literature suggests that empowering women through technology is a significant matter, because providing women with professional opportunities can empower an entire society (Carvalho & Bouma, 2012). The researcher observes these as further significance for exploring and understanding the role of social media in empowering Saudi women who are dealing with everyday challenges. Based on the limited knowledge in the literature about the role of social media in empowering Saudi women, the researcher assumes that encouraging women to seek professional development is a significant step to empower Saudi women and eliminate gender inequality in Saudi Arabia, but the ability of ICTs to support women's empowerment, agency, and leadership is complex and depends largely on the capacity of women to access and utilize these new technologies. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the ways in which Saudi women access and utilize social media, this will expand future research about the role of social media in Saudi women's lives and will also help Saudi authorities and decision-makers find better ways to empower Saudi women through technology. More specifically, it will help support the goals in Vision 2030.

Finally, the researcher believes, as a Saudi woman, that gaining access to insider knowledge about the current situation of women in Saudi is important and best achieved by exploring their personal perspectives and lived experiences. In qualitative practice, using the real experiences of Saudi women adds a significant value to the research. Thus, there is a necessity for Saudi women's voices and this study aims at exploring the insider experiences of Saudi women's by providing an opportunity for these women to share voices and visions. This study addresses an important gap in knowledge by providing an insider look at the challenges and opportunities related to professional development in Saudi from the perspective of Saudi women.

Definitions of Terms

Social Media. social media is broadly defined as “any number of technological systems related to collaboration and community” (Tess, 2013, p. 1), including collaborative projects (e.g., wikis), blogs, social networking sites, virtual social worlds, content communities, and virtual gaming worlds (Tess, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In this study, social media refers to any social networks, sites, and forums including but not limited to (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc).

Professional Opportunities. The word “professional” describes a person’s work or job that requires advanced education and special training. Whereas the word “opportunity” refers to a situation in which it is possible for a person to do something that he/she wants to do (Collins English Dictionary, 2018). These involve a good position, chance, or prospect, as for advancement or success. In this study, this means any opportunities provided by social media to enhance Saudi women’s empowerment and professional development.

Socio-cultural Challenges. The term “sociocultural” is a combination of both social and cultural issues or factors. In another word, sociocultural challenges are pertaining to, or involving the interaction of social and cultural elements (Collins English Dictionary, 2018). These are challenges and constraints related to a society, such as with cultural practices, social norms, or traditions. In this study, “social challenges” refers to gender inequality, gender stereotyping, sex segregation, and socio-political constraints.

Personal Challenges. This term refers to challenges related to one particular person including feelings, relationships, and health (Collins English Dictionary, 2018). Challenges related to family or personal issues. In this study, this term refers to challenges that hinder Saudi

women's professional development, which include family commitments, professional skills, and networking.

Technofeminism. Is an approach used to understand the relationship between gender and new technologies (Wajcman, 2004). Drawing on new perspectives in postmodernism, feminist theory, and science and technology, Wajcman (1999, 2007) explored new perspectives regarding the relationship between technology and gender. Wajcman suggested that the connection between technology and feminism has created opportunities for women to further their progress in using technology.

Theoretical Framework

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the role social media provide to help Saudi women advance in work and life, as well as examining the professional, societal, and personal barriers that hinder Saudi women's professional development, and therefore, the theoretical framework for this study is based on the Technofeminism approach, which is informed by feminist theory. Feminist theory, including Intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1989,1991; Bell, 1984), is used as a broad lens throughout this study in order to better understand Saudi women's challenges and marginalization, particularly as regards the workplace, while Technofeminism helps in understanding the relationship between women and o communities. In addition, social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000) is also used to help in investigating the sources, nature, and extent of the challenges Saudi women face, and elucidates ways in which gender impacts the nature of the stereotypes in Saudi Arabia.

Thesis Organization

This dissertation is structured into five chapters. In this chapter, an introduction to this research study is provided, which focuses on the roles and types of information and communication technologies associated with women's empowerment and leadership status. In addition, the problem statement is examined, purpose of the study is provided, research questions are listed, significance of the study is delineated, definitions of main terms are defined, theoretical framework, and a summary.

Chapter 2 presents a summary of a general profile of Saudi Arabia, a review of the published literature on Saudi Arabian cultural characteristics, women status in Saudi Arabia, feminism theory, techno feminism, and social role theory. This chapter conclude with a rich review of a literature on the role of ICT's in women empowerment.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology with a restatement of research questions, population and sampling, trustworthiness, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, ethical consideration, and a summary. Chapter 4 is divided into two sections: the first section presents the general findings from the qualitative interviews while the second section provides an advanced analysis and interpretations through linking both findings from interviews and document analysis.

Finally, chapter 5 chapter provides a discussion of the findings from interviews and document analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings, a discussion of limitations of the study, implications, and areas of future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Background for the Review

In order to comprehend the status of women in Saudi society, it is important to consider the cultural, religious, and socio-political contexts in which these women live and work.

Profile of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a desert country that covers an area of 1,960,582 square kilometres (Index Mundi, 2012b). It is located between Africa and Asia, encompassing most of the Arabian Peninsula, and its coastlines include the Red Sea, Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Aden, and Gulf of Aqaba (Figure 1). The country is relatively young, as it was only founded by King AbdulAziza Al-Saudi in 1932 (Hamdan, 2005). The kingdom is the largest among the Gulf states, and is divided into central, western, eastern, southern, and northern regions. Riyadh is the capital, and it is located in the central region. As of 2016, the population of Saudi Arabia was approximately 31 million, including 5.8 million foreigners. Of Saudi nationals, males comprise 50.4% of the population, while females comprise 49.6%. Arabic is the official language and Islam is the official religion (Saudi Arabia Information Resource, 2016).

Saudi Arabia is an important nation not only as a global centre of Islam, but also as a major global oil distributor (Al-Dosary & Rahman, 2005; IHS, 2012; Index Mundi, 2012b). Historically, the discovery of oil was the main contributor to Saudi Arabia's transformation into a modern country. The kingdom has the second-largest oil reserves in the world, behind Venezuela and ahead of Canada, and has developed its economic strategy based on refined petroleum products (Index Mundi, 2012b). The country's modernization has resulted in various

societal improvements such as enhanced education, health care, employment, transportation, and telecommunications (Al-Munajjed, 2010; Almohsen, 2000). Importantly, the roles and status of women have undergone major changes, including vast improvements in women's education and employment (Al-lily, 2011). Recently, reforms announced by the king and his son Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman have included major improvements in women's rights, such as allowing women to drive and to apply for passports without obtaining permission from a male guardian.

Saudi Society and Culture

Saudi Arabian culture is a unique mix between the traditional and modern, which distinguishes it from other Arab nations. The dynamic nature of Saudi culture is based on both the religious system and common cultural traditions (Robertson et al., 2001). As Alsaggaf (2004) explained, Saudi culture is very homogeneous in nature; it is based on a combination of traditions and Islamic values, making the culture both unique and complex. Such a combination makes it hard to differentiate between cultural practices and religious values, as Islam plays a central role in "defining the culture, and acts as a major force in determining the social norms, patterns, traditions, obligations, privileges and practices of society" (Alsaggaf, 2004, p. 1).

As a result of the combination of religion and traditions, Saudi society is considered to be conservative (Nydell, 2006). The influence of this conservatism is reflected in almost every aspect of Saudi society, including legal and social practices and economic development, as well as food, behavior, language, and health care (Al-lily, 2011; World Bank, 2016). This conservatism has created a high resistance to modernity, which in turn makes the society very slow to adapt to cultural change (Igbaria, Shayo, Olfman, & Gray, 2001). In addition to conservatism, Saudi culture is known to be patriarchal. According to Moghadam (1992), patriarchy is "the senior man has authority over everyone else in the family, including younger

men, and women are subject to distinct forms of control and subordination” (pp. 6-7). The patriarchal nature of Saudi culture created the male guardianship system, which implies that a male guardian has responsibility for making critical judgments in a woman's life. Every Saudi woman must have a male guardian, regardless of their age, social, or economic status (Al-kayed, 2015). A male guardian refers to a direct male relative such as a father, brother, husband, son, or uncle. According to numerous studies, the male guardianship system impedes women's mobility and professional development (Metcalf & Mimouni, 2011; Thompson, 2015; Al-Munajjed, 2010; Aldossary, While, & Barriball, 2008; Oshan, 2007).

Another remarkable aspect that distinguishes Saudi culture from other cultures is the segregation between the two sexes in all forms of organizations in society (public and private). Women are not allowed to mix with unrelated men, and this applies in schools, hospitals, and banks, etc. Hamdan (2005) explained that women's education and work in Saudi Arabia have always been separated from men in order “to ensure that women's education did not deviate from the original purpose of female education, which was to make women good wives and mothers, and to prepare them for ‘acceptable’ jobs such as teaching and nursing” (p. 44).

These traditional gender practices are extensively rooted in Saudi culture, and many believe they are based on Islamic values; however, the Saudi patriarchal system dates to the pre-Islamic era (Engineer, 2008). Hamdan (2005) argued that some cultural practices in Saudi society are not related in any way to Islamic laws, such as the belief that women do not have the right to drive, participate in decision-making, or work in certain jobs (e.g., law or engineering). Further practices such as women not being permitted to work, travel, or study without gaining consent from their male guardians are laws that is not reflected in the Qura'an or Sunnah (Roy, 1992). Leslie (2011) explained that there are many indications in the holy Qura'an and Sunnah

reflecting the achievements of Muslim women in many spheres of life. At the time of the Prophet Muhammad, women worked actively in different fields such as education, medicine, business, politics, and social matters (Al-Hashimi, 2003; AlBukhary, 1959). Women were encouraged to participate in the workforce and were given rights equal to men. They also participated in wars, either by working as nurses or by making weapons (AlBukhary, 1959). Ultimately, the reflection of women in the Qura'an does not imply any marginalization of women or segregation between the two sexes (Al-Fahad, 2010). Muslim women worked side by side with men, and they were involved in economic, political, business, and decision-making activities.

Women in Saudi Arabia

Gender-based roles within Saudi society are defined by the tribal culture and social norms in the country (Leslie, 2011). These cultural aspects, along with the political practices, have helped in shaping the position of women in Saudi society. From a cultural perspective, the social structure up till the recent past excluded women from public spaces because females in Saudi represent the honor of the family or the tribe, and therefore it was deemed necessary to protect women and keep them safe from strangers (Al-Munajjed, 1997). Even with the introduction of education for females in 1964, gender segregation was officially practiced in the public sphere (Hamdan, 2005). Female education was based on principles that matched with Islamic and Saudi cultural values, that is, appropriate for preparing females to be a good Muslim wives and mothers (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013). Accordingly, as a means of respect for cultural and Islamic values, schools for females were segregated from those for males, which allowed females to unveil while learning (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013).

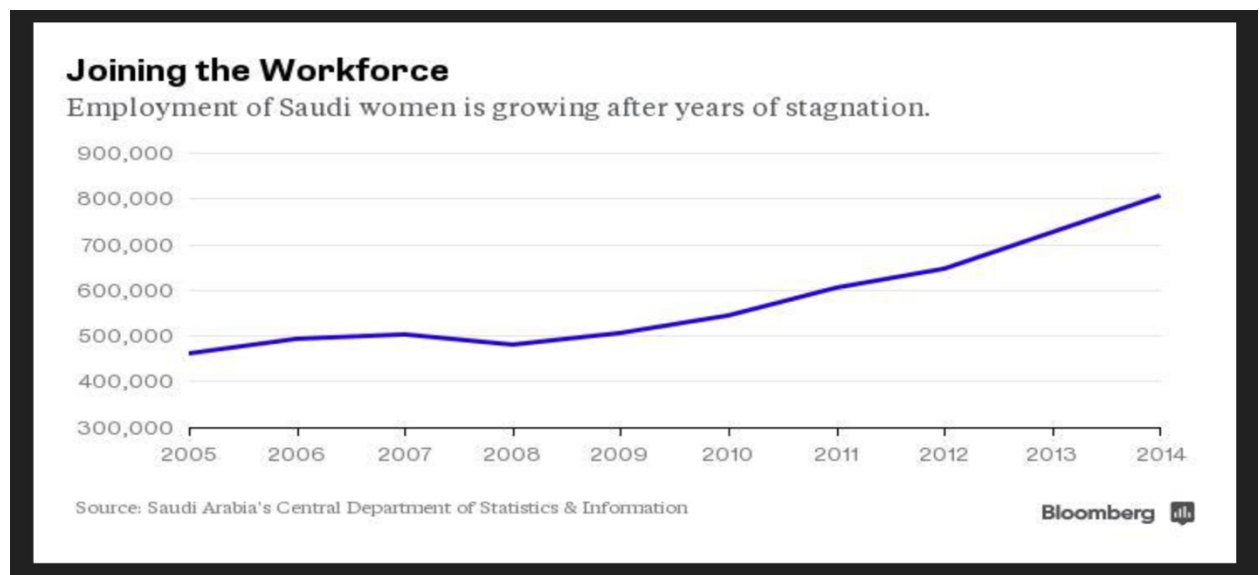


Figure 1 Number of Saudi Women in the Workforce (Source: Bloomberg, 2015).

Vision 2030. More recently, after the announcement of social reforms included in the “Vision 2030” by Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, significant changes will be brought to many aspects of Saudi women’s lives, and one of the main goals of the vision is to provide equal opportunities for everyone in Saudi society, including economic and legal opportunities. Among the many bold and ambitious goals of the vision is to strengthen the contributions of women as a means of developing the economy and enhancing its legal system (Vision 2030, 2016).

Women’s education. By enhancing women’s education, the country is moving towards creating new jobs to accommodate Saudi women, and at the same time enhancing their professional skills. Saudi Arabia has empowered women to pursue their education by providing them equal access to knowledge centers in various fields (Vision 2030, 2016). As a result of fostering women’s education, many Saudi women now earn advanced degrees, and unlike at any

time before, they can finally study in various fields including law, engineering, and agriculture. According to the annual report issued by the Ministry of Education in 2015, there were more Saudi women than men in different educational sectors:

Saudi women constitute 51.8 percent of Saudi university students. There are 551,000 women studying bachelor's degrees compared to 513,000 men. In addition, 24,498 Saudi women are completing their graduate studies. A total of 16,221 are completing their master's and 1,744 are completing their PhD..... Saudi women studying abroad are dispersed across 57 countries. The US has the largest number with 18,221 students. There are 6,754 Saudi women students in Europe, 2,923 in Canada and 1,445 in Australia and New Zealand. The Arab world has 5,369 Saudi women studying in the region. There are 812 Saudi women students in East Asia and 13 students in South Africa and Kenya, according to the statistics. (13-23).

Other notable steps in Saudi women's education have been the establishment of the world's largest female-only university, the Princess Nora University, in Riyadh, as well as the establishment of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Jeddah. There are currently 36 universities in Saudi Arabia available for women to enroll in, which has increased women's participation rates in education over the past few decades and also helped in women taking on new professions, such as IT, law, science, and architecture. Fostering equal educational opportunities means that women can be assets to the Saudi economy in the public and private sectors. Taylor and Albasri (2014) argued that equal educational opportunities in Saudi Arabia not only help in reducing the gap between the sexes in terms of access to education and job opportunities, but also prepares and qualifies Saudi women to act as decision-makers and leaders in the government and private sectors.

According to the World Bank (2013), almost all Saudi females attended school, and more women than men were in universities. The text of “Vision 2030” describes the new efforts provided by the government to enhance women’s skills development, as given that women constitute 50% of Saudi graduates, the government wants to take advantage of what they termed a “great asset”. As mentioned by the Government of Saudi Arabia (2016),

Saudi women are yet another great asset. With over 50 percent of our university graduates being female, we will continue to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities and enable them to strengthen their future and contribute to the development of our society and economy (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016).

By pursuing this vision, the country is moving towards creating new jobs for Saudi women.

Women’s employment. In the text of “Vision 2030”, the economic roles of women in Saudi Arabia are discussed, and the new opportunities to strengthen the contributions of women to society and the economy are explained. Instead of depending solely on the oil industry, Saudi Arabia is using alternative economic means to create new and fresh jobs for the whole society, and more specifically for women. This promising economic transformation in Saudi society has resulted from changes in the traditional societal boundaries. These changes are in line with the belief that a more inclusive attitude towards Saudi women as well as the acknowledgment of their economic role will benefit the overall economic progress in the region. According to “Vision 2030”:

Our economy will provide opportunities for everyone - men and women, young and old - so they may contribute to the best of their abilities. We will place a renewed emphasis on lifelong training and we will seek to make the most of the potential of our workforce by encouraging a culture of high performance. These efforts will be coordinated by the

recently established Job Creation and Anti-Unemployment Commission. One of our most significant assets is our lively and vibrant youth. We will guarantee their skills are developed and properly deployed. While many other countries are concerned with aging populations, more than half of the Saudi population is below the age of 25 years. We will take advantage of this demographic dividend by harnessing our youth's energy and by expanding entrepreneurship and enterprise opportunities.

With all these new and promising employment opportunities for women, the society is moving towards equality and starting to get used to seeing women working side by side with men. The government is no longer requiring segregation between the sexes in the workplace (Financial Times, 2017), and subsequently, it is expected that Saudi women are no longer be treated as hidden figures or to work behind closed doors. Public as well as private companies are being encouraged to hire more women (Ministry of Labor and Social Development, 2017), and as a result, women's participation in the workforce is expected to increase from 22% as of 2017 to 30% by the year 2030 (Vision 2030, 2016). As cited in the Saudi Gazette Report (2018), the rate of unemployment among Saudi women dropped to 30% in 2018 after a level of 31% in 2017, and according to the Saudi General Authority of Statistics (2018), the job market will have more than 350,000 new opportunities in the near future. However, the head of the women's department in the Ministry of Labour has said that the new jobs for women will be mostly in retail, and that jobs for Saudi women in other fields such as medicine, law, and engineering will still be relatively limited (Ministry of Labor and Social Development, 2017).

Despite the governmental initiatives towards women's empowerment through education and employment, gender inequality based on cultural practices still impact the position of women in Saudi society in different ways. These cultural practices, such as the ultimate authority of

male guardianship, have been and still are significant challenges for Saudi women, affecting their participation in the workforce (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). Doumato (2010) argued that because of gender inequality, women in Saudi Arabia still lack equal access to employment, education, and economic opportunities, in addition to access to justice and governmental departments, and therefore they must rely on their male guardians to represent them (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). Such practices imply that the overall freedom of Saudi women is limited (Doumato, 2010), and as a result, *women only comprised 16% of the Saudi workforce in 2015* (Saudi Arabia Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2015). This result contradicts with what has been reported in the Saudi Gazzette report (2018), and such contradiction may indicate that because women are only assigned to certain jobs and have limited access to employment in different fields.

Feminism

Feminist theory is the contextualization of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse. Malewski (2010) explained feminized theories as: “an understanding of women’s oppression and agency in social life across various domains” (p. 223). Feminism seeks to empower women through fighting gender inequality and enhancing women’s rights (Brym & Lie, 2010). In principle, the goal of feminist theory is to understand the foundations and formation of gender inequality in any given society (Donna & Pauline, 2009), and particularly, it examines women’s roles through placing value on women’s social roles and experience, interests, and status in politics, education, sociology, communication, economics, anthropology, and philosophy (Crotty, 2006; Donna & Pauline, 2009). To create gender equity, this theory focuses on women’s social relations with males to reveal how women in the past were

subordinates to men and to demonstrate the importance of women in society (Brym & Lie, 2010).

Intersectional feminism. Intersectionality is a branch of feminism theory used to explain how different institutions of social and political discrimination interconnect and overlap with gender (Bell, 1984). The term of intersectionality was first coined by the feminist scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, and the purpose of the intersectionality theory began as an exploration of the oppression of black women and understand how aspects of social stratification such as class, race, sexual, age, religion, and gender combine to create various forms of discrimination for women's employment in the U.S (Crenshaw, 1989). Today, intersectionality has expanded to include studying aspects of social identity and explore the "relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations" (McCall, 2005). While the beginning of intersectional theory revolved around the issues of black women's employment, the term has gradually gained prominence in feminist studies, and theorists suggest that the theory can be applied to all people who are most marginalized in society (Bell, 1984). Recognizing the forms of oppression experienced by women that create harm, feminist began to understand how gender, race, and class combined to "determine the female destiny" (Bell, 1984).

Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) is used in this study to examine experiences and perceptions of Saudi working women about the challenges they face in the workplace. Given the social construction of gender and race in the Saudi culture, it is likely that Saudi women are subjected to complex challenges in the workplace. These challenges could be related to their gender and other personal dimensions of their identity, such as social class, economic status, and qualifications (Koopmans, 2015). Thus, an intersectional lens is helpful to understand the

“various socially created categories interact in intersecting systems of oppression” (Turner, 2011).

Social Role Theory. Various social theorists have pointed out the contradiction between the way the Saudi government is promoting gender-based reforms and how it still acts as a tool of the patriarchal status quo by enforcing the “protection” of women by prolonging their restricted status (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Saudi women's stereotype of being “exemplars of purity and guardians of traditional values” has been held up in supporting the concept of Saudi women as signifying the difference “between the pious Saudi state and other ungodly states”, but by reinforcing this stereotype, women's status as being subordinate to males is in turn reinforced because it implies that “women's purity” can only be protected by men (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Further, any woman who goes against this stereotype is shown disdain, which minimizes any of their accomplishments and reinforces their subordinate roles (Omair, 2017). In social role theory, gender roles are social constructs developing from the perceptions of male and female performative roles in various situations or settings (Eagly et al., 2000).

Technofeminism. Over the last two decades, feminist writing regarding the fields of science and technology has theorized about the relationship between gender and technology. Starting in the 1990s, feminist approaches have emphasized the positive impact of ICT on the possibilities for empowering women and transforming social gender-based norms (Kemp & Squires, 1998; Green & Adam, 1999; Kirkup et al., 2000). Heron, Belford, and Goker (2014) discussed the presence of women within the online gaming sphere, which is a widely male-dominated space. The general absence of women in the online gaming community, be it among players or among developers, has created a culture that can be repulsive and violent towards

women. The authors presented two different incidents where women received online and offline threats of violence, including sexual violence, which were considered as normal within the online gaming community.

More and more, women are adopting new digital and communication technologies involving communication networks, Internet, computers, software, and hardware that are used as platforms to gather, store, analyse, process, and transmit information in various forms such as emails, videos, blogs, data, MMS, and SMS (Prasad & Sreedevi, 2013). Information communication technologies (ICTs) have tremendously aided in present-day improvements in women's rights and women's empowerment. The common belief has been that men's technological dominance is the source of their power and that women's dependence on men is due to this fact, and so therefore women have begun entering fields such as contraceptive and bio-technology.

However, according to Wajcman (1991), while women have focused on these fields, men have focused on other areas that reinforce their dominance, such as home and daily-life-related technologies. Wajcman (1991) also stated that social media is one technology where men moved to have dominance. After more than fifteen years of her book about women and technology, Wajcman (2007) shed light on the designs of online and social media and women's consumption of it, and bridging the gap in technological innovation between males and females. Wajcman (1991) stated that women's consumption of social media is quite high, and emphasized the necessity for women to move into these technologies and be involved in their design in order to improve their user experience. Wajcman (1991) further stated, however, that nothing had really changed regarding women's representation in technology design and production.

Before embarking on a review of women's empowerment and ICTs, it is important to clarify the definition of 'technology' from a feminist perspective. Wajcman (1991) suggested that there are three layers when defining technology: first of all, what people know in using technology; the interaction between human practices and technology; and finally, physical technological objects such as computers or phones. Based on her definition of technology, Wajcman (1991) argued that women are almost absent from all these technological layers. For instance, in the first layer, women are less knowledgeable about the use of technology than men, while in the second layer, women are less represented in technological fields, and lack access to ICTs, and finally, women are less involved in putting forward new technological innovations (Wajcman, 2007). Given that the ability of digital ICTs to support women's empowerment, agency, and leadership depends in the first place on the capability of women to access and utilize these new technologies, this indicates that women face barriers that hinder them from participating in technological innovations, as well as in using ICTs. Three different factors hinder the access of women to new digital ICTs: gendered norms and relations; the risk of being a victim of violence and oppression; and disadvantaged women's restricted access to ICTs (Cummings & O'Neil, 2015).

Women's Empowerment and ICTs

Women's empowerment involves the ability of women to take action to build inner strengths such as self-confidence and their openness to learning new ideas through a socially effective social status (Mehta & Sharma, 2014). Essentially, women's empowerment emphasizes the fact that women are able to independently make and implement important social, economic, and political decisions that have consequences for their lives and the lives of others surrounding them (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005). Mehta and Sharma (2014) suggested that

women's empowerment is based on different domains, such as mobility, visibility, the ability to make decisions within their household, economic security, and the ability to effectively interact in the public environment. Mobility and visibility help women move towards creating an innovative, interactive, and complete integrated culture where women are accountable and which lead directly to women's leadership (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

The ability of digital ICTs to support women's empowerment, agency, and leadership depends firstly on the ability of women to access these new technologies. In poor and developing countries, access to ICTs is available only for a restricted number of elite women (Cummings & O'Neil, 2015). Further, Cummings and O'Neil (2015) suggested that the use of the ICTs depends and should be based on the local political, economic, and social contexts as well as the needs of women and girls. For instance, women in Saudi Arabia started using social media groups to contextualize and promote their causes, such as the "Support #Women2Drive" Facebook group (Chaudhry, 2014). Moreover, Saudi women also use social media to promote their businesses and to create business connections (Abed et al., 2015).

Barriers to Women's Empowerment

Gender-related social norms are the primary source in hindering women's and girls' access to new digital ICTs. These norms, which favor men over women, include: family responsibilities and life commitments (Gill et al., 2010); collateral cultural factors such as curfews (Cummings & O'Neil, 2015; Olatokun, 2009); financial issues (Cummings & O'Neil, 2015); and high illiteracy rates among women, which limits women's access to technology (Dlodlo, 2009). Cummings and O'Neil (2015) found that some factors are based on psychological barriers, suggesting that in Afghanistan, the reason why more than half of Afghani women do not have access to cellphones is because they think that seeking permission from

family members will be problematic. In addition, approximately 10% of Egyptian and Indian women said they do not have access to the Internet because they think it is culturally inappropriate, and 9% believed that it would cause disagreements with family members (Cummings & O'Neil, 2015).

According to Hilbert (2011), Latin American women have a higher potential than men to use ICTs for education, but they tend to restrict their ICTs use to doing and promoting businesses, which means that ICTs may also be used to maintain and endure existing social and gender differences (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). According to Cummings and O'Neil (2015), many men believe that the use of ICTs by their wives and daughters is a waste of household monetary resources, while a study conducted in Zambia found that husbands reacted negatively towards their wives when they used mobile phones, believing that it breaches their authority over women (Wakunma, 2012).

Additionally, the commercialization of new digital ICTs and the domination of big businesses in the ICT market are associated with patriarchal connotations that act as gatekeepers, and as a result, this restricts women from using these technologies because of the threat of cyber-violence; this consequently limits the role of ICTs in supporting women's identities (Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Moreover, women may also be actively discouraged from accessing and using new digital ICTs, with Cummings and O'Neil (2015) finding that some of the barriers to women accessing ICTs are entrenched and psychological.

The spread of ICTs in many countries has also increased violence against women and girls. A lack of governmental protection and appropriate regulations, and the dominance of patriarchal systems has contributed to an increase in violence against women in countries like Pakistan. This is especially true for women whom men perceive as dishonoring themselves,

which makes them more vulnerable to punishments like honor killings (Dreßing et al., 2014). It also increases men's control over women and makes them more vulnerable to violence because women are considered to be violating the cultural gender norms. This was the case with Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani feminist education activist, who used social media to fight for the rights of young Pakistani girls to receive an education, resulting in her attempted assassination (Dutt & Rasul, 2014; Wikan, 2015).

Digital ICTs can also easily be used to harm women remotely through cyber-sexism and stalking (Dreßing et al., 2014; Eliazar, 2015; Halder, 2013), with Dreßing et al. (2014) finding that more than 80.5% of women had been victims of cyber-stalking. Moreover, women who have identifiable social media accounts are often victims of cyber-abuse and threats due to their public debates online or in mainstream media (Halder, 2013). Many women who openly criticise and challenge male-dominated sectors become victims of cyber-hatred campaigns. Anita Sarkeesian, the Canadian-American feminist media critic and blogger, was one of many women who have fallen victim to online hate campaigns because she raised funds to expose the stereotypes and gender biases in the gaming industry.

The role of digital ICTs in supporting women also faces other challenges, as their gender is not the only obstacle preventing women from benefiting from ICTs. Age, incomes, and socioeconomic status also contribute to only a narrow stratum of women from the elite benefitting from ICTs (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). Cummings and O'Neil (2015) found that there was a digital divide among women in using ICTs, suggesting that there was both a democratic divide and a social divide. The social divide consists of the difference between those who use ICTs to participate in and comment on public forums and those who do not, while the

social divide consists of the gap between those who have rich access to information and those who have poor access to information.

Possibilities Brought by ICTs

Despite all the barriers that hinder women's access to and participation in ICTs, the quick growth of digital ICTs provides different possibilities to support women's empowerment, agency, and development of their identities. For instance, women may use ICTs to promote their political, economic, and social views, which can lead to leadership development.

The use of ICTs has allowed women to initiate vast changes in the social structure in the Arab world (Khondker, 2011). The uprisings and political turmoil that sparked what is known as the Arab Spring in various countries in the Arab world in 2011, such as Yemen, Egypt, and Tunisia showed the activism, involvement, and leadership of women. Although women in these countries are treated as excluded segments by their societies in the public, social, and political spheres, the Arab Spring brought good examples of women searching for empowerment; for example, Tawakkol Karman in Yemen and women of the April Youth Movement in Egypt (Korotayev & Zinkina, 2011). During the Arab Spring events, Arab women played a decisive role through cyber-activism, taking advantage of their skills in using new information and communication technologies (Radsch & Khamis, 2013).

Cyber-activism is the use of internet and ICTs to show support and advance political and social issues and causes that would be difficult to defend offline (Howard, 2010). Women in the Arab world are using ICTs to redefine the perceptions of boundaries and limits between the public and private spheres. They have been able to define their social and political spheres by using ICTs and participating in mainstream media as citizen journalists in order to broadcast the

reality of the political uprisings to national and international audiences (Cowell et al., 2011; Korotayev & Zinkina, 2011; Radsch & Khamis, 2013).

Use of Digital ICTs to Support Women Empowerment, Agency, and Identities

Studies have shown that digital ICTs have increasingly contributed to women's critical consciousness and self-confidence, influencing social gendered norms and gender relations as well as improving women's socioeconomic statuses. In addition, digital ICTs have had a positive impact on improving women's independence and providing new economic opportunities for women. ICTs provide women with new possibilities to communicate and engage in public affairs, and are also essential elements for collective actions (Radsch, 2012; Novo-Corti et al., 2014; Rajkumar & Prasannakumar, 2014).

Self-confidence and independency. Digital ICTs are contributing increasingly to women's critical consciousness and self-confidence, which leads to women critically thinking and questioning their traditional social roles and norms imposed by society (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Rajkumar & Prasannakumar, 2014). Acquiring and building self-confidence is a primary condition for women to voice their opinions and improve their roles within the family, community, and society (Rajkumar & Prasannakumar, 2014). Rabayah (2010) argued that training women to use digital ICTs has a higher impact on women's self-confidence than it does for men, finding that 96% of women living in rural areas in Palestine who were trained to use ICTs showed improvements in self-confidence.

Social Gendered Norms. New digital ICTs, such as mainstream media broadcasting, are associated with changes in social gender norms. Although no causation was proven, Klugman et

al. (2014) found that women's access to television in India was associated with an increase in women's education, less tolerance of violence against women, higher women's independence, higher women's financial autonomy, an increase in the gap between births, and a decrease in preferring boys over girls (Klugman et al., 2014).

According to Hilbert (2011), the participation of women in establishing the content of mainstream media and in the creation of broadcasted programs plays an important role in presenting women as role models who are capable of inspiring other women. Antonio and Tuffley (2014) suggested that although gender social norms in some countries hinder women's empowerment, ICTs enable women to fight against those norms and promote their opinions and voices to national and international audiences.

Socioeconomic Status. Simply by training women on how to use new digital ICTs shows a significant increase in women's social status. Karan and Mathur (2010) argued that women running information kiosks under the e-governance programs in India were reported to have a higher social status compared to their female counterparts working in other sectors in the country due to the income generated from the job and from the women's use of ICTs. It is important to mention, though, that learning how to use ICTs is not the only factor associated with a higher social status, but that ownership of ICTs such as mobile phones is also considered a sign of higher status (Mpazanje & Chigona, 2012). Although learning how to use ICTs and owning them are signs of power and high social status, however, access to learning and owning these technologies may still be problematic (Dlodlo, 2009).

Economic Opportunities. Women's economic empowerment is a strong basis for women to show their importance, change their social roles, voice their opinions, and defend their causes, as improvement in their economic situations puts women in a better position to be part of

the public and political spheres (Prasad & Sreedevi, 2013). The use of cellphones, for example, enables women to work out their problems and create solutions to the dominant patriarchal system. Muslim women in Nigeria use their cellphones and other ICT technologies to get in touch with their customers, partners, and different stakeholders, which enables them to balance between their purdah status and running their enterprises (Chew et al., 2010; Buskens & Webb, 2014; Mathew, 2010). Moreover, Jacobsen (2011) observed that in many African countries, women use cellphones to control and manage their businesses as well as staying in touch with their families, and found that ICTs provide women with increased capabilities to keep their work and personal activities under control. ICTs also help women to negotiate and find new business opportunities through information that their competitors may not have access to (Alam et al., 2011). Also, businesswomen use ICTs to manage their banking activities in segregated organizations (Buskens & Webb, 2014).

Collective Actions. New digital ICTs offer different opportunities to women to engage in public and political spheres regardless of their geographical locations or the social restrictions on them regarding travelling or voicing their opinions publicly (Newsom & Lengel, 2012; Gheyntanchi & Moghadam, 2014). If they can acquire them, digital ICTs offer disadvantaged women opportunities to ask for help and improve their situations (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). Moreover, digital ICTs are effective in promoting political campaigns for women nationally and internationally (Khondker, 2011), and Nawara Negm, an Egyptian blogger, used social media to call on Arab women to support and participate in the Tunisian revolution (Hawley, 2014). As a response to the arrest of Maha Al-Qahtani for driving a car in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia's capital), Manal Al-Sharif, an IT consultant and a Saudi feminist activist, launched the Facebook "Support

#Women2Drive” group, which has received support from many men and women, including then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (Khondker, 2011).

ICTs play a significant role in raising awareness and calling for action, both nationally and internationally. According to Mona Eltahawy, an Egyptian journalist and feminist activist, women get their strength from other women's stories. Social media websites and ICTs users participate by spreading these stories, which gives women the chance to express themselves, share their experiences, and define themselves rather than letting men define them (Radsch, 2012). In the early 2000s, a very small proportion of Arabs had access to the internet, while in 2010, 40% of Arabs had access. The debate over the contribution of social media to the Arab Spring remains a moot question (Radsch & Khamis, 2013), as in 2011, at the beginning of the revolutions in the region, there were around seventeen million Facebook accounts in existence in the Arab world, including two million Facebook accounts in Tunisia and five million other accounts in Egypt (Radsch, 2012). After the start of the Arab Spring, people, especially women and youth, clamored to open Facebook accounts and participate in the events taking place in the region. As well, the number of Facebook users in the Arab world rose by 68 % between January and November of 2011 (Radsch & Khamis, 2013).

Women represented a minor proportion of Arab Facebook and social media users in 2011; however, they were inspired by the images of female citizens who were journalists and cyber-activists and what they achieved (Khondker, 2011). Therefore, young Arab women rushed to open their own Facebook and social media accounts in order to render their voices heard to society and decision-makers, and to participate in this historical event (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Khondker, 2011). According to Stephan (2013), physical space and social context are the most important factors in the creation of a collective identity, and so the construction of collective

identities in online communities requires common agreements concerning the contexts and the objectives of these communities (Stephan, 2013; Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

In summary, women in the Arab world are using cyber-activism to express their opinions on different issues regarding the promotion of women's rights and women's empowerment (Khondker, 2011). They form online communities in support of their causes because they have similar cultural characteristics and have common agreements regarding their objectives. Moreover, it can be seen that cyber-activism and raising awareness about different social issues and causes through online communities is significantly correlated to changing political opinions and views among Arab women, and represents a critical form of women's empowerment (Radsch, 2012). Cyber-activism on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media websites has contributed to helping Saudi and other Arab women to voice and express their opinions in order to change their lives and improve their political situations (Khondker, 2011; Radsch, 2012).

ICTs and Leadership

Wijnen and Wildschut (2015) emphasized the role of ICTs in building women's leadership, and according to Peus et al. (2012), leadership is the ability to consistently do things that are in concordance with one's values, principles, beliefs, and purposes in life. Building self-confidence, independence, and socioeconomic status is necessary in order for women to empower their states and define themselves independently in their communities and families. Furthermore, women are able to take advantage of rising opportunities offered by ICTs when they are aware of their human potential and skills. This ignites a sense of leadership that leads women and their organizations towards different dimensions of success in consistent ways (Momsen & Carlson, 2013).

Dugan, Fath, Howes, Lavelle, and Polanin (2013) found that women adopt more human-oriented and value-based leadership styles than men do. Value-based leaders are also called inside-out leaders or authentic leaders. Value-based leadership consists of living, working, and leading organizations and groups consistently with the leaders' beliefs, values, principles, and purposes in life. This means that the women's use of ICTs enables them to increase their awareness of specific values, principles, beliefs, and purposes in order to become successful transformational leaders (Momsen & Carlson, 2013). All these factors play an important role in the construction of women's identities, which is the first step in their developing and implementing leadership. Judith Butler (1988, 1990) argued that the construction of identity functions through practices of continuance, which she calls 'performativity'. This means that for women to be leaders, they should be thoughtful and aware of themselves. Leadership skills and competencies are acquired and developed through continuous practice, interaction, and reflection, which allows females to receive constructive feedback and support from their environment and peers (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Women leaders should also comprehend the reasons for their being able to ignite their extraordinary potential to lead organizations and groups. Momsen and Carlson (2013) argued that the alignment and concordance of female leaders' values, beliefs, and principles affects women leaders' behaviour and allows them to extract and show their best qualities.

ICTs are important in forming women's leadership due to the economic opportunities that they provide to females around the world (Ely et al., 2011). ICTs encourage women to develop their visions of owning their businesses. Additionally, ICTs play a catalytic role in calling women to take collective action to empower themselves, improve their social status, find economic opportunities, and implement their vision and strategic plans consistently with their own beliefs,

values and principles (Khondker, 2011). While also taking into consideration the interests of different stakeholders with respect to public, political, social, and cultural restrictions (Chew et al., 2010; Buskens & Webb, 2014).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Overview

A qualitative research perspective was best suited for this study because of its ability in providing deep understanding and interpretation of meanings constructed by individuals. Also, this approach helps in uncovering intentions underlying human interactions. According to Patton (2002), "Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases; and this increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability" (p. 14), and, "a qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 255).

A research methodology is determined by the nature of the research question as well as the phenomenon being studied (Deniz & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, the research method used should be utilized to answer the research questions. As discussed in the previous chapters, this qualitative study aimed at exploring insider experiences and meaning constructed by Saudi women in work and life; more specifically, the aim of the study was to provide a holistic in-depth understanding of the investigated phenomenon from the perspective of involved participants.

The qualitative approach in this study begins with a detailed explanation of: (a) the research questions, (b) design and rationale, (c) research population, (d) data collection and procedures/instrumentation, (e) data analysis processes, (f) limitations, (g) trustworthiness, and (h) ethical considerations. The end of this chapter addresses the researcher's biases and summarizes the key points.

Research Questions

In order to gain insight into the insider stories of professional Saudi women in their work and life, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges professional Saudi women perceive in work and life?
2. How does the participation in social media help Saudi women overcome the challenges they face in work and life?

In light of the research questions, the first one aimed at exploring the participants' stories and enable them to relate personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions concerning their work and life, and the opportunities available for Saudi women in those areas. Whereas the goal of the second question is to learn about the role of social media in professional Saudi women's lives, how they perceive opportunities through this technology, and how social media may or may not help them overcome challenges in work and life.

Research Design and Rationale

An exploratory qualitative approach using interpretive method forms the overall design of this study. Given that the main purpose of this study is to explore the role of social media in providing professional opportunities to professional women, a qualitative design was deemed appropriate to fulfill the research objectives. The qualitative research also descriptive, because it describes the current situation of Saudi women in the workplace by capturing their insider experiences about challenges and opportunities. This research adopted Yin's (2014) qualitative study guidelines and combined additional relevant processes from the wider literature. A research methodology and design is the plan and structure of investigations as well as the direction of the process of scientific inquiry used to answer the research questions (Kothari,

2005: Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is known for its flexibility in that the researcher can use multiple empirical materials, including personal experiences, cultural and historical materials, life stories, interviews, observations, and interactions, all of which describe meanings through individuals to develop a better understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

In this study, the perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of the relative situations and voices of the selected professional Saudi women were the primary sources of information. For this reason, a qualitative study design is considered appropriate for descriptive and exploratory studies (Mouton, 2001). Thus, this qualitative study involves three main data collection sources: interviews, documentation, and the researcher's journal.

A good research design involves a logical sequence that links the collection and analysis of empirical data with the conclusions in order to answer the initial research questions. An exploratory qualitative study is usually used in empirical research to answer "what", "why", and "how" research questions (Yin, 2009, p.24-26). This research attempts to answer the following questions: "What are the challenges Saudi women perceive in work and life that hinder their professional development?", and "How does the participation in social media help Saudi women overcome the challenges they face in work and life?". Therefore, an exploratory qualitative design is appropriate for the current research because it will help in exploring, understanding, and interpreting: (1) the insider experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of Saudi women related to professional, societal, and personal challenges that hinder their professional development; and (2) the role of social media in providing opportunities for Saudi women to help them overcome the challenges they face in work and life.

Creswell (2013) argued that an interpretive study can be both qualitative and quantitative. However, the interpretive approach adopted in this research relies on qualitative data collection. The differences between qualitative and quantitative methods have been given significant attention from methodology scholars, including Robert Yin (2009 & 2014), Creswell (2009 & 2013), Merriam (1988 & 2009), Denzin and Lincoln (2008), and Patton (2002). The differentiation between the methods is essential to identify the value of each method in any research, and more particularly research that deal with humans (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The use of a qualitative research design is appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, the nature of the topic under research requires an in-depth understanding and a careful examination of the challenges professional Saudi women face in work and life. In addition, the objective of this study was to explore the perceptions, insider experiences, and beliefs concerning the role of social media in the lives of those women. This is something that could not be as effectively achieved quantitatively.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher is the agent for gathering and analyzing the data, it is crucial that the researcher maintains reflexivity. The role of the researcher has a significant impact in qualitative research, as the perceptions of the researcher may create bias as well as assumptions which may affect the data collection, data analysis, and findings (Creswell, 2013). Reflexivity is an important tool for the researcher in order to inform the issue at the center of the study by presenting authentic and reliable reporting of the perceptions, experiences, and voices of both the participants and the researcher themselves (Patton, 2002). Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) argued that the goal of qualitative research “is not to completely eliminate subjectivity (the researcher's or the subjects'), but more fully clarify the role of subjectivity in the context of the phenomenon

under study” (p. 8).

As a Saudi female, this researcher might have common beliefs with the women interviewed for this study; nevertheless, she utilized a researcher journal throughout the project to distance herself from her own assumptions and beliefs in order to focus on the perspectives of the participants. In addition, this researcher realized that because she shared the same background and beliefs with the participants, her personal assumptions could have possibly influenced the way in which this study was carried out and the overreached findings. Therefore, this researcher's unique perspectives and experiences as a Saudi woman were inevitably part of this study, while personal biases and assumptions were kept suspended (Merriam, 2009).

Moreover, the role of the researcher in this study was to focus on the primary objective of the research while interviewing, and therefore the researcher carefully followed the protocols for a qualitative study suggested by Yin (2014):

- Ask good questions and ensure that the interviewee clearly understands the research objectives.
- Manage time so that all questions are covered.
- Be a good listener in order to assimilate large amounts of new information without bias and capture the affective components from the interviewee's perspective.
- Be flexible, generate new investigations, and adopt new approaches if unanticipated events occur.
- Be objective and critical in order to identify any potential misunderstandings with the interviewee before ending the interview.
- Avoid bias; any clarifications should be followed up with the interviewee as soon as possible.

- Discuss and review the transcript with the interviewee upon completing the interview to compare impressions.

Population, Sampling, and Recruitment Procedures

The aim of this study was to explore the role of online social media in providing professional opportunities to help Saudi women improve in work and life. Therefore, the target population for this study consisted of professional Saudi working women who occupied different positions within organizations in Saudi Arabia. A summary of demographic information collected from the research participants is provided in the findings (Table 1). Participation in this study was voluntary, and the participants were informed of their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. The number of participants in this study was limited to ten Saudi women. This followed the principles of the qualitative method, as there are no rules for sample size in a qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 244). The size of the sample was chosen to be small in order to help make the research process manageable and to help generate rich data, as “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size” (Patton, 2002, pp. 244-245).

Sampling procedures. A purposeful sampling method with snowballing and criterion techniques was used in this study to locate cases and stories that could answer the research questions and meet the research objectives. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), purposeful sampling is perhaps the most appropriate selection strategy when conducting qualitative interviews. Purposeful sampling is a technique used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases, and helps in conserving limited resources (Patton, 2002). This method elicits useful information from the selected population to help understand the

research problem (Creswell, 2013). By definition, snowball sampling is "a technique for finding research subject. One subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third and so on" (Vogt, 2005). The main advantage of snowball sampling is in accessing hidden or hard-to-reach populations such as people who are deprived, elite, or socially stigmatized (Gabler, 1992). The targeted populations were mainly located in:

- Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, in the central region
- Jeddah, the major commercial city in the western region
- Dammam, the largest city in the eastern region, and a major administrative center for the Saudi oil industry

Criterion sampling. Criterion sampling “involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2001, p. 238). Patton (2002) stated that “The criteria you choose to emphasize in your work usually depend on the purpose of your inquiry, the values and perspectives of the audiences for your work, and your own philosophical and methodological orientation” (p. 551). Thus, in this study, the main criterion for selecting the participants was that they be Saudi working women in professional positions within organizations in Saudi Arabia. The organizations include but are not limited to government institutions and educational and non-profit businesses.

Another criterion was that the participants had work experience for at least two years in a mixed-gender workplace. The rationale for this was that these women would have would theoretically have had sufficient experience or opportunities to encounter and/or overcome enough challenges in work and life to be useful for this study. Also, the participants must have access to Internet and electronic media, including a computer, as this was the main way of communication between the participants and the researcher, who was located in Canada. This

was also a requirement for conducting the VoIP or virtual interviews through Internet applications such as Skype, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Google Voice, etc. Finally, the participants must have had experience using social media in order to be able to discuss the roles of social media and online communities in their work and life.

Recruiting procedures. the researcher adhered to the following steps when conducting the study:

1. Obtaining approval to conduct the study from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (Health Sciences and Science REB) (Appendix-1).

2. Compiling a list of potential participants for the interviews by networking through some well-known organizations in Saudi Arabia. Following snowballing the technique, the contact information of the participants including, emails and phone numbers, was obtained from different companies, friends, and families. Some other names were suggested by the researcher's colleagues and the interviewees.

3. Once a sufficient list was built, requests for interviews were sent to the Saudi working women via emails, texts, and WhatsApp (Appendix-2), and the participants recruited through emails, text messages, and Internet applications (WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram, and Snapchat).

3. Each request for an interview included a brief description of the study and its objectives, including some qualifying statements about the sampling criteria, in order to determine the potential participant's eligibility (Appendix-2). If they fit the criteria for participation in the study, they were provided with a consent form with a detailed explanation assuring them of their right to confidentiality, and any possible risks associated with participation in the study were outlined. The participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary (Appendix-2).
- 2). If the potential participant consented to be interviewed, she was asked to sign a consent form

before the interview.

4. To ensure ethical conduct in this study, a consent form for audiotaping was discussed with each participant prior to the interview. All the interviewees readily agreed to be recorded, as they had been informed that their identities would be anonymous and that their information would only be used for the research purposes.

5. At this point, the interviewer arranged times and dates with the women who had responded to the invitation and signed the consent form.

Instrumentation

Qualitative, unstructured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with professional Saudi women were the main research instrument in this study. As Yin justifies, one of the most important sources of information in qualitative study is the interview (2009, p. 106). The interviews were conducted through VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technologies such as Skype, FaceTime, and Google Voice. VoIP provides an opportunity to interview participants either through voice or video over the Internet. Unstructured interviews were considered favorable because they are more flexible than structured or semi-structured interviews and provide a better understanding of the interviewee's perspective. They also help the researcher to refocus questions, shift the interview where needed, and prompt for more information (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Hence, unstructured interviews can generate rich data and reveal surprising or unexpected information (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). The interviews covered personal experiences in depth in efforts to discover 'how' online communities/social media helped or provided professional Saudi women with opportunities to overcome challenges they face, and also to understand 'why' they face such challenges in work and life. The chosen participants

were asked questions regarding intersectionality they had experienced in the workplace. These questions touched on topics such as gender inequality, gender stereotyping, cultural norms, and legal frameworks. The interviews conducted in this study will enable others to learn about the challenges and opportunities Saudi women have faced while advancing in work and life.

Data Collection

This qualitative study involved three main data collection sources: (1) interviews, (2) documentation (Appendix-5), and (3) the researcher's journal. In qualitative research, data collection involves following three important principles, namely, using multiple sources of evidence, creating a database for the study, and sustaining a chain of evidence (Yin, 2014). Given that the key objective of this study was to explore the role of social media in providing professional Saudi women with opportunities in work and life, the data were collected using multiple sources of evidence based on qualitative study protocol. The sources of evidence included but were not limited to: personal interviews, recording and analysis of existing text and documents (Creswell, 2013), the researcher's journal, and personal experience (Merriam, 2009). According to Yin (2009), the findings of any qualitative study are "likely to be more convincing and accurate if [they] are based on several different sources of information" (p. 116), and because multiple sources of evidence can lead to data triangulation (Yin, 2014). Details of the data collection protocol are explained below.

In-depth interviews using VoIP. The primary source of data collection in this study was in-depth interviews via VoIP, as since the participants were located in Saudi Arabia, face-to-face interviews were not possible. Without VoIP, the researcher would have needed much greater financial and time resources to travel and reach the same variety of participants, and VoIP

technologies made the research process more flexible. Fleitas (1998, p. 286) argued that “distance is a variable that prevents an international representation of participants in most qualitative studies. The Internet eliminates this barrier”. Using this technology, the researcher was able to reach eligible participants from different parts in Saudi Arabia in a timely manner. Given the nature of Saudi Arabian culture is somehow unique, gaining accessibility to Saudi females is not an easy task, and so doing interviews through VoIP provided an opportunity to reach otherwise inaccessible participants (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). This was advantageous, as it gave the participants complete freedom to participate in the study from their homes without the need to travel or be physically present. Most importantly, using VoIP technology allowed the participants to reveal sensitive and personal experiences without being directly observed by the researcher.

The interview protocol mainly consisted of broad, open-ended questions with in-depth, exploratory sub-questions (Appendix-4). The questions were written in a non-judgmental way, and the participants were asked different sub-questions depending on the need to build on the previous information. To increase the utility of the unstructured questions, the researcher carefully ensured an alignment between the research questions and possible interview questions. According to Maxwell (2013), there are functional differences between research questions and interview questions:

Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people to gain that understanding. The development of good interview questions (and observational strategies) requires creativity and insight, rather than a mechanical conversion of the research questions into an interview guide or observation schedule, and depends fundamentally on your understanding of the context of

the research (including your participants' definitions of this) and how the interview questions and observational strategies will actually work in practice. (p. 101)

Depending on the research questions, the interview protocol included four sections. The first section inquired about the participants' demographic and background information, while the second section asked broad, open-ended questions with sub-questions to inquire about challenges, life experiences, and opportunities in work and life. The third section asked additional open-ended questions to gain information about the role of social media in helping Saudi women overcome the challenges they face from the participants' perspectives (Appendix-4). The final section provided follow-up as well as closing questions to wrap up the interviews and give the participants a chance to reflect on their answers. As suggested by Yin (2014), an interviewer should not rely solely on audiotaping, but largely depend on handwritten notes. Therefore, both audiotape and notes were used during the interviews. Every participant was asked to explain their personal experiences and challenges in work and life, as well as available opportunities at their workplace. Questions also covered cultural factors, legal framework, social background, education, personal skills, and the economic status of each participant.

The interview protocol, including the consent form, was translated into English and was made available in Arabic for each participant (Appendix-3). Arabic was used in the interviews rather than English because it was the participants' first language. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) stated, "The researcher questions are usually formulated in a theoretical language, whereas the interview questions should be expressed in the everyday language of the interviewees" (p. 158). Therefore, questions including probing questions were not asked in formal classical Arabic, but rather in the local Saudi tongue, which was more familiar and understandable for both the researcher and the interviewees. Castillo-Montoya (2016) argued that "as the researcher you can

use your knowledge of contexts, norms, and every-day practices of potential participants, to write interview questions that are understandable and accessible to participants”.

The duration of each interview was a minimum of one hour in order for the participants to adequately express themselves and their opinions. As Yin (2009) explained, in an in-depth interview, “you may even ask interviewee to propose her or his own insights.. The “interview” may therefore take place over an extended period of time, not just a single sitting” (p. 107). Upon the completion of each interview, the interviewees were asked to provide any insights or feedback on the interview itself, and also at the end of each interview, the researcher reviewed the key points with the interviewees to confirm their accuracy and avoid misinterpretations. Finally, the data collected through audiotaping including notes were transcribed after each interview and translated into English for analysis. To ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions and translations, the researcher performed a full review of the transcripts, and corrections were made after comparing them with the recorded tapes.

Documentation. An analysis of the existing documents and relevant literature about the challenges and opportunities for Saudi women, as well as, the role of social media was another source of information serving data collection (Appendix-5). Documentation is a social research method and an important qualitative research instrument by itself, and is also used as an invaluable part of data triangulation (Bowen, 2009). The purpose of triangulation is to provide a combination of evidence that lends credibility. Corroborating findings can reduce the impact of potential bias by examining information collected through different methods (Bowen, 2009). According to Yin (2009), “the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 103).

In his article, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method", Bowen (2009) referred to the advantages of document analysis in qualitative research, meaning that document analysis is an efficient method that requires data selection instead of data collection, which makes it less-time consuming and more cost-efficient. Availability is another reason that makes document analysis advantageous, as documents can be found in a variety of forms and are generally easily accessible at no cost. In addition, documents are stable and 'non-reactive', which means that they can be reviewed multiple times without being affected by the researcher (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). Documents can also serve as part of the research by providing background information, supplementary research data, track changes and developments, and suggest further questions to be asked or situations that need to be observed (Bowen, 2009, p. 30).

In this study, documentation was used as a secondary source of information to define and determine the extent of the challenges that professional Saudi women face in work and life, and also to investigate the possibilities and opportunities that new information and communication technologies, including social media, offer to Saudi women to improve their lives. The main goal of using this step was to help in verifying and validating the collected information from the interviews. Also, to gain better understanding of the nature and extent of the challenges captured from the insider experiences of Saudi women.

Before the actual document analysis, the researcher went through a detailed planning process to ensure reliable results. As the study adopted an inductive approach in analyzing the documents, the process of searching for relevant documents followed a snowballing technique. The goal of such a method was to ensure that the selected documents were relevant to the objectives of the study and related to the research question. The positive outcome of using this

technique is that it not only helped in reducing the researcher's bias, but also in generating additional information and leading to more objective findings.

The process of searching for adequate documents first involved identifying the scope of the research question, which involved Saudi women, social media, challenges and opportunities, work and life. Prior to conducting the search for documents, all of the concepts in the research question were reviewed, and synonyms for each concept were identified. Using synonyms and alternative terms helped in extracting as many documents as possible from different sources. Six different sources were used to collect documents: Saudi government databases, academic journals, newspapers, conferences, dissertations, blogs, and online forums.

Based on the research questions as well as the objectives of this study, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting documents was decided. The selection criteria for inclusion were as follows; a document needed to include:

- Challenges faced by Saudi women in work and life
- Opportunities available for Saudi women in work and life
- The role of social media in the lives of Saudi women
- Publication date 2010-2019 (inclusive)

The exclusion criteria were based on insufficient quality of these documents in terms of their relevance to the research question, and their dates of publication (pre-2000). Any text not focusing on Saudi women was excluded from the selection as well.

Researcher journal field notes. In addition to interviews and document analysis, personal experiences and engagement were also used for the data collection in this study. Due to the strong knowledge the researcher has about Saudi Arabian cultural norms, political practices,

and religious values, the researcher had “direct contact with and [got] close to the people, situation, and phenomenon under study; the researcher’s personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

The researcher kept a journal of thoughts, reflections, and insights throughout the data collection and analysis process. To avoid personal impressions, feelings, biases, values, prejudices, and early interpretations from descriptions, every effort was made by this researcher to systematically acknowledge and reflect on any potential influence from personal values. Reflexivity involves the researcher’s ability to have an ongoing means of separating feelings and impressions by reflecting upon personal biases and views systematically while collecting data (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). This journal served as the primary means of separating the researcher’s personal biases, values, views, and impressions. As noted by leading experts in qualitative research, qualitative field notes are “an essential component of rigorous qualitative research” that help the researcher to enhance the data and provide a rich context for analysis (Creswell, 2013; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006; Mulhall, 2003; Patton, 2002). Most importantly, they provide extra information about the interviews that is useful in understanding the participants’ meanings (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

Finally, a qualitative database was developed based on the data collected from the interview transcripts, documentation, and journal notes. Yin (2014) explained that a qualitative database allows researcher to develop a chain of evidence, from data collection, through the analysis, to the final conclusion. All items in the database in this study were categorised and indexed in order to facilitate retrieval. The overall intent of this rigorous data collection was to

develop an in-depth understanding of the insider experiences about the challenges as well as the role of social media for each participant and their contexts.

Data Analysis

The first important consideration for the data analysis in this study was choosing the most appropriate approach to analyzing the interviews, documents, and notes. Because the nature of this study was exploratory, the data were analyzed as soon as the data collection process was complete. Yin (2014) suggested that early analysis of the data is a crucial aspect for the overall interpretation of the study's results. To assist in the early analysis of the cases, in this research, a decision was made to choose a qualitative approach of thematic analysis (codes and coding technique). Generally, thematic analysis is widely used when analyzing qualitative interviews.

Thematic analysis is an approach for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the context of a qualitative research, “data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence to draw empirically based conclusions” (Yin, 2009). The main reason for choosing this method was that this “rigorous thematic method can lead to an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The next important consideration was identifying key findings within the raw data, including the interviews and documents, then searching for common themes that might go beyond a particular case (Yin, 2014). The data collected throughout this study were analyzed based on a three-stage procedure: (1) preparing the data for analysis (transcribing from the audio tape), (2) reducing the data into themes through coding (themes development), and finally (3) representing the data (description of data), (Creswell, 2013).

Preparing the data for analysis. Following each interview, the annotations,

descriptions, and narratives were transcribed from the audiotape and combined. This process was carefully done, as since the original data were in Arabic, this required accurate translation when transcribing. The audio-recordings of the 10 participants were listened to several times in order to ensure the accuracy of both the translations and transcriptions. After translating the interviews into English, they were stored in the researcher's computer in Microsoft Word to facilitate the data coding.

Reducing the data into themes through coding. To achieve accuracy in the themes identification, the researcher followed the following steps (Thomas, 2003, p. 2):

1. Familiarizing oneself with the data: The researcher carefully read the transcripts from the interviews a number of times in order to capture any patterns, trends, or meanings that emerged from the responses.
2. Generating initial codes: After reading each transcript, a full screening of patterns was done. This process involved creating codes from the interview responses, which allowed for the quick identification of any potential themes related to the research question. The main goal of this process was to ensure alignment between the generated codes and the research questions.
3. Searching for themes: At this point, the researcher identified patterns as well as the relationships among codes to develop the main themes. This step required consistency throughout the process.
4. Reviewing themes: This step involved evaluating themes by identifying the significance and adequacy of each theme generated. The goal of this step was to detect broader patterns of meaning, which led to the development of more themes and sub-themes. In order to ensure the appropriateness of these themes, each was defined and evaluated. The process of

evaluation involved ensuring that certain phrases (or ones similar to them) were found in a participant's statement in order for a theme to be assigned.

5. Defining and naming themes: The careful examination of assigning codes and themes led to category construction. Categories are larger conceptual themes which consist of many pieces of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After the themes were classified into categories, the data were reevaluated with the codes captured in the previous step. Broad themes were developed along with sub-themes, and each theme was defined and linked to the actual transcript quotes. The processes of extracting themes and sub-themes were guided by the research questions.

Representing the data. The descriptions of the data mainly focused on the themes that emerged from the analysis. Finally, a broad interpretation of what had been explored from each case was made. Then, an external professional editor was asked to review the final transcript in order to make sure that the coding processes and themes were accurate, reliable, and most importantly, linked to the research question. The results were reported using descriptive and interpretive styles, which involves presenting a descriptive summary and actual quotes of the results followed by an interpretation (Krueger, 1998a, p. 113). The advantage of this approach lies in reducing the amount of data without affecting the interpretation of the analysis.

Process of Data Analysis of Selected Documents

The documents served as a supplementary source of information for the interviews analysis. Information gathered from the selected documents were analyzed after the completion of the interview analysis. The documents were analysed based on their relevance and ability to support the categories and themes that emerged from the interview data. This approach helped to draw connections between the interview data and documents in the form of similarities, and also

helped to reveal new findings. The analysis of the relevant documents involved a careful re-reading and review of the data (Bowen, 2009) in order to generate themes pertinent to the studied phenomenon. The process of coding information from the documents required following several reiterative stages, and was completed manually in an individual manner by the researcher. The sequence of the stages was as follows:

- Classifying and segmenting all texts and documents into groups based on the categories that emerged from the interview data
- Coding the information for each group
- Identifying codes
- Linking categories and themes from documents with interview data

At this point, it is important to reiterate the impact of the researcher in the process of data analysis in a qualitative study. Since this study included the interpretations of the researcher and those of the participants, according to (Stake, 1995), “it is up to the researcher to determine whose interpretation is presented and emphasized in the findings”. Stake (1995) also stressed that an “ongoing interpretive role of the researcher is prominent in qualitative study” (p. 43).

After the completion of the coding process, a description of the study was finally produced, which is a detailed description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1988). The description may include different elements such as historical background, specific events, and cultural settings, as well as the participants and their personal experiences and day-to-day activities (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Merriam, 1988). The description in this study presents the context of the case, which looks at the challenges Saudi women face in work and life as well as the significant role of social media, by providing certain dominant themes explored through the interviews. Subsequently, an advanced analysis and interpretation was presented; this was

achieved by linking the findings of the study to documents and the available literature.

Research Design Limitation

Given the nature of Saudi Arabian culture is somehow unique, gaining accessibility to Saudi females was not an easy task. To mitigate this limitation, a selective sample of professional Saudi women were interviewed through online applications.

Also, thematic analysis can lack transparency through the stages of identifying codes and themes. Thus, detailed and rigorous steps were taken throughout the process to ensure providing full transparency. Another limitation associated with qualitative conduct includes the interpretive nature of the study and challenge in guarding against researcher bias. Due to the strong cultural background the researcher shares with the participants, every effort was made to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material. To mitigate this limitation, rigorous attention to procedural consistency throughout the process of data collection, data analysis, and analysis were used in addition to keeping an ongoing researcher journal to formulate emerging ideas and guard against researcher bias.

Another methodological limitation to this study is the possible subjectivity in the process of translating the interviews from Arabic to English. Given that all of the interviews were conducted in Arabic as it is the first spoken language for both the researcher and the participants, there is a possibility that potential errors in translation obscure some of the actual meanings for an English-speaker reader. To ensure meaning, the translations of transcripts including the emerged themes were discussed for several times with a professional scholar who is an English-speakers.

Overall, this methodology and design were appropriate because there has been relatively little research on Saudi working women. Therefore, this qualitative study allows for the

exploration and understanding of the challenges, experiences, and perspectives of those women, and provides a platform for their stories. It also helps in outlining the roles of social media in Saudi women's lives in light of the challenges they are facing.

Trustworthiness

As descriptive research depends profoundly on participants' stories, which has a significant impact on research findings (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, this qualitative research considered utilizing several practices and techniques to assure that the research study's findings accurately portray participants' responses (Patton, 2002). It should be noted that testing credibility in qualitative research differs from that done in quantitative research; credibility relies on instruments in quantitative studies, while in qualitative studies, "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2002). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), "credibility comes not just from who you interview and how well you check what they say; it also comes from showing readers how carefully you have carried out the research" (p. 67). Hence, researchers must be aware of the importance of testing the research credibility. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argued that researchers can ensure the credibility of their research through several techniques, including triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement with the data, and logging notes and details about the study. Following these techniques helped the researcher to increase the study's credibility as well as resolve any ethical considerations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Triangulation. Refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources to build a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). This qualitative study involved careful reviewing of data collected through different sources including interviews, documentations, and researcher's journal in order to achieve a more accurate and valid assessment of the findings.

Member checks. To further increase the credibility of the data, the participants were asked to provide feedback on the findings, and member checks helped the researcher to ensure that the interpretations of the data reflect the actual stories and meanings provided by the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After the interviews, transcriptions were sent to the participants so that they could check for any misinterpretations or incorrect perceptions of their thoughts and perspectives.

Audit trails. Another technique used to increase the credibility of this study was applying audit trails, including ensuring translation accuracy, and using reflexivity to address the researcher's biases, perspectives, and personal life experiences. In addition, the audit trails provided detailed justifications and documentation about the study's purpose, the researcher's role, research questions, steps and procedures for the research processes, and methodology (Creswell, 2013). These audit trails served to provide full documentation of the researcher's engagement with all the data obtained, detailing how the research was conducted and explaining how the data were analyzed, how the results were reached, and finally how the conclusions were drawn.

Adequate engagement with the data. Finally, the researcher made every effort to have adequately engage with the data. This involved providing detailed documentation of the data collection and coding processes until no more emerging codes were found (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

In any qualitative study, ethical issues can arise. Therefore, to ensure ethical rigor, several considerations pertinent to this research were carefully taken into account, including providing the participants with a detailed description of the study along with an explanation of the potential risks associated with participation. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, which involved Saudi females, approval was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the University of Ottawa in order to ensure that there was no risk of social repercussions and that the participants' identities would remain anonymous. The only potential risk to the participants involved whether they might feel uncomfortable emotions as they talked about their experiences and feelings during the interviews. However, this risk was minimal and was mitigated by providing them with the contact information of the researcher as well as that of the University of Ottawa Protocol Officer for Ethics Research in case they felt the need to inquire about the ethical conduct of this study.

Another ethical consideration involved providing the participants with information about their rights to privacy, which included the right to refuse to participate in this study, the right to anonymity and confidentiality, and the right to informed consent. To ensure that all participants had a full understanding of the study, they were required to sign and return a consent form before participating.

Finally, several methods were used when storing and handling the data in order to ensure the privacy of the participants' information as well as the safety of all data collected. The researcher created several backup copies of the data, including audio recordings, and stored them in secure files in her personal computer, using a password for extra protection. All identifying information was concealed, and the participants' names were replaced with unique numbers

instead (Creswell, 2013). All hard copy data, such as the researcher's notes and reflections, were stored in the researcher's personal office at her home, where the researcher possesses the only key. None of the data are accessible to or have been shared with anyone except for the supervisor directing this research. All audio recordings as well as electronic data will be destroyed at the end of three years.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative was to explore the role of social media in providing professional opportunities for Saudi women. Specifically, this research sought to explore and describe the insider experiences about the challenges and barriers faced by working women and how they impact the women's work and life. To achieve these objectives, multiple sources of data collection and analysis were employed as part of the research process, including interviews, documents, and demographic data. The principal data source consisted of interviews with 10 Saudi women who met all the criteria, while the documents and the demographics served as supplementary sources of data for the analysis, representing secondary data sources. The findings presented in this chapter are divided into the following sections: (1) general findings, which consist of demographic descriptions and themes derived from the interviews; and (2) advanced analysis and interpretation, which is a connection between the interview data and the documents data.

General Findings

Demographic Description

Reporting demographic data on the research population allows the reader to have a general understanding of the participants' backgrounds and helps contextualize the challenges this qualitative study seeks to explore. All participants in this study were Saudi women living and working in Saudi Arabia, and the ages of the 10 participants ranged between 26 and 40 years old. The participants were located in different regions across Saudi Arabia, and their geographical locations were as follows:

- Riyadh (the capital of Saudi Arabia): two participants
- Jeddah: three participants

- Dammam: four participants in total; two from Al-Khobar city, and two from Dhahran city
- Madinah: one participant.

Table 1 provides the following demographic characteristics for each participant: age, geographical location, marital status, level of education, occupation, work experience, and time spent online.

Table 1 Demographics Information

ID	Age	City	Marital Status	Level of Education	Occupation	Work Exp.	Time spent online
1	40	Dammam	Married	Master's	Human Resources	17 years	Almost all day
2	26	Dammam	Married	Master's	Geophysics	4 years	6 to 8 hours
3	35	Riyadh	Single	PhD	Academic Professor	8 years	4 to 6 hours
4	35	Madinah	Divorced	Master's	Family Counselor	6 years	6 hours
5	36	Riyadh	Single	Master's	Human Resources	7 years	Almost all day
6	27	Jeddah	Married	Bachelor	Marketing	3 years	8 hours
7	32	Dammam	Married	Master's	Software Engineer	5 years	6 to 8 hours
8	31	Dammam	Single	Master's	International Business	9 years	Almost all day
9	35	Jeddah	Divorced	Bachelor	Insurance Company	13 years	Almost all day
10	37	Jeddah	Married	Master's	IT Department	7 years	6 to 8 hours

The marital statuses of the interviewed women differed significantly; five of them were married, while three were single, and two were divorced at the time of the interview. The majority of the participants had a high level of education; two of them had bachelor's degrees, whereas seven had master's degrees, and one had a doctoral degree. Nearly half of the participants had earned their higher education from Western universities, including in Canada and the USA. The professional positions of these women also differed significantly, and

included human resources management, geophysics, professor, school counsellor, marketing, software engineer, international business manager, insurance company manager, and IT specialist. All participants were working in well-known organizations in Saudi Arabia. The level of work experience for the women ranged between 3 to 17 years in the same position. Almost all the participants were active users of social media, and the average time they spent online was between 6 to 8 hours per day.

Themes and Categories

This section presents the findings from the interviews. After deep analysis of the transcriptions and the notes taken during the interviews, recurring words, phrases, and similarities were identified. Certain concepts appeared repeatedly in the transcripts, and accordingly, these concepts were closely evaluated. Each concept was then defined and linked to the actual wording in the statements by the participants. Consequently, these concepts were developed into themes and subthemes, and were classified into categories. These categories, which are discussed below, explore and examine the challenges Saudi women face in work and life, while explaining the role of social media in these women's lives. Using the data analysis processes outlined in the methodology chapter, two main categories with six themes were derived throughout the analysis of the ten interview data sets. The categories were: (1) challenges facing Saudi women, (2) and the role of social media.

The main themes were: (1) socio-cultural challenges, (2) personal challenges, (3) ethical challenges, (4) institutional challenges, (5) civic and professional engagement, (6) socialization and privacy issues, Table 2 presents an overview of the key themes and categories discovered.

Table 2 Overview of emergent categories and themes

Categories	Themes
Challenges Facing Saudi Women	- Socio-Cultural Challenges - Personal Challenges - Ethical Challenges - Institutional Challenges
The Role of Social Media	- Civic and Professional Engagement - Socialization and Privacy Issues

Category 1: Challenges Facing Saudi Women

The categories were ordered starting from those most dominant and stressed by the participants, to the least dominant ones. The categories and themes were then linked to the analyzed documents in order to generate an advanced analysis interpretation of the findings. Table 3 shows the emerged themes and sub-themes for the first category.

Table 3 Emergent themes and sub-themes related to challenges facing Saudi women

Category 1: Challenges Facing Saudi Women		
Themes	Sub-themes	
Socio-cultural challenges	• Gender inequality • Social perceptions • Family pressure • Life-work balance	
Personal Challenges	• Self-perception • Dependency issues • Psychological issues	
Institutional Challenges	• Work opportunities • Gender discrimination • Male guardianship	
Ethical Challenges	• Social hypocrisy • Appearance • Reputation • Sexual advances	

Theme 1: Socio-cultural Challenges

The first dominant theme under the first category explores the challenges faced by Saudi women related to the socio-cultural aspects of Saudi society. Based on the data analysis, the following sub-themes reflect the most common socio-cultural challenges the Saudi women were facing: (1) gender inequality, (2) social perceptions, (3) family pressure, and (4) life-work balance.

Gender Inequality. The majority of the participants discussed that gender inequality was one crucial challenge they experienced during their life journey towards professionalism. The most flagrant facet of gender inequality as disclosed by the participants was access to education. Most of the participants stressed that access to education is an important factor in achieving professionalism, building a career, and gaining independence, but explained that during their educational journey, they felt they never had the same privileges and opportunities as were available to men. Participant 5 emphasized this, saying,

While I was in high school I always dreamed to be an engineer just like my brother, but that was only possible outside the country, I searched all universities in Saudi and this major was only available for men at that time.

Another comment further explains how gender inequality in education was a challenge. Participant 10 stated,

for me the main challenge was the limited programs offered for females; my choices were limited and I ended up studying abroad. Although studying abroad was a great chance for me to expand my knowledge and explore a new culture, having an option to study in my own country would have been better.

Participant 1 had a different point of view on gender inequality with regard to access to education, expressing that:

Although options were limited for women in terms of professional majors and academic programs, the government offered scholarships for women to study abroad. However, it should be noted that this only became available recently and it wasn't culturally acceptable before.

Inequalities in education were a challenge for most of the women participating in this study, as they did not have the same chances and options available to men. They had limited access to educational programs, and also limited chances to pursue education abroad. However, it is important to note that the women in this study talked about how women in Saudi Arabia now, unlike at any time before, are promised to receive “big support from the government as well as the companies” (Participant 2), and also discussed the “great initiatives made by the government to empower women and improve women's rights” in work and life (Participant 7).

Social Perceptions. The second dominant sub-theme explores how social perceptions created identity issues for Saudi women. According to several participants, the challenges related to the socio-cultural aspects of Saudi society that negatively affect their identities are: (1) marital status bias, and (2) social class.

Almost all the participants referred to their marital status as an important factor that had an influence on their professional identities and constituted a challenge for them in work and life. For example, women who were married were treated differently than those who were still single, while women who were divorced were stigmatized. As a result of these different treatments based on their marital statuses, some women sometimes tended to hide their marital status to avoid negative reactions. This is clear in the following quote from by Participant 5:

Believe it or not, the marital status can strongly control your professional life progress in Saudi Arabia. Meaning that if you are married you may have less opportunities at work, and if you are single you will probably improve in your career, but you will have a smaller chance of getting married and starting family. For that reason, some women tend to hide their marital status, so they don't get judged or treated differently.

When the women in this study tried to hide their marital status because they feared negative judgments or negative treatments by others, they clearly showed how their society's standards dictated who and what they should be. The study's findings revealed another area of identity issues that affected Saudi women's progress in work and life, which revolves around divorce. The participants in this study believed that divorced women in Saudi Arabia were perceived as less fortunate than the others in the society. They considered themselves stigmatized, and therefore they forced themselves to act in a certain way in order to gain acceptance. In the following excerpt, Participant 9 explained her struggles in maintaining her identity as a divorced woman after she started her professional career:

You know how our society sees divorced women? When I started working after my divorce, it was my first time to work in a mixed environment company. It was really hard for me to deal with men there, I'm not trying to generalize but only non-Saudi's treated me fairly. This had an impact on my personality, it was challenging for me because I had to think of everything I do or say in front of the people I'm working with. You know for sure that they already have something against you in their heads just because you are divorced.

However, not only divorced women found it challenging to maintain their identities as women. The study's findings also revealed that married women experienced similar challenges. One married woman in this study had the opinion that men at her workplace would avoid married women because of the social norms; according to Participant 1, "You can tell you are different when you see your manager is communicating normally with your female colleague who's single and avoid you because you are married. I think it's strongly related to our social

norms and culture.” She thought that men in Saudi society tended to avoid married women because they believed that married women belonged to their husbands. Therefore, their negative attitude towards married women arose because they feared the women's husbands and wanted to show them respect by avoiding their wives. Finally, Participant 4 noted that the marital status of a Saudi woman was a challenge for all women because of deeply engrained societal norms, and believed that “social norms draw frames for women, and force them to act within these frames in order to feel appropriate and accepted.” She also stated that that being single made her vulnerable to different types of harassment, which affected her identity as a female. This point indicates a shared perception concerning the power of social norms in Saudi society. Indeed, the stories shared by the participants in this study highlight how the standards in Saudi society represent a perceived challenge for Saudi women to freely maintain their identities in the face of social norms and practices.

Another factor creating identity issues was social class. The participants in this study believed that social class created a challenge in their work and lives which in turn affected their personal and professional identities. Whether because of their upper- or lower-class background, tribe, family name, or socio-economic status, all of these aspects, which are related to the socio-cultural challenges, affected women's identities. As mentioned by Participant 3, “It's in the culture--social class is more important than how good your qualifications are. You have to have this fancy family name to get the respect you deserve.” Another participant stated, “If you don't have a strong social class, you have to be tough to protect yourself and stand up for yourself. Otherwise people will downgrade you” (Participant 7). Social class was perceived to be one of the stressors that had an influence on the women's personal and professional identities, which in some cases hindered their professional development.

Family pressure. The third important sub-theme that was brought up by the participants in this study is another perceived challenge related to the socio-cultural aspects of Saudi society. This theme explores how family pressure is a challenge for Saudi women.

The majority of the participants mentioned that they faced many constraints from their families because of their family's reputation. The participants' comments on this subject were enlightening, e.g., "I think one of the main things that affected my progress in life is my family. They believe in the so-called tribal honor, and they wouldn't let me work in rural areas, or take night shifts" (Participant 2). Participant 5 stated, "Although I have the pressure they put on me is the actual challenge. For example, my mom would keep reminding me that the honor of the family depends on my behavior and attitude!". Still another participant said, "The family's reputation plays a major role in shaping my identity," and when she was asked how, she said, "I have to act according to what my family sees is right for them" (Participant 3).

Participant 4 had a different opinion about the role of the family in women's life. She stated that the support that every female gets from her family was usually the main reason behind her success. She stated, "because my family was my biggest support, I mean my mother and father, I was able to stand firm and succeed. So, when you see any female reaching her goals and reaching up high you know for sure that her parents are the reason."

Work-life balance. The fourth important sub-theme related to socio-cultural challenges is work-life balance. The women in this study revealed that work-life balance was a major hindrance to them in advancing in work and life. When the interviewees were asked to describe the challenges affecting them in work and life, most of them cited issues of balancing between life and work, including but not limited to family commitments. The majority of the women in

this study expressed that their careers had been affected by their family commitments and responsibilities as a wife, mother, or even caregiver. Although some of the participants were not married, they indicated that family and social commitments constituted a challenge for them. As Participant 8 stated,

It is really hard to maintain a life balance when you are a working female. I have so many commitments that makes it hard for me to balance between my life and my work. Unlike men, women find it more challenging to juggle between their responsibilities.

Another participant mentioned that “is not the case anymore; women are striving to achieve professional success, and that is the price of it” (Participant 6). One participant provided a justification for this challenge, saying, “The bottom line is that the society is still not ready to define women's roles in life, and that's pretty much what is causing the imbalance in working women's lives” (Participant 10).

Theme 2: Personal Challenges

The second dominant theme explores how personal challenges create struggles in Saudi women's lives. The main sub-themes that emerged under this theme are: (1) self-perception, (2) dependency issues, and (3) psychological issues.

Self-perception. The majority of the participants explained that they had experienced negative self-perception, which created some challenges that hindered their progress in work and life. According to them, there were two main reasons women have negative self-perception: lack of professional skills, and lack of adequate qualifications.

The participants stated that their lack of professional skills was due to a lack of proper education and that therefore they lacked the needed skills for their professional development. As

Participant 4 commented, “Of course when you don’t have a proper access to education you will definitely miss good opportunities to build yourself professionally, and consequently you will have this bad image about your work quality at the workplace.” Another participant experienced the same self-perception, although she had a good education: “The problem is not my educational background, but it is the idea that most of us in our society believe that women cannot function as good as men, at least this is how I see it in my head” (Participant 6). An additional opinion offered by Participant 10 reflected,

It’s challenging because when I look at my male colleagues I found that they don’t have this negative self-perception of themselves like women, maybe because it’s in their bones; I mean they are not like us new to the field. They have more experience and they are more skillful.

The women in this study expressed negative self-perceptions due to how people perceived them, which made them have negative beliefs about their capabilities. Even if they had the appropriate skills for doing exactly the same things as men, the idea that they lacked capability and intelligence was programmed in their mindsets. This point leads to the next sub-theme, which explains how Saudi women are deprived from opportunities in work and life because of the way people perceive them.

Another reason for the negative self-perception as described by the participants was a lack of adequate qualifications. The participants believed that because they did not have the same qualifications as their male counterparts, they were deprived good opportunities. One participant spoke extensively about how she had to work hard in order to challenge her self-perceptions, but said that she would always fail:

I try so hard to show my professionalism at work. I would always have this negative self-image of inadequacy because I know that I'm not qualified enough for my position. I might be wrong and it could just be my own perceptions. I think we should be fair about what men think about us, I mean they might be right that we women are not as professional as them because we are still fresh and new to the workplace! I guess! (Participant 8).

The participants in this study expressed strong feelings that females were subject to being seen as less desirable candidates for professional positions because of the risk that they might lack proper qualifications and skills. Therefore, the real challenge is not in how the society perceived these women, but rather the way the women saw themselves. The negative self-perceptions the women demonstrated about themselves and the belief that they were inadequate was revealed in this study to be a major challenge.

Dependency issues. The second major sub-theme that emerged from the data analysis under the second theme “personal challenges” revolves around dependency issues. The participants emphasized that being dependant on men, either financially or legally, hindered their progress in work and life. One participant explained that “Saudi men have an expectation that women can't be independent because they need support in everything” (Participant 2). She added, “Women have to have their male consent for legal practices, such as filing a case in a court or renewing an ID card.” Another participant stated, “Men view themselves as heroes, they don't trust what you do and always check after you to make sure that any decision in your life is made by them, which makes you feel completely dependent” (Participant 10).

Still another participant talked about her frustration over being viewed as dependant on men, either financially or legally: "The problem is that we know it's wrong and we know that we are able to be independent, but men are still see us as dependants whose lives can't run without their involvement and support" (Participant 4). She noted that the reason why most men have this belief about women is because of "the rules and regulations of the country", and added, "They gave the power to men to treat women this way and left women with no choice but to be legally dependent." It is interesting to note that the divorced women indicated that they suffered from dependency issues more than the others; as Participant 9 reflected, "Men usually have doubts that a divorced woman can't depend on herself, and any critical decision in her life has to be made by her male-guardian."

One participant shared her opinion about challenges related to female-dependency issues, arguing that almost all women face these challenges anywhere and everywhere around the world, but that "in Saudi Arabia, challenges are perceived differently because of our cultures. You need to make more effort to prove yourself" (Participant 6). Further, as stated by Participant 7,

I find it difficult to deal with male-counterparts and men in general. Because it's a male-dominated society, you will always have to work hard to prove yourself, otherwise they will never take you seriously, and they will never understand you.

Based on the participants' responses, Saudi women are likely to have limited work opportunities in comparison with men, and that society's preconceptions about women's capabilities were among the reasons for this. Many of the participants believed that women would be seen as less qualified for professional jobs because of the "preconception in our society that women should stay at home and take care of [the] family" (Participant 6). Another example of preconceptions, as brought up by Participant 7, was that "women cannot be as professional as

men, [because] hiring women costs the company because they get pregnant and have commitments.” One participant was of the opinion that “Most of the well-known companies are mainly run and dominated by males, who usually prefer not to hire females. And if in some cases they agreed to hire women, they would assign them to lower positions” (Participant 5).

Some women in this study also argued that the reason behind their female-dependency issues was the Saudi legal system. One said, “The guardianship system is the reason why men see us as dependant. When the legal system itself doesn't trust your ability or treat you as an adult, what do you expect from the men in our society?” (Participant 8). According to another participant, “One of the major obstacle that prevents my progress in work and life in general is the so-called system of guardianship. Major decisions are made by men and I need to take permission for most of the things in my life”.

Even though women in this study talked about dependency issues, it was somewhat surprising that the participants showed a level of exhilaration when they talked about the removal of the driving ban on women as an important part of women's rights development. They believed that the right to drive would provide them with “a sense of independency and freedom,” as mentioned by Participant 6. In addition, Participant 4 shared her excitement about this matter, and considered herself lucky to witness this improvement in women's rights in Saudi. She said,

I think I should say that I am lucky to witness this revolutionary moment that Saudi women can finally drive. This is the first time in history Saudi women can get behind the wheel and hit the road. Although, I already have an American driver's license; I got it when I was studying there, but honestly it feels so much different to drive in Saudi. I'm really excited, happy, and I feel very lucky!

Almost all respondents in this study believed that despite of all challenges they were facing in work and life, they have witnessed new significant changes in the country following the announcement of vision 2030, which according to them, guaranteed Saudi women the right to drive and, therefore, feel some level of independence.

Psychological issues. This important sub-theme explores psychological issues as part of the personal challenges the Saudi women in this study faced, as the women interviewed indicated that they faced problems regarding lacking self-confidence. The majority of the interviewees expressed that they lacked self-confidence due to Saudi society's negative perceptions about women being weak and in need for support. One participant observed that she was always in doubt about her ability to progress at work, saying, "Being surrounded with people who mistrust your ability of being independent or qualified affects my self-confidence, my performance, and also my relationships with others" (Participant 3). Another participant explained that as a female,

You can clearly see the preconception men have against working women. When they underestimate your opinions, or when they don't accept to have you as a leader, all these factors affect your self-confidence and force you to make more efforts than men (Participant 1).

Theme 3: Institutional Challenges

The third theme in the first category explores the challenges the women faced within institutional environments. Two main sub-themes emerged from this: (1) gender discrimination in promotions and workloads, and (2) male guardianship.

Gender discrimination. This sub-theme looks at how women are treated differently inside the work environment. One side of gender discrimination that was brought up by the participants in this study was inequality in promotions. Many participants observed that men would be promoted faster than women, even if they both worked in the same department and delivered the same work quality. One participant shared her thoughts:

When it comes to promotions, usually men are given higher ranks and better evaluation than us. In the company I worked at, for example, there is an annual ranking for every employee. The ranking is based on the quality of work delivered, and usually men will get higher ranks than women because men see themselves as leaders by nature. I guess they get promoted faster because they are responsible for the family. And you know, ironically, women would always hear things like, you should be at home cooking for your kids. It's like a joke to make you feel okay for not getting promoted. (Participant 7).

Interestingly, the majority of the participants emphasized that despite the fact that employment opportunities for women are still not as equal as for men, there are a lot of promising opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia today. As one participant shared her opinion about the new promises made by the government, "Women are having more advantages today than any time before, there are so many opportunities for women to learn, develop, and explore" (Participant 4), and another said, "I guess women will have more privileges than men, with all promises made by the government, women are becoming luckier than men" (Participant 1). Participant 9 declared how "Things started to change into the favour of women, [and] although men still have better opportunities and gender discrimination is still an ongoing issue in Saudi work fields, new and equal opportunities will be available for women." One participant who

talked about “inequality between men and women in professional opportunities” later added that “it won’t be challenging like before. Saudi women are a special case and they are given so many chances”; for instance, “women now can work in management, can be lawyers and more in the technical field” (Participant 5). Another participant shared her observations about the promises towards gender equality. She attributed this improvement to the government’s initiatives, which she called revolutionary. Her opinion is given as follows:

It is happening, the society is changing towards and in the favour of supporting women by investing a lot in women’s education and employment. Women will be equal with men in terms of professional opportunities, now I see that as a female I can have the same tasks and opportunities like men, for example, women now can be engineers, lawyers, pilots and more importantly they can drive. It is a revolution, it is historical! (Participant 1).

Male guardianship. The second important sub-theme related to the challenges, as described by some of the participants, was the imposition of male guardianship, which also affected their progress in work and life. Participant 3 explained how male guardianship constituted a challenge in her education and professional life:

One of the things I remember that made it difficult for me to progress in my education was the rules that my family put on me, including that I can’t go to college with the driver alone; I was supposed to go with my brother, who would be most of the times not available to either pick me up from college or drop me off. This cost me to stay in collage for another couple of years to finish. The same thing happened when I started working: the first couple of months I would have to be accompanied by my brother or my father to go to work. That was kind of embarrassing for me (Participant 3).

The participants believed that some men avoided working with women because it was religiously unacceptable, and that women were expected to be accompanied by male relatives when they went to work. One participant talked about her experience, saying, "When I first started working at the company, I shared an office with a couple of male colleagues.... One of them refused to stay in the same office claiming that it is religiously wrong!" (Participant 8). She further explained her disturbance about such an attitude, and she elaborated that: "Our religion promotes respect especially when dealing with females, and this is absolutely not religion, this is in people's mentality, due to the strong effect of our culture."

What is surprising is that the majority of the participants believed that the new generation will be different in a positive way regarding the attitudes towards Saudi working women due to the promises by the government to improve women's rights. They were optimistic that this will contribute to altering some of the discriminating cultural beliefs and practices of the Saudi society regarding women. For example, the majority of the participants agreed that "The new changes taking place in the kingdom are slowly changing the stigma against working women" (Participant 4). Also, participants talked about the differences in cultural practices between the past and after the recent announcement in Vision 2030 of women's rights improvements. One said, "Before the vision of 2030, men used to avoid marrying working women" (Participant 5), but, "I started to see many examples of men who are being very supportive to their female's relatives" (Participant 1). Participant 1 then added an example of men's support: "Many male guardians today proudly encourage their female relative to work, study, and be effective in the society."

Nevertheless, participants expressed that they were hoping to see changes in the system regarding the current imposition of male guardianship. Although the participants talked

extensively about the significant changes in women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia, they believed that the society is only slowly accepting these changes and that "the resistance from the society is still high" (Participant 4). Major changes, as referred to by the participants, were the right to drive and gender equality. For instance, Participant 6 expressed her pride in the government's moves to support and empower women, but at the same time she criticized the absence of "the male-guardianship system" from the vision's goals. She attributed this to the fact that "male guardianship is still a part of the legal system," and she believed that "resistance from culture and social norms" was the main reason the government did not include the removal of male guardianship among the vision's goals. This finding was expected and suggests that Saudi women are skeptical about the promises in Vision 2030, and shows their uncertainty about the vision's goals.

In addition to the male guardianship system, participants placed a strong emphasis on implementing laws and regulations to protect women from gender stereotypes at home and work. One participant said, "I strongly believe that defeating gender discrimination through legal channels will force the society to change the negative stereotype against women in Saudi" (Participant 9), while another suggested that "The vision should support women not be victims to the society's preconceptions and perceptions" (Participant 8), with another suggesting that this could be accomplished through "the government that plays a major role in changing negative cultural practices against Saudi women" (Participant 4). Other participants suggested that the implementation of laws and regulations should be "aligned with teaching women about their rights, and spreading awareness among both sexes" (Participant 1), and finally, "promoting and activating the promised laws for women's protection in work and life" (Participant 9).

Theme 4: Ethical Challenges

The fourth important theme in this category is the ethical challenges the women faced in work and life. These challenges consisted of ethical and moral issues the Saudi women found themselves forced to accept and not report in order to advance their careers. These challenges are divided into three main sub-themes: (1) social hypocrisy, (2) appearance, and (3) sexual advances.

Social hypocrisy. Participants in this study brought up “hypocrisy” as an ethical challenge influencing their personal and professional lives. Specifically, the findings revealed that women tend to be “hypocrites in order to fit in the society” (Participant 2). As a result, the women in this study found it confusing to maintain their identities while obeying the society's norms. A couple of participants expressed their frustration about hypocrisy; as Participant 6 said, “our society forces you to wear masks. For example, when to play strong or weak and how to show your feelings, how to talk and behave, anything just to fit in without showing your real personality,” while Participant 7 stated, “I’m still trying to figure it out, I don’t know how I can get promoted and reach higher positions without losing my values, my identity, and my authenticity.” An additional comment by Participant 2 was,

I can’t do like others just to make my manager happy. I mean, I believe that I’m an honest person so I wouldn’t tell my manager that I love you or I like you or like what you do, just because he wants to hear it! I will only say it if he really deserves it.

Another participant shared her opinion, saying,

Unfortunately, if you really want to be something, you have to flatter or be a hypocrite. People call it politics, but it’s not. Seeking professionalism through hypocrisy cannot be

in any way, political. I don't like that; I just feel very disrespectful to myself. (Participant 5).

Participant 1 described how her ability to maintain her values at work, develop professional skills, and deliver quality performance helped in her professional success, and considered the challenges she faced as opportunities for success and achievement. She stated,

It took me 8 years to be in the position I'm in right now. With determination, I agreed to take every challenge as an opportunity without giving up myself or playing the victim role; I was able to achieve my professional goal. If I was a man I would probably have reached the same position in no time!

Maintaining values, being a hard worker, and accepting challenges as opportunities helped this woman achieve her professional goals. However, the comparison she made between herself and men indicates a perceived presence of gender discrimination.

Appearance. The second important sub-theme as an ethical challenge inside the institution was women's appearance, as the majority of the participants expressed that their appearance had a big impact on their professional careers. For example, Participant 5 said, "Although a woman's qualification is a very important aspect in the workplace, in Saudi society appearance is more important." Another participant emphasized that she had noticed "What is more important than qualifications is how you present yourself, and when I say present yourself I mean how you dress up and how you look" (Participant #2). Participant 8 elaborated more on how the importance of appearance over qualifications had an impact on aspects of her self-esteem, such as wearing veiling or unveiling the face/head, or wearing make-up:

I can't be myself. I need to make an effort to be like the others so I don't get judged. If I tell you some stories I may shock you, but let me tell you about my own experience, I

used to wear 'niqab' (face veil) at the workplace because we have men in my department. Then after a while, I realized that my department manager would always avoid me, he would call the people I work with for meetings but not me. When he passes through our department in the morning he would greet my colleagues and say nothing to me! I can't deny that affected me so much, until one of my friends suggested that I take off my veil, and I did. Yes, things improved at work by 180 degrees, but it affected something inside me so badly, I mean it affected the way I see myself and what I want to be.

One participant spoke extensively about how she had lost good opportunities at work, including promotions, presentations, and rewards, because

Women who are decent, or dress decently, are not going up the ranks that much. If you are too conservative in terms of how you look, the company will never involve you in big projects that require presentations, especially if the presentations are taking place somewhere outside the country. Because of the social stereotype related to gender, I guess, they want to avoid cultural misrepresentation. (Participant 7).

To further explicate how the importance given to appearance over qualifications influenced Saudi women at work, Participant 1 described how some women feel pressured to dress in a certain way in order to fit into the society and be accepted by others:

It's very important to me that I don't change myself or my apparel, but some women who work at the same department as me are pressured to wear fancy brands and dress in a certain way that makes them noticeable to others. They have this belief that doing this will lead them to professionalism so quickly.

The women interviewed in this study had a general agreement that their appearances had an influence on their professional careers. By following their society's standards, the women in

many cases found themselves forced to dress in a certain way, which in turn had a negative influence on their personal values and identities.

Sexual advances. Several interviewees said that sexual harassment in the workplace was another area of concern. Most of them mentioned that sexual harassment was usually indirect rather than overt, with verbal harassment being more prevalent than physical harassment or sexual assault.

It is interesting to note that many of the participants were reluctant to give specific examples of sexual advances they had faced at the workplace, just referring to other women's stories or giving general opinions and thoughts, with no further elaboration. Take for example how Participant 2 expressed her views about sexual harassment: "As a Saudi female advancing in your career journey, you will for sure experience improper sexual advances encompassing unwanted verbal, visual, and sometimes physical offence." Many women in this study attributed this phenomenon to the unequal power between the genders in a male-dominated society. Participant 7 made similar observations, describing how "Women cannot do anything about sexual harassment because they are afraid of being judged by the society, and at the same time they usually remain silent to protect their family's reputation." She believed that these practices were due to "the inactive rules and regulations that protect women from any kind of abuse," and that even if they were active rules, that "Saudi women prefer not to reveal for their status and reputation safety" (Participant 7).

The participants also believed that men usually initiated sexual conducts through jokes or derogatory comments. As Participant 8 said, "Men usually test females' limits through

discussing different topics with them at work, which are not appropriate in a professional environment. They sometimes tend to make personal comments or do unnecessary touches and gestures just to see your reaction.” However, the women in this study expressed fears and concerns about reporting harassment because they believed that Saudi culture affords men the right to control women in almost everything; therefore, the women were reluctant to speak up when they were verbally abused or sexually harassed out of fear of losing their jobs or family honor.

Category 2: Role of Social Media

The second important category explores the role social media has in the lives of Saudi women. When participants were asked to explain what roles social media played and how it helped them overcome the challenges they faced, two major themes were identified: (1) civic and professional engagement, and (2) socialization and privacy issues. Several sub-themes emerged from the discussions with the women in this study, and they are discussed under each theme. Table 4 shows the main themes and sub-themes of the second category.

Table 4 Emergent themes and sub-themes related to the role of social media

Category-2 Role of Social Media	
Themes	Sub-themes
Civic and Professional Engagement	• Access to the professional world • Self-expression • Independence • Emotional support • socio-cultural change • Socio-political change • Socio-economic change
Socialization and Privacy Issues	• Lack of freedom of Expression • Trust issues • Social exclusion

Theme 5: Civic and Professional Engagement

All women in this study stated that social media played a positive role in their lives and helped them overcome some of the challenges they faced in work and life. Seven major sub-themes are grouped under this theme: (1) access to the professional world, (2) self-expression, (3) independence, (4) emotional support, (5) socio-cultural change, (6) socio-political change, and (7) socioeconomic change.

Access to the professional world. The majority of the interviewees said that participation in online social networks/ media made it possible for them to access the professional world. By “searching for experts, reading professional articles, communicating with professionals, and learning from others’ experiences, Saudi women were able to gain professional skills at no cost” (Participant 6). Another participant shared her experience about how the access to the professional world had helped her to have professional interactions with specialized people outside her professional environment. She also said that social media had helped her in finding good opportunities around and within her professional environment. For example, she said, “I can easily search for events, courses, and most importantly I can reach out to people with similar interests but from different backgrounds and different cultures (Participant 8). This study also revealed that participating in social media “led to self-improvement” of Saudi working women by “exposing them to the world of professionalism” (Participant 2).

Self-expression. Another positive role of social media that the women in this study referred to was the “ability to express” themselves in a way that “is not similarly possible in physical life” (Participant 1). Almost all the participants described that they were able to freely

practice self-expression online without feeling pressured or judged. For instance, Participant 6 compared her online experience with her offline experience thusly:

I've always been ambitious to be very good at work and in my life. I always think about how I can be who I am without losing my manners, temper and prestige. In offline life, this was hard for me to achieve, simply because as a female you can't freely express yourself in front of people. They will always judge you, underestimate you, and most of the times they will put you down and make you feel inappropriate. However, in social media things are different. I can talk about anything I want, I can purely be myself behind the screen without losing myself and my values. I can share my beliefs, concerns, and even expressing inner thoughts without being afraid of social judgments or harsh criticism.

Other participants justified the positive role of social media as follows: "because of the level of anonymity social media provided, women feel safe to share information about themselves" (Participant 8), and being able to "stick to being authentic and appreciate who they are, without fearing negative judgments of the Saudi culture" (Participant 10).

Independence. The females in this study revealed that by using social media, they discovered a new sense of independence that was not available in their regular lives. For instance, Participant 4 explained how social media provided women with independence: "Thanks to the ubiquity of this technology, women are able to explore the world without being dependant on male-guardians." Another participant referred to independence as freedom. According to her, "Online social media provided women with a sense of freedom to expose themselves to the world, without needing permission from their male relatives" (Participant 3).

Emotional support. In addition to independence, emotional support was another important positive role of social media brought up by the participants. They described how they perceived emotional support online. For example, when “feeling stressed, depressed, or lacking confidence” (Participant #4),, they would go on social media sites to “meet with people, read other people’s stories, and most of the time seek advice from specialists for free” (Participant 3).

Participants also discussed topics that fell under the sub-theme of emotional support. More specifically, they strongly believed that social media provided a good emotional support for divorced women. One participant talked extensively about how social media helped her after her divorce:

After I got divorced, I was full of negative, mixed feelings including anger, sadness, and depression. I was emotionally broken, and it was hard for me to cope or adjust with my situation. I had that sense of fear of tomorrow. I was totally confused and literally feeling lost, until one day I heard about Instagram. I created an account, and for the first time in my life I started posting pictures for myself, and I was surprised with the number of the likes I got on my pictures. I felt so good about myself. I made a lot of friends from different backgrounds. Then I started writing about my feelings and it was just crazy how people did react to my posts with all positive and encouraging comments. I must say that was a big plus for me and a strong emotional fulfilment. (Participant 4)

One of the women interviewed revealed that participating in social media exposed her to “greater emotional support” and also helped her to “deal with anger against the gender stereotype in the society” (Participant 9). For instance, she described that posting on Twitter anonymously about her thoughts and feelings made her feel relief from her anger, and explained how participating in social media helped her to mindfully control and cure her anger. For example, she said, “I

learned from other people whom I follow on Twitter. They provided me with mindful steps, which as a result helped me to feel better and relieved” (Participant 9).

Socio-cultural change. The majority of the participants discussed how participating in social media helped them bridge socio-cultural constraints. For instance, many participants compared the nature of communication between the sexes in and offline settings, and noted significant differences. One participant mentioned that “in physical life, it is improbable for unrelated men and women to communicate with each other informally, either face to face or on the phone” (Participant 10). As well, many women in this study observed that social media helped in bridging this cultural constraint by making them able to communicate with unrelated men without breaching social and cultural values. One participant shared her story:

It is a great privilege that as a female I can communicate with professional men online in a way that was never possible before, and still limited in offline settings. For example, after I graduated from the university, I always wanted to communicate with my male-supervisor who was the director of the program to ask him for an advice, and of course I cannot go to the university and meet with him face to face because as you know men are segregated from women in separated buildings. Then after a couple of years, I accidentally found his contact through LinkedIn, I was able to communicate with him directly, and I was happy that he responded in a very friendly and less formal way. (Participant 3)

In describing their experiences in online settings, participants observed that “communication with men was friendlier and less complicated” (Participant 2). Another said, “What I like about social media is that it made it possible for men and women to communicate informally while still respecting cultural values” (Participant 1). Still another participant mentioned that “unlike

offline settings, women can talk, email, or chat with men online without being culturally judged” (Participant 6).

Socio-political change. Many participants believed that social media made it possible for them to engage in political activities by allowing them to share their political views and voices in a way that was not possible in regular life, explaining that until a relatively short time before this study they had been excluded from politics, and could have barely any say in political or governmental activities. They talked about how social media had provided them with access to politics, and also discussed how social media had helped them learn about their political rights. For example, Participant 10 stated:

Being an active user of social media including Facebook and Twitter, I became more aware of our local political actions. I came to know my rights and I always share my political views online. I like going through political debates, especially when it is about women's rights in Saudi. I feel like my voice is heard more when I use this tool; I no longer feel excluded from the society. However, it is sometimes risky, and if you say something against our legal system you may get arrested.

Another participant held a similar opinion, stating that she was able to “engage in meaningful political debates with Saudi male political figures, which was not possible any time before” (Participant 2). She described her feelings as, “I feel delightful that as a female I can be part of the political system in my country, I can give my voice and make political contribution from my home through online channels. Feels good, so good!”. As well, Participant 6 observed that “with the wide spread of social media, Saudi women are now more involved with local politics, pay more attention to political actions and also have the ability to reflect on political situations without feeling excluded.” However, many participants also indicated that the political freedom

they believed they were enjoying online was limited to certain topics, and that they should be increasingly cautious about what they posted or shared online.

Socio-economic change. This important sub-theme focuses on how social media helped women in this study to deal with economic challenges. Participants believed that social media had a significant role in improving their economic statuses. For instance, one mentioned that “through participating in social media Saudi women were able to establish their own businesses and start-ups without dealing directly with men or being dependent on men” (Participant 10), while another explained how her participation in social media had helped in maintaining and improving her economic status:

Social media did fulfil my aspirations to work as an artist, and besides my full-time job I started a group page through Facebook to present my art work. Then I had the opportunity to start my own business and sell my art crafts through different social media channels. Now I can say that my financial status is way better than any time before, and one day I would have the time and enough financial resources to open a physical art school. (Participant 1)

Participant 5 observed that social media had helped in changing Saudi society's views in regard to working women. According to her,

Social media is a great tool to fight social stereotypes against working women. Saudi women are now able to work and make fortune through social media. There are a lot of successful examples out there, and the most important part is that the society is accepting the idea very well.

The women in this study had similar views in regard to the positive role of social media in their lives. Most of them agreed that social media helped them not only to have freer and wider access to the professional world, but also made it easier to have professional interactions and build professional skills. Social media also helped the women in this study with access to new jobs, and provided them with new means for financial independence. In addition, by participating in social media, the women were able to improve their social skills by interacting with different people from different cultures without having to deal with cultural consequences. To them, social media was an empowering tool that allowed them to express their feelings, reveal their stories, gain emotional support, and share a wide range of new thoughts.

Theme 6: Socialization and Privacy Issues

The second important theme in this second category explores the consequences of using social media. Many participants talked about the perceived negative effects of participating in social media, including: (1) lack of freedom of expression, (2) trust issues, and (3) social exclusion.

Lack of freedom of expression. The majority of the participants talked about how their use of social media in Saudi Arabia involved constraints on freedom of expression. For example, one believed that “Sharing ideas and thoughts through social media could be risky and may lead to jail” (Participant 7).

Regarding freedom of expression on the Internet, some women in this study revealed that they were “uncertain of the level of freedom and security” the Internet has when “sharing or posting online” (Participant 9). This point leads to the next theme, which involves issues related to Internet security and trust.

Trust issues. The women in this study expressed concerns regarding security and trust issues when using social media, and talked about how their lack of trust made them reluctant to use their real identities online. According to one participant, “social media could be the most dangerous place to deal with and it could ruin your life if you don’t use it properly” (Participant 6). Another participant brought up the idea of information privacy and how this constituted a concern for her: “The idea that social media platforms have an access to my personal information makes me freak out,” and later added, “I don’t know how they would use it and who can have access to it; I just don’t trust these platforms” (Participant 10).

Participants also discussed another topic related to trust issues, which is the vulnerability of online users’ anonymity. As one participant said, “The problem with social media is that it allows users to act under multiple identities, which most of the times makes it unsafe and maybe dangerous” (Participant 8), and that even when “dealing with experts online, you don’t really know if they are real or fake” (Participant 6), and, “You can’t tell who is behind that screen” (Participant 5). Therefore, participants were “reluctant to use their real identity in social media” (Participant 10), and most of them would prefer to “have different accounts for public postings” (Participant 1).

Social exclusion. The majority of the respondents observed that as a result of their excessive use of social media, they became socially excluded. When the interviewees were asked to explain what they meant by “socially excluded”, the majority said, although social media helped in maintaining virtual relationships, making new virtual friends, and staying connected with family, they noticed that they became isolated from real relationships in the physical world. One participant shared her experience:

Unfortunately, social media is an addiction, after a while I noticed that I became socially excluded. All the friends I have on Facebook and Snapchat I barely meet with any of them; this makes me feel isolated. Even in family gatherings, people are always busy checking their accounts on social media. Sometimes I would spend three to four hours chatting with people online whom I call virtual friends that I've never met, it does feel good at the beginning but then you realize that you are totally lonely!" (Participant 2)

Although women in this study discussed that social media provided more connections in the digital realm, they believed that "it disconnected" them "from the real world and fostered loneliness" (Participant 6).

Summary

The interviews with Saudi women delivered several interesting findings. Two main categories with six major themes emerged from the interviews. In summary, these results suggest that Saudi women face significant challenges in work and life including socio-cultural, personal, institutional, and ethical challenges. Participants shared insider stories of how the Saudi culture and social norms have a significant impact on creating challenges that hinder their professional progress. For example, due to the rigidity of Saudi culture Saudi women had limited opportunities in terms of access to education and employment and, therefore, women are perceived to have less power than men and less competent. In addition, Saudi women appeared to be controlled by their families and male-guardians and, therefore, women are perceived as submissive, dependent, and regarded as source of shame. The stories from the women in this study revealed that social perception and expectation have a negative impact on women's identities and self-perceptions. That is, that social class is more important than women's

qualifications and women are promoted based on their family names and social class rather than their professional skills and qualifications.

The results also indicate that Saudi women employ some strategies to maintain their identities, such as being hypocrites, changing appearance, or hiding marital status. Altogether, it can be concluded that the negative stereotypes about Saudi women perceived by the participants in this study reflect the nature of the social norms and the culture of the Saudi society and appear to create an overlapping system that gives men more power over women. Finally, the results show that social media provided Saudi women with new opportunities to empower women and help them overcome some of the challenges they face in work and life.

Advanced Analysis and Interpretation

Following the thematic analysis approach, a coding process was used for examining and analyzing the participants' interview data. This process allowed for the identification and exploration of the main themes and sub-themes, which in turn provided an explanation, based on the data analysis, for both the challenges Saudi women face in work and life and the roles of social media in these women's lives. In addition to revealing the themes and sub-themes, the coding process also allowed for the creation of various categories that offered insights into the meanings and reasons behind those themes and sub-themes. Finally, the themes and categories allowed the researcher to put forward an answer to the main research question of the study, which is "What is the role of social media in building professional opportunities to help change Saudi females' lives for the better?" [from Ch.1]

In response to the main research question, the advanced analysis and interpretation presented in this section provides a connection, in the form of similarities and contradictions, between the interview data and document data. This linkage allowed for the interview findings to either confirm, extend, or contradict certain elements in the literature. This process also allowed the interview data to be validated by documents. The documents used for analysis were gained from Saudi government sources as well as public domains that were accessible to everyone. These included online newspapers, research articles, official websites, and other applicable literature. After identification of the documents' sources, the process of document analysis was used as defined in the methodology chapter. The process of analyzing documents followed the same approach that was used in analyzing the qualitative interviews. Finally, this section provides an analysis and interpretation of the dominant themes, sub-themes, and related

categories in the general findings of the study, using documents to further elaborate on the findings. Table 5 is a summary of the general findings from the interviews.

Table 5 Summary of general findings

Categories	Themes	Sub-themes
Challenges Facing Saudi Women	Socio-Cultural Challenges	- Gender inequality - Social perceptions - Family pressure - Work life- balance
	Personal Challenges	- Self-perception - Dependency issues - Psychological issues
	Institutional Challenges	- Work opportunities - Gender discrimination - Male guardianship
	Ethical Challenges	- Social hypocrisy - Appearance - Reputation - Sexual advances

Role of Social Media	• Civic and Professional Engagement • Socialization and Privacy Issues	• Access to the professional world • Self-expression • Independence • Emotional support • Bridging socio-cultural constraints • Socio-political change • Socio-economic change • Lack of freedom of Expression • Trust issues • Social exclusion
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Category1. Challenges Saudi Women Face in Work and Life

In connection with the interview data previously presented in the general findings, this category provides an in-depth explanation to understand the challenges Saudi women face in work and life by linking the dominant themes under the first category of “Challenges Facing Saudi Women” to academic literature, documents, and possible theories. The dominant themes are: socio-cultural challenges, personal challenges, institutional challenges, and ethical challenges.

Socio-cultural Challenges

Gender inequality. The majority of the participants said that gender inequality was one of the crucial challenges they experienced related to the cultural aspects of Saudi Arabia, and more specifically, the most glaring facet of gender inequality as disclosed by the participants was access to education. Most women participating in this study expressed that they did not have the same chances and options as those available for men in terms of access to education. As a result of this gender inequality, men had been access to leadership and more dominance in the workplace. Participants attributed these inequalities to the social norms rooted in Saudi culture; according to them, Saudi society has created the cultural perception that women are expected to carry out domestic responsibilities.

A number of studies have found that inequality of opportunities between genders acts for many Saudi women as a barrier to fulfilling their professional potential (Alyami, 2016). One study stated that certain social and cultural factors have fostered gender inequality in Saudi Arabia, and hence women are more likely to have fewer educational opportunities, and that these inequalities have deprived Saudi women from gaining recognition in the work sphere (Alsaleh, 2011). For instance, women are limited to certain professions and are put in lower positions as compared to men (Varshney, 2019). The main area of participation of Saudi women in the workforce is in public sectors that are considered feminine, such as education, health, and social affairs organizations (Alselaimi, 2014). These findings of these studies are consistent with those of the current study, showing that in the recent past, Saudi women faced gender inequality that had an impact on their professional careers.

However, recent statistics in the literature reflect a different image. According to the statistics in Saudi Arabia, there is a significant difference between the number of women

graduating with post-secondary education and the number of jobs available for them (Koyame-Marsh, 2017). The number of qualified graduates indicates that access to education was available for women, which contradicts the respondents' opinions. In addition, there has been a significant shift in the policies and regulations in Saudi Arabia in order to promote women's education (Alyami 2016). The latest report by the Saudi Ministry of Education (2019) included a new national strategy on developing general education in such a way that provides equal opportunities to all Saudi citizens through following a set of policies. One of these policies is to "provide balanced enrollment opportunities for equal and suitable education without any discrimination in terms of gender, social status, or geographical location" (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2019).

According to Scott (2014), gender discrimination is further promoted through laws, rules, and regulations that act as control mechanisms. Thus, based on this theory, there might be two possible explanations for the discrepancies between the statistics and the responses. First, it could be argued that the inequality with regard to educational opportunities is being reduced due to the significant shift in Saudi policies, practices, and society's attitudes towards women's education, and therefore, the levels of gender discrimination are decreasing (Alyahya, 2016). For example, take the comment made by Participant 1:

Although options were limited for women in terms of professional majors and academic programs, the government offered scholarships for women to study abroad. However, it should be noted that this only became available recently and it wasn't culturally acceptable before.

Second, the Saudi government offers the opportunity for women to study abroad, as some programs were not available for women in the past (Alyahya, 2016; Islam, 2014). This is

reflected by the majority of the participants in this study, who had earned their higher education from Western universities, including in Canada and the USA. Also, it could be argued that women who had equal access to education abroad were able to have equal access to professional opportunities back home. On the other hand, women who had limited access to education in Saudi Arabia found it challenging to gain professional opportunities equal to their male counterparts. The findings of Allui and Kamaludin's (2017) study confirm that women, even now, "have still to overcome ingrained socio-cultural and structural barriers if they are to achieve equality with men in their career progression" (p. 55).

Social perceptions. The majority of the participants explained how social perceptions had created challenges for them in work and life. Specifically, the participants expressed opinions about how they were perceived and treated by men based on their marital status and social class. A study by Elamin and Omair (2010) used statistical tests to identify Saudi males' perceptions towards working women in Saudi Arabia, and concluded that men in Saudi Arabia tended to hold very traditional perceptions towards working women, e.g., that women were perceived as dependent, submissive to men, and less capable than their male counterparts. These negative perceptions toward working women have been attributed to the social norms and gender roles (Saleh & Luppigini, 2017; Alyahya, 2017; Budhwar et al., 2010).

These perceptions of working women are very relevant to this study, and could explain why Saudi men tended to avoid dealing with women. For example, women in this study expressed how married women were treated differently than those who were still single, and that women who were divorced were stigmatized. According to Participant 1, "You can tell you are different when you see your manager is communicating normally with your female colleague who's single and avoid you because you are married. I think it's strongly related to our social

norms and heedless culture.” This claim is consistent with the findings of Budhwar et al. (2010), who found that Saudi men perceived working women as submissive, which implies that they belonged to their male breadwinners, and that by avoiding them, they were showing respect to the women's husbands or fathers.

From the interviews, the divorced participants explained that women preferred to hide their marital status in order to avoid negative social perceptions. Saleh and Luppicini (2017) described how divorced women were socially stigmatized in Saudi society and that as a result, “Many divorced women reported their preference not to reveal their marital status to the public because they fear the harsh reaction and the exclusion they will inevitably encounter from society” (p. 188). Finally, a study by Al-Ahmadi (2011), who surveyed more than 160 Saudi women working in leadership positions, found that widowed leaders reported significantly higher levels of structural challenges than their married, divorced, or single colleagues. On the other hand, married and divorced women reported significantly greater cultural challenges.

Another socio-culturally-related challenge that came up in the findings was the perceptions of working women based on their social class. The majority of the participants explained how a “fancy family name” and “strong social class” had influences on people's perceptions as well as their personal and professional identities. Baker, Al-Gahtani, and Hubona (2007) found that women's family names, clans, and influence of their tribes played a major role in the advancements of women in their careers as well as in the attitudes of their colleagues towards them. Many studies on this topic highlight that Saudi women must have social status and family connections in order to advance in their professional careers (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015; Omair, 2010; Baker et al., 2007)

Elamin and Omair's (2010) study of Saudi men's attitudes toward working women confirmed that the cultures of local companies promoted gender stereotypes and conservative social norms, contributing to the creation of gender-segregated work environments that limit women's professional development. These findings are further supported by Al-Ahmadi (2011), who surveyed more than 160 Saudi women and found that women faced structural challenges, especially associated with the male domination of decision-making.

Family pressure. Women in this study revealed that families in Saudi Arabia put more pressure on their female members than males in order to protect the honor of the family, the tribe, and the social class. Nydell (2006) described family honor as the most significant element within the Saudi family, and in the context of the Saudi Arabian culture, it is unusual for Saudi women to mix with unrelated men outside the workplace, and the sexes are not allowed to be alone with each other. Social interactions between men and women can be interpreted in a very negative way, which could cause harm to the honor of women (Al-lily, 2011; Alsaggaf, 2011; Nydell, 2006). According to Saleh and Luppicini (2017),

Family ties and reputation are crucial characteristics in every Saudi family. Specifically, family honor is based on the behavior of the female family members in Saudi Arabia; therefore, women face many restrictions from their families and relatives in order to avoid dishonoring the family and destroying its reputation. (p. 189)

Omair (2017) stated that women's morality, and more specifically, their sexual morality, is the main point defining women in Saudi culture, and therefore, Saudi women are strongly perceived to be in the position of safeguarding morality. Surprisingly, while being perceived as moral guardians, Saudi women may "at the same time and for the same reasons, be stereotyped as a source of potential shame of their families" (Omair, 2017. p. 27). Each of these cultural factors

has been theoretically and empirically connected to the creation of restrictive gender stereotypes that may be harmful to women (Alesina et al., 2013). For example, Nisbett and Cohen (1996) explained the concept of a “culture of honor” as “emphasizing male control over their female family members, particularly their sexual behavior.” In keeping with this concept, the perception of any improper actions or behaviors brings a sense of shame and dishonor to both the woman and her family (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Thus, women may suffer from the stereotype of being moral guardians, but at the same time be stereotyped as a source of shame and dishonor for their families.

Work-life balance. The women in this study revealed that work-life balance constituted a hindrance to their advancement in both of those areas. Specifically, the participants explained how difficult was for them to balance their family commitments and professional duties. The reason for that, as indicated by some of the participants, is that “it has been quite common in Saudi that men are the main providers for their families” (Participant 2), and that therefore, “women are more likely to be encouraged to stay home and be good housewives” (Participant 9).

This finding aligns with the study conducted by Al-Ahmadi (2011), who concluded that among the challenges Saudi working women face is “the ability to take responsibility and to achieve balance between professional and family obligations” (p. 163). In a study on working females in Saudi Arabia, Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan, and Rajasekar (2017) found that work-family role conflicts stem from general societal factors, including the societal expectations that women are responsible for their homes and child care. Similarly, the findings in the current study indicate that “the society is still not ready to define women's roles in life, and that's pretty much what is causing the imbalance in working women's lives” (Participant 10). According to Omair (2017), the perception of work-life balance is one significant area of workplace gender

stereotyping that could hinder Saudi women's professional development. Omair (2017) argued that in collective societies, women are expected to face a high degree of stereotyping due the dominance of cultural perceptions that people should prioritize the good of the family and the community over personal desires. Such a perspective reinforces traditional standpoints of women's abilities to balance professional duties and family commitments (Gibbons et al., 2012; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). In contrast, Lyness and Judiesch (2014) found that gender stereotypes and perceptions related to work-life balance appear to be weaker in highly egalitarian societies.

Personal Challenges

Self-perception. The majority of the participants explained that they had faced personal challenges including negative self-perceptions, dependency issues, and psychological issues. The literature has also highlighted some of the numerous personal challenges Saudi women face in work and life (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alsubaihi, 2016; Abalkhail, 2017). Al-Ahmadi (2011) argued that Saudi working women face personal challenges because they struggle with personal and professional life balance. As mentioned previously, due to the strong gender stereotyping, Saudi women are likely to be perceived as being less capable of achieving professional development in comparison to men, and as a result, women are more likely to have negative self-perceptions, as they perceive themselves as less qualified for higher positions than their male counterparts (Omair, 2017).

In addition to self-perception, dependency issues and psychological issues were among the personal challenges revealed by Saudi women in this study. In her study, Al-Ahmadi (2011), noted that the main reason Saudi women lacked independence was because "empowerment as a state of mind has not been fully achieved due to the lack of agency associated with authority, independence, knowledge skills" (p. 163). Due to their poor empowerment, women lacked

control and authority, and were almost completely excluded from decision-making (Al-Ahmadi, 2011), and as a result of their lack of independence, Saudi women lack self-confidence and personal initiative (Omair, 2017). This is in line with the interview data, as the majority of the participants talked about how they lacked confidence and independence because of the pressure put on them from their male guardians.

Institutional Challenges

Gender discrimination. One side of gender discrimination that was brought up by participants in this study is inequality in promotions. Many participants observed that men would usually be promoted and given higher positions in comparison to women, even if they both worked at the same department and delivered the same work quality. However, in response to pressures to increase women's participation in employment, more organizations are employing females and have started to create all-female sections (Achoui 2009; Al-Ahmadi 2011). Although not intended to change the company's culture, this may make organizations aware of Saudi females' rights to equal opportunities in the workforce, and thus potentially, it may make them become more socially responsible.

Ethical Challenges

Social hypocrisy. The participants explained how negative social perceptions and social expectations affected their personalities and encouraged them to be hypocrites. The findings from the interviews suggest another form of gender stereotype affecting women's abilities to achieve professional development. From a psychological perspective, stereotyping can be understood as a form of cognitive bias that allows people to make impressions, expectations, and predictions about an individual's behavior (Fiske, 2000; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). These

expectations, and more specifically, social expectations, are the main determinant of gender roles (Eagly, 1987a). According to the social-role theory, gender roles are defined as “shared beliefs about appropriate behavior that apply to people on the basis of their socially identified sex” (Ridgeway, 2013, p. 106). The findings provide evidence that Saudi women were perceived as dependent, less capable, and inferior to men, and therefore are more encouraged to be hypocrites by showing false reactions and feelings in order to fulfil social expectations. It could therefore be possible that the perceived gender roles and their subsequent stereotypes have a major influence on women's behavior and values.

Appearance. The women interviewed in this study generally agreed that their appearances had an influence on their professional careers. Due to the social expectations and gender stereotypes, women found themselves in many cases forced to dress in a certain way, which in turn had a negative influence on their personal values and identities. Similarly, a study by Al-Hazmi et al. (2017) suggested that perceiving women based on their appearance at the workplace represents an obstacle for them. Al-Hazmi et al. (2017) argued that in mixed-gender workplaces, men are likely to avoid professional interactions with conservatively dressed women (e.g., those who were veiled). In contrast, women wearing more modern apparel would have more professional engagements with their male-counterparts (Al-Hazmi et al., 2017). This finding is consistent with the pervasive practice of social perceptions and stereotypes in Saudi society. The findings from the interviews confirm that women endorsed the stereotype that Saudi women who dress in a less conservative way achieve their professional goals faster.

Sexual advances. Another form of ethical challenge that women in this study reported was sexual harassment in the workplace, although they were reluctant to provide rich and detailed examples to explain the nature of their harassment. Al-Zahrani (2011) stated that sexual

harassment is one of the obstacles Saudi women face in mixed-gender environments. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research regarding sexual harassment in the workplace within Saudi Arabia, and consequently there are limited data available about this specific issue. In a 2018 report for the Arab News Al-Turki said, "No statistics are available on the incidence of sexual harassment, because of past reluctance to prevent violations."

Since Saudi Arabian culture is considered an honor-based culture that places a huge emphasis on avoiding the dishonor associated with any female violation of sexual morality (Al-Rasheed, 2013), women are more likely to stay silent when sexually harassed or abused in order to protect family honor and reputation. Although the participants confirmed the existence of anti-harassment policies in institutions where they had worked, they preferred not to report any infractions. This could explain the strength of the stereotype that Saudi society perceives women as ethical, and that the consequences of "shameful" conduct are huge and more powerful than laws and regulation.

Category 2: Role of Social Media

This category explores the perceptions of the interviewed Saudi women regarding the role of social media in helping Saudi women overcome challenges in work and life. The dominant themes under this category are: civic and professional engagement, and socialization and privacy issues.

Civic and Professional Engagement

The women in this study had similar perceptions in regard to the role of social media in their lives. Most of them expressed that social media helped them not only to have freer and wider access to the professional world, but also made it easier to engage in professional

interactions and build professional skills. Social media also help Saudi women in this study to access new jobs and also, provided them with new means for financial dependency. In addition, by participating in social media the interviewed women were able to improve their social skills freely and independently, through interacting with different people from different cultures without dealing with cultural consequences. These results broadly support the work of other studies in the area of the positive changes brought by social media into the life of Saudi women (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Luppacini & Saleh, 2017; Al-lily, 2011; Guta & Karolak, 2015; Alsaggaf, 2015; Saleh, 2014; Alghamdi & Plunkett, 2018).

Regarding to *access to professional world*, a qualitative study conducted by Guta and Karolak (2015) investigated how Saudi women use social media for expressing their identity and found that social media provided Saudi women with possibilities to have professional interaction without stepping outside into the social settings. To further examine the role of social media, Guta and Karolak (2015) adopted in depth-interviews with seven undergraduate female Students in Saudi Arabia to understand how Saudi women construct their identities online in a way that help them communicate with others and grant them agency. The author asserted that social media can “provide access to information that might be obstructed by cultural and political and local barriers” (p. 117). This also accords with earlier observations by Al-Saggaf (2004), which found that social media has a significant impact on Saudi females as it allowed them to engage through professional settings which is not possible in offline settings. More recently, a quantitative study highlighted that Saudi females showed more academic involvement with social media due to the social restrictions imposed on Saudi women (Alghamdi & Plunkett, 2018). Alshehab (2017) also confirmed that social media can serve as a learning tool for Saudi women and those who used this technology demonstrated a level of improvement in their

English language proficiency. Consistent with these findings, this research which revealed that participating in social media “led to self-improvement” of the Saudi working women by “exposing them to the world of professionalism” (participant #2).

Self-expression. Another important role of social media as expressed by the participants in this study was the level of flexibility this technology offers for self-expression. Given the negative gender stereotype experienced by participants in the real life, they reported that social media provided them with a free space to express themselves without being judged or stereotyped by the society. This was also reported by Al-lily (2011), Guta and Karolak (2015), and Luppigini and Saleh, (2017), found that new media provide a space for women where they can express their voices not only locally but also globally. These studies concluded that due to the anonymity this technology offer, Saudi women feel safe to share, express, and interact with others while keeping their identities concealed. With further elaboration, Guta and Karolak (2015) argue that in Saudi society, social rules are strictly dictated and severely limit the opportunities for women, therefore, access to new technologies “multiplied the availability of tactics to evade the strategies pervasive in the society” (p. 120).

Independence. Participants described the independence they perceived online as freedom from male-guardianship. Similarly, Luppigini and Saleh (2017), explored the role of social media in supporting divorced women in Saudi Arabia and found that unlike offline settings, divorced women were able to interact with friends, expose to the world, seek help, and share stories online without depending on their male-guardians. Likewise independence, the authors also reported that social media provided *emotional support* to divorced women in Saudi. This result is consistent with the finding of this research.

Socio-culture change. Participants in this study indicated that social media brought new positive changes to the Saudi society and more specifically to their lives. For instance, using social media they were able to bridge cultural constraints without breaching Islamic or traditional values allowing them to interact and form relationships with the opposite gender while physically absent. In his qualitative study, Al-Saggaf (2011) found that online communities created a space for Saudi women to explore, interact, and communicate anonymously with the opposite sex without dishonoring the family or affecting their reputation. However, this finding is contrary to that of Guta and Karolak (2015) who found that because of the social norms in Saudi society and the segregation of men and women, which is applicable to almost every aspect of public life “is also valid online and prohibits female-male friendship or any other contact between women and men outside of the bonds of family”. The author contributed this finding to the collectivism nature of the Saudi society that perceive women to represent the honor of the family and any inappropriate behavior of the female members will bring dishonor and shame to the whole family in the society, thus, “losing honor in society leads to rejection equal almost to a loss of one’s own existence”. Therefore, in this study Saudi women were found to practice a high level of self-censorship to avoid bringing shame to the family or tribe.

Socio-political and socio-economic change. One of the new opportunities social media have provided to Saudi women is the allowing them to engage in political debates, share their own political views, and learn about their political and legal rights. This result is supported by several previous studies conducted by (Aljasir, 2015; Noman, Faris & Kelly, 2015; Al-Jenaibi, 2016; Coley, et.al, 2019), these studies confirmed that social media increased awareness about women rights in Saudi. In addition, Luppacini and Saleh (2017), found that social media offered a safe space for Saudi divorced women, who are considered marginalized in their society, to

learn about their legal rights after divorce. Also, Amer (2016), suggested that social media has a significant role in enhancing women rights through allowing them to express and share political views. The author gave an example of the driving campaign that Saudi women launched in Twitter and Facebook to call for their right to drive. In the same vein, Guta and Karolak (2015), confirmed that “social media contributed to granting women their voices and agency and destabilized the portrayals of them as victims of longstanding patriarchal oppressive practices”. Al-jenabil (2016), who conducted a content analysis to examine how Twitter is contributing to the revolution in the Gulf countries, found that “Twitter provided Saudi users with more freedom of expression to talk about subjects that might be considered taboo in an older and more traditional form of media. Saudis are becoming part of the political decisions by posting opinions and views”. Although the author's focus was not specifically on Saudi females, the results can be used to understand how social media is providing Saudi women, as part of the Saudi society, with political opportunities.

It is worth mentioning that the 2011 Arab Spring and its aftermath witnessed a rise in Saudi women use of social media to start campaigns and to call for their rights. For example, in 2011 some Saudi women activities started campaigns to focus on women's right to drive through hashtags in Twitter, videos in YouTube, and pages in Facebook to encourage other Saudi women participate. As a result, women were granted the right to drive for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia. More recently, in 2016, Saudi women activists started another campaign posing an objection to the male-guardianship system. As a result, Saudi Arabia released an extensive new policy and reforms “The Saudi Vision 2030”. Thus, according to Nora Doaiji (2019), “heavy reliance on social media, especially Twitter hashtags and group chats, allowed Saudi women to organize and obtain a high degree of visibility, contributing to the campaign's unprecedented

level of mobilization”. Similarly, Winder (2014), examined the Twitter phenomenon in the Saudi society and concluded that the current transformation in cultural and political aspects is somehow linked to the usage of social media, and “many Saudis view Twitter as an online parliament that gives them the freedom to discuss their issues more than governmental institutions allow them to”.

Moreover, women in this study talked about how social media helped them improve their economic status by providing them with new opportunities such as starting a new business online, searching for a job, or learning new ways from other people online. Only few studies were found to support this finding, for example Alshuibi (2017), conducted a literature review to explore the role of technology in implementing the Saudi Vision 2030, the results of his study indicated that new forms of technology will increase employment and enhances business growth. However, these results were only assumptions based on information gathered from previous literature.

Socialization and privacy issues

Despite the positive role and the new opportunities social media provided to Saudi woman, participants in this study brought up the negative side of using social media including lack of freedom of expression, trust issues, and social exclusion. Specifically, participants explained how social media in Saudi Arabia could be risky and therefore the women should be careful on what they share or post online. They also talked about the trust issues and privacy online and how their identities can be misused creating more harm. Finally, many of the participants experienced social exclusion as a result of their excessive use of social media, which affect them socially and emotionally.

With regards to the negative effect of social media in Saudi women's lives, several previous studies are partially in line with the current findings (Alsaggaf, 2015; Al-Saggaf, 2011; Baker, 2016). An empirical study conducted by Al-Saggaf (2011), examined the experiences of young Saudi females on Facebook, the author observed that when using Facebook, Saudi females showed a level of consciousness in regards to their privacy and they were reluctant about sharing any political views online. The study also found that the excessive time Saudi females spent using social media took away from family and study. The current study found that women were able to share their political views when anonymous, while being careful if using their real names. The consistency between the findings of this study and Al-Saggaf (2011) appear to be, arguably, the result of rigidity in the Saudi culture as well as the role of the family. As reported in this study, Saudi women fear that their political activities online could put them at risk either legally or socially, and can also cause a serious damage to their family reputations.

Conclusion

This chapter concluded the findings of the study based on the research objectives, which included exploring and investigating current challenges Saudi women experience in the workplace that hinder their professional development, and also, exploring the role of social media in providing new opportunities to help Saudi women overcome these challenges. The main results showed that Saudi women experience different challenges in the workplace that affect their progress in their career. The study also showed the primary role of socio-cultural, personal, institutional, and ethical challenges in Saudi women's lives and the way they interconnect and create obstacles for women to improve in work and life.

The data collected from interviews and document analysis shows that social media have a significant role in providing Saudi women with new opportunities to help them overcome some of the challenges they face. However, the study also revealed that social media has its dark side in terms of security issues and lack of freedom of speech.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings from interviews and document analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings, a discussion of limitations of the study, and areas of future research.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges Saudi women face in work and life, and to examine the role of social media in the lives of those women as they grappled with the challenges they face. Hence, the study was guided by the following research questions:

Q1 What are the challenges Saudi women perceive in work and life?

Q2 How does the participation in social media provide new opportunities to help Saudi women overcome the challenges they face in work and life?

In order to best explore these questions, a qualitative study design was used as a methodological approach. In-depth interviews were used to allow participants make meaning of their lived experiences and perspectives. The main research question informed the qualitative methodology of this study, which included a multi-facet dataset informed by researcher journal notes, documents, and interviews from 10 Saudi professional women working at different organizations who contemporaneously had completed at least a Bachelor's degree. Unstructured interviews were the primary source of data collection, and document analysis, and researcher notes served as the secondary sources. Using thematic analysis approach, data was transcribed, coded and analyzed for each of the interviews and selected documents, while paying attention to the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study. Linking the results from the

interviews with documents provided support and extension to the findings. Accordingly, two main categories with six themes were identified:

Table 6 Summary of key findings

Categories	Themes
Challenges Facing Saudi Women	Socio-Cultural Challenges Personal Challenges Ethical Challenges Institutional Challenges
The Role of Social Media	Civic and Professional Engagement Socialization and Privacy Issues

Discussion of Key Findings

In this section, the two main categories with six dominant themes emerged from interviews and document in response to the research questions are discussed as follows:

RQ1: Challenges Facing Saudi Women in Work and life

The first question explores the challenges Saudi women face that hinder their professional development in work and life. The Saudi women interviewed in this study shared various experiences about the challenges they face and hinder their professional development. The majority of the participants indicated that, in the past, they did not have equal opportunities as those available for men, particularly, in access to education, which was seen as attributions to the gender stereotypes rooted in the Saudi culture. The participants believe that the Saudi society

has created different cultural perceptions such as, women are expected to carry out domestic responsibilities, women are perceived as less qualified, and dependent. Although on a policy level the Saudi government takes gender equality seriously (The Saudi vision, 2016), it appears as though negative stereotypes and social perceptions about Saudi women are still practiced in the society. Saudi women in this study explained different opinions about how they were perceived based on their social class and marital status. These findings appear to indicate an intersection of overlapping stressors affects Saudi women at both work and life, including socio-cultural, personal, institutional, and ethical challenges.

In the same vein, a number of scholarly articles that highlighted the social, economic, legal, and ethical challenges (AL-Hazmi et. al, 2017; Alselaimi & Lord, 2012; Allui & Kamaludin, 2017; Hakem, 2017; Jouharah M. Abalkhail. 2017) confirmed the challenges facing Saudi Arabian women in the workplace. This research corroborates some previous findings, such as social and cultural norms are fostering gender inequality in Saudi Arabia, and therefore, women are more likely to have fewer educational and work opportunities (Alsaleh, 2011; Al Yami, 2016; Alyahya, 2016; Varshney, 2019). Even though there is no observable restrictions for women to apply for professional positions in the society; some studies confirmed that the principle problem for women to achieve professional development is the traditional patriarchal perceptions toward Saudi working women, women were perceived as less capable, submissive, and less qualified (Elamin and Omair, 2010; Saleh & Luppigini, 2017; Alyahya, 2016; Budhwar, et al., 2010; Abalkhail and Allan, 2016). The traditional attitudes and negative perceptions against working women were partly explained through social role theory from a feminism perspective (Eagly & Wood, 2011). The fact that the social power and dominance in Saudi

society are conquered by men, it is possible, that women become less competitive as the stereotype affects the social order in Saudi (Omair, 2017; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017).

These negative perceptions towards working women may also explain the social stigma practiced by the society against women based on perceivable social class or marital status. In Goffman's theory of social stigma, a stigma is perpetuated and created in society by those who have power against those who have less power (Goffman, 1963). In this case, Saudi women are perceived as those with less power and socially stigmatized by men who socially have more power. Collectively, these studies outline a critical role of the negative gender stereotype on the professional progress of Saudi Arabian women. In this study, the affirmative tone in the participant's quotes explains how the society's strong preconceptions about gender inequality in terms of working opportunities affect Saudi women's professional development. As such, the results of the current study is consistent with these findings where the opinion on the issue of gender inequality in education and employment including work promotions is largely dependent on the traditional gender stereotypes against women in the society.

Another part of socio-cultural challenges as perceived by the participants was the pressure put on them from their families to protect their honor and family reputation. A number of studies found that Saudi women are put under a significant pressure by their families because, based on the Saudi culture and traditions, women represent the honor of the family and inappropriate behavior may destroy the reputation of the whole family or even the tribe (Al-lily, 2011; Alsaggaf, 2011; Nydell, 2006; Saleh & Luppigini, 2017). Similarly, women in this study revealed that families in Saudi Arabia were overprotective and tended to put more pressure on their female members, which hindered women's professional development in work and life. Surprisingly, while being perceived as moral guardians, Saudi women may, "at the same time

and for the same reasons, be stereotyped as a source of potential shame of their families” (Omair, 2017. p. 27). Each of these cultural factors has been theoretically and empirically connected to the creation of restrictive gender stereotypes that may be harmful to women (Alesina et al., 2013). For example, Nisbett and Cohen (1996), explained the concept of “culture of honor” as “emphasizing male control over their female family members, particularly their sexual behavior”. In common with this concept, the perception of any improper actions or behaviors brings a sense of shame and dishonor to both the woman and her family (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Thus, women may suffer from the stereotype of being moral guardians and at the same time being stereotyped as the source of shame and dishonor for their families. Therefore, the majority of the participants thought it was a challenge for them to act normally and freely without thinking of the consequences may occur because of them. Although the general perception is that Saudi families restrict their female's member from acting independently, there are some examples of Saudi women whose families were encouraging and supportive in their career. Only a minority of the participants explained that this was a moderate issue for them and they believed that the culture is changing and the families are starting to be less controlling and supportive.

It is important to note that the Saudi women interviewed in this study experienced challenges balancing between work and family commitments as part of the socio-cultural challenges as well. Although conducted many years ago, Al-Ahmadi's (2011) study aligns with the respondent's views regarding the difficulties of balancing between work and life commitments. More recently, Al-Asfour, et.al (2017) and Omair (2017) support Al-Ahamdi's findings that Saudi women find it hard to balance between work and family's responsibilities. One possible explanation for this result is as discussed by Allui and Kamaludin (2017) the lack

of adequate child-care for working mothers is an important factor affecting Saudi women in their professional career. Even though it is quite common in Saudi Arabia that women are responsible for the household care, it is also more common for families to have maids to help them with household responsibilities including baby care (ILO, 2013). Family commitments as mentioned by the participants in this study were not only about child-care and household responsibilities, they mainly were about the role they should play as perceived by the society, for example, “the bottom line is that the society is still not ready to define women's roles in life, and that's pretty much what is causing the imbalance in working women's lives” (Participant 10). Specifically, women are expected to be good wives, mothers and daughters and when they spend the time at work their family expect from them to make up the time they spent outside their homes (e.g. attending family gatherings, taking care of children, etc.). At the same time, it is obvious to this researcher that many participants in this study expressed their persistence to improve in work and life as reflected through interview responses illustrating how they manifested their willingness as well as their ability to overcome the challenges that hinder their professional development and they were ready to face social expectation and challenge social norms by being determinant and successful.

Alongside the confirmation of the challenges related to socio-cultural aspects, the findings of this study also demonstrated multiple personal challenges, namely, negative self-perceptions, dependency issues, and other psychological issues. Consistent with the social role theory, the findings provided support of the distorted image Saudi women seem to have about themselves. This finding was foreseen as attributions in regards to the lower qualifications and lack of professional skills of women, and for the most part, women see themselves as less capable than men. This might be because in Saudi Arabia the power is held by men, which could

possibly shape the competence stereotypes within the organization (Eagly & Wood, 2011). It might also be due the past history of inequality of opportunities in both education and work for women and that Saudi men used to have have the most opportunities in education, employment and leadership. Thus, the distorted image these women have about themselves could be because they have been experiencing oppression and inequality for sustained period of time which make them believe and accept the views of oppression as reality, this condition according to psychology and sociology is called internalized oppression (David, 2009). In intersectional feminism, "oppression lowers self-esteem, reduces life opportunities" (Crenshaw, 1991), and can put people in danger of different forms of abuse and can lead to internalized oppression (David, 2009). This could also explain why Saudi women in this study accepted to be silent when sexually harassed or treated with avoidance. It seems that this picture or stereotype has been instilled in Saudi women's minds and was transferred to the work environment which created institutional and ethical challenges as was reported by the participants.

A key challenge that Saudi women faced while trying to progress in their career is the imposition of male guardianship and the lack of independence which is reflected in Hofstede's (1992) cultural dimensions applied to the Saudi Arabia context. In Saudi Arabia, organizations have similar trends with regard to the cultural values of the society (Hofstede 1998). According to Hofstede (1992), power distance and masculinity are considered very high in the Saudi managerial network; a masculine atmosphere is dominant in most organizational cultures, as they are male-dominant workplaces with a long-term orientation that values loyalty (Hofstede, 1992; Al-Krenawi, 2014). Power distance places emphasis on respect for age, knowledge, hierarchy, and gender, and from a managerial and business perspective, high power distance may "explain the power differentials between men and women, bosses and subordinates and the relevance of

seniority” (Rao, 2012, p. 234). Building on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, this researcher believes that the improvement of women’s equality and independency requires a significant shift in the Saudi cultural perceptions and traditional stereotypes about women outside and within the workplace. The findings of this study suggest that Saudi women may utilities different approaches, which may not reflect their values and ethics, to propel their rights, defeat gender discrimination, and gain opportunities. Consistent with the assumption of the social role theory that individuals are motivated to reflect a positive character and identities, Saudi women are more encouraged to be hypocrites in order to fulfil social expectations and mitigate gender discrimination. However, this act by itself is considered an intersecting challenge and could be seen as a form of an oppression, when being a female in a male-dominated work environment makes it hard to maintain values and real identity, this according to Crenshaw (1991), is a systematic discrimination and barriers that impact access to opportunity. Although some women in this study were able to achieve success without losing values, the findings suggest that the perceived gender roles and their subsequent stereotypes have a major influence on women’s behavior and values.

This finding indicates that the permeating influence of the intersectionality from socio-cultural challenges have created other challenges such as personal, institutional, and ethical challenges in the workplace. Consistent with intersectional feminism and social role theory, the present study has revealed the ways in which oppressive institutions such as gender, marital status, appearance, and social class are interconnected and creating challenges for Saudi women in work and life. For example, participants described how they were treated differently based on their appearance. Women who decided to wear hijab and veil at work face more challenges than those who adopt a modern appearance. Also, the findings of this study revealed how the Saudi

society dictates gender roles and stereotypes, and that the stereotypical image of Saudi women being less qualified, subordinate, and submissive to men is apparent. Overall, the themes heightened in the first category are interconnected and overlapping, which confirms that Saudi women face intersecting challenges that influence their progress in work and life.

RQ:2. The role of Social Media

The second research question inquired about the role of social media in providing new opportunities to help Saudi women overcome challenges and advance in work and life. Using Technofeminism approach (Wajcman, 2004) to understand Saudi women's engagement with the social media and how does this engagement empower them in all domains of their lives, such as education, employment, political and social activism. Thus, findings revealed that social media provided Saudi women with opportunities that help them overcome some of the challenges they face on a daily basis. For example, the findings suggest that due to the inequality in education and work opportunities, Saudi women have limited opportunities and they are often stereotyped as less qualified or lack professional skills. Hence, social media provided Saudi women with a digital space not only to have a free and wide access to the professional world, but also to make it easy to have professional interaction and build professional skills.

The findings also revealed that women who were perceived and treated as dependant or subordinate were able to access to new jobs through social media which provided them with new means for financial dependency. In addition, this study found that Saudi women may be deprived from professional opportunities because they lack professional skills, however by participating in social media the interviewed women were able to improve their social skills freely and independently. Also, interacting with different people from different cultures without dealing

with cultural consequences they face in physical life (Al-Saggaf, 2011), such as the concerns about appearance, social class, and marital status. This finding also suggest that social media is an empowering tool for Saudi women as it allowed them to express their feelings without concealing their identities which protect them from the negative judgments. In line with Technofeminism (Wajman, 2004), this research specifically emphasizes the potential of social media in women empowerment. From one viewpoint, technofeminists scholarship has underlined how the new technology can alter “the relationship between the body and the self” (Wajman, 2004), and as a result to the capability of the Internet to transform gender roles while “all physical, bodily cues are removed from communication” women’s virtual interactions are “fundamentally different because they are not subject to judgments based on sex, age, race, voice, accent or appearance” (Wajman, 2010). In his study about Saudi Females on Facebook, Al-Saggaf (2011) found that the anonymity reduced hierarchical features, which are very significant in Saudi Arabi, such as “age, race, gender, wealth, physical appearance and status characteristics”. This is why women in this study were encouraged to disclose about their insider experiences as stated by the participants “because of the level of anonymity social media provided, women feel safe to share information about themselves” (Participant 8), and being able to “stick to being authentic and appreciate who they are, without fearing negative judgments of the Saudi culture” (Participant 10).

Furthermore, anonymity made Saudi women more open to discussions and interaction with the opposite gender as women in this study reported to be less conservative when interacting with men online. The fact that they are using fake or unknown identity makes it easier for them to communicate with men while physically separated as one mentioned “social media made it possible for men and women to communicate informally while still respecting cultural

values” (Participant 1). As outlined earlier, most of these findings reflect a strong cultural effect and this is obvious through how these women are utilizing social media. For example, being able to communicate with the opposite gender without being judged is an indication of the rigidity of the Saudi culture and the way women are treated and perceived in physical life. With that being said, it is apparent that social media provided Saudi women a space to discuss the boundaries imposed on them by cultural and social norms and, therefore, contributed to granting women their voice and agency.

Also, the women in this study appeared to be conscious about their privacy when using social media. They showed a level of awareness in regards to how and what to reveal about personal information. These concerns are seen as legitimate because as it was outlined in this study, Saudi women are expected to represent their families' honor and any inappropriate mistake could damage their families' reputations. In addition, although the findings revealed that Saudi women were able to engage in political discussions online, they also appeared to be more conscious about “sharing ideas and thoughts through social media could be risky and may lead to jail” (Participant 7). This finding indicates a lack of freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia and according to Al-Saggaf (2007) “discussing politics in online forums often involves engaging in upfront arguments which are things Saudi women normally try to avoid as these things are not in harmony with the traditions of Arab women”. In line with this thought, the researcher believes that political participation may not be an issue for women in Western societies (Thompson, 2015). Therefore, truly empowering women requires “expanding their choices” (Kabeer, 2005), and this can only be done through active involvement and full engagement in regards to online participation. In this case, Saudi women appeared to be less empowered by social media than they could be because of the lack of expression.

Finally, it is important to note that, despite the possibilities and multiple opportunities offered by social media for women empowerment, “the Internet like other technologies, is flexible and contains contradictory possibilities” (Wajcman, 2004, p. 120). While on the positive side, the findings revealed that social media offered a safe space for Saudi women to be sociable, more-self-confident, and receive emotional support, on the negative side, women became socially excluded and disconnected from the real world. This finding is in line with other research studies that reported that excessive time spent online interacting with unknown people can disconnect women from the real world and make them feel lonely (see Luppicini & Saleh, 2017; Al-Saggaf, 2011). However, it is not clear if exposure to social media itself made them feel lonely or whether loneliness arose because of how social media was utilized. It could be possible that because Saudi women are faced with several restrictions in the physical world, they prefer to spend more time online where no restrictions are needed. It could also be argued that because of the potential for women to “express multiple and often unexplored aspect of the self, to play with their identity and to try out new ones” (Turkle, 1995). In this respect, Technofeminists see “the collapse of these oppressive binaries-(nature\culture, human/machine, subject/object- is liberating” (Wajman, 2010).

Theoretical Implications

Given that much of the Technofeminist literature to date focuses mainly on Western societies, this study found a gap in intellectual weight regarding the intersectional inequality “not only within the framework of single nations, but also against the backdrop of transnational relations: economic-political-cultural hegemonies and power differentials among nations” (Lykke, 2010, p. 55). Applying a Technofeminist lens to explore how social media provides Saudi women with opportunities and empowerment extends the scope of Technofeminist thought to new areas not

yet explored. Thus, this study advocates for the expansion of Technofeminsim to include closer examination of ways in which dominant social norms in Saudi Arabia shape and affect women's empowerment through social media. Also, informed by the analysis of this study, more attention is needed to inform how social media can be harnessed in a sensitive culture like Saudi Arabia to help more women express their views about existing structures of inequality and oppression without restrictions. This will allow for deeper exploration of the social media in the cultural context where Saudi women live and work. Nevertheless, the lens of Technofeminisim along with intersectionality theory enabled the exploration of the nature and the extent of the challenges Saudi women face in work and life as well as in social media. For example, the lens of intersectionality was helpful in understanding how Saudi women were able to develop meanings for their overlapping challenges and try to dissolve some of them through participating in social media. At the same time, Technofeminism was particularly useful for understanding the way in which Saudi women use social media. The study showed that cultural and social norms continue to affect Saudi women in work, life, and even in online sphere. Also, the use of social role theory helped in understanding the social order in Saudi society and the types of stereotyping related to women. Specifically, the theory was useful in explaining normative beliefs, attitudes against women, and identified the patriarchal nature of gender relations and roles in the Saudi culture (Eagly and Wood, 2011). This was confirmed in this study that men are often perceived as the protectors and providers while women are often perceived as subordinate to men. Overall, the use of the theoretical framework in this study helped meet the objectives of the study and revealed new data.

Implications and Recommendations

One unanticipated result was that the participants indicated that religion per se cannot be blamed for creating many of the challenges faced by women in Saudi society. Despite the fact that the Saudi society is perceived as conservative; women in this study were able to distinguish between Islamic obligations and cultural elements of Saudi society. This finding is contrary to previous studies which have suggested that religion, specifically Islam, has resulted in creating challenges for Saudi women (Al-Munajjed, 2010; Geel, 2016; Dumato, 2010). Most of the work carried out about the status of Saudi women has not distinguished between Islam and culture. Although Islamic values are prevalent in various aspects of the Saudi society, the research to date has failed to consider the roots and underlying causes of the so-called gender-based challenges Saudi women are facing in daily basis. In other words, no previous study has closely examined the multiplicity of factors related to cultural, legal and political perception which previously used to be very deeply ingrained and structured in the society. It is possible that the absence of a clear understanding of the complex associations between cultural challenges and Islamic interpretation has led to the misinterpretation of legal, political, and traditional practices. Thus, exactly how religion, Islam in particular, contributes to gender-based challenges in Saudi Arabia remains understood. In a recent study, Varshney (2019) reported that “in reality, Islam treats men and women equally in many things. In fact, a fair reading of the Quran and Hadith proves that the problem is not with Islam, but in the cultural stereotypes that have dominated the Saudi society for decades” (P. 362). Based on the state of current research and findings from this study, it is recommended that more social research is required to uncover the complex intertwinement between religion, social values and culture.

The outcome of applying a Intersectional feminist lens in this study has important implications for policy makers and institutional leaders in drawing attention to the complexity of overcoming systemic oppression faced by Saudi women. This builds on other work which identifies the pervasiveness of multi-layered oppressive systems and the need for critical analysis of overlapping challenges of gender, identity, religion, and power at work (Crenshaw, 1991).

Another implication of this study relates to the advancement of research on cross-cultural comparative research. For instance, how does the Islamic culture specific to Saudi Arabia differ from western culture and why it is important to understand and accommodate the mix between social norms and Islamic principles? Although women's rights and feminism are universal concepts, It is this researcher's assumption that using a Western feminist theory alone for understanding Saudi women may not be adequate. Because Saudi women are Muslims, including Islamic feminism in future research might be more adequate to help explain and understand the unique features of the context where those women live.

The role of social norms and presence of negative gender stereotypes of women was observed in this study through participant perceptions and document analysis. Findings revealed that social roles in Saudi society were structured uniquely for men and women; women were perceived as homemakers, dependent, and honor guardians whereas men were considered protectors and leaders. Similar to several previous studies, these perceptions as expressed by the Saudi women in this study had affected their professional development in work and life. Thus, findings from this study imply a significant need to adjust traditional social expectations and make efforts to diffuse negative stereotypes against women in Saudi society which may hinder their professional opportunities. This researcher suggests the implementation of awareness

programs within institutions as one possible intervention to help educate people about the consequences of gender discriminations.

Although Saudi Arabian society has witnessed certain positive changes in the recent years with respect to women's rights and availability of professional work opportunities, this study revealed that the Saudi women still face multiple challenges at work, including the persistence of traditional forms of guardianship structures and influences. This researcher suggests that these findings may encourage other researchers to explore the complex dynamics between social guardianship and Islamic guardianship to better understand the nature of the challenges Saudi women face while attempting to progress in their careers. Furthermore, it is also suggested that the Saudi government could improve the status of women and their professional success by taking an active role in eliminating the guardianship system. For instance, the government could require Saudi organizations to provide workplace equity and respect training to all employee to help raise awareness of inequalities when they arise and to help reduce the negative attitudes towards Saudi women as professional. Even though rules and regulations to protect women are put in place within organizations, Saudi women still face sexual harassments at work. Therefore, understanding the source of intersectionality is essential for the organizations not only to prevent the interwoven discrimination Saudi women face in their daily lives, but also to activate the rules and regulations within the organizations where these women work. With that being said, the theoretical argument for this result suggest the need for policy review within public, private, and online spheres due to their significance in providing sustainable regulations.

The present study has shown the power of social media in shifting social, political, and economic aspects of the society. For instance, the participants explained how social media helped them bridge socio-cultural constraints and allow them to freely communicate with the

opposite gender without breaching traditions and cultural values. To benefit from this powerful technology, institutions could integrate and adapt social media as a tool to improve communication between men and women within the workplace. Implementing online communities of practice and social media in the workplace will empower and support women who are affected by the negative ingrained societal-cultural stereotypes. This researcher believes that online communities of practice have a promising role to play in helping Saudi women be more open to discuss gender stereotyping and discrimination they face within and outside the organizations due to its unique features.

Overall, the results of this study focused on exploring challenges women face from professional women perspectives only. Future research may focus on objectives by including a sample of both men and women to investigate the role of gender stereotypes in creating oppressive systems challenging for Saudi women. It is obvious to this researcher that gender stereotype against working women is a strong social power that creates multiple challenges for Saudi women, and therefore, it would be interesting in future research to more deeply explore the effects of gender stereotypes as well as how both genders utilize stereotypes. It would also be interesting for future research to compare experiences of both sexes within the same culture to get a more holistic picture.

Limitations

This study presented findings about the challenges professional Saudi women face in work and life, and their perceptions of using social media in the light of these challenges. Nevertheless, a number of limitations concerning this study should be addressed. It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this research cannot be generalizable to all women in Saudi Arabia due to the lack of diversity in demographic locations of the participants. Participants who

were able to take part in this research were located in four major cities in Saudi Arabia (Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, and Madinah). It is possible that perceptions, experiences, and challenges women face in other parts of the country with more traditional nature (e.g. rural areas) differ from the findings of this study. Also, all the participants had at least a bachelor degree or above, thus, the findings cannot be generalized due to the lack of diversity in level of education. Nonetheless, the aim of this study was not to generalize the results, rather, the study was conducted to provide a better understanding of the researched phenomenon.

Moreover, the sensitive nature of the topic which is about women's experiences in Saudi society constitutes a limitation to this study. That is, the majority of the participants were not ready to speak openly about legal challenges. It could perhaps be the reason why women refused to be interviewed face-to-face. Although the interviews were virtually conducted, and the participant's identities kept anonymous, the participants refused to engage in political discussions or reveal some information they perceived as sensitive. It is possible that the lack of participant's cooperation restricts some of the findings allowed to be presented in this study. The shared gender and cultural background of the participants and the researchers was helpful in establish trust needed to make the participants feel comfortable about sharing their perceptions. While exploring the experiences of the participants in this study, it became obvious to this researcher that the stories of those women are common and she could relate to their experiences in many ways. For example, the participants explained how gender inequality in education had an impact on their progress at work and how some of them had to study abroad to enhance in their career. This researcher concurs with those women on the importance of gender equality in education and employment and how it will alter negative gender expectations. Also, the

participants described how they were judged based on their marital status and social class, this researcher witnessed similar judgments while working in Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the insider experiences of Saudi women about challenges Saudi women face in work and life. The study also investigated the role of social media in providing Saudi women with new opportunities to help them overcome these challenges. Using theoretical framework informed by feminist theory including Technofeminism, Intersectional feminism, and Social Role theory, this study has provided a deeper insight into the challenges Saudi women face in work and life. The findings clearly indicate the fact that Saudi women experience socio-cultural, personal, institutional, and ethical challenges. The most significant findings to emerge from this study highlight the complexity of overlapping challenges in Saudi culture which influenced Saudi women in different ways at both personal and professional levels. This study also discovered that not all Saudi women are going to face the same sort of challenges as some may experience more than others depending on their social class, role of the family, economic status, marital status, and appearance. For example, this study showed that Saudi women who have upper-class background, famous family name, or were able to gain opportunities and respect from others. Same thing with those who chose to hide their marital status so they don't to be judged or stigmatized and lose their professional opportunities. Although there are a few examples in this study of women who gained professional opportunities due to their persistence and courage, women who are assertive, tough, and decent were often disliked and viewed negatively because they are expected to be shy and submissive. The study

revealed that Saudi women perceive stereotypes of Saudi women and professional career challenges to be entrenched within the cultural and social systems.

Another significant finding to emerge from this study is that social media appeared to be empowering for Saudi women by providing new opportunities to help them overcome some of the challenges they face in work and life. In the absence of the body and without family restrictions, social media brought new ways of social, economic, and political engagement for Saudi women. Participants were able to mitigate the negative influence of female stereotypes and express themselves in a way that was not possible in real life. However, it was also found that participation social media did not address all challenges Saudi women still face in work and life.

To conclude, as it may seem in the bigger picture, Saudi women in this study believe that the new reforms and promises in the country are significant for women empowerment. Increasing education and work opportunities as well as allowing women to drive are seen as positive steps towards enhancing women rights in Saudi Arabia. Yet, some major negative practices are still observed in the society and was not included in the new reforms such as the imposition of male-guardianship system and the negative gender expectations. The absence of these regulations that grant women independency leaves the dilemma unsolved, at the will of the cultural norms and traditions. Thus, conducting this research, giving Saudi females a chance to be heard, and uncovering insider experiences, this researcher believes that for Saudi women to see the changes they deserve, "there will need to be a considerable interaction between those who carry altered gender expectations and those who maintain traditional representations of both fact/fiction and male/female" (O'Brien, 1996, p. 66).

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Appendices

Appendix-1 Ethics Board (Health Sciences and Science REB) Approval

File Number: H05-17-14

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 06/28/2017



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice Health Sciences and Science REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Rocci	Luppisini	Arts / Communication	Supervisor
Ramzia	Saleh	Electronic Business Technologies	Student Researcher

File Number: H05-17-14

Type of Project: PhD Thesis

Title: The Role of Online Communities in Providing Professional Opportunities in Work and Life: The Case of Saudi Arabian Women

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
06/28/2017	06/27/2018	Approval

Special Conditions / Comments:
N/A

Appendix-2 Request for Interviews and Consent Form (English)**Request for Interview and Consent Form****Researcher Information****Ramzia Saleh**

Doctoral candidate in Philosophy Electronic Business
University of Ottawa

Supervisor Information**Rocci Luppicini, Ph.D.**

Editor-in-Chief, International Journal of Technoethics Associate Professor,
University of Ottawa

Dear [Participant's Name]:

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree in the Department of Electronic Business at the University of Ottawa under the supervision of Professor **Rocci Luppicini**. I would like to provide you with more information about this study and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Purpose of the study

The status of Saudi women is changing rapidly due to governmental initiatives toward improving women's education and employment opportunities. Recent developments by policy makers have expanded the role of Saudi women in the country's economic development and political system. Even with the recent improvements in women's rights in the Kingdom, women still face different challenges that hinder their professional development. Those challenges can be overcome by empowering women in work and life through technology. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how online communities help Saudi women building professional opportunities and overcome challenges in work and life. This study also aims to investigate current challenges experienced by women in the workplace that hinder their professional development include the cultural, institutional, personal and legal.

Benefits of the Study

This research identifies cultural, social, professional, and personal challenges that hinder Saudi women's professional development in an attempt to reduce these challenges. Because of the scarcity of research about Saudi women's challenges at the workplace, this study hopes to raise awareness about Saudi women's rights and hopes to open the door for future studies to improve Saudi women's status. The outcome of this study would identify the importance of online communities in empowering Saudi women in work and life. Empowering women in work and life through technology is a significant matter because providing women with professional opportunities can empower an entire society.

Type of Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately an hour and a half in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may request the results of the study after the completion of the research.

Confidentiality and anonymity

All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may also decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. If you wish to withdraw from the study after the interview you have the option of withdrawing the data collected from you. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate the collection of information and later transcribed for analysis.

Conservation of data

Data collected during this study will be retained for 10 years in a locked file, with access strictly limited to the researcher and the supervisor of this study. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

Acceptance

If you choose to participate in this research, consent is implied by signing this form and send it back to the researcher. The participant should print a copy of this consent form to keep for their personal records.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact the researcher at

If you have any questions regarding ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5

Tel: (613) 562-5387 Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

Thanks!

Participant Signature_____

Researcher Signature_____

Appendix-3 Request for Interviews and Consent Form (Arabic)

التاريخ

بيانات الباحثة

رمزية بنت هشام صالح
دكتورة في الفلسفة وإدارة الأعمال الالكترونية
جامعة أوتوا

بيانات المشرف الأكاديمي

د. روكي لوبيتشيني
رئيس تحرير المجلة الدولية وأستاذ مشارك في التقنية الحديثة ،
جامعة أوتوا
:

عزيتي (المشاركة)

أدعوك للمشاركة في البحث الذي أقوم به كجزء من اتمام مرحلة الدكتوراة في قسم ادارة الأعمال الالكترونية و أود أن أعرض عليك مزيدا من .التكنولوجيا في جامعة أوتوا بكندا تحت اشراف البروفيسور روكي لوبيتشيني المعلومات حول طبيعة هذه الدراسة و أهدافها و أهميتها.

الهدف من الدراسة

يشهد المجتمع السعودي تطورا في أوضاع المرأة بسبب المجهودات التي قامت بها الحكومة السعودية لتحسين وضع القرارات الجديدة الصادرة من الحكومة و اصحاب القرار في المملكة ادى الى .المرأة في التعليم في والتوظيف و لكن على الرغم من كل هذه الجهود فإن المرأة .تعزيز دور المرأة في تطورات البلد الاقتصادية و السياسية لذلك فإن الهدف .السعودية و تحديدا العاملة لازالت تعاني من مشكلات تعرقل نجاحها و تقدمها الوظيفي و المعيشي من هذه الدراسة هو اكتشاف الدور الذي تقدمه وسائل التواصل الالكترونية الحديثة كالمنديات ووسائل التواصل و تهدف الدراسة أيضا الى .الاجتماعي لمساعدة المرأة السعودية في تطوير و تحسين وضعها المهني و الشخصي تسليط الضوء على المشكلات التي تعاني منها المرأة السعودية العاملة في مجال عملها والتي تحد و تعرقل من تطورها المهني و الشخصي.

نوع المشاركة

تتطلب الدراسة اجراء مقابلة شخصية مع المشاركة و طرح بعض .المشاركة في هذه الدراسة تطوعية و اختيارية سيتم اجراء المقابلة .تستغرق المقابلة ساعة فأكثر تقريبا .الأسئلة بهدف جمع المعلومات التي تخدم الدراسة و اهدافها في المكان الذي يناسب الباحثة و المشاركة علما .و يحق لها الامتناع عن إجابة اي سؤال متى شئت .يحق للمشاركة الانسحاب من هذه الدراسة في اي وقت بأنه لا توجد اي مخاطر جراء المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

حماية الهوية و المعلومات

جميع المعلومات الشخصية التي سيتم الحصول عليها ستبقى سرية و غير معلنة و لن يتم جمع الاسماء للمشاركة سيتم استخدام بعض من اقوال المشاركات بعد الحصول على الموافقة منهن .لن تستخدم إلا لخدمة الدراسة هذه فقط شخصيا.

حفظ البيانات

الدخول لهذه .سنوات في جامعة اوتاوا 10البيانات التي سيتم جمعها سيتم حفظها برقم سري في ملف لحمايتها لمدة
البيانات سيكون مقيدا للباحثة و مشرفها الأكاديمي فقط
قبول المشاركة
و الرجاء من المشتركة .الموافقة على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة يتطلب منك توقيع هذه الوثيقة و ارسالها الى الباحثة
طباعة هذه الوثيقة و اخذ نسخة منها للاحتياط
اذا كانت لديك اي اسئلة عن المشاركة او استفهام عن الدراسة الرجاء عدم التردد في التواصل مع الباحثة على
البريد الالكتروني
اذا كانت لديك أي اسئلة او استفسارات حول الإجراءات المترتبة على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، يمكنك التواصل
مع الموظف المسؤول في جامعة اوتاوا على العنوان التالي:

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!و شكرا

توقيع المشاركة
توقيع الباحثة

Appendix-4 Possible Interview Questions

Section (1) Demographics

1. How old are?
2. Which city are you living in?
3. What is your marital status today?
4. What is your area of education and what level?
5. What is your profession? Why did you choose this job?
6. How many years of experience do you have?
7. Are you an active user of online social media?
8. What are the main platforms of applications do you engage in the most? Why?
9. How many hours a day do you spend on online social media? Why?

Section (2) Challenges, life experiences, and opportunities in work and life.

10. Can you talk about your career path that led you to your current position?
 - Probe: What are your present responsibilities?
11. Have you experienced any barriers in your present position?
 - Probe: Describe challenges you have encountered all the way through
 - Probe: Can you explain the reason behind facing such challenges?
 - How did you resolve this challenge?
 - If not, why not?
12. Have you experienced family or personal challenges in your path to success as a working female?
 - Probe: How have these challenges affected you personally and professionally?
13. In your experience, what do you think are the advantages or disadvantages to being a woman in your current position?
14. Describe any experiences you have had with being a female in your professional life?
 - Probe: How did it influence you?
 - Probe: How do you perceive yourself?

Section (3) The role of online social media and the differences between online and offline communities

15. In your experience, how did your participation in online social media helped you resolve any of the challenges?
 - Probe: How did it influence you?
 - Probe: does participation in online social media has any contribution to your

success in work and life?

16. In your experience, what do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of using online social media for Saudi working women?

- Probe: In your experience, do you think online communities provide more freedom to you as a working woman than your society and workplace?
- Probe: How and why?

Section (4) follow-up and closing questions

17. What advice would you give to another woman who aspires to develop a professional career in Saudi Arabia?

18. How do you feel about this interview? Is there a last thing you like to add or you think is significant for understanding your experience as a working woman in Saudi Arabia?

Table 7 Analyzed documents (Challenges Facing Saudi working women)

	Authors	Title	Type	Methodology	Main Findings
1.	Mohammad Abdullah AL-Hazmi1 , Mohammad Ahamd Hammad & Hend Faye AL-Shahrani, (2017)	Obstacles of Saudi Woman Work in the Mixed Environment	Peer-review	questionnaire	obstacles facing the Saudi woman in the mixed work environment. Analysis of collected data showed that there are many social, ethical, professional, psychological obstacles that can be as barriers for success in her work.
2.	Raneem Alselaami and Linley Lord (2012)	Female participation in the Saudi Workforce: A Saudi perspective of key barriers	Academic Article	Semi-structured in-depth interviews	barriers to women's employment in Saudi Arabia reveal the strong connections between culture, religion, the view of western culture as a role model, responsibilities towards family and expectations that are held regarding women's employment.
3.	Alawiya Allui, Kamilah Kamaludin, (2017)	Career Advancement And Challenges Of Saudi Women Graduates	Peer-review	Structured survey	The findings of this study confirm that women, even now, have still to overcome ingrained socio-cultural and structural barriers if they are to achieve equality with men in their career progression.
4.	Moniah Amer, (2016)	Examination of Saudi Arabian women's perception of social media use	Dissertation	In-depth interviews	Perceptions of social media: Independence and rights Driving Self-expression Freedom and opening up Culture and traditions
5.	Mark C. Thompson, (2015)	Saudi Women Leaders: Challenges and Opportunities	Peer-review	Interviews	challenges and opportunities facing women at the forefront of societal reform, that is, the leaders of societal groupings arguing that Saudi female leaders, the "trailblazers", can play a positive role in Saudi national development.

6.	Hanan Al-Ahmadi, (2011)	Challenges facing women leaders in Saudi Arabia	Peer-review	survey of 160 women	Findings indicate that the main Challenges facing women are: structural challenges, lack of resources, lack of empowerment, cultural and personal challenges
7.	Baqi S, Albalbeesi A, Iftikhar S, Baig-Ansari N, Alanazi M, Alanazi A, (2017)	Perceptions of gender equality, work environment, support and social issues for women doctors at a university hospital in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Peer-review	An online anonymous cross-sectional survey	There were significantly fewer women at consultant positions, a deficiency that needs to be addressed.
8.	Ahmed Al-Asfour, Hayfaa A. Tlaiss, Sami A. Khan & James Rajasekar, (2017)	Saudi women's work challenges and barriers to career advancement	Peer-review	12 in-depth semi-structured interviews	significant number of prominent societal and organizational structural and attitudinal barriers to the advancement of Saudi women in paid employment.
9.	Abalkhail, Jouharah M., and Barbara Allan, (2015)	Women's Career Advancement: Mentoring and Networking in Saudi Arabia and the UK	Peer-review	44 interviews with working women	Both groups of women experienced challenges in their careers and received different forms of support from their professional groups and family members.
10.	Lama Hakem, (2017)	The Challenges Saudi Women Face at Work	Research paper	survey included 11 open-ended interview questions	Challenges facing Saudi women: Social role(culture and traditions) Personal experience Personal strength The government role
11.	Mona AlMunajjed, (2010)	Women's Employment in Saudi Arabia A Major Challenge	Research paper	Survey	Challenges facing Saudi women:: Social Constraints work-life balance Legal Constraints Educational Constraints Occupational Constraints Recommendations
12.	Jouharah M. Abalkhail. (2017)	Women and leadership: challenges and opportunities in Saudi higher education.	Peer-review	In-depth interviews	This study shows that women face a number of challenges preventing them from achieving equitable representation in leadership positions; conversely, they do have

					some opportunities which help them in their careers.
13.	Varshney, D. (2019).	The Strides of the Saudi Female Workforce: Overcoming Constraints and Contradictions in Transition	Peer-review	Literature Review	Saudi women have consistently shown grit toward their employment and career amidst various challenges such as limiting culture, deeply embedded traditions, and related obstacles.
14.	Elamin and Omair ,(2010)	Male attitudes towards working females in Saudi Arabia	Personnel Review	Questionnaire	Saudi males report very traditional attitudes towards working females. Moreover, the single, unemployed, young and educated Saudi males report less traditional attitudes towards working females compared with married, employed, old, and less educated ones. Age was found to be the most important predictor of the males' attitudes towards working females.
15.	Raneem Alselaime. (2014)	Increasing Saudi Women's Participation in Professional Occupations: A Saudi Perspective	Dissertation	Interviews	Creating equal opportunities in the male-dominated Saudi workforce, touching on major influences such as cultural and structural implications
16.	Julie Hodges, (2017)	Cracking the walls of leadership: women in Saudi Arabia	Peer-review	Interviews	The challenges faced by professional women in Saudi Arabia are social, religious, cultural and organizational. The findings reveal that women's relationship to self, others, place and work are key influencers in how they perceive and experience leadership. The findings also indicate the need for a review and promotion of policies to eradicate inequalities which prevent women from becoming leaders.

17.	Rawa Alyahya, (2016)	Saudi Women As Leaders: Voices, Challenges, & Strategies For Effective Leadership: A Qualitative Study	Dissertation	Interviews	The study indicated that social norms and roles in the workplace and in life were major barriers to obtaining leadership positions. In addition to these cultural issues, lack of role models also limited the ability of women to reach leadership opportunities.
18.	Omair, Ali Hadi, (2017)	Stereotypes of Saudi Women among Saudi College Students	Dissertation	survey questionnaire	Men showed stronger endorsement of the stereotype that Saudi women are less competent, submissive.
19.	Alsubaie and Jones, (2017)	An Overview of the Current State of Women's Leadership in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia and a Proposal for Future Research Directions	Research paper	Literature review	An overview of the current state of women's leadership, focusing on the higher education context, and discussed proposals for future research directions. New policies and initiatives that aim to improve women's freedom of movement, their participation in the workplace and in leadership, provide the academic community with a rich source of research material.
20.	Syed, Ali, and Hennekam, (2018)	Gender equality in employment in Saudi Arabia: a relational perspective	Research paper	In-depth interviews	The interplay of factors on macro, meso and micro levels influences equal opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia, such as religio-cultural factors, the social power of wasta, the notions of female modesty and family honour and issues related to gender segregation, discrimination and harassment at work. Moreover, Saudi women's experiences are varied on the basis of social class, family status and other dimensions of individual identity, adding to a growing body of intersectional research.

21.	Ramzia Hisham Saleh and Rocci Luppigini, (2017)	Exploring the Challenges of Divorce on Saudi Women	Peer-Review	Qualitative survey	This research builds on the growing body of knowledge concerning the challenges of divorced Saudi women in contemporary society.
22.	Alyami, Rfah Hadi. (2016)	Saudi Women's Education and Work Opportunities	Research paper	Literature review	women still do not have the opportunities to access all professions, and literacy rates continue to favour males.
23.	Fry, E. (2015)	This CEO is helping Saudi women break a gender barrier	Online Magazine Fortune.com		Saudi women can build great economic foothold within the limited domain of the Saudi society.
24.	NUGALI, N. (2018)	'Justice for all': How Saudi Arabia's sexual harassment law will work	Online news paper Arabnews.com		With Saudi Arabia's new anti-harassment law soon to take effect, individuals could now live a normal life free of fear.
25.	Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, (2017)	Statement: A driver's licence for Saudi women: a vital step to other freedoms	Online news UN Women	Unwomen.org	substantive equality for women and girls in Saudi Arabia, with more access to public spaces and life, increased participation in the job market and a life free of violence in all spheres.
26.	Perper and Pasley, (2019)	Saudi Arabian women no longer need a man's permission to travel. Here are the biggest changes they've seen in the last 2 years.	Online news Forum Business Insider	Businessinsider.com	Woman over the age of 21 in Saudi Arabia can now travel without a male guardian's permission.
27.	Martin Chulov, (2018)	Saudi Arabia's new mood: more freedom for women – but is the nation ready?	Online news Forum The Guardian		The kingdom's women can now drive, join the military, visit sports arenas and cinemas – with other changes planned

28.	Alsaleh, S. (2012).	Gender inequality in Saudi Arabia: Myth and reality.	Research Paper	surveys distributed to 70 female students, and 330 female employees	The development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has brought with it increasing opportunities for women in education, employment, and in political participation, as will be seen in the up-coming elections for Shura Council and municipal councils.
29.	Alselaimi, R., & Allui, A. (2018, March)	Female Employment in Saudi Arabia: Legislative Encouragements and Socio-cultural Support.	Peer-review	semi-structured interviews with experts and professionals working women	This review supports the notion that social, organizational, and personal support faced by women in employment in Saudi, just as the previous challenges arises from the socio-cultural based gender roles and status. Overcoming these constraints have gradually helped and supported the sweeping reforms that would enable Saudi women to take a serious part of developing their country.
30.	Al-bakr, F., Bruce, E. R., Davidson, P. M., Schlaffer, E., & Kropiunigg, U. (2017).	Empowered but not Equal: Challenging the Traditional Gender Roles as Seen by University Students in Saudi Arabia	Article	Questionnaire	Gender equity is only possible through increased societal acceptance of women's freedom in their everyday lives.
31.	Aloufi, A. (2017).	Gender and national identity in Saudi Arabia	Doctoral dissertation	Narrative analysis.	The result of this research is an examination of an evolving identity that has withstood the changes of today's world and continues to stand strong.
32.	Islam, M., Bokhari, A., & Abalala, T. (2018).	Perceptions to Start up Business as a Career Choice among Saudi Female Higher Education Students.	Peer-review	Questionnaire Survey	findings will assist relevant authorities in facilitating an increase in female entrepreneurship to contribute to the national Vision 2030.

33.	Van Geel, A. (2016).	Separate or together? Women-only public spaces and participation of Saudi women in the public domain in Saudi Arabia.	Article	Interviews	demonstrating how ideas about the participation of women in the public sphere are positioned as part of the construction of a local, 'enchanted' modernity (Deeb, 2006) that has a material and a spiritual dimension.
34.	Al-Omran, A. (2016).	Saudi women move into work force but face limits.	Online news paper/ . Wall Street Journal		Women playing greater but contested role in Saudi economy as it seeks to diversify away from oil
35.	Alrowaithy, R. A. (2018).	Obstacles Faced by Saudi Working Women in the Private Sector Labor Force: From the Perspective of a Sample of Private Sector Workers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	Doctoral dissertation	questionnaire	Saudi women were most concerned with having childcare provided at the workplace, transportation to and from work, and an expansion in fields of specialization in higher education positions such as administrative or supervisory education and training or for new types of positions private sector businesses need to fill.
36.	Koyame-Marsh, (2017)	The Dichotomy Between the Saudi Women's Education and Economic Participation	Theoretical study.	Content analysis	The paper demonstrates that more and more Saudi females are enrolling and graduating from colleges and universities than the amount of jobs available for them.
37.	Wagemakers, J., Kanie, M., & van Geel, A. (2012).	Saudi Arabia between conservatism, accommodation, and reform.	Research project	in- depth interviews were conducted with	Women in Saudi Arabia are often presented as lacking civil rights and having limited possibilities to be active in the public sphere'.

				members of civil society in different parts of the Saudi kingdom.	
38.	Eleanor Abdella Doumato (1999)	Women and Work in Saudi Arabia: How Flexible Are Islamic Margins?	Journal Article	Interviews	Saudi Arabia's education system is producing more employment-seeking graduates than the economy can absorb, while for women, cultural and legal constraints further hinder the growth of new employment options.
39.	Zainab Al khudairi (2018)	Saudi Women Aspirations and challenges	Third Cultural Forum on the occasion of International Women's Day		Challenges: • Legal challenges • Economic challenges • Social challenges • Organizational challenges
40.	Hussain Alhejji Eddy S. Ng* Thomas Garavan Ronan Carbery (2018)	The Impact of Formal and Informal Distance on Gender Equality Approaches: The Case of a British MNC in Saudi Arabia	Journal Article	Interviews	Gender equality in Saudi Arabia and UK
41.	Yusuf M. Sidani Alison Konrad Charlotte M. Karam (2015)	From female leadership advantage to female leadership deficit A developing country perspective	Peer-review	Interviews	Organizational structures are not highly salient as the most important factors affecting women's leadership. Rather, patriarchal structures, explicit favoring of males over females, and assignment of women to nurturing roles within the private sphere of the family are the major limiting factors impeding women's ascension to

					leadership.
42.	Jeddah, Saudi Arabia January 31, (2018)	A changing future: the economic role of women in Saudi Arabia	Online Blog		Opportunities for Saudi women
43.	Doumato, E., (2010)	Saudi Arabia, In Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, eds., Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa	Article	Literature review and survey	The privacy of women, which involves their anonymity and chastity, is fused with ideals of family "honor".
44.	Bahkali, W. (2013).	The issues of work life balance for Saudi women workers	Doctoral dissertation		
45.	Albakry, A., Mitchell, Patricia, Koirala-Azad, Shabnam, & Taylor, Betty. (2016).	Voices of Women Leaders in Corporate Institutions in Saudi Arabia	Doctoral dissertation	Semi-structured interviews	one of the most difficult obstacles to professional success was going up against the culture's traditional expectations of what the roles of women should be.

Table 8 Table 1 Analyzed documents (Role of online social media)

	Authors	Title	Type	Methodology	Main Findings
1.	Al-Saggaf, Y. (2016).	An Exploratory Study of Attitudes towards Privacy in Social Media and the Threat of Blackmail: The Views of a Group of Saudi Women.	Journal Article	questionnaire	
2.	Alghamdi, A. A., & Plunkett, M. (2018).	Perceptions of Saudi Male and Female Postgraduate Students Regarding the Impact of Social Networking Sites and Apps on their Academic Life: A Study of Umm Al-Qura University – Makkah	Academic Article	surveys, individual interviews and focus groups involving 313 male and 293 female	both males and females engaged with SNSAs at a moderate level of use for academic purposes, and they perceived more positive than negative impacts associated with the academic use of SNSAs.
3.	Thorsen, E., Sreedharan, C., Mohamed, E., Douai, A., & Iskandar, A. (2019).	#EndMaleGuardianship: Women's rights, social media and the Arab public sphere	Academic Article	Tweets analysis	Twitter provided shared online communicative spaces that had several characteristics commonly associated with public sphere(s). There is also evidence that using these alternatives spaces, women transcended to an extent the gender segregation that exists in traditional public discourses and spaces of Saudi society. The anonymity of Twitter offered women a safe place to deliberate their concerns about male guardianship. We suggest that these deliberations created a counter public sphere of sorts, which helped Saudi women legitimise the #EndMaleGuardianship campaign.
4.	Hala Guta & Magdalena Karolak, (2015)	Veiling and Blogging: Social Media as Sites of Identity Negotiation and	Peer-review	In-depth interviews	social media contributed to granting women their voice and agency and

		Expression among Saudi Women			destabilized the portrayals of them as victims of longstanding patriarchal oppressive practices
5.	Moniah Amer (2016)	Examination of Saudi Arabian women's perception of social media use	Dissertation	In-depth interviews	Role of Social Media: Independence and rights, Driving , Self-expression, Freedom and opening up Culture and traditions.
6.	Melissa Ann McCooley (2017)	Overcoming isolation as a woman in the Male-dominated super intendency	Dissertation	interviews	Social media and online forums can serve as a convenient platform for women in the super intendency to interact, share ideas, and vent when necessary.
7.	Asma Abdulmana Alhamadi (2017)	The influence of social media on Saudi graduate students: An explanatory case study of six Saudi graduate students studying in American universities	Dissertation	interviews	• social media influence • social media experience • changes brought by social media
8.	Rocci Luppisini & Ramzia Saleh (2017)	The role of online social networks for divorced Saudi women in the face of social, psychological, economic, and legal challenges	Peer-Review	Interviews & Questionnaires	Positive and negative roles of online social networks for Saudi divorced women.
9.	<u>Al-Saggaf, Yeslam; Williamson, Kirsty</u> (2004)	Online Communities in Saudi Arabia: Evaluating the Impact on Culture Through Online Semi-Structured Interviews	Peer-Review	interviews	Exposure to different cultures.
10.	<u>Al-Saggaf, Yeslam</u> (2017)	The Effect of Online Community on Offline Community in Saudi Arabia	Academic Article	Online survey	The results of the study indicate that participants, in addition to gaining self-confidence, became open-minded in their thinking, more aware of the personal characteristics of individuals within their society and less inhibited about the opposite gender. On the negative side, participants neglected their family commitments, became less shy and some became confused about some aspects of their culture and religion

11.	Al-Saggaf (2011)	Saudi females on Facebook	Academic Article	Interview	Saudi females used Facebook to keep in touch with their friends; express their feelings, and to share their thoughts.
12.	Alsaggaf (2015)	The use of Facebook by Saudi women	Academic Article	Online Interviews	Using Facebook, Saudi women are able to construct their identities, share their political, religious, and social concerns, and to socialize, obtain benefits, and generate positive social outcomes.
13.	Alsharkh (2012)	Social media and Saudi society	Dissertation	Survey	potential social change in the Saudi Arabian society.
14.	Madini (2012)	Online interaction of gender issues among Saudi students		Discourse Analysis	online communication provides the opportunity to reflect on cultural traditions without breaching Islamic and cultural values.
15.	Al Lily (2011)	Online and under veil	Peer-review	Literature Review	Technology-facilitated communication has shaped the social-cultural pattern of Saudi female experience within academia.
16.	Alkahtani (2012)	The Impacts of Social Media and Electronic Mediating: Improving Educational Outcomes for Saudi Women within an Electronic Social Networking Environment	Dissertation	Interviews	The result clearly reflects that social media has a positive effect on the collaborations of students, as they are able to keep their cultural and religious values without physically intermingling with the opposite sex, which is a requirement of religion and culture.
17.	Al-Rawi (2014)	Framing the online women's movements in the Arab world	Peer-review	Content Analysis	The misrepresentation of women in the west is reformed by the online social media.
18.	Madini and Nooy (2013)	Disclosure of gender identity in Internet	Article	Content	The gender and culture of online

		forums among Saudis		Analysis	users are what control the extent of online revelation
19.	Aljasir (2015)	Facebook usage in Saudi Arabia	Dissertation	Questionnaire	Facebook allowed Saudis to engage in several activities, including cross-cultural and cross-gender communications, and also to defend their religious beliefs and advocate Islamic values.
20.	Hattingh, Machdel, and Hugo (2012)	The degree of isolation experienced in Saudi Arabia	Dissertation	Survey	Online virtual communities play a major role in the harmony of expatriates by addressing the main concerns the participants had and as a result reducing feelings of isolation.
21.	Noman, Faris, and Kelly (2015)	Openness and Restraint: Structure, Discourse, and Contention in Saudi Twitter	Article	Content Analysis	Twitter serves multiple groups in Saudi Arabia to express their opinions and to engage in conversations on political and social issues.
22.	Almahmoud, (2015)	Framing on Twitter among Saudis	Dissertation	Content Analysis	The impact on westernizing women in Saudi and shifting their cultural and religious identity.
23.	Alothman (2013)	Social Media for Social and Political Purposes	Dissertation	Survey	social media plays a role in the social life and political environment in Saudi Arabia. Saudis use social media to improve the political environment and change the society positively.
24.	Al-Kahtani, Jefferson, and Jefferson (2006)	How Saudi female faculty perceive internet technology usage and potential	Article	Interviews	Mixed opinions about the role of online social media in Saudi Arabia.

25.	Al Omoush, Ghaleb, and Alma' Aitah (2012)	Arab cultural values on online social networking	Article	Online questionnaire	The study confirms a significant effect of masculinity and long-term orientation cultural dimensions on motivations of Facebook membership.
26.	Al-Jenaibil(2016)	The Twitter Revolution in the Gulf Countries	Journal Article	Content Analysis	Twitter provided Saudi users with more freedom of expression to talk about subjects that might be considered taboo in an older and more traditional form of media. Saudis are becoming part of the political decisions by posting opinions and views.
27.	Winder (2014)	The Twitter Phenomenon in Saudi Society	Journal Article	Content Analysis	Linked the usage of Twitter with the current transformations among youth people who have a desire to express their opinions on social, political, and religious issues. Many Saudis view Twitter as an online parliament that gives them the freedom to discuss their issues more than governmental institutions allow them to.
28.	Abdulrahman EA Al Lily (2013)	The social shaping of educational technologies in Saudi Arabia: An examination of how the social fabric shapes the construction and use of technologies.	Journal Article	Literature review	The data analysis demonstrated that Saudi society was committed to many established relationships, structures and identities, a commitment that has resulted in the social shaping of educational technologies.
29.	Abdulaziz Alshuaibi (2017)	Technology as an Important Role in the Implementation of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030	Journal Article	Literature review	IT has been known to contribute greatly to creation of a good business environment by enhancing government relationship with firms

					especially by ensuring smooth operations for the latter. Again, it has allowed business-to-business exchanges, which will promote business growth through ideas and innovations. That will lead to increased production, employment opportunity and increased revenues for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, thus improving the country's GDP. As such, technology should be considered a necessity in the realization of Saudi's Vision 2030.
30.	Samargandi, N., Alandejani, M., Al Mamun, M., & Sohag, K. (2019).	Women at work in Saudi Arabia: Impact of ICT diffusion and financial development	Journal Article	Literature review and content analysis	result potentially signifies that the benefit of ICT diffusion is achieved when the financial sector is properly developed, to support the investment need for the growth of private sectors, which creates more job opportunities.
31.	Faqihi, Mohammed, (2015)	The Climate of Public Opinion in the Digital Age: Exploring the Impact of Social Media on Freedom of Expression and Political Activeness in Saudi Arabia,	Dissertation	Survey	a strong significant impact was found on the way that people perceived the opinion climate via social media. Moreover, entertainment was the main purpose for Saudis to use social media that influenced their expression freedom, political activeness, perceived opinion climate.
32.	Madini, A., & De Nooy, J. (2016).	Cross-gender communication in a Saudi Arabian Internet discussion forum: Opportunities, attitudes, and reactions.	Article	Content analysis	The possibility of relatively anonymous communication involving no physical proximity means that Internet discussion forums offer opportunities for cross-gender communication that do not necessarily violate Saudi Arabian rules for behavior.

33.	Alaslani, E., Coley, Franchesca M., Hampsten, Katherine, Kennedy, Amanda, & Sperling, Rick. (2019).	"Insta-Tweet" Appeal among Saudi Women: A Uses-and-gratifications Perspective	Dissertation	Interviews	In Twitter, seeking important information, trending topics, giving space to Saudi women, increasing awareness about women rights while in Instagram the common themes were entertainment, self-presentation, Instagram itself, creativity and Saudi women.
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