

The Representation of the Driving Ban in Saudi Media

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Abstract

The present study aims to analyse the impact of printed media on lifting the driving ban for women in Saudi Arabia. In this relation, the study examines the way in which media represents the driving ban and the challenges and barriers faced by women in Saudi Arabia. For the purpose of addressing the objectives of the research, a secondary qualitative method has been used. Discourse analysis has been conducted under which the newspaper reports have been analysed to examine the perception of the media about the driving ban for women. The results of the study show that women in Saudi Arabia are not treated equally to men and thus there are deprived of basic rights like driving. It can further be analysed from the research findings that for long time media has played an essential role in presenting and covering the major events in Saudi Arabia. The media of Saudi Arabia has highly lifted the event of a driving ban for women in Saudi Arabia and has helped women in raising their issues related to equality.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, driving ban, women, media and politics

1. Introduction

The major aim of this chapter is to conduct a discourse analysis regarding how printed media impact the women's social movement, and particularly in relation to the lifting of the driving ban in the KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). So, this chapter will explain how different news reports contributed to the lifting of the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia. Initially, this chapter presents a theoretical framework that is adapted and modified from a study by Greenberg (2000). The next section looks at Saudi patriarchy and women's participation, and there is a brief discussion of ways in which Saudi women are facing barriers that restrict their movements for their personal and family needs. The subsequent section is about gender and Saudi society, where the researcher thoroughly discusses the perceptions and expectations of gender in a society that is shaped by traditional Saudi culture. After that, the next section discusses the role of print media in presenting the ban on women driving, in which the researcher highlights the way that politicians are influenced by media cues, and how they also use media to influence and change social perceptions with the purpose of bringing about change in the KSA. Furthermore, the researcher provides many media published extracts to draw out the meanings of the different news reports presented in the media that led to the lifting of the driving ban for women in Saudi Arabia. The next section deals with the politicians' agenda, wherein this study investigates the debate among Saudi citizens and political leaders regarding the empowerment of Saudi women and what are perceived as challenges that require immediate attention.

In the context of politicians paying strong attention to the news, this research provides evidence that the information highlighted in the media daily concerns public issues and policy matters. The discourse analysis section in the literature review conducts discourse analysis on the public's views of women's driving in the KSA and demonstrates the Saudi government's efforts to change the Saudi mindset. The next heading is mobilisation, wherein the researcher discusses the three levels of the mobilisation process, which are the micro, meso and macro levels, which go hand in hand. Furthermore, the section discusses how this mobilisation process is useful to understand by linking back to media reports of the ban on women driving. This section also highlights the efforts made by the government to influence society on this issue. Concerning political power exerted by individuals, this section examines the role played by a particular Saudi prince in using media to communicate with policymakers and citizens to prepare for change regarding the freedom to drive for Saudi women.

The next section looks at the 'media agenda', wherein the researcher provides significant evidence regarding how the government has been using the media as a power to convince society to lift the women's driving ban (WDB) in the KSA. The last section addresses the policies and preferences of the Saudi moderate movement as reported in the news and provides evidence that the tone of the news in print media was both neutral and experimental in their reporting about women's empowerment and freedom, which is why women's right to ride a motorbike was also written about.

2. Discourse Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is illustrated in Figure 2-1. This framework depicts the boundary lines between generalised social representations, as well as the uses of these representations at an individual level in social discourse and interaction (Van Dijk, 1990). The social actor group, which is at the heart of this framework, may include individuals or any organisation that uses print media to communicate their message to the general public. This study analyses newspaper articles in the context of such groups of social actors on the basis of their active involvement within the discourse (see Figure 1).

Openly criticising political elites who are in power and the building up of meanings are the key contributions of these social actors, who manifest their presence in media by supporting different activists in various regions and actively responding to messages from their government. Their success is based on their active news reports in the media, which influence activists and policymakers to address the issue of the WDB in the (KSA). Moreover, both social activists and policymakers have turned to print media not only to facilitate democratic change in the KSA but also as a supportive platform to promote new policies that can empower Saudi women to make independent decisions such as driving.

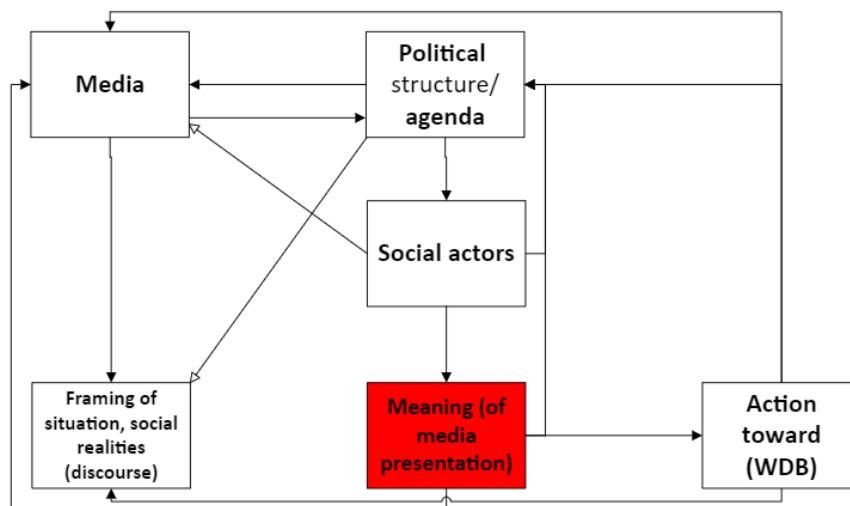


Figure 1. The Role of Social Actors in Media Discourse: Adapted and modified from (Greenberg, 2000)

Non-government organisations, for example, women's rights and human rights activists and environmental groups, are also included in the social actor group. In addition to having a strong presence in conventional media, political actors and authorities with power, as well as their agents, also have physical presence and power in the digital world. The digital world includes all digital and smart devices that enable the publishing of print media newspapers on the Internet, so that the maximum number of social actors can access the relevant information. In the current study, the media logic pursued was to plant the seeds of the government's media agenda to move towards women driving policies in the KSA. With this effect, media logic becomes essential for the selection and advancement of particular frames (Budzinski & Stöhr, 2019). The media will likely report on occurrences that are surprising as compared to focusing on unsurprising and expected occurrences. Further, reporting in the media depends on the extent to which the occurrence is unusual, and the perceived importance of the news (King et al., 2013). Similarly, the media directs significant effort toward reducing the ambiguity and complexity of these occurrences and making them clearer (and less complex) to the readers, often through personalising the story and dramatising it in terms of winners or losers (Valkenburg et al., 1999; Alshakhs & Alanzi, 2018). Finally, the mechanisms which create the selective imaging are affected by the media's tendency to refer to themselves, generating an echo-chamber effect, which, in this case, directs public attention toward the women driving ban (WDB) in the KSA.

Skinner et al., (2013) state that the media have resources and power that influence the political agenda. Firstly, there is the discursive power of media, which can influence specific frame creation and alignment (Mampaey et al., 2013). Secondly, there is the access power of media, which can control the range of voices and acquire access to a bigger audience (Waldow et al., 2014). Third is the resource power of media, which can impact government actions as far as their economic and bargaining power is concerned, and which relates to politicians, governmental bodies, companies, political parties, and other organisations (Street, 2011). Social actors and politicians may thus represent political parties or groups that may otherwise have a vulnerable or weak physical presence in the world because of inadequate institutional democracy and

the favouring of various well-organised elites by the Saudi political structure. The activists who have the strongest online presence include grassroots journalists, bloggers and others with active involvement on the Internet (Bivens, 2018; Gillmor, 2006).

The political structure is the third element in the model. According to Kitschelt (1986), there are various elements which make up political structures, such as particular configurations of institutional arrangements, resources and historical models for social mobilisation, which sometimes constrain protest movements, while facilitating their development in other instances, as is the case in the KSA. However, the duration of any social movement cannot be completely determined through political structures. In their regions, the long-standing elites and political leaders in power try to influence social movements through mobilisation of their resources: e.g., they extensively use national newspapers and broadcasting agencies. They also frequently impose intense media filtering, such as through temporarily shutting down the connection to the Internet to limit the access of citizens to available data/information and disturb the communication and discourse (Norris, 2012).

The active presence of both political structures and social actors can be observed in online media. Grenberg (2000) observes a strong impact of social actors on political structures. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, due to the non-democratic characteristics of states in this area, oppositional views to those in power are only allowed slight influence on policy and the political structure. Moreover, social actors with views different from those in power are arguably freer to openly express themselves via social networks (Norris, 2012). As a result, social media platforms have appeared as key loci for discussion (see Figure 1).

Van Dijk (1990) describes discourse as a type of language that is used in social interactions, while according to Lyytinen and Hirschheim (1998), communication is achieved either through the utilisation of language or by any other sign system that facilitates a mutual understanding of the world. Building meaning is an important outcome of discourse and often results in action: therefore, the present study tries to understand the meaning of the different news reports presented in the media that led to the lifting of the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia.

Grenberg (2000) proposes a social network and agency paradigm to evaluate the roles that interest groups and social actors play in mobilising the masses in a democratic institutional context, wherein socio-political structures tolerate and endure the formation and activities of different social actors and opposition groups. This paradigm also acknowledges that opposition groups are legitimately eligible to contribute to the political discourse in order to influence decision-making procedures by challenging those in power. There is a high level of autocracy in Saudi political structures, due to which the relationship between elites in power and social actors is significantly different from that in democratic countries. Democratic societies usually provide the opposition with opportunities to circulate their respective political agendas. In non-democratic societies, social actors' actions in mobilising the masses for a fairer society or against the existing rulers are considered illegal and therefore are often subjected to prosecution. The media discourse analysis model proposed by Grenberg (2000) will thus be adapted to reflect the current political situation in the KSA and the association between political structures and social actors as mediated by social platforms which post reports by the print media.

Understanding social action, communication and discourse in this context includes understanding the meanings of news reports about and by social actors and how the development of policy making about women's driving is presented by the local Saudi print media. Habermas (2006) argues that mass media, which are based on mass communication technologies, act as a great power source. In MENA and other developing countries, mass media provide the citizens with opportunities to participate in public discourse (i.e., an act of democracy) without any limitations on time, physical condition or place (Hacker & van Dijk, 2000). Habermas describes reaching a common understanding as a basis for public discourse. In the context of communicative action theory, Habermas (2001, p., 136) notes: "every communicative actor has to commit to fulfilling universal claims to validity. Insofar as she participates in communication (i.e., a process of reaching understanding) at all, she cannot avoid raising the following claims: (1) to express herself intelligibly; (2) to make something understood; (3) to make herself understood in doing so; and (4) to reach a mutual understanding with another." Successful communication encompasses all of these four elements. Reaching a common understanding with other people may enable individuals to arrive at other levels of social activity: i.e., in the organisation of societal actions (Habermas, 1989). According to Hacker and van Dijk (2000), the media facilitate citizens and politicians in addressing economic, political, cultural and social issues which they deem very important in connection with institutional politics. The citizens can, if they so desire, organise their social actions and/or create political systems to bring such matters to the attention of the general public.

3. Saudi Patriarchy and Women's Participation

Saudi Arabia is a state in which the king heads the state, government and *Shura* Council and is also the supreme commander of the armed forces. The legislation in the KSA is based on royal decrees issued by the king, and the society is dominated politically and economically by the Saudi royal family (Al-Khamri, 2018). Because of local contextual factors, which included the local culture, social values and politics, women in Saudi Arabia have not had the rights which

women have in other Muslim countries, let alone in the western world. Due to Saudi culture and religion, until very recently, women required the permission of their male guardians from cradle to grave for a range of activities (Hodges, 2017). They could not study, travel or work without the approval of a male guardian, and a widowed or divorced mother could be subjected to the guardianship even of her teenage son (Hodges, 2017).

Despite the injustices stemming from this system, the system appears to have the support of Saudi women, due to the lack of cultural and social support for women voicing their opposition, which means that many Saudi women feel powerless to claim their rights. Thus, there are very few voices against the system. As everyone prima facie appears to be supporting the king (Pharaon, 2004). There are even some active women's voices in support of the system, although they are argued to be sponsored by the government to continue providing support for the system. Such voices are intended to silence the voices who dare to be different (Alfurayh & Burns, 2020). Al-Khamri (2018) reports that voices that support the system and attempt to mask its injustices of the system sometimes use the argument that women who want empowerment and claim they are being persecuted should 'go back to living in caves' and cover themselves up.

However, looking at government-level efforts, the Saudi government had already started to empower women before lifting the women's driving ban in Saudi Arabia. As Ahmad (2013) states, the government was reluctant to lift the WDB because there was very strong resistance from the public, which is why the government used delaying tactics to prepare the public and show them that it was a social necessity for women to be able to drive. Therefore, it seems the government was making parallel efforts to those of the activists to prepare society to accept women driving and to improve human rights (Ahmad, 2013).

4. Gender and Saudi Society

The perceptions and expectations of gender in a society are shaped by the culture of that society (Otnes & Tuncay-Zayer, 2010). Anthropologists state that the term 'culture' includes beliefs, inherited ideas, knowledge and values, which make up the shared foundations for social action (Ssenyonjo, 2016). In this regard, a culture represents a group or society wherein people think and live in a similar way (Collins English Dictionary, 1999). Culture also involves influences from religion (Raday, 2003). Gender identities and gender relations are among the critical features of the culture, as they shape the way of life in a particular society and also the community relationships among different members of the society. Gender is as much an establishing principle of society as is ethnicity and race, due to the cultural connotations of being male or female (Otnes & Tuncay-Zayer, 2010). The social changes which people have experienced due to globalisation have given rise to strong voices for women's rights in society. Feminist voices are increasing due to the economic, cultural and social disadvantages women have faced over the years, and particularly for those belonging to the lower middle and poor classes (Namazie, 2001; Aderinto, 2013).

A number of women have spoken against gender inequality and gender-based discrimination in the KSA at different times. They have launched campaigns against such discrimination and injustice by submitting petitions before the king to put an end to the driving ban and abolish the male guardianship system. However, they have neither been heard nor supported. When Aziza al-Youssef submitted a petition before King Salman in September 2016 against the male guardianship system, the petition was not entertained. Instead, she was asked to submit the same by mail. Earlier in the same year, the then Deputy Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Salman, said that Saudi women may be denied the right to work because they were not used to working. Loujain al-Hathloul, a women's rights activist, challenged the statement and declared it to be 'unfair'. She argued that women have long been waiting to be employed, particularly in the education sector, but that local institutional settings simply did not support women to work (Ahmad, 2013). Based on these reasons, women have made many efforts to obtain their rights. Women are working in every country to gain both women's rights and cultural rights, which are mutually reinforcing (United Nations, 2010). They are also trying to build and highlight traditions and cultural practices which support the human rights framework (Msuya, 2017), as well as articulating the idea of increasing cultural rights to ensure the protection of other rights such as those related to property, education, natural resources, language and self-determination (Okin, 1998). It has been argued that women are only able to enjoy their rights when those rights are culturally and legally protected, including also freedom from domestic violence (Okin, 1998). Considering the media presentation, and how the local print media was highlighting the campaign, then it is very clear that the newspapers were reporting and presenting the women's efforts to prepare society. The Saudi Gazette (SG) presented the women's rights Twitter campaign of 2013 as follows:

"The tweets quickly became widely spread through the social media network and rapidly developed their hash-tags; however, many Saudi tweeps [people who post on Twitter] condemned the attack on the female Shura members, especially since they came from figures who are supposed to preach tolerance, compassion and respect" (SG5- 25 Feb 2013).

As has been stated above, WDB was a cultural issue and women's social roles are different in the KSA, which makes the Saudi WDB a unique case.

5. The Role of Print Media and the Ban on Women Driving

News media play a prominent role in influencing both Saudi society and policymakers. Research from political communication studies shows that the media is regarded as a tool by politicians to gain popular access to the public and draw support from the people (Cohen et al. 2008). Scholars studying the mediating effects of the media have argued that politicians also tend to adopt such behaviour as is considered acceptable within media logic to continue to be in the news (Elmelund-Praestekaer et al. 2011). The researchers on political agenda-setting have highlighted how the agenda interactions between politicians and media influence final policy and the decision to implement it, and have also suggested that once the media draws attention to specific issues, they tend to draw attention from politicians as well (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Politicians are influenced by media cues, and they also use the media to create influence and to change social perceptions in order to bring change (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006) in the KSA.

Mass media coverage plays a mediating role within the Saudi context (Al-Sudairy, 2017). For example, when a social movement takes place, the media tends to cover events, which then gives rise to debates concerning the underlying issues. However, the significance of mass media and its effect on political attention towards issues of women's empowerment issues and the way this can give rise to protests has remained unclear (Al-Sudairy, 2017), despite the fact that the mass media is regarded as the chief forum for sharing information and holding a public debate on WDB in the KSA.

Concerning this, Koopmans (2004) states that the mass media are regarded as critical platforms for conveying the claims of movements: however, it is unclear whether the mass media plays the role of a mediator in events and social movements surrounding the WDB debate, because many Saudi women activists in the movement to lift WDB have been jailed. Regarding the mechanism of influence of the media, several scholars of mass movements focus on the significance and relevance of the mass media in highlighting protest politics and social movements. It has also been argued that discursive opportunities are created by the mass media which are required for spreading the message of various movements. If a social movement is not given coverage by the mass media, it tends to remain invisible from the public eye, and this can provoke resistance: therefore, the media often try to supply a historical context to issues to increase the public's understanding (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004; Koopmans, 2004).

As the local print media highlighted regarding the WDB in the KSA:

"In 1990, 47 women drove on the streets of Riyadh in protest about the driving ban and were arrested. In 2008, during the reign of King Abdullah, some women made another unsuccessful attempt. From 2011, when women started gaining power, when they were allowed to vote in the local elections and appointed to the Shura Council, when they were granted more education facilities and job opportunities, when they were issued ID cards and were allowed to participate in the Olympics, when sport was sanctioned for girls in private schools, Saudi women further started to raise the issue of women driving and organised several campaigns to challenge the driving ban" (SG 05 Oct 2017).

As discussed above, this media report shows the importance of the WDB in terms of its historical context but does not show the impact of news reports on the WDB. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) observe that a protest event is not effective unless the media cover it and provide information which could lead to the formation of an agenda for a policy to influence society in the required direction (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012). Various research has evaluated the impact of protest on public opinion and on the actions of political elites, which require public endorsement before implementation of their decisions, and thus require time to use the media to change public perceptions (McAdam & Su, 2002; Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997; Costain & Majstorovic, 1994). Literature is abundant on the political impact caused by Saudi social movements and the mediating effect political allies have on political impact and the political system through using media as mediators of the political agenda. However, these studies also point out that political outcomes only arise when institutional actors see an advantage in coming to aid of the activists; and that the government requires some time to develop and implement new policies to meet the activists' claims (Amenta et al. 1992). As shown below, the Saudi government prepared policies to lift the WDB, and this was in their Vision 2030 plan.

"Changes that have been made make it clear how Vision 2030 will help empower women. Women were granted higher level positions in the business sector, guardianship rules were eased in government services, such as education and healthcare, physical education was introduced in girls' schools and recently families were allowed to attend the 87th National Day celebrations at the King Fahd Stadium in Riyadh for the first time" (SG 05 Oct 2017).

It is important to address the significant question of why attention is given by politicians to issues when they have reached a deal with activists; and why they require time to deny these claims at an earlier stage. A basic assumption in this regard can be drawn from the understanding suggested by Lohmann (1993) that this is often the case when the media provides coverage of a social movement. Arguably, the same thing has happened in the KSA's media debate on WDB, as extensive

information concerning women's driving issues which were not previously highlighted was later made available. The social movement and media debate represented the people's dissatisfaction with particular issues related to women and the prevailing state of affairs, and by protesting, activists are conveying a message about the need for a change in the *status quo*. Social movements which do not receive sufficient media attention are unlikely to become popular in society, although women activists also use social media to voice their concerns. Nevertheless, the mass media coverage of a social movement indicates a signal for change in the status quo. Such signals are heeded by politicians, as politics is seen by the public as being about solving problems in line with the wishes of people (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2009).

"The Shura Council on Tuesday, June 2014, turned down a proposal to amend the traffic law to raise the minimum age for a driving license from 18 to 20. It voted not to carry out elaborate studies on the proposal, mooted by Ahmed Al-Mufreh, the Saudi Press Agency reported. The Council discussed a report of the security affairs committee concerning the proposal to make amendments to the traffic law. Al-Mufreh suggested three amendments, including an increase in the age for getting a driver's license. The committee recommended that the member's proposals were not appropriate for deliberations" SG, (10 Jun 2014).

"WOMEN driving is an old subject but many citizens across the country still call for this genuine right, which is expected to bring about a revolution in women's empowerment, facilitating their movement and increasing their involvement in social and economic activities. I understand that readers would be a bit disappointed reading about this subject but as a columnist, I have to write about it again and again with the hope of convincing the decision-makers to allow Saudi women to drive their vehicles like other women around the world. We have seen some Shura members making continuous efforts to raise the issue and press for a resolution to lift the ban on women driving in the country" (SG, 28 Apr 2016).

"Saudi Arabia: There are fierce debates over allowing women to become members of the Shura Council. I wonder what would happen if women were allowed to nominate themselves to be the speaker of the council. Saudi women will soon be able to participate in municipal council elections. Will fatwas be issued against those who allow their daughters or wives to nominate themselves for such positions? It has been decades since the fight over women driving started in the Kingdom. That issue has not yet been resolved" (SG, 12 Mar 2015).

"Media outlets should always remember that they have a responsibility to inform the public and as such must always strive to adhere to the highest possible standards of professionalism and journalistic ethics" (SG, 14 Feb 2015).

As per the understanding developed from the above quotes, which were published in print media, these signals also work as an indicator of an area where people are demanding change from the government or public institutions to bring women to an equal level in society. It indicates the dissatisfaction among women with the status quo. Mass media coverage has the effect of conveying a message from the public to political elites, which is then heeded by politicians and taken into account in policymaking. There are different features of such coverage of social movements that are particularly noteworthy, as they indicate how the Saudi public is persuaded to agree with the empowerment of women. Earl et al. (2004) states that such features are those that are signalled as: accessible, public, negative, unambiguous, possessing an evaluative slant, applicable to a person's task and also in line with existing predispositions.

Although there are also some documented and inherent biases whereby media coverage is given to social movements (Earl et al. 2004), social movement events for which the media breaks its routine agenda show that protest is compellingly strong, and the government was working in parallel rather than ignoring the WDB social movement.

"A group of Saudi women launched a new campaign to be allowed to drive their cars, the Al-Hayat Daily reported. The campaign, launched a week ago, has so far attracted 30,000 supporters. Al-Dawsari added that only Saudi women can end the ban imposed on them. "Women driving is a legitimate right all over the world and there are no logical reasons why they should not be allowed to drive," she said. The issue is still heavily debated in Saudi society" (SG, 12 Oct 2014).

The first and foremost expectation following the mass coverage of the movement as discussed in the literature is that this media coverage will have the effect of attracting the attention of political elites towards the issue about which the public is protesting. In his theory of discursive opportunities, Koopman (2014) highlights the significance of news coverage of protests, and suggests that such coverage also influences politicians. The elite's behaviour is especially influenced when the mass media covers the protest widely. While news coverage of WDB had the aim of bringing public attention to the matter, the media also provided justifications and reasons for permitting Saudi women to drive. The quotation below provides an insight into how the media justifies the government agenda to allow women to drive in the KSA.

"The number of people demanding that Saudi women should be allowed to drive has increased lately and the demands have become more aggressive. People all over the world want Saudi women to be able to drive and move around without the need for a guardian's consent. To understand these demands, we have to be aware of the concept of freedom. We should remember also that moderation is an important value in Islam. There is no harm in keeping up with other people as long as our advancement and development do not compromise our religious values. In other words, our advancement should not be at the expense of religion" (SG, 21 May 2016).

Koopman (2004) also observes that the interaction between political elites and social movements does not take place directly, but through the lens of mass media, which highlights the claims of social movements. It is through media that most political elites come to know about the demands of a social movement. As some scholars have claimed, protest influences the policy cycle early on (Soule & King, 2006; Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012). It is clear from the following that the media's presentation of women's interactions with policymakers in the country to move forward to a resolution of the Saudi WDB issue highlights the outcomes of the social movement and shows the interactions between activists and policymakers.

"Two Shura Council female members have put forth a proposal to amend local traffic laws and allow Saudi women to obtain an international driver's license. Latifah Al-Shalan and Haya Al-Manea presented a similar proposal endorsing women's right to drive over nine months ago. Shura officials are still studying the proposal. Abdullah Al-Alami, who wrote "When will women drive a car?", said the proposal does not call for allowing women to drive but helps them get their licenses here instead of travelling to nearby countries" (SG, 20 Jun 2014).

The above media quote provides an understanding of what occurs when the media cover an event that takes place: an event triggers the attention of the media towards the issues raised by a movement, and media attention then exerts influence on the government to take certain actions.

It is also a well-established fact that the issue agenda of the media influences the political agenda (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Vliegenthart et al. 2016). Thus, social movements attract the attention of the media, whose reports attract political attention (Earl et al. 2004; Smith et al. 2001; Oliver & Maney, 2000). Considering the above quotation, it is observed that the media agenda was influenced by the Saudi government's decision to facilitate the development of a policy to allow women to drive. Therefore, it is only logical to expect that the political agenda is shaped by the politicians rather than the media; but still, the point should not be ignored that the media depiction of the WDB campaign changed the political leadership's or policy makers' perceptions and, ultimately, their decisions.

6. Media's Role in Social Influence

Brosius and Bathelt (1994) conclude that exemplars significantly influence the personal opinion of a person, whereas base rate information has little effect on the formation of public opinion. The media have a significant role in a democratic society; and are now increasingly being dubbed as a fourth pillar of the state and a watchdog on politicians and other stakeholders in society (Trappel et al. 2011). It is noticeable from the extracts below that the government have used the media as a tool of social influence to change public opinion about women driving in the KSA. It is evident from these quotations that although they appear to represent public views on women's driving in the KSA, they also show the efforts and social experimentation of the Saudi government geared towards changing citizens' mindsets; and that this was the first stage in moving toward creating and implementing a policy on lifting the WDB.

"Steering away from the debate over women driving in Saudi Arabia, a religious authority announced this week that Saudi women are allowed to cruise on bikes and buggies. But women will be free to drive under one condition: a male relative or guardian (Mahram) has to be present with them while they ride a bike, Saudi daily Al-Yaum reported on Monday" (SG, 01 Apr 2013).

"Women wishing to drive motorbikes and bicycles should choose places where there are no gatherings of young men to harass them or steal their belongings." (SG, 02 April 2013).

"In June, the Kingdom plans to begin issuing licenses to women, even allowing them to drive motorcycles, according to local reports. It will be a huge change for women, who have had to rely on costly male drivers or male relatives to get to work or school or to run errands and visit friends" (AIRD, 29 Dec 2017).

"Sumaya, a 30-year-old-doctor, said now that the driving ban has been lifted by a royal decree, Saudi women will no longer have to rely on someone else for transport. She spoke of her own struggles to arrange reliable transportation" (SG, 07 Oct 2017).

"I am worried for example about what to do if my car stops in the middle of the street, how to fix

my car or change the battery. It is all new to us, but the knowledge will come with time. I am very happy that this historic decision will allow me to move around, study, apply for jobs and entertain myself freely without a male voice asking me to hurry up or to cancel my outing because he is busy” (SG, 07 Oct 2017).

In order to fully play their role, the media need to be independent of state control: however, it is seen that the Saudi print media unfortunately is not independent, and presents the government’s agenda throughout the country. Autonomy makes the media a defining centre of public communication, drawing the public’s attention to particular matters; and, independence from economic and political powers is critical to ensuring the independence of state as well as private media (Trappel et al. 2011). This requires that the influence of the state and its institutions should be as minimal as possible on public media so that journalists can exercise their duty with full professional autonomy (Trappel et al. 2011). Further, media regulations are determined by public, political, and economic objectives; and independence is a critical factor concerning all these objectives.

Spence et al. (2015) also highlight the significant impact of exemplification on the public's response to the government and vice versa. In the current study, it is very clear that the Saudi media was operating under the government's agenda, which was to influence the public toward accepting a policy to let women drive. As has been stated above, women activists had started their efforts to fight for their rights at the same time that the Saudi government was making efforts to empower the women in parallel.

“It would save me the headache and money of having to hire a perfect stranger to drive my wife and children around. To those who oppose women driving, think about this: Would you prefer to have a strange man drive your wife and daughters, imposing on their privacy or have them drive themselves in the safety and privacy of their car? Think about that!” (Joe, Online response- SG14-21 Oct 2013)

The extract above demonstrates the government's agenda to use the media to pre-empt opposition to the policy to empower women by allowing them to drive, and to gain public approval. Concerning the issue of the WDB, some people were voicing the concern that children who were chauffeured to school were at risk of being exposed to abuse (Al-Maeena, 2012). This author was writing at a time when the WDB was still fully in place, and revealed how airing relevant issues like fears about child abuse was changing public opinion. The arguments in the media ran along these lines: although no one understands the risks pertinent to children more than the parents themselves, in Saudi Arabia, it is also difficult for fathers to shuttle their children to and from school due to their work schedules, while mothers are not allowed to drive: besides, not everyone can afford to have a chauffeur (Ajzen, 1991). In spite of this situation, there is a ban on women driving; and the question then arises of whether the public should remain hostage to those people who oppose driving for women. A great majority of Islamic clerics had stated that there were no religious reasons stopping women from driving vehicles; therefore, in such situations, women needed to be allowed to drive (Al-Maeena, 2012). Publishing these views was shown to encourage citizens to support any policies that gave women the right to drive, and reporting the fact that many religious scholars were in support demonstrated the media's autonomy to communicate such types of information as news, as well as being an example of how the Saudi media was portraying the government's agenda to bring in a policy allowing women to drive (Al-Maeena, 2012).

7. Mobilisation

Macro-mobilisation occurs when small groups, organisations and individuals are mobilised within current mass-oriented movements (e.g., trade unions and coalitions of political parties constituting a labour movement), while micro-mobilisation takes place when an individual organisation mobilises small groups or individuals (Gerhards & Rucht 1992). Micro-mobilisation happens when small groups or individuals mobilise other small groups or individuals via communicating networks to fulfil the kinds of political mobilisation that are currently owned by political organisations (Bimber 2003). Thus, there are three levels on which mobilisation processes occur, which are: the micro-, macro- and meso- levels; and these go hand in hand. Many authors have noted that micro-mobilisation works if local groups are structured loosely and are operating at a meso-level (McAdam 1988; Gerhards & Rucht 1992).

“The three female Shura members have taken this vital step after conducting necessary studies and taking into consideration the social, economic, cultural and security benefits of women driving. It also goes in line with the country’s Basic Law of Governance. They have taken up the issue while shouldering their responsibility toward the nation and society and pushing the Shura Council to instruct the security committee to study the proposal and present it for voting in the 150-member body as the proposal is ready and complete” (SG, 28 Apr 2016).

“A woman driving a car, whether right or wrong, cannot logically occupy the energies of an entire nation. Please wake me up from my deep slumber if I am having a bad dream. Women will continue driving cars in succession just like dominoes when they fall one after another. Ultimately, women

will be allowed to drive. However, this will happen without any proper prior preparations or a setting of the stage” (SG, 26 Dec 2014).

“Saudi artists and YouTube personalities Hisham Fageeh and Fahad Albutairi’s rendition of the song, retitled “No Woman, No Drive,” is the latest incarnation of the reggae hit, addressing the cultural and social clash Saudi Arabia faces today on the women’s driving debate” (SG, 27 Oct 2013).

“The word ‘debate’ here is used very loosely, as some from the opposing extreme have declared openly that women who wish to drive are prostitutes who deserve rape, among other atrocious comments” (SG, 27 Oct 2013).

Media offer a platform for debate and discussion that helps synthesize certain grievances into political stances, and through which negotiation processes are supported (Gerhards and Rucht 1992). As demonstrated in the above extracts, the media plays an important part in political mobilisation in Saudi Arabia. Here, the mobilisation process in the media shows both sides of the picture, which includes both activists' and the government's moves toward the lifting of the ban. The last extract shows the strength and vehemence of the opposition, which explains why the government took its time in mobilising the public toward accepting the lifting of the WDB. Therefore, intermediary structures are vital in mobilisation, working in parallel to develop public awareness and policy development in the country. Beyond the aspect of crossovers between mass media and micro media, crossovers happen between meso- and micro-level mobilisations which require greater focus.

“Two Shura Council female members have put forth a proposal to amend local traffic laws and allow Saudi women to obtain an international driver’s license. Latifah Al-Shalan and Haya Al-Manea presented over nine months ago a similar proposal endorsing women’s right to drive. Shura officials are still studying the proposal. Abdullah Al-Alami, who wrote “When will women drive a car?”, said the proposal does not call for allowing women to drive but actually helps them get their licenses here instead of travelling to nearby countries” (SG18- 20 June 2014).

“Sept. 25 was an occasion for Saudi women and the entire nation to celebrate. This date marks the first anniversary of the announcement made by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, that women will be appointed as fully-fledged members of the Shura Council. The King also said Saudi women could vote and run for municipal council elections” (SG16- 26 May 2013).

“Justice Minister Mohammed Al-Issa said in April 2013 that there was no clear position in the Saudi system of governance or constitution to prevent women from driving. “The matter is entirely a societal one” [he said]” (Al-Alami, 2013).

During the process of mobilisation, both Aziza al-Youssef and Loujain al-Hathloul were arrested, along with 9 other women’s rights activists (Al-Khamri, 2018). The activists were detained on charges of security and threatening the stability of the country, which does not necessarily mean the government disagreed with these activists' demands. Another activist, Nouf Abdulaziz, who worked on gender-based discrimination and violence against women in Saudi society, had written a heart-breaking letter for the eventuality that she was arrested (ibid). Her letter read that she was not provoking people and that she was neither a criminal nor a terrorist or traitor, that she loved the Kingdom and wanted the best for her people (ibid). The Kingdom has a history of imposing travel bans on or detaining women's rights activists, who have been subjected to smear treatments resulting in loss of employment and education, as well as having their passports cancelled, and being imprisoned, or detained for an indefinite period of time (Al-Khamri, 2018).

It has been argued that women’s rights activists have been more or less treated in the same way even under reform-minded Saudi leadership. This shows that the government feels threatened by the rights campaign for women’s equality. Thus, critics argue that the reforms that are being brought about in the Kingdom are not genuine, as women’s rights do not hold a particular position in such reforms (Al-Khamri, 2018). Meanwhile, the other side of the picture was seen when the government announced the admittance of women to the *Shura* council so that women’s voices could be heard, and women’s protests over that issue were not banned.

“As with every YouTube comment section, the debate eventually turned into a battle royale of words: Christians and Jews vs. Muslims, Pro-women driving activists vs. those against women driving, those who would put words in the Prophet’s mouth and claim that women driving is un-Islamic, and so on. Over one million people saw the video and heard the song in a little over a day, and though not everyone was impressed or pleased with it, there is no doubt that it was heard” (SG, 27 Oct 2013).

“I believe there are a lot of people who called for women to have the right to drive and they are

walking free in the streets so it's not about women asking for the right to drive and they have been arrested before Women's Driving day" (OKAZ, 26 July 2017)

"Economists have been gloating over the financial benefits of women driving. They say that the average Saudi family will save SR20,000 a year thanks to a drastic reduction in the amount paid to drivers and women in the workforce will save a significant amount of money on transportation, meaning they will have extra income to spend and inject into the economy" (SG, 07 Oct 2017).

"We must make sure that the intentions and objectives of any campaign or movement are significant. What's even more crucial is ensuring that these objectives align with the method of carrying them out. Abiding by the law will not only save us trouble but will also ensure that everyone else in Saudi Arabia can see the unquestionable humanity behind granting us our rights" (SG, 28 July 2017).

It is very clear from the above quotations that the media was also trying to convey a message regarding the need to allow women to drive. Women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia also fought against other laws preventing women from full enjoyment of their rights. For example, Aziza Al-Youssef did not only participate in a protest against the driving ban, but also protested against the guardianship laws of the Kingdom, which were significantly affecting women's rights. However, she was taken into custody by the authorities along with other activists. Her detention was cited as affecting the reputation of the Crown Prince's efforts to reform Saudi society, but the authorities claimed that her detention was necessary to minimise the emerging dissent (Heath, 2016). The authorities detained a total of nine people who were protesting against guardianship laws, while all of these arrests were reported in foreign media as reflecting the resistance of the government to lifting the driving ban. Previously, the Saudi authorities had arrested women for protesting about gender inequality, and many other women had faced a travel ban due to their involvement in such activities, and particularly for speaking out against the driving ban (Al-Khamri, 2018).

"In its statement, the Ministry of Media said that recent reports published by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are baseless and untrue. The Ministry categorically and strongly denies all of these allegations. What increases the flimsiness of the 'lies and claims' published by these organisations, which are well-known for their hostile stances toward the Kingdom, is that they attribute these claims to unidentified sources. This means that they are narrating 'fabricated' stories" (SG, 28 Jan 2019).

One of the more prominent protests against the driving ban in Riyadh involved 40 women driving on the road. However, they were soon caught by the authorities and were also fired from their jobs for driving. Although a number of petitions were submitted to the King at that time in favour of lifting the ban, these were to no avail. Wajeha al-Huwaider, a prominent blogger from Saudi Arabia, also made a video of herself driving on International Women's Day (Speica, 2018). Many other women also joined the protest, as they uploaded videos of themselves driving cars in Saudi Arabia. However, they met an unfortunate fate, as they were caught by the authorities and placed behind bars in 2011, and one of the women was even sentenced to 10 lashes. In 2013, when the driving ban was still in force, Loujain al-Hathloul announced an event on YouTube asking women and activists to drive on the road. Following this announcement, she received multiple threats and was later detained by the Saudi authorities (BBC, 2018).

"There are the procedural issues: What would be the mechanism for issuing women with a license? Give them a driving test? Where, and who would be the teachers? Of course, there would also be a need for driving instructors and driving schools and maybe female traffic policewomen, which would be an issue as sensitive as that of women drivers. And what would a woman do when her car breaks down at night on a dark and lonely road? Seek the help of a total male stranger?" (SG, 25 Oct 2013).

"Ultimately, women will be allowed to drive. However, this will happen without any proper prior preparations or a setting of the stage" (SG, 26 Dec 2014).

It is very clear from the extracts above that the government was developing policies and making institutional preparations to offer women driving rights at the same time as some women were driving as a sign of freedom, which was illegal at that time, as policies were still under review. Consequently, these activists were fined and detained for security reasons. As per the news published in local media, their detention was justified by the government on the basis of public security and the stability of the country. It may not have been seen as wise for the government to open up all of the issues in the debate at one time because there is very high public resistance to women's freedom from some groups in Saudi Arabia. As is clear from the extracts from the local media reports above, the government was aware of women asking for the freedom to drive and policies were being created; however, the government was facing resistance from certain sections of society, which is why the government used the media as a platform to present arguments about why a policy which allowed women to drive was required in the KSA.

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